

EPHRAIM E. LISITZKY

In the grip of CROSS-CURRENTS

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IN THE GRIP OF CROSS-CURRENTS, *is the title of an autobiography by Ephraim E. Lisitzky, an outstanding American Hebrew poet and pedagogue.*

IN THE GRIP OF CROSS-CURRENTS, *is the English rendition of Dr. Lisitzky's Hebrew volume* EILEH TOLDOT ADAM, *published by Mosad Bialik in Israel, and still a best-seller there. Lisitzky's English edition of his autobiography,* IN THE GRIP OF CROSS-CURRENTS, *will be ranked among classic Judaica. The introduction is by Professor Hillel Bavli of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The English translation is by Moshe Kohn and Jacob Sloan.*

In his introduction, Dr. Bavli writes in part about the book:

"In his autobiographical work, Lisitzky has revealed his ability to describe the realities of Jewish life in America. In this book, sketches of people and landscape, images and ideas, and lyrical rhapsodies are merged into a harmonious whole, lending poetical color to a number of

(Continued on back flap)

IN THE GRIP OF CROSS-CURRENTS

by **Ephraim E. Lisitzky**

Translated from the Hebrew by
Moshe Kohn and Jacob Sloan
and revised by the author

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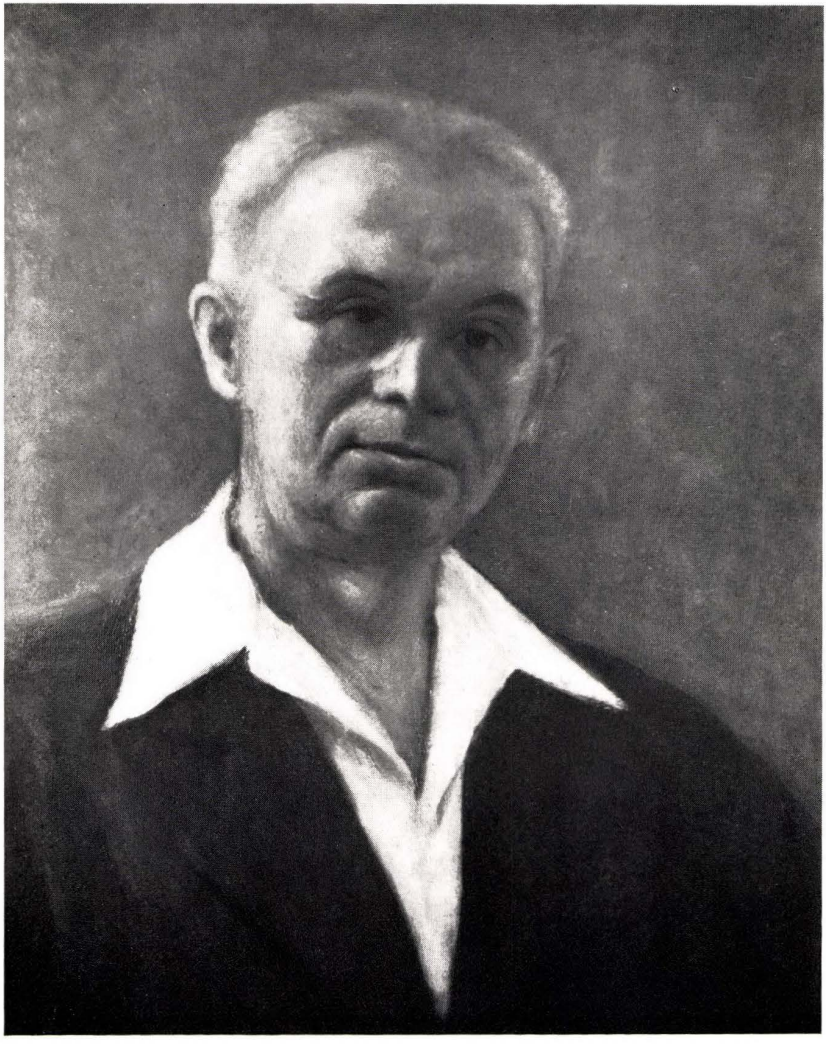
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IN THE GRIP OF CROSS-CURRENTS



EPHRAIM E. LISITZKY

To my daughter,

ANNETTE L. BROWN

to my devoted student,

LABEL KATZ

and

to my esteemed friend,

the distinguished American Jewish leader

PHILIP M. KLUTZNICK

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INTRODUCTION*

By Hillel Bavli

Professor of Hebrew Literature
The Jewish Theological Seminary of America

I have known Ephraim Lisitzky as a friend for more than forty years. I was witness to some of his life experiences, his tribulations and spiritual struggles in the course of his development. In coming now to discuss his creative work, I am very careful not to confuse the man with the artist. For the two, close as they are in their roots, are not always identical in stature.

Lisitzky first impressed me with his strange, wistfully eloquent sadness. Here beside you sits or walks a man, all ears and attention, of few words, as if he were guarding some secret too precious to be disclosed even to someone intimate. He occasionally utters brief, rhythmic sentences in a sad melody like some old Talmudic chant, and continues to meditate in silence. It is a silence palpable and many-faceted: There is a humility in it, submission, and resignation. Yet, how remarkable: This taciturn, naive man is also a speaker when he so desires, a popular orator who knows how to move an audience with flaming, exuberant oratory and rich

* Extract from an extensive essay in Hebrew. Translation by Moshe Kohn.

language. But, having completed his oration and his fervor having subsided, he is again reticent, listening and attending, a prince of silence.

The poet gives us some explanation of his humble silence in his autobiography, *In the Grip of Cross-Currents*. In this book, rich in sadness and beauty, Lisitzky limns with great artistry his wretched youth, and sketches somber portraits of orphanhood, poverty and melancholy. With a kind of lustful glee and self-inflicted pain of a person shedding the burden of many years that has subdued his tongue and pen, he bares the dark sides of his soul, the sense of inferiority deeply rooted in him since early youth because of his humble origins, even as he tells of the ambition to elevate himself which he harbored in his heart, to blot out his "disgrace." He describes the humiliations and setbacks that from the start imbued him with a wrath and desperation which remained with him until, at the age of sixteen, he left his town in White Russia to find refuge in the land of his father's sojourning, the United States. These childhood impressions which Lisitzky described so well when he grew to maturity gave a dark tinge to his poetry, which first blossomed some fifty years ago, in a remote Canadian village, and which has since flowered and grown profusely.

Lisitzky's poetry is wide in range, diverse in form. It includes lyrical meditation, odes and sonnets, a massive lyrical drama, narratives of Jewish and general content, an epic of American Indian lore and a variety of Negro spirituals.

In his autobiographical work Lisitzky has revealed his ability to describe the realities of Jewish life in America. In this book, sketches of people and landscapes, images and ideas, and lyrical rhapsodies are merged into a harmonious whole, lending poetical color to a number of chapters. In rich prose Lisitzky recounts his early years, his "green" years in the United States and in Canada, describing his experiences, the psychic struggles of a poor immigrant. He also sketches some features of the Jewish life in America of the time and draws personality portraits both in rich colors and tempered hues. Out of these somber pages speak the rootlessness

and spiritual poverty of a Jewish population which had been uprooted from its soil in Eastern Europe and had not as yet acquired a distinctive aspect in the ground in which it had been transplanted, together with the cry of anguish of the individual. Out of the hubbub of insolent market place sounds rises the cry of the blood of the few who battle for self-preservation and aspire to build a Jewish life in the United States. And Lisitzky sets up monuments to all the brave spirits who sanctify Jewish tradition in an environment of libertinism and profanity. As in a haze, pass the shadows of the Jewish communities in Boston, in little Auburn, and figures flicker of individual scholars, students, spiritual leaders, intellectuals and writers, pioneers of the national movement and of Hebrew literature in America. Here and there emerges a crude, lusty type: a jolly mohel, completely businesslike, ever on the prowl for customers; or the poet's relative, a tailor who made good in America and became wealthy, and now preaches his philosophy of life to his poor immigrant relative who has come to ask him for a loan. The Jewish background generally is dark and barren. There is no *joie de vivre,* no prospect for the future, for over all these sights hovers the melancholy, soul-rent poet, and his mood permeates every picture and character sketch.

Lisitzky has succeeded in painting his self-portrait boldly and clearly. We see the scholarly young man in vain seeking a foothold in reality. The environment with all its alien clamor frightens him, as does his anguished heart, with its burden of poverty and sense of inferiority. We accompany him through pages permeated with sadness and great human beauty, through his hesitations, his gropings and wanderings, his search for trades and occupations, beginning as peddler and cigar roller and ending as shohet and teacher.

What powerful impact in the chapter describing the struggle between the young poet in search of his path in life and his peddler father, the simple, naïve, Orthodox Jew. The father's travails, his poverty and bitterness, his dreams and aspirations to spiritual uplift through his son; his disappointments and sufferings, the son's revolt against tradition, his submissions to temptation

and his regrets—all this is packed into powerful chapters out of which rise occasional strains of Lisitzky's poetry. The tone of introspection, to a point of self-castigation, that permeates these memoirs enhances the value of the book. Here, a sensitive man bares himself, all his frailties and foibles, his inclinations and aspirations, and—above all—his struggles in an environment alien to him until he weaves himself into this environment, unconsciously becomes attached to it and part of it.

Lisitzky compresses a great deal of his linguistic and descriptive power in the chapters of his life in Canada, in the tiny village of Ahmic Harbor. His confessed weakness for nature finds full expression in these chapters. His description often departs from the narrative form and takes on the color of legend. He uses color generously and paints with overflowing ecstasy idyllic pastorales, majestic, primitive sylvan scenes, and his words are gossamer and fragrant as if here, in the Canadian village, he had found the desired haven, his final destination. On the background of his landscapes we make out human silhouettes: gangs of lumbermen in their labor camp and on their days of rest and holidays; simple peasants hot in pursuit of deer; a villager "with an artistic soul," a smith, boat-builder and violinist, who befriends the young poet. In Lisitzky's words: "We were alike in a way: both of us aspired to great and wondrous things and both encountered obstacles to realizing our aspirations. His obstacles were his roots, mine—my rootlessness." Among his *dramatis personae* are an elderly Scottish gentleman-farmer on whose heart and tongue lay only his native Scotland—and he, and his young daughter who loves nature and poetry and the Hebrew poet. Pure, noble types, of whom, from the perspective of time, Lisitzky sees the light—and only the light—of their souls. Another colorful personality: a widely experienced American, an elderly man who does not age, an adventurer and philosophizer, Truex by name, a pioneering type, a man close to nature and to people, who becomes the poet's patron and teaches him the social graces and how to take roots. In the center of all of them are Yudel Brown and his family, the Jewish immigrant storekeeper who had settled among non-Jews and

constantly longs for a Jewish community life—but stays put and finds his consolation in his increasing prosperity.

These chapters exude calm and joy of life, and complement the grey chapters of the book which seethe with the grimness of life. The book as a whole is a fine commentary on Lisitzky's life and on the tapestry of his art, a tapestry streaked with black threads of reality and dipped in the aura of fantasy.

All my life I bore a crown of thorns upon my head and I devised to set a Sabbath hat over it to conceal it from all eyes. I now remove this Sabbath hat. I no longer shy from revealing my crown of thorns—it is a crown of glory that was set upon my head.

PART I

A Passing Shadow

I

The obstetrician had no choice—mine had to be a live birth. It was my mother's first pregnancy, and she had a hard labor of it. Her condition being critical and the old midwife unable to deliver me on her own, my father called a famous Minsk doctor—Minsk was where we lived at the time. The doctor examined my mother, and decided that I could not be delivered whole without jeopardizing my mother's life. My father agreed with the religious principle that the life of the mother must be saved at the expense of the unborn child. But my father's mother would have none of that; she insisted that the doctor rely on the merciful Lord, and urged him to try to have me delivered alive. My grandmother was a strong-willed woman, and she had her way. The doctor yielded, and brought me into the world hale and hearty. The good Lord, too, yielded to my grandmother's shrill and tearful entreaties; He allowed my mother to survive for my sake.

The doctor's elation at the sound of my crying—for he had to work hard to produce it—equalled that of my parents. He insisted on being allowed to stand godfather at the circumcision. My parents were displeased. They would have much more preferred a learned and pious man as Sandek. But, when all is said

and done, a physician will do as a godfather, too. However, the doctor made another demand: "No more pregnancies! Miracles don't repeat themselves." This my parents could not accept. "Having one son is like having a single shirt to your back." They relied on God to continue in His marvelous ways. My mother became pregnant six times during the next six years; each time she miscarried, and the sixth pregnancy cost her life. She was twenty-nine when she died and I was not quite seven.

My mother's image has lingered in my memory like a phantom: tall, slender, with a pale face, black hair and black eyes, melancholy, a creature whose few words seemed to be a plea for mercy. Her love for me was boundless. It was as though she knew in her heart that her days were numbered, and she had to lavish all the love she could on her soon-to-be-orphaned child. Still, when the occasion called for it, she did not hesitate to rebuke me, with her hand as well as her tongue. She came of a poor family and had grown up with little training at home. But she had known suffering and poverty intimately, and these had taught her superior qualities which she tried to inculcate in me at my earliest childhood. Later, after her death, I heard a great deal about my mother's personality from my father and other relatives. One particular episode, showing a characteristic trait of my mother's, has remained in my memory from my own childhood experience of her:

One Sabbath my mother took me to visit one of her relatives. On the way I had a great piece of luck: I found a silver coin. I picked it up and put it in my pocket. Walking along further, we met another boy my age who was clacking a stick along a picket fence.

"Heathen!" I shouted. "Don't you know you're not allowed to carry sticks on the Sabbath?"

"Son," Mother scolded me, "aren't you a 'heathen' yourself? You know you're not allowed to carry money on the Sabbath. Don't you be accusing other people of your own faults!"

I blushed for shame, took the coin out of my pocket, and threw it into the street.

My father was a water carrier. From early morning till late at night he shuffled along the streets and alleys of Minsk, loaded down with his yoke and two pails, going from house to house, carrying water for a paltry fee. In the summer he would come home late at night, blistered from the sun and soaking with sweat; in the fall he would be drenched from head to foot; and in the winter he would appear at the table frozen, rime-bearded, and coated with ice. He would sit down, miserably fatigued, and groan through supper. He would fall asleep over the grace after meals, his head slumping to the table, the last word of the grace crumbling from his lips.

My father had been a yeshiva student in his youth. Necessity had forced him to become a water carrier, but he had never become reconciled to his lot. A bitter man, his resentment grew when he enrolled me in the traditional one-room *heder;* his frustration at his own life was sharpened by the knowledge that I must suffer for it, too. Sometimes, on the way to or from *heder,* I would see my father coming toward me, the yoke across his shoulders. His face would redden with humiliation, and he would turn off into the nearest courtyard. My father's bitterness was slightly relieved by his office as reader of the Torah Scroll on the Sabbath in one of the poor folks' synagogues in Minsk. As he read from the Holy Writ, his spirits would soar upward, out of the mean workaday world into the divine spheres. Many early Saturday mornings I remember being awakened by his chanting of the day's reading from the Torah in preparation for the great moment. He would begin softly, sadly; I would hear it as though in a dream. Then his voice rose, the tones grew rounder, firmer, to reach a pitch of clarity and joy. I woke and looking at my father, could not recognize him: there was a holy glory in his face.

Though my father drudged for every penny, he was mortgaged in advance to informers. Let me explain:

Minsk had a gang of rascals who thrived on extorting their fellow Jews with the threat of informing on them to the authorities. My father was one of their victims. What had happened was this: When it came time for my father to serve in the hated

Russian army of the Czar, his widowed mother, whose sole support my father was at the time, hit on the idea of changing his elder brother's name, and entering him in the town's death records. This imaginary death earned my father the right, as the first-born, to be exempted from military conscription.

Unluckily for him, however, my father passed from the frying pan of military service into the fire of the informers. Those scoundrels learned of my grandmother's ruse after a few years, and proceeded to make my father's life miserable. Under the threat of denouncing him to the authorities, they extorted money from my father. They visited our home from time to time. Loudly, banging their fists on the table, they would yell: "We're assessing you so much and so much. You deliver it by such and such a date or we turn you in!" Vainly my father and mother pleaded with them to have mercy; they had to hand the money over on the scheduled day—money they had saved by stinting on food or pawning their few possessions.

One day the informers dropped in on my mother when she was alone and told her they were holding my father at one of their hide-outs, and they would hand him over to the police if she didn't pay up within an hour. My mother was pregnant at the time, in her seventh month. Her heart constricted with anxiety—where was she to get the money? At that moment she went into labor, knelt, and gave birth—to a live child, for once. But she was alone in the house, and fainted during the birth. When she regained consciousness, the infant was dead. My mother recovered physically from this ordeal, but she lost her mind. She pounded the wall all day with her fists, screaming to heaven, throwing dishes at the good women of the neighborhood who came to calm her. She rained blows on the head of my father as well as her own father, who had been summoned from his home in Slutzk. After a short while she came to herself, but the depression never left her until the day she died.

The earliest childhood feeling that I can remember was a sense of combined insult and humiliation: My father was a water-carrier, my mother a crazy woman. My childish eyes looked bit-

terly at the whole world and pitifully at my wretched parents. I crawled into my shell to suppress these feelings; when the inner pressure grew unbearable I retreated to a solitary corner of our courtyard and cried.

Eventually, I sensed intuitively that my mother was about to be taken from me. At times, visualizing my mother lying on the ground like my dead grandmother, covered by a black sheet, candles burning at her head, I would rush to her, bury my head in her lap, and burst into a paroxysm of tears.

My intuition proved right. One midnight I awoke from a nightmare and jumped into my mother's bed, as I often did for the reassurance of her nearness at such times. I snuggled up close to her, and then shuddered. Her body was cold. Terrified, I looked at her face—it was frozen white. "Mama! Mama!" I sobbed hysterically. At my cry, my father rushed over, picked me up and carried me out of the bedroom in his arms. "Ai, ai, poor son of an unfortunate mother! Ai, my poor little orphan!"

II

Even before thirty days of mourning were over, the matchmakers were visiting my father with marriage proposals. These proposals were only hinted at in my presence; they were made explicit in undertones in the corner. Still, I was aware of the subject of these discussions, for orphans mature early. Though jealously guarding the memory of my mother, whose place another woman was to take, I realized that this was the way of the world, and determined to make the best of a bad situation. I gave the matter some thought and suggested to my father a fitting replacement for my mother. For if God can arrange proper matches for His children, can not a poor orphan arrange a match proper for himself? The wife I proposed to my father was my aunt, my mother's stepsister, who had come from Slutzk to work as a servant maid with some rich people in Minsk, and used to visit us often. I was attached to her. My father was receptive to my advice and proposed marriage to my aunt. At first she declined, on the grounds that she was young and pretty and had many young men courting her. Why marry a widower and bring up another woman's orphan? But her parents pressed her, and I tearfully begged her. Finally, she agreed. I was a mournful par-

ticipant at the wedding. Grief-stricken, I retreated to a corner, where I sat all alone, my eyes following the groom, his bride, and the marriage guests. At that moment, I was bitterly jealous of my dead mother's memory. All the affection I had felt for my aunt turned into hatred. She was no longer my beloved aunt, but a despised stepmother.

After my father married my aunt he decided to move from Minsk to Slutzk, where her parents lived, and to give up his Gibeonite trade for another—if not an easier one, at least it should be less degrading. The move from Minsk was no easy matter. The informers got wind of my father's plan and threatened to denounce him if he dared carry it out. They'd never let him out of their jurisdiction—he would have to pay them off the rest of his life. My father tried to placate them with promises of payments from Slutzk. These attempts failing, he decided to sneak out of Minsk and hide in a nearby village until my stepmother could join him with the household goods, helped by some of our sturdy relatives.

In Slutzk my father began a Sisyphean struggle for a livelihood. Slutzk was a city of paupers, all of whom lived off one another. It was hard for the natives to get along, much less a newcomer. Then, almost immediately, the informers caught up with my father. Two of them paid him a visitation in Slutzk. Caught in their vise, my father felt he had no recourse but to leave the country—come what may, he would emigrate to America! Anything to be rid of the plague of informers! He wrote his sister, who had settled in Boston, to send him a ship's ticket. She sent it to him at once. His departure from Slutzk, like that from Minsk, was stealthy. But this time he succeeded in eluding not only his informer enemies but his beloved only son as well.

My father kept his forthcoming trip to America a secret from me. But, like the prophet Elisha, who clung to Elijah sensing that his master was about to be translated to heaven, I stayed close to my father's side until the moment he left. Returning from the *heder,* I would attach myself to my father and follow him about like a shadow, getting up when he got up, sitting down when he

sat down, and crawling into his bed after him. There I held him hard until I fell asleep. That year I was reciting the mourner's prayer for orphans; every morning I got up early for the morning services at the nearby synagogue. One morning, I awoke to find that my father was not at my side.

"Where's papa?" I cried, shaking my stepmother awake.

"Papa has gone to synagogue," she replied, her voice choked with tears.

I rushed to synagogue in a panic. I looked for my father among the worshippers—but he wasn't there. I knew at once that my father had abandoned me. My world turned dark. I opened the prayer book; the print was dim, a mist of tears obscured my vision. I rubbed my eyes with my coat sleeve and tried to pray. But my voice failed me. There was a live coal stuck in my throat. I choked. I began to recite the mourner's prayer and the lump of coal dissolved, crumbling before the rush of my tears. I recited the prayer as I had recited it for the first time at my mother's grave, in tones of unmitigated anguish: O God, now I am a double orphan—deserted by my mother, abandoned by my father!

I was about seven and a half when my father left for America, and my days of childhood and youth were spent in the desolation of orphanhood. My soul thirsted and my flesh pined for my dead mother and for my father in far-off exile. My heart yearned to utter the words "papa" and "mama." At night, my daytime thoughts were reflected in dreams of my mother and father. Realizing that my mother was dead and my father in far-off exile, I would burst into hysterical sobbing and my stepmother would wake me with a scolding. During the day, I would conjure up their forms in my fantasy, while my eyes gushed tears and within me a bitter cry arose: "Mother, why have you forsaken me?" "Father, to whom have you abandoned me?"

The *heder* was my only comfort. It was a dark and dreary place; my teacher, a grim man. But the pages of the Bible unrolled a glorious world before my eyes. The heroes of the Bible took the place of my father and mother. Kindly, merciful, they addressed me with warmth and compassion.

Nature was my other comfort. Slutzk was a poor city. The streets were muddy, the houses dilapidated, especially in our quarter, the poorest part of town. Where we lived, the mud never dried, not even at the height of summer, and the ramshackle huts were sunk in earth up to the windows. But there were fields and gardens and orchards outside Slutzk. Summers I would wander off on the way back from heder and go to see the windmill in the meadow on the other side of our house. I was fascinated by the four hands of the mill, alternately attracted by the happy whirring as the wind spun them around and terrified of the ghosts and demons that were said to revel in the windmill at night. There I would sit and stare off into the gold-tinged late-summer afternoon sky. Yellow stalks swayed in the breeze. Butterflies fluttered past in a riot of color; beetles, bees, and mosquitos buzzed and murmured. Across the horizon a green wood called me out of the reddening mist. The sun set. The fringes of the western sky blazed purple. Peasant women in colorful shawls, returning from their vegetable gardens, sang sad, sweet songs. Grasshoppers chirped in the meadow, frogs croaked in the purpling pond, birds twittered under the windmill roof. In the sky, awesome clouds drifted through the flames—not clouds, but seraphim, the very same seraphim that the prophet Isaiah had seen in his vision of the Lord: each one had six wings. . . . From the mystic heights the glory of God revealed itself to them. I heard their cry: Holy, holy, holy! Near me, on a mound, a bush burned, branches aglow—the burning bush! I heard a voice —not the voice of God that Amram's famed son heard speak to him from the bush in the land of Midian, but the voice of one of His prophets, proclaiming the verse I had learned in the *heder:* "O God, Thou in Whom the orphan is comforted . . ."

III

They say that the Jews of Slutzk always keep their little finger bent. Why? Because they have appropriated nine-tenths of the pride in all the world. And when you ask a Slutzk Jew, Why this exaggerated pride?" he puts his right forefinger on his left little finger, bends the little finger, and tots off his virtues: "In the first place, I'm from Slutzk! In the second place . . ." But there really is no second place—so his little finger stays bent.

Slutzk was renowned for its poverty; it had the lion's share of the poverty common to all the Jewish cities and towns within the Pale of Settlement in Czarist Russia. The Slutzk Jews were dressed in rags, lived in hovels, and ate dry crusts of bread together with a groat krupnik soup—a Slutzk delicacy consisting of nothing but a sea of boiled water with occasional islands of potato slices and groats. Poor though Slutzk was, it was a center for the study of the holy Torah—for, as our masters have said, poverty is a fit condition for those who study the Torah, and the way of the Torah is filled with travail. A long line of rabbinical geniuses had dwelt in Slutzk; there were always many outstanding scholars in the town studying regularly in the synagogue, where they also taught both the prominent gentry and the simple

folk of Slutzk. Even Slutzk's ignoramuses were fragrant with the aroma of Torah, like the thorn that retains some of the scent of the myrtle growing nearby. There were yeshivot, rabbinical academies, for young and old; students flocked to the Slutzk yeshivot from far and near to apply themselves to the study of the Torah. Poor as they were, the Jews of Slutzk shared their meager rations with the needy scholars, and, in their synagogues, gave them a roof over their heads and a bench to sleep upon. For the Jews of Slutzk were proud of the city's learning.

I lived in Slutzk during the first eight years of childhood when personality is formed, and the city stamped me with its spirit permanently. From the Bible I went on to study of the Talmud, passing from the ideal to the practical, from the mysteries of divine creation to the banalities of property ownership. But my imagination transformed the Talmudic realities into airy abstractions, and shaped the sages dealing with them in the real-life visages of the elders of the Slutzk synagogue, as I saw them competing over the elucidation of disputed passages with angry grimaces, frowning, eyes ablaze, haranguing one another with bristling thumb and arched back, in a battle to the finish. But these sages dealt with me kindly, revealing the mysteries of the Torah to me with a sweet and pleasant mien.

The weekaday studies in the company of the ancient sages relieved some of the bitterness of my orphan's life; but it all came back to me again on the Sabbath. Seated in a synagogue corner, I would look jealously at the other boys my own age. There they sat, lucky sons, next to their fathers enveloped in prayer shawls, basking in the beaming faces of their parents. What sin had *I* committed to be an orphan?

Some Saturday afternoons, on the way to services, I would visit one of my *heder* friends at home. Once I found our teacher there: it was his practice to visit one of his pupils at home in turn every Sabbath, there to examine him in his parents' presence. It was my friend's turn that afternoon. Feeling my presence to be unwelcome, I slipped outside. I peeked through the window and saw his parents glowing with pleasure, the rabbi's look of satis-

faction at having gotten his student successfully through the examination—and the universal pleasure at the wine and cookies that finished off the visit. I was eaten up with envy. I was just as good as my friend. Why didn't the teacher visit *my* home and examine *me?* Why should I be ignored just because I was an orphan? Hurt and angry, I walked to the synagogue. After the services I stayed for the recitation of the Psalms. Shadows of the gloaming filled the synagogue and their dimness absorbed the glow of twilight reflected from the western horizon. On the Almemar stood Yeke, the tinsmith, and chanted verses from Psalms that bid the Holy Sabbath Bride farewell. He chanted the verses with a nostalgic moaning and mournful melody, and the sparse congregation, immersed in shadows and sadness, responded wholeheartedly. I, too, joined him, and in the recitation of the verses I bemoaned my orphanhood.

I longed to be examined in my studies, too. Since I had no parents, the examination would be before my grandfather. I did not want my own teacher to examine me—I resented his discriminating against me—so I preferred one of the learned scholars of Slutzk. At that time I was studying about the Merchants of Lod in *heder,* so I decided to memorize that section for the examination. When I finally knew it all by heart, I urged my grandfather to have me examined by Rabbi Heshke, who worshipped at the same Yeshiva Synagogue where my grandfather did. At first, my grandfather refused. He sat on a bench behind the almemor in synagogue, with the common people—how could he dare even to approach Rabbi Heshke, who occupied a seat of honor next to the Ark, and for whom everybody rose when he came in or went out? But, at last, grandfather gave in to my pleading and took me to see Rabbi Heshke one Sabbath afternoon. We both approached the seat of honor with quaking knees. The rabbi's head was bent over a volume of the Talmud and he did not notice our appearance. My grandfather coughed several times. Rabbi Heshke looked up, cross at the interruption.

"What do you want, Reb Yid (Mr. Jew)?"

"I want . . . uh . . . that is to say," grandfather stammered,

"he wants . . . this is my grandson, my dead daughter's son—his father's in America—uh . . . a colt drawing the yoke of Torah . . . he wants . . . uh . . . I mean, *he should like* to be examined, rabbi."

Rabbi Heshke asked me what Talmudic tractate and section I was studying, then sent me to the bookcase for the particular volume. I proceeded to recite the whole of the Merchants of Lod by heart, eyes lowered in shy awe of his grim visage. When I was done, Rabbi Heshke plied me with questions, both relevant and irrelevant. I answered them all. Glancing at him out of the corner of my eyes, I could tell he was satisfied.

"God bless the lad," he said to my grandfather. "He is a 'precious vessel,' indeed! Happy be his mother in heaven and his father in America!"

Tears rose in grandfather's eyes; my own heart tightened, and a lump rose in my throat.

"My son," Rabbi Heshke addressed me, "study with diligence, that your father in America may rejoice in you and your mother in heaven be glad, as it is written: 'May your father rejoice'." At those words, I burst out crying, and all the mortification of my orphanhood erupted in a sob of one anguished word: "Father! Father!"

IV

A teacher can be very important—but sometimes a school chum can be even more important. I was particularly close to my friends, being an orphan and all, and one of them, in particular, exerted a great influence on me. His name was Berel—just Berel. We studied together under Reb Yossel in the Householders' Synagogue for about a year and a half, and then in Rabbi Nehemiah's Yeshiva for another year. The moment we met we became good friends, and we stayed so until our lives separated.

I remember Berel as a young boy: his pale, tense face overcast —half with sadness, half with grimness—sometimes enlivened by a modest smile; his black, dreamy eyes were tinged with melancholy; the black lustre of his hair heightened the pallor of his face. Vividly I recall the fascination of his fingers, genteel, white and delicate. Still, there was a certain heavy quality about him, a contemplative seriousness. Berel's mood, like his walk, was measured, cautious, slow, ponderous. He was an outstanding student, head and shoulders above Reb Yossel's other students. And, despite his sobriety, Berel was a gifted mime, capable, when in the mood, of hitting off anyone in speech and grimace, baring the weaknesses of small and great alike, slashing them with incisive wit.

Every day together we reviewed the Talmud lesson Reb Yossel had expounded. Then, between the afternoon and evening services, we went off to a corner of the synagogue and there, sloughing off our studies, engaged in secular conversation dealing mostly with intimate matters. I told him about my mother, and he told me the wonderful stories he had read in Hebrew books he had come across. Sometimes we day-dreamed about far-off lands where we would discover hidden treasures. We swore everlasting friendship, sealing our pledge with an oath.

One day, between semesters, Berel talked me into going with him to Rabbi Nehemiah to be examined for admission to his yeshiva. I didn't think we knew enough Talmud to be admitted to Rabbi Nehemiah's Yeshiva, famous in Slutzk and environs. But Berel's self-assurance was contagious, and I went along, tagging behind. Entering Rabbi Nehemiah's house, Berel told Rabbi Nehemiah what we wanted. Rabbi Nehemiah assigned each of us a page of the Talmud to study thoroughly; we were to report the next day to be examined. We rushed off to the synagogue, and stayed there until we had mastered our assignments—helping one another over the difficult spots.

The next day we went to Rabbi Nehemiah. The examination over, learning that both Berel's father and mine were in America, he ordered us to send our mothers to see him. We knew at once that we had been accepted. We rushed home—even Berel, uncharacteristically, ran—and ran back to the rabbi, Berel with his mother, I with my stepmother. We stayed outside the rabbi's house, waiting breathlessly while our parents consulted with Rabbi Nehemiah. After a while they came out beaming with the good news. Of course, we had been accepted. Besides, Rabbi Nehemiah had told them that if they couldn't afford the tuition, he would assign us to help two of his slow students whose parents would pay our tuition in return. That *was* a holiday occasion!

Rabbi Nehemiah was a perfect representation of the Talmudic master Shammai: sharp in doctrine and sharp in looks—with chiseled features, pointed beard, and, above all, eyes like daggers. His yeshiva was famous for its discipline as well as learning. His

students treated him with awe mingled with fear. His strict manner helped him maintain a close discipline over all his students, large and small. After delivering his usual day lectures to his two classes, Rabbi Nehemiah would circle the almemar, humming through his nose as he concentrated on some Talmudic dispute. His eyes as he walked scanned his many pupils all sitting at their lecterns reviewing the day's lesson and preparing the next day's. Pity the poor pupil who dared interrupt his study or chat with a neighbor! The rabbi would train his sharp face on the miscreant until his flesh crawled. Rabbi Nehemiah readily explained difficult points to inquiring students. But he shunned all other conversation. A pupil, the masters say, must be treated like a child and held at arm's length—Rabbi Nehemiah held *his* at an arm-and-a-half's length. Still, his students respected him. He was an able expositor, and his daily lectures were beacons lighting up the dark seas of the Talmud.

Berel and I studied together for half a year in the Class at the Small Table. During this time there was a change in Berel. He withdrew completely into a grim shell. He lost the urge to study, and we gradually were alienated from one another.

The next semester Rabbi Nehemiah graduated me to the Class at the Big Table. I viewed this promotion as a kind of debt of honor, and threw myself into my studies heart and soul. Rabbi Nehemiah's eyes softened at the sight of my diligence, and I was happy. But Berel and I drifted apart. Eventually, he left the yeshiva. We lived in two different worlds. I stayed in the old world of traditional learning; he was attracted to the modern Haskalah, the Enlightenment movement. We lost contact with one another.

One day Berel and I happened to meet in the corridor of the Householders' Synagogue. He was holding J. L. Gordon's Hebrew poems under his arm, I a thick Talmudic tome. We talked: I of the pages of the Talmud that I had mastered and of the great commentators, he of the Hebrew literature he had read, the names of books I had never even heard of. We spoke different languages.

We never again met in Slutzk. Berel vanished from my life; I had no idea where he was or what he was doing.

Six years later, in America, when I, too, was under the spell of modern Hebrew literature, I met a former classmate from Rabbi Nehemiah's Yeshiva. We began to reminisce. Our conversation turning to Berel, my old chum exclaimed in amazement: "Who could have imagined then that Berel would become Hebrew literature's outstanding young novelist?!" The names of the young Hebrew novelists I had recently read flashed through my mind. "Why, Berel is I. D. Berkowitz!" I exclaimed in sudden recognition.

V

A new yeshiva, of a higher standard than Rabbi Nehemiah's, was founded in Slutzk by Rabbi Pesah, formerly of the town of Mocz. I decided to transfer to the new yeshiva after a year with Rabbi Nehemiah.

I have said that Rabbi Nehemiah was a living personification of the Talmudic master Shammai; Rabbi Pesah was Shammai's opposite number, Hillel. If "sharp" was the perfect word for Rabbi Nehemiah, "smooth" fitted Rabbi Pesah to a "T." There was a velvety smoothness about both the inner and outer man. His face shone with the light of learning and spirituality. The tiny pockmarks on his face seemed merely attractive dimples; his candid eyes were innocent; his carefully combed beard was lustrous. Rabbi Pesah was something of a dandy. His clothes were always immaculate, shoes polished, posture erect, gait aristocratic. Notwithstanding this careful attention to outward appearance, the rabbi was completely without pride—even that iota that is allowed the sage by tradition. A humble man, he loved the simple people, whom he treated with unpretentious directness.

For that reason Rabbi Pesah located his yeshiva in the Smiths' Synagogue. In Slutzk smiths were considered lowest in the scale

of skilled workers. They were crude men, who found it easier to grapple with a horse reluctant to be shod, or to handle a heavy wheel that needed a new rim, than to struggle with the strange letters in the prayer book. Treated by the learned folk with scornful contempt, the smiths, like the tailors, hatmakers, and butchers, left the synagogues dominated by the learned to build their own place of worship—the Smiths' Synagogue.

The presence of Rabbi Pesah's Yeshiva in the Smiths' Synagogue converted that lowly place into an authentic House of Study for its worshippers. From time to time the rabbi would lecture the smiths, and every day, between afternoon and evening services, he gave them a lesson in *The Life of Man,* a popular edition of the *Shulhan Arukh,* the accepted code for Jewish conduct. Part of the time he read, translated from the Hebrew into colloquial Yiddish, and explained the text to them; the rest of the time he preached heartrending sermons. The smiths sat around the table, the rabbi at the head. Their calloused, black-grained hands under their beards in a gesture of attention, they looked up at the rabbi with grateful eyes for this hour of spiritual exhilaration.

Rabbi Pesah was as modest with his students as he was with the smiths. He forced no discipline on them; he was their friend, their grown-up friend who stepped down to their level only to raise them to his. Scholarship at his Yeshiva gained through this spirit of comradery; the students repaid their master with love both of him and of learning.

There was this typical incident: It was between semesters. The snow was melting and all the streets and alleys of Slutzk were one huge quagmire. I went to Rabbi Pesah's home with three school friends about some matter he wanted to talk over with us. The walls and ceilings of his home had been newly whitewashed for the coming Passover. They shone solemnly. The bookcases packed with thick, well-bound books had an air of scholarly grandness. His charming young wife added an air of gentility. After we had finished our consultation, during which he treated us as colleagues rather than pupils, Rabbi

Pesah told us the story of his life—his adventures before he turned teacher and why he had preferred to be a yeshiva headmaster rather than a rabbi. Then he launched into praise of Jewish learning. Occasionally his wife interrupted with some folk story or anecdote about her old home town.

Suddenly, we heard angry shouting outside. We looked out the window and saw a peasant standing next to his wagon. It was axle-deep in mud, and the peasant was whipping his horse, cursing furiously. The wretched beast strained and tugged, but the wagon wouldn't budge.

"Come," Rabbi Pesah called us, "this is our chance to fulfill a commandment—the one that goes 'If thou seest the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldst forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.' "

We hurriedly followed Rabbi Pesah out into the street, tramped through the mud, and went over to the wagon. Shoving and pulling with hands and shoulders, we eventually helped the steaming horse get the wagon out of the mire. When we were through, Rabbi Pesah was unrecognizable. Usually, his clothes were spotless. Now he was covered from head to toe with mud, mud smears on his face and mud driblets in his beard. We stood there deeply touched. His spirituality shone out of the filth. The peasant stood with us, gaping silently. Then he removed his cap and crossed himself.

Rabbi Pesah influenced me more than any other teacher. He was both teacher and father to me. I loved him wholeheartedly, and threw myself with particular diligence into my studies. I waited impatiently for Thursday nights, when I would study during an all-night vigil. I was frail, and the Thursday night vigils drained my strength. Rabbi Pesah often scolded me for the sinful abuse of my body, contrary to Jewish law. But I continued the vigils; my body suffering was more than offset by my soul's delight. There was delight in an extra night's study, and special delight in the shadowy stillness of the synagogue during these lonely vigils. How happy I was that I had found my call in the

Torah. I would be a rabbi, and repay my father for his mortifying life of base labor, tribulations and humiliations.

Soon, my yeshiva schoolmates chose me to be a "reviewer." Every day, after Rabbi Pesah had lectured, my function was to review and expound to them the commentaries he had presented, both his own and those of other scholars. Rabbi Pesah sat on the side, as I reviewed the lecture, smiling contentedly at my performance.

After two years, several of my schoolmates and I decided to transfer to a more advanced yeshiva, one which ordained rabbis. We would leave Rabbi Pesah's Yeshiva the day we celebrated having finished that semester's tractate. The celebration took place with great ceremony in the presence of a large audience of friends, relatives, and worshippers from the Smiths' Synagogue. It looked like a Simhat Torah night celebration. The lamps and candelabra burned bright and the congregants were loudly merry. Rabbi Pesah was happiest of all: he was the "Bridegroom of the Torah"! His voice rang as he recited the traditional scholarly discourse, the Hadran, summarizing the completed tractate. But there was a note of sadness in his recital—it was a farewell address to favorite students who were leaving him. We shared his sadness: it was hard for us to part with our beloved teacher.

When the Hadran was over and we had all had some food and drink, we formed a circle around Rabbi Pesah, holding hands in a closed chain, and danced around the almemar. Ecstatically, we danced out the synagogue door, under the open sky in the square in front of the synagogue. Passover was coming. Winter had passed, with its snow, ice, frost, and storms. A silvery new moon floated in the blue sky, its white light shining in the rivulets of water cascading melodiously down the gutters on either side of the street. A warm wind, emitting fresh moisture, lovingly caressed our faces, curled our hair and whispered in our ears tidings of approaching spring with its bountiful blessings, and the branches of the bushes near the synagogue that had begun to bud affirmed, noddingly, its good tidings. From a nearby bakery we heard the

sound of rolling pins, flattening the matzoh dough—a sound of good tidings: the festival of spring is coming—Happy Holiday! Croaking frogs, somewhere, and a chirping cricket lodged in the wall of the synagogue responded joyously to the tidings of spring that resounded in the world. It was as though the whole world joined us in dancing and singing:

Rejoice and be glad in the joy of the Torah!
Rejoice and be glad in the joy of Spring!

VI

One of the strongest influences on me when I was a boy was a simple man, Uncle Reuben, my step-grandmother's uncle.

Uncle Reuben was a small-time itinerant tailor. He walked from village to village sewing shortcoats, trousers, and other clothing for the peasant families. Every Sunday he would put a small, hand-operated sewing machine on one shoulder, and a bag on the other shoulder with the rest of his sewing implements, bread for the week and, of course, prayer shawl, phylacteries, and prayer book. Thus loaded, he would set out on his rounds of the farms. When he had a job to do for a peasant, he would settle down in the farmhouse, eating the bread he had brought along from home together with the potatoes the peasant wife baked in the hearth. He would share the peasant's bed of boards, which served for the whole family. The peasants were fond of Uncle Reuben. He never cheated them, his prices were reasonable, and he never kept for himself the leftovers from the material they supplied him with. And during his visit he regaled them with news of the great world and edifying stories from the holy books. He was treated as an honored guest. When Uncle Reuben was ready to leave, the peasants would give him bunches of onions and garlic, bags of

beans and peas and millet and spilt, and similar country gifts. For his part, Uncle Reuben liked the peasants, too. He spent most of his time in their households, and felt like one of the family.

Nevertheless, Uncle Reuben looked forward to celebrating the Sabbath among his own people. Friday morning he rose early and went home as soon as he could. Once in Slutzk, he would hurry to the public bath house, steam the week's work out of his body, which he scrubbed with hot water and rinsed with cold. He left the bath house a new man.

When Uncle Reuben's wife died and his youngest daughter went to America—where all his other children had settled long before—he moved into our house. We were then living in a back room which we had rented cheap, and we were rather crowded. But my stepmother acceded to Uncle Reuben's youngest daughter's request, and allowed him to board with us for a small fee. For a while, Uncle Reuben continued to make the rounds of the neighboring villages, though he received a monthly allowance from America that was enough for him to live on. But he developed a hernia, which made walking hard for him, and Uncle Reuben finally decided to stay at home. When he stopped visiting the peasants, they took to dropping in on him. They would fetch him cloth and beg him to sew for them, since they could not rely on any other tailor. Uncle Reuben gave in, first, because he really enjoyed tailoring—it made him feel useful and wanted—and second, because he could put aside money for interest-free loans. Uncle Reuben was generous to all.

Every day Uncle Reuben awoke before dawn, washed his hands, and recited the daily portion from the Psalms. Later he went to the synagogue where he said the morning prayers and stayed on to study a chapter from the Mishna. On his returning home he would open the thick leather-bound prayer book whose pages had yellowed with age and handling, and recite an additional prayer, comprising excerpts from holy writings, assigned for each day of the week. Then he would eat breakfast, and sit down to work. He sewed, as he prayed, with great dedication: he was meticulously precise, anxious to do credit to his friends, the peasants. At one

or two in the afternoon, Uncle Reuben would stretch out on the sofa, and nap briefly. Then he would wash his hands again, open the Midrash Rabbah, and study the portion of the week. He had a hard time walking the muddy roads of Polesia on his rounds of the villages; but the intricate paths of the Midrash were even harder. En route he would stumble over strange words, lose his way, wander in circles, and finally stop and look desperately around. Where in the world was he! Suddenly, Uncle Reuben's face would light up. "Aha!" He had found his way out of the morass of the Midrash.

Having reached the main road, Uncle Reuben would pause, take a pinch of snuff out of his snuff box, fill his nostrils, and sneeze, "Marvelous!" It was hard to decide which was marvelous —the snuff or the portion from the Midrash that he had finally comprehended . . . Then Uncle Reuben repaired to the synagogue, said the afternoon prayers, sat down to study *The Well of Jacob,* said the evening prayers, and sat around for a while to hear the news from the shopkeepers, idlers, and fancy young men who read the modern Hebrew papers. He topped off the evening meal with a dessert consisting of a chapter from a popular inspirational book which he read both in the original Hebrew and in the old Yiddish translation in the margins. He read in a loud singsong; my stepmother and the visiting neighbor women would stop gossiping, perk up their ears, and listen with pious awe.

When his reading was over, Uncle Reuben would tell us wonderful stories about things that had happened in the old days.

One story was about his brother, who had been kidnapped and conscripted in the Czar's army when he was a child of eight. Like the other Jewish children in the same plight, his brother had been taken somewhere deep in Russia, and the family lost all trace of him. Forty years later, during the Russo-Turkish War, Uncle Reuben's brother came to his home town to pray over the graves of his parents. By then he was a general. He revealed his identity to his brothers and the rest of the family. With tears, he told them of the tortures he had gone through; the army officers had forced him to change his faith. Now, having prayed over his parents'

graves, he vowed that if he survived the war, he would return to his God and his people. But Uncle Reuben's brother was not fated to fulfill that vow. He fell in the Battle of Plevna.

Then there was another story Uncle Reuben told, about a Polish nobleman who had an estate near the home town of Uncle Reuben's father. He liked Jews, and he employed a number of them—including Uncle Reuben's father—on his estate. The nobleman was a leader of the Polish revolt against Russia. The revolt was crushed, and the Russian authorities searched high and low for the nobleman. When they were hot on his heels, he came to my uncle's father, disguised as a peasant, and asked to be smuggled out of town to a Polish border city, from which he hoped to escape the country with the help of smugglers. Uncle Reuben's father agreed. Hiding the nobleman under a wagonload of hay, he drove off to the border city. The nobleman asked him to name his reward. But he said: "Noble sir, you can give me nothing I can accept. I did not risk my life and smuggle you out for a reward, but simply to return kindness with kindness. You have been good to me and to many of my fellow Jews—may the God of Israel reward you!"

Sometimes, Uncle Reuben would ask me to play checkers with him—it was his favorite game. Against my better judgment I would agree, resigning myself in advance to the frustration I knew lay in store for me. We sat at the checkerboard, playing completely opposite games: he, with great deliberation, chewing on the tip of his beard and mopping his forehead as he carefully plotted every move and considered its consequences; and I, impulsively charging ahead to immediate victory, unaware of the traps ahead. Both of us would be humming to ourselves. Suddenly, a resounding slap on my hand—I had moved, then changed my mind, and moved back again. Quivering with rage, Uncle Reuben would cry: "Heathen! You can take three steps back when you pray, but not when you play!" One game led to another, but I never learned. The games always ended with my hand swollen like dough and beet-red.

My Uncle Reuben had a peculiar passion—fasts. He observed

all the fasts incumbent on every pious Jew, including the Leap Year fast, the New Moon's Eve fasts, and the fasts for the Ten Days of Penitence. To these regular fast days he added a fast day of his own almost every week—a "dream fast."

"I've had a bad dream. I had better fast today," Uncle Reuben would announce, returning from synagogue in the morning, in a tearful voice not unmixed with pleasant anticipation. He couldn't wait until the Monday and Thursday fasts. On fast days he fairly exuded spirituality. His face beamed, his eyes glowed, and he chanted a High Holy Day tune as he sewed. Sometimes, my stepmother would beg him to stop torturing himself with these self-imposed fasts.

"Torturing myself? You don't know what you are talking about. It's no torture at all—it's a pleasure, the greatest pleasure in the world!"

Uncle Reuben had another passion—the public bath house. Every Friday afternoon he retired to the bath house and stayed there until just before sunset. Having treated himself on the upper bench in the steam room to a basting and flogging with a bundle of twigs, he scalded his body with hot water, rinsed it with cold, followed by an immersion in the ritual bath. He did not neglect his soul on these occasions: he treated it to conversation with his cronies and eavesdropping on the conversations of community leaders on matters of great public concern. Sadly, it was the bath house, which so invigorated both his body and soul, that almost cost my Uncle Reuben his life.

One bitter cold Friday afternoon in the early winter, Uncle Reuben hurried to the bath house and stayed there until close to sunset. My stepmother had finished preparing the Sabbath meal when someone came running up from the bath house with the message that Uncle Reuben had had his clothes stolen from him, and she was to send back one of my suits by return messenger—for Uncle Reuben had only one suit, which he wore day in, day out. My stepmother quickly rolled up one of my suits and rushed over to Uncle Reuben in the bath house post haste. But on the way she met Uncle coming home in his cap, fur coat, and boots. When

she expressed her relief at the recovery of his clothing, he exclaimed:

"Recovery, you say? You don't know what you're talking about! All those thieves left me were my fur coat, my cap, and my boots —I'm naked as the day I was born!" And Uncle Reuben lifted the hem of his coat to demonstrate what he meant. He had a terrible time getting into my trousers and jacket. When he finally succeeded, he looked like a scarecrow. He had to usher the Sabbath in at home—my clothes were so tight on him, Uncle Reuben could barely walk. When he had blessed the wine and sat down to break the Sabbath bread, an explosion shook our room—my pants had split!

Saturday night the bath house keeper came to our house with Uncle Reuben's clothes. He had been robbed of his memory, not of his clothes. The bath house had a new wing, known as the New Bath House; a long corridor connected the old bath house with the new. Uncle Reuben had undressed in the old bath house, then changed his mind, put on his boots, fur coat, and cap and gone down the corridor to the New Bath House. After a few hours there he forgot where he had undressed. Uncle Reuben recovered his mislaid clothing, but he had caught a cold on his way home from the bath house. Now he developed pneumonia and almost died.

I have no doubt that Uncle Reuben was saved from death partly by his own lifelong piety, and partly by my fervent prayers for one who was as dear to me as a father. But my prayers were only partly efficacious. True, Uncle Reuben was granted a full recovery. But at the same time he left me—uncle emigrated to America!

For some time Uncle Reuben's sons and daughters in America had been urging him to come to them and spend the rest of his days in comfort. When he got well they sent him a ship's ticket and a letter imploring him not to postpone the trip any longer. He thought it over for a long time. It was hard to say yes. It was hard to uproot himself from his native land, where he had lived in peace and where he even had a burial-plot waiting for him. It was even

harder to go into exile to a country where—rumor had it—there wasn't a kosher doorknob! The very idea of the ocean trip frightened him: "It's no simple matter crossing a wide ocean where so many ships have sunk like rocks!" Suppose his ship were to meet the same fate? He'd not even get a proper Jewish burial.

Uncle Reuben pondered the problem for a long time. Finally he gave in to his children's wishes and prepared for the journey. The days before his departure were a time of mourning for him; he wept and wept. He wept as he finished his last suit of peasant clothing; he wept as he dried some slices of bread that he had soaked in beer, to serve as provisions for the journey; he wept at the graveyard, whither he had gone to pray farewell to his ancestors. He wept as he distributed the traditional eighteen rubles for "life" among the poor. He wept as he packed. He wept here, he wept there, his eyes were an unfailing spring of tears. And I wept with him, inside. But on the day of his departure, I could not suppress the tears any longer, and we both wept together.

VII

My mother's father was a pauper, with nine children to match the classic "nine measures of poverty." Six of the nine children were girls who reached marriageable age one right after the other. Grandfather was originally a coach driver, transporting freight and passengers on the Slutzk-Minsk and occasionally the Slutzk-Bobruisk route. When he grew older, Grandfather turned in his coach for a droshky, and took a stand in the town square near the market place, lining up with the other droshky drivers. "Change your job, change your luck," as the popular saying has it. But it didn't work with Grandfather. The only change was that the bad luck that used to chase him by coach chased him by droshky. He simply couldn't make a living with either vehicle. In his shabby coachman's uniform, he sat patiently in the driver's seat of his dilapidated droshky harnessed to a lean horse, on the look-out for passengers. When one came along, it was always one of the more agile drivers who would pull out of line and capture the gesturing or hailing passenger. The other drivers took the best passengers for themselves, and left Grandfather the small pickings.

Grandfather couldn't make a living and he had a large family, so my grandmother pitched in to help. Summers, she hired out to

work in the vegetable gardens on the outskirts of Slutzk alongside other poor women. She left at sunrise and spent all day spading, furrowing, weeding, and picking. She returned home at sunset, her head bent, her whole body aching and gritty. Home, she would cut up some cucumbers and onions, toss the slices into a cucumber brine whitened with buttermilk, and serve the dish with dry black bread. Sitting down to eat with the family, she would rest her weary head on her arm and fall asleep, forgetting all about her hunger.

In the winter, Grandmother sold potatoes, frozen apples and pears, chickens, geese, and similar commodities. She stayed in the market all day. When she came home her dress was frozen stiff, her body a piece of solid ice. Thawing out at the oven, she set a pot of water on the fire, threw in some slices of potatoes, groats, and onion, sprinkled on salt and pepper, and prepared the famous Slutzk *krupnik* that I have mentioned before. After supper, she cleared the dishes from the table to make room for the pile of feathers from the fowls she had accepted to pluck for a few pennies. She plucked until midnight. Every now and then she would doze off, her head nodding—but her fingers miraculously worked on of their own accord. Between Purim and Passover Grandmother worked in a matzoh bakery. Every day during that period she stood over the dough crib from dawn until midnight, kneading dough. Two days before Passover she returned home, her hands as puffed up as the dough she had kneaded, her back so twisted she could hardly straighten up without cracking her bones. Groaning, she cleaned the house, made the utensils kosher for Passover, and prepared meals. The first night of Passover, Grandmother's groans mingled with Grandfather's sad chanting of the Passover Haggadah at the Seder.

But "many trades mean no income," as the saying goes. My grandparents spent their whole life fending off poverty, but poverty refused to desert its old friends. This house of theirs, with its clay floor, mildewy and spider-webbed walls, its sooty ceilings, dripping filth whenever the oven was lit—where could poverty find a finer residence? Generally speaking, Grandfather and Grand-

mother resigned themselves to God's will—poverty was fated to be one of the members of their family. But once a week, on Thursday, Grandmother would protest to her Maker: "Master of the Universe! Sabbath is at hand, and we've no flour for *hallah,* not a trace of meat or fish, and nothing left to pawn. What sin have I committed to deserve this punishment?"

But new troubles make us forget the old ones. My mother, Grandfather's favorite daughter went out of her mind; she got well, but died soon after, in her bloom. Grandfather was inconsolable. Then, before the grass was green on my mother's grave, his second daughter who lived in Bobruisk died, too. Grandfather took her death even harder than mother's; mother had left only one orphan, my aunt left five. Besides, she died a violent death.

One winter night my aunt's husband took her to see a new apartment, which he said could be rented cheaply. He returned alone. The next morning, when the water carrier went to draw water from the well near the house, his bucket yielded a scarf. Frightened, the water carrier called the police. They eventually pulled my aunt's drowned and frozen body out of the well. There was reason to believe that my uncle had thrown my aunt down the well—he had fallen in love with a neighbor's daughter but my aunt refused to allow him to divorce her. However, since there were no eyewitnesses and no one wanted to press a murder charge, the police did not pursue the matter.

But this was not the end of Grandfather's troubles. One day he picked up a passenger whose wallet fell out of his pocket as he got into the droshky. Grandfather gave in to temptation. The wallet was packed with money, grandfather had three daughters to marry off, no way to make ends meet. He picked up the wallet and hid it in the collar around the horse's neck. At the end of the ride the passenger realized when he came to pay Grandfather that he had lost his wallet. He hauled Grandfather off to the police. They searched Grandather and his droshky thoroughly and found the lost wallet. Grandfather was arrested, tried, and sentenced to three months in prison—the judge refused to take Grandfather's age into consideration.

Grandfather couldn't bear the sight of his family's poverty. He suffered from an overwhelming sense of wretchedness and insult which cast him into a depressed mood. This mood created a barrier between Grandfather and the rest of the family; it was as though he was always cross at us. We feared his anger. I reacted to his waspishness with ambivalence. I resented his dragging me off to the bath house every Friday like a calf to the slaughter house. There he put me on the upper bench and gave me a good basting with a bunch of prickly twigs while I writhed and groaned, scalded and choking in the stream. When Grandfather took me down, my skin was red and raw. But he wasn't done yet. He doused me with scalding water, shutting his ears to my screams and the other bathers' pleas that he cool the water somewhat. I resented Grandfather—yet I loved him dearly at the same time, for he was both father and mother to me.

My great love for Grandfather enhanced my pity for him when he was sent to prison. And, when I visited him with Grandmother, seeing him standing there in the prison yard in his prison clothes, utterly wretched and ashamed, his face lowered, at a loss for words —my pity for Grandfather was mixed with shared humiliation. For I felt as though it was I wearing the prison uniform. I went to *heder* every day like a man going to the gallows. I sat at my desk with head lowered to avoid my classmates' eyes. I was sure their eyes were taunting me: "What's a jailbird's grandson doing here with us?" The letters in the Talmud open before me were black fire spelling the words: "Jailbird's grandson, jailbird's grandson." My voice, mingled with the voices of my classmates in the immemorial Talmud chant, cried: "Poor Grandfather! I pity you! I feel for you!"

My grandfather had a powerful build. He came of healthy stock—all his parents had lived to a ripe old age, clear-eyed and vigorous. When he went to prison his hair was steel-grey, his body erect, his walk springy. But when Grandfather got out of prison his hair was snow-white, his back bent, and he tottered when he walked. The three months in prison had made a tired old man of him. Dejected, head bowed, Grandfather came home the morning

he was released from prison. He sat down in a corner of the room, shrinking into himself, as though afraid to take up space in his own home. His eyes begged for mercy. Silently he picked up his pipe, which he had been forbidden to smoke in prison, filled it with tobacco, lit it, inhaled, coughed, exhaled, and shook his head sadly. Horse and droshky sold, all the money used up during his prison term—what was to become of him? Again he inhaled—exhaled—sighed—waved his hand in resignation: nothing for him to do but to become a beggar.

But Grandfather's troubles were still not over. A fire broke out in Slutzk—unusually severe even for this fire-ridden town. Despite everything the fire brigade could do, the fire raced from street to street, destroying every house in its path. In one night, a large section of Slutzk—including Grandfather's house—went up in flames. Next morning, the chimney of Grandfather's house was one of hundreds jutting out of heaps of ashes, like gravestones. Grandmother fell on her knees before the chimney, wringing her hands and crying. Alas, their last possession, after they had lost their source of livelihood, a roof over their heads, had gone with the smoke!

VIII

Man is born with passions, some of which mature of their own accord, others by a forced ripening, before their time. My passion for reading was developed prematurely by a wagon driver. We had moved into a small room of his house after my father went to America.

Like all the other classes in town, the Slutzk coachmen were divided into upper, middle, and lower strata. The upper stratum consisted of droshky drivers. Their droshkies were lacquered black, had velvet-covered cushions filled with felt and hair, and good springs, and the horses that pulled them were fine galloping animals. The drivers themselves, outfitted in long, pleated coats with brass buttons, sat high on their seats, transporting wealthy citizens about the town.

In the middle stratum were the draymen, who transported passengers and freights on the routes between Slutzk and cities and towns far and near. Their horses were big, brawny beasts, capable of pulling heavy loads day and night over bad roads. Their wagons were high and heavy, covered with a canopy to keep out the sun and rain. The draymen wore no uniform like the droshky drivers; but in the driver's seat they sat like kings—the reins were the reins of government, the whip, the royal sceptre.

The lowest stratum was the local wagon drivers, who carried loads inside the town limits, on hire. *Their* horses were lean creatures, with sunken thighs and spare hair, advanced in years. *Their* wagons were dilapidated and battered vehicles. *These* drivers sat miserably on boards slung across the sides of the wagon, and prodded the cadaverous horses with whip and lashing tongue. But the horses ignored them.

It was to this lowest stratum of drivers that our landlord belonged. He was a fine figure of a man, tall, broad-shouldered; but he was no bully. He was a friendly fellow, even with those he bore a grudge against, and he wouldn't harm a fly. Generally, he was like a lamb. But when he had had one vodka too many on a Sabbath or holiday occasion, he would turn into a lion. He would go to the house where someone he had a grudge against lived, and, standing outside the window, invite his enemy with loud curses to come out and fight like a man. His enemy's silence would infuriate him all the more; he would thrust his shoulder against the locked door and begin to break it down.

But, as the saying goes, "Even the lion fears the Ethiopian gnat." This lion's Ethiopian gnat was his wife. Our landlord's wife was his complete opposite in appearance: short, lean, haggard of face. But there was a tremendous magical power in her eyes that both terrified and subdued her husband. At the critical moment, a messenger dispatched to our landlord's wife would bring her rushing to the scene of imminent calamity. The moment she turned her eyes on his, he collapsed into a heap of bones. He tagged after her dragging his tail and mane like a tame lion returning to his lair. He emerged from the Saturday afternoon nap mild as a lamb again. He had forgotten all about the beating he was going to give that man he hated. He reverted to type: friendly to everyone, including those he inwardly disliked, insulted, but never retaliating.

These eruptions of our landlord's while he was under the influence of liquor were protests of a repressed artist in him. Finally, the artist gaining the upper hand, gathered together a group of young coachmen, smiths, cobblers, tailors, and idlers, organized

them into a troupe of Purim players, and directed them into a Purim play where he had the starring role. He bit off more than he could chew: he did not want one of the usual Slutzk Purim plays, presented by lower-class people who went from door to door singing silly songs and asking for a handout. He wanted a big-town performance, which, as rumor had it, was performed before an audience as a real dramatic presentation. He finally decided to stage *The Sale of Joseph*. The cast met every night in our landlord's house where he directed them with all his inborn artistry. He was not one for reading books, and it was with great difficulty that he made his way through the prayer book—like his horse plodding through a muddy street. Yet, wonder of wonders: he went through the book of *The Sale of Joseph* like a veteran, himself playing the hero. He knew the whole play by heart, and he made every one of his pupils commit his part to memory. He trained them to speak fluently and clearly, every word with the proper diction and intonation, raising and lowering the voice where it had to be raised and lowered, stressing or slurring as required, crying out in agony or shouting in joy—all as the occasion demanded. He also taught his cast to sing the singing parts of the play, keeping the correct pitch. Our landlord was successful! His pupils passed their studies with honors. When Purim arrived the wing of the great synagogue was filled to the rafters with men, women and children enjoying *The Sale of Joseph*. Slutzk local pride was satisfied: the town had come up in the world—Slutzk had a theatre, too!

After Purim our landlord invited neighborhood women to his house every Friday night for story-reading hours. There were stories of famous kings, and heroes, holy and saintly men, robbers and sorcerers, demons and ghosts, all set down in chapbooks whose pages were yellowed with age. Contemporary romances by popular writers told of loving couples and their vicissitudes. He read these tales with feeling for plot and character. After finishing a chapter he would add his own interpretation, clarifying the cryptic and elaborating on the obvious. Thus he sat before his audience of women, reading and interpreting until the flames from

the dying tallow candles cast weird shadows on the walls. Then the women dispersed to their homes, regretful at the end of the entertainment.

But our landlord's artistic needs were still not satisfied, he joined the Slutzk orchestra. He chose a huge instrument: a tremendous bass viola with a thick body and long neck. He had a small part—playing background accompaniment to the other instruments. The accompaniment was at the bottom of the scale and was a monotonous zoom-zoom, hum-hum, zoom-zoom, hum-hum. Nevertheless, when our landlord played he felt like a Levite performing in the Temple service. He was a big man, head and shoulders above the rest of the players. But he seemed to shrink as he stood over his bass viola with bent back and bowed head: it was as if his whole being had been transferred to the bass viola.

In the end he became a *badhan*. And, wonder of wonders, this coachman, who could not correctly translate a single verse of the Bible, in calling on the future mothers-in-law and other women relatives and all the women guests to dance with the bride, embellished every invitation with ornate Hebrew titles. And when he seated the bride between two rows of women and seriously preached to her to the accompaniment of a fiddle whose wailing tones caused the women to weep and the bride to faint—at such moments he would weave passages of Scripture and Talmud into his chant, both in their original tongue and in the Yiddish vernacular. He was highly adept, during the wedding feast following the marriage ceremony, at announcing the wedding gifts and extolling them and their givers. And as the guests ate and drank to the heart's content, he sang them folk songs, old and new, sad and gay. Enthusiastically they listened, responding to every song with applause and coins tossed into the plate he had put on the table.

Friday nights, during our landlord's story-reading hour, I would join the audience of women that met in his house. I looked forward to it all week. A wonderful world was opened up to me; dreaming and waking, I lived in that world.

I developed a need to read romances on my own. I would stand in the doorway of our city's bookstore looking greedily at the

story books displayed on the table and the titles on the blue and red covers, alas, they were inaccessible to me because I had no money. The cooked-pea-and-bean seller used to visit the *heder* every day and sell a scoopful or two of these delicacies out of her pot for half a penny. The warmth and smell rising out of the pot when she removed her shawl from it were tantalizing; my mouth watered—but I couldn't enjoy that delicacy for the lack of half a penny. So how in the world could I afford the books, which cost so much more? I began to concentrate on finding a source of income. Finally, I found one.

Behind my grandfather's house near the outskirts of Slutzk was an empty lot where slaughterers used to slaughter and skin beasts. Tired or sick old horses, dogs they had trapped, were taken to this lot, killed and skinned. The cadaver would be left behind to be devoured by crows, dogs, and other scavengers. The lot was strewn with disjointed bones. These, the children of the poor collected and sold to the chandler for pennies. The chandler paid for them by weight. Extracting the last drop of tallow, he drew wicks through their putrid, yellowish essence and made Sabbath candles. Everything is a matter of luck, even when it comes to a horse's or dog's bone. These bones were lucky enough to supply the Sabbath light which Jewish women blessed with upraised hands. I joined the bone collectors once a week. I was of somewhat squeamish nature, and was revolted every time I joined this macabre harvest. But I overcame my squeamishness, for the few pennies I earned were exchangeable for books, whose reading was paradise.

Even after I entered the yeshiva, the passion for romances stayed with me. It was no longer proper for me as a yeshiva student to collect bones. But another source of income turned up: every day I was given a penny for a roll to tide me over the long hours between lunch and supper. I saved up my pennies to borrow books. My bookseller had Yiddish novels, too. When studies were over on Friday afternoon I would repair to the book shop, choose a penny's worth of one of these novels, and immerse myself in it. I knew that reading popular Yiddish novels was a shameful in-

dulgence for a yeshiva boy like me and I was careful not to disclose my vice to my fellow students. But in chatting with them I sometimes relapsed into the florid style of those novels, which I knew by heart, and they would wonder: "Where did you get your German?"

Reading romantic novels at such an early age proved my undoing, for it led to a premature love affair that brought me more sting than honey, and left an everlasting mark on me.

IX

Though poor, the Jews of Slutzk never dreamed of disobeying the Biblical injunction to be fruitful and multiply. They had many children—mostly girls!—and that was a problem: for what were they to do about marrying the girls off when they came of age? To be sure, Jewish girls, even poor girls, are pretty, and there were, thank God, poor boys to cast an eye upon them and court them. But, even the poorest of the boys were proud of their masculinity and demanded a cash dowry in escrow as a condition of engagement along with a promise of linen, clothing, and an elegant wedding. Where was all this to come from? Leave it to those Slutzk paupers! Masters at pulling a living out of the air, they were to be trusted not to let their daughters remain spinsters. Now there are some rich people whose wives can do nothing but grow a double chin. They are quite useless for everything else and have to rely entirely on their maids. Not so the daughters of the Slutzk poor. Skilled at every household task, they hired themselves out to the wives of the rich as cooks, ironing women, and governesses, taking their wages in food and cash. Year followed year, penny joined penny, until they had saved enough for dowry, trousseau, and wedding. Then they married the mates who had

been ordained for them in heaven forty days before their birth. And the couples were fruitful and multiplied and bred a new generation of paupers, to fulfill the verse: "For the poor shall never cease out of the land." You may well wonder: But the rich people in Slutzk could be ticked off on the fingers of one hand! Luckily, however, there was a big city near Slutzk—Minsk was its name—and Minsk was blessed with an abundance of wealthy people. Every year a veritable caravan of girls went down to Minsk to minister to the needs of the rich. And among the girls who went to Minsk to serve in the houses of the rich were my grandfather's daughters.

My grandfather's daughters were beautiful. They had little to eat—but their cheeks were peaches and cream. They dressed in rags—but their figures shone through the tatters. Lovely and carefree, they enjoyed every bit of pleasure that came their way to the full. They left for Minsk rich in beauty and gaiety. But they returned tired and broken from service in the homes of the delicate matrons of Minsk. Back home in Slutzk they married, one a water carrier, a second a cobbler, a third a coachman, and set up a "House in Israel," an abode for poverty, which, as our sages say, befits Israel.

But my grandfather's youngest daughter refused to follow her sisters' footsteps! She would not become a maid to any rich woman. My step-grandmother pleaded, my grandfather protested, but it was no use—she stood her ground. My grandfather beat her, but she persisted: "You can kill me, but I'm not going to become a slave!" All of my grandfather's daughters were pretty, but the youngest was prettiest of all. She wore a tattered and frayed dress and worn and decrepit shoes, but her looks and bearing bespoke grandeur. Her home was poor and its dilapidated walls were dark —but her beauty radiated from it like a precious jewel from a poor setting. Her body was frequently licked by grandfather and her spirit crushed—but she sustained her pride. Her food was the bread of bitterness, but her face beamed and she was full of laughter and song. There is still hope for her. One day a prince will come along and deliver her from captivity and take her with

him to a life of high position. She expects this prince to come any day now, but until he comes she is friendly to the poor boys who cluster around her—beckoning them with her right hand and putting them off with her left, trifling with them and making them jealous of one another and bringing them to blows, while she looks on and is amused.

My aunt loved to sing and dance. She was no reader but she knew by heart all the folk songs sung by laborers, housemaids, street beggars and *badhanim*. She picked every new song that came to Slutzk and every new dance, and taught them to her friends.

Every Sabbath, my aunt turned my grandfather's house into a social club for the poor boys and girls. My grandfather was a bitter man. The singing and dancing in the house every Saturday went against his grain. When boys and girls gathered in his house after lunch, he would seize one of the logs lying behind the oven, and pacing the room grumble: "I am going to crack somebody's skull!" But they would ignore him, secure in the knowledge that grandfather would crack no skulls. Finally grandfather would throw down the log and climb to the top of the oven* for his Sabbath afternoon nap. As soon as his snoring became loud, the boys and girls began singing and dancing under my aunt's direction. They kept this up until sunset, when they left in a group to stroll in the fields and gardens that stretched behind my grandfather's house.

I used to visit my grandfather's house every Saturday afternoon and stay there until sunset. I was strict in my religious observance then and conducted my life according to the traditional code, "deviating neither to the right nor to the left," as befits a yeshiva boy to whom piety is no less an obligation than scholarship. By that standard, I should not have associated with a group indulging in love songs and mixed dancing. But I enjoyed the gay, youthful company in grandfather's house. I felt at ease in this company.

* A Russian type of stove made of bricks and used for both heating and cooking purposes, with a flat top which was used for taking naps. It was hard, but warm, in the winter.

All week, among my fellow yeshiva students, I suffered from a feeling of inferiority which drove me to feats of industrious study and exaggerated piety. Yet neither industry or piety could overcome my feeling of inferiority. Here, in my grandfather's house, in the company of these boys and girls, I felt that I was among my own kind and did not find it necessary to compensate for my humble origins.

One of the regular Sabbath visitors at my grandfather's house was a girl my age, Batya. She was not especially pretty; her features were sharp and bold—but she had a savage charm. She looked like a gypsy: her hair was vividly black and soft, her complexion was a glowing tan; her lips were crimson, the upper lip coquettishly curled, flaunting beautiful, even rows of teeth, and her black eyes flashed. Carefree and gay, she bore herself like a gypsy. Batya was everywhere and laughed at everything, a gay, husky, flirtatious laugh. She exercised a sharp wit and ridiculed the silly side of people in their everyday behaviour treating them sometimes tenderly and sometimes joking and stinging like a scorpion.

Like a moth drawn to the flame in the dark of the night, my soul was drawn to Batya. In this divine flame of love I suffered the torments of hell. To a yeshiva boy like me it was an alien fire disqualifying his sacred learning and his piety. I was careful not to disclose my love to her even by the slightest hint; but my eyes meeting hers revealed the secret, and her eyes reciprocated. Batya's love for me changed her personality. She lost much of her high spirits. Her laughter became rare and tremulous, her wit tender. She arranged to sit beside me between dances, and when the young folks left to stroll in the fields and gardens at dusk, she urged me to join them. When I consented, she walked at my side, her eyes glowing with joy, a song in her voice. I was like one of those sinners in Hell, whom the Holy Sabbath brings a brief respite from torment. On Saturday night I would return home from my grandfather's house to suffer cruel torments of longing for Batya the rest of the week. I would return to the yeshiva and try to concentrate on my studies; but my mind was on Batya. I drove

myself, swaying violently over the lectern—but it was no use. Batya's image appeared between the lines of the Talmud. I raised my voice in loud recitation—but a voice inside me cried, "Batya! Batya!" I would return home from the yeshiva, eat supper without appetite, and lie down to a sleepless night, filled with thoughts of Batya. Devoutly I recited the prayer before sleep, praying that no bad dreams or evil thoughts might frighten me. But when I finally fell asleep, Batya appeared in my dreams flirting with one of the boys in my aunt's crowd. I would awaken with a jealous start.

Thus the week passed. On the Sabbath I would eat a hasty lunch, singing snatches of Sabbath songs and slurring over grace. Then I would rush over to my grandfather's house, to be there before my aunt's guests began to gather. I would sit on pins and needles watching the door. A boy would enter, a girl, but still no Batya! Doubt would begin to steal into my heart. Maybe she isn't coming at all today! Then Batya would appear and I would be flooded with joy. Looking at her my heart would sing a verse from the *Song of Songs*:"How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!" But she would avert her eyes from mine, go off and dance with the other boys, only rarely coming to sit next to me between dances—either out of caution, so as not to disclose our relationship, or out of a feminine desire to make me a little jealous. Yet I knew that she was mine, mine with all her soul. My heart told me so, and an occasional stolen glance as she danced with one of the other boys confirmed it: "I am yours—all yours!"

Towards evening we would leave to stroll in the fields and gardens with the rest of the group and our steps would slow until we had fallen behind the other strolling couples. When we realized that we were alone, we would stop talking. Our whole conversation would be nothing but a cover for the hidden feelings that had begun to throb in our hearts when we left Grandfather's house and which yearned for expression. When we were alone, this banal conversation was supplanted by the fundamental dialogue: the dialogue of two hearts. But this dialogue, for which the propitious moment had come and for which we had both longed, would

find no expression. The words hesitated in the throat, shy to emerge, and when they did emerge they emerged in a confused stammer, come to reveal but only concealing.

It was summer. The landscape over which we moved was a carpet of verdant gold, suffused with the sad aura of the ebbing Sabbath. Rustling grain stalks, chirping grasshoppers and twittering swallows joined in a twilight song, a sad, meditative recitative. Golden sunflowers lowered their heads towards the sinking sun in mute prayer: Stand still, O Sabbath sun in the west! Surrounded by a retinue of fleecy clouds, the sun sank in the western sky, lingering a moment to regard the world, with a sad and pitying look, as if purposely delaying its departure so as to prolong the sanctity of the day. One of the cows grazing in the meadow turned its head to the sun, and mooed, and the moo was like an outcry of sorrow and longing uttered by the world's soul at that moment. Our hands chanced to meet, and they clasped, giving expression to the pain of parting—our parting from each other with the imminent departure of the Sabbath. A tremor passed over my body at the touch of her hand, and as I trembled a stream of fire shot through and swept my being. I was aflame. And the sky, the clouds, the tree crests, the blades of the windmill were also aflame—aflame and singing with me—a fiery song in praise of life—and love. For their beauty and sadness, delight and pain —Blessed be the Lord!

X

My secret love was finally discovered by my fellow students, who began to gossip. My closest friends took the liberty of admonishing me, fulfilling the precept: "Ye shall surely rebuke your neighbor." I thought long and hard and came to one conclusion: it was either Batya or the yeshiva. For my love for Batya was not only contrary to the standard of conduct that the yeshiva demanded of its students, it was also bound to interfere with single-minded study. If my love for Batya was most important there was nothing for me to do but leave the yeshiva and learn a trade. It was hard to decide. To leave Batya meant leaving life. To leave the yeshiva meant giving up the sublime goal toward which I had been striving: to be a rabbi. Bad days followed for me, days of exhausting struggle.

Shortly afterwards I had a relapse of the malaria from which I had suffered in my childhood for about a year and a half, brought on by nervous exhaustion. I came down with attacks every other day, half a day of chills followed by half a day of fever. As I lay in bed alternating shaking and burning, tortured by indecision, a new choice presented itself and turned the scale: the choice of death. I wanted to die. Death was the only way out.

One evening as I lay semi-conscious in bed after a fever had subsided, I heard a voice speaking inside me:

"Son of a mad mother and a water-carrier father, grandson of a jailbird coachman, offspring of riff-raff, seed of paupers, lowest of the low, how dare you put yourself on a level with men of learning and lineage? Why do you push yourself where you don't belong? You'll be an alien there—your citizenship always fictitious. You will wear a scholar's robe—but your ignominious lineage just inside your robe will be like a hump. You will never be able to hide it.

"You will place the crown of Torah on your head while the mark of shame is stamped on your forehead—you can never burn it off. And even if you are accepted by the salt of the earth, it will always be on tolerance. To you, cordiality will also seem a veiled contempt. Return to your own world—where you will live by right and not by charity. Be yourself again—you can never escape it. Find the peace and security of a man who knows his place. Leave the yeshiva, learn a trade, and live happily with Batya, whom you love. Life will be hard, but you will earn your own bread and Batya's love will be compensation enough. She will bring you back the mother you have longed for since you were a child. Haven't you suffered enough? Why add to it by rejecting love? 'God's very altar weeps' for him who spurns his first love! How lucky you are to have found love so early. Don't abuse it—it comes only once in a lifetime!"

Yet at the same time I heard another voice, at once scolding and pitying me: "Don't listen! The evil inclination is only trying to turn you from your Maker's will! It is Satan who has sent Batya to lead you from the path of Torah, and drag you down back to the depths out of which you have so laboriously climbed. Hear the voice crying from Mount Horeb: 'Woe to you for your neglect of the Torah!' All the spiritual qualities and noble strivings you have acquired through suffering, all your purity and innocence you have protected so painfully against contamination and defilement to which poverty and orphanhood are exposed—all these would you sacrifice for imaginary love, a childish fancy? Return while there is yet time! Return to the path of Torah which leads upward. Great things await you at the end of this road—compen-

sation for a mad mother, a water-carrier father, and a jailbird-coachman grandfather. You will be a rabbi, not to be proud and aloof, but to go back to your own kind, the poor, the oppressed, and downtrodden, the shamed and despised, and bring down to them the light of the Torah to brighten their lives. You will bring to them the word of the merciful God, Father of orphans and widows and the poor and destitute to sustain and hearten them. The degradation you suffered and the stigma of your inferior parentage will endear you to them. You will be like a brother in their eyes, a brother who ascended to great heights yet came down to them to share his glory with them. Indeed, you have suffered greatly in your young life and now you would add to your suffering the torments of frustrated love. But it is good that you suffer such torments! They will be a crucible in which the filth of life will be purged away and you will be cleansed from its contamination. You will become sensitive to the sufferings of the sufferers and even before they will call out to you, you will respond and bring to them God's consoling and healing word. You are privileged to have your life dedicated to such a noble service."

I recovered and returned to my studies. I stayed away from my grandfather's house and gave up Batya, though it cost me dear. One night as I returned from yeshiva, I met Batya, waiting for me at a street corner. I turned to a nearby alley but before I could escape, she joined me. We walked together, and she spoke her bitter heart. I was dumb. At the end of the alley, when it was time for us to part, I blurted out: "We must separate. It is God's will. Forgive me, Batya. I know I've hurt you. Believe me, I've hurt myself ten times as much. Let the memory of our love ease the wounds of our hearts. Let us bear it as a sacred memory!"

A stream of tears gushed from her eyes.

XI

The Rabbi of Slutzk was Rabbi Jacob David, the son of Zev, known after the initials of his Hebrew name, as "The Ridbaz." The Ridbaz was a famous scholar, whose knowledge was vast and profound. He had mastered the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, the early and the later exegetes. He was a prolific writer, his *magnum opus* being the *Commentary and Addenda of the Ridbaz* to the Jerusalem Talmud. This work he published, together with the original text, his commentary on the right-hand margin and his addenda on the left, like the classic commentaries of Rashi and Tosafot in the Babylonian Talmud. In this monumental opus he revealed both scope and profundity. The Ridbaz was also at home in the Kabbalah.

The Ridbaz was a man of irreconcilable contradictions, with a stormy temper that was likely to erupt at any moment. He became involved in various disputes. He was the son of a tailor, and his sense of coming from a poor family made him hypersensitive to every imagined slight. The Ridbaz was a poetic man on fire with religious fervor. He preached with pious zeal, his face burning, his eyes torches, his voice hurling tongues of fire, hands flailing. Even his ordinary conversations often culminated in outbursts of temper.

The devotion of the Ridbaz to the study of Torah was boundless. He sat in his room from early morning till midnight studying the books piled up on his table. He spared but a few occasional hours to considering difficult litigations or serious communal problems. The disputes he and his adherents engaged in with their adversaries gained no access to his study room or his heart. Within the noble world of his study room he himself became a noble being of another world.

The Ridbaz loved not only the study of the Torah but also its students, especially the young ones. If he heard of a youngster in a *heder* or yeshiva who excelled in his studies, the Ridbaz was sure to show his love for the lad with a pinch of the cheek. He pinched young scholars at every opportunity; and felt as though he were performing a sacred ritual, and as he pinched them he sighed with delight, dedicating in his thoughts these pinches to the service of God. He also honored young scholars with invitations to accompany him on a brief walk. On these walks he had no mind for the passers-by; completely immersed in conversation with the youngsters, he came down to their level, joking and laughing with them.

Slutzk was a center of learning of long standing, and many boys from the surrounding regions came to its yeshivot. But the town lacked the pinnacle of scholarship—a yeshiva that ordained its students for the rabbinate. The Ridbaz was not content until he had gone to Kovno and brought back a group from the Slobodka *mussar* yeshiva. This group became the nucleus for a new *mussar* yeshiva headed by Rabbi Zundel. Before long the fame of the new yeshiva spread. Outstanding students came from far and near to prepare for ordination, and ordained students to round out their studies.

The establishment of this *mussar* yeshiva in Slutzk was fuel to the flames of the dispute between Ridbaz and his opponent, Rabbi Mayer Paymer. Rabbi Mayer vigorously opposed the study of *mussar,* which he considered an alien growth. He mobilized his adherents and mounted an attack. The city was in ferment. In market place and street, in synagogue and public bath house,

everyone spoke about the yeshiva debating and wrangling, pro and con. Friends turned foes, relatives became estranged. At the height of the dispute the authorities intervened and ordered the yeshiva closed. Some said that informers among Rabbi Mayer's supporters were responsible, others that the authorities had decided on their own to close down the source of contention. At any rate the yeshiva was not closed for long. The supporters of Ridbaz succeeded by dint of entreaties and gifts, persuading the authorities to break the seal they had placed on the yeshiva doors.

The Ridbaz was in the habit of praying at home with a quorum of his yeshiva students so as to avoid the loss of time in the trip to the synagogue and the prolonged public prayers. I was included in this quorum. The Ridbaz had been very fond of me since my early childhood, pinching my cheek, too. He also honored me by selecting me from time to time to be his walking companion. The Ridbaz sometimes examined me, asking me questions and putting problems to me from the Talmudic portion I was then studying. Satisfied with my replies, he would give me a double pinch, one that made me see stars. After one such examination and reward, the Ridbaz advised me to enter his yeshiva, and I agreed.

The study of *mussar* frightened me. The twilight hour devoted to this study presented a terrifying sight. Most of the students were usually well-groomed: they dressed in short jackets, trimmed their beards with scissors, joked a lot, went swimming in the river. But the hour of *mussar* found them depressed with feelings of guilt, remorseful. Some ran up and down the synagogue, distraught and terrified, like mourners with bowed heads. Others swayed violently over their lecterns, with contorted faces, eyes streaming, hands clapping. They would all be sighing and groaning over the vanity of this world and the meaninglessness of life, repenting imaginary sins and thoughts of sin. They cleansed their souls by detesting human passion, through contemplation of the source and end of human existence. My hackles rose at the sight. I rebelled against this asceticism out of a healthy feeling I inherited from a stock of Jews, sound in body and spirit, which made me

love life and bless the good Lord for every little crumb of life allotted to me. I was a native of Slutzk and since I did not need the financial aid that the yeshiva granted out-of-town students, I was in a position to give up the *mussar* study, and I decided to do so.

There was quite a difference between the two yeshivot I had previously attended and the *mussar* yeshiva I attended now. There was gradual learning, adjusted to my age, while in the *mussar* yeshiva it was speedy, geared to advanced students who were able to engage Rabbi Zundel himself, the headmaster, in Talmudic discussion. I was at a disadvantage under the new system where I was a novice, and I lost the joy of study. I lost status, too: I had been a leader at the other yeshiva; here, I was at the tail end of the student body, and then I had no friends—at this yeshiva the students were older, ordained, or about to be ordained, and would not condescend to associate with me.

I became bored. I would sit over the tractate, my lips moving as I repeated the text, but my heart and mind were elsewhere. Sometimes I would long for a remote, hidden world somewhere outside yeshiva walls. I would slip out of the yeshiva, walk to the outskirts of town and sit down under a tree. I would sit for hours looking at the fields, the gardens, meadows, rich with fruit and sun, seeking the key to the wonderful world I longed to enter there; I would sit for hours until the sun went down. Suddenly I awoke, as out of a dream. The sun was setting. A lowing herd was returning from pasture. Peasant women were returning home from the fields singing sadly. Somewhere on the outskirts of town, a church bell chimed into the twilight stillness, and the chimes hummed and reverberated, floating to the distant horizon aglow with purple lights—the gate of heaven which had opened for evening prayers.

XII

I was still in the process of adjusting to the new yeshiva and had actually begun to make friends with some of the younger students when two tickets for America arrived from my father: He had finally made up his mind to settle there. My stepmother was overjoyed, as I was, too, at first. But when my stepmother began joyful preparations for the trip, I grew unhappy; it was hard to leave the world of my birth. True, the world I knew was a narrow and limited one; the shadows exceeded the light. But now that I was to be ejected from that world, it seemed a glorious place. It was hard to leave the old world—it was even hard entering the new. I knew in my heart that a new, painful birth was imminent, and I feared a "reincarnation"—the radical transformation of an almost mature individual, the having again to assume the painful task of finding a new purpose and way in life.

Several times, I resolved, after careful deliberation, to remain in Slutzk and continue my studies in the great yeshiva into which I had had the privilege of being admitted. But I could not keep this resolution. I had pined for my father for eight years; I had thought of him day and night, in my waking and sleeping. I had longed to cling to him, and now that the yearned for day

had arrived how would I deprive myself of its pleasure? I decided to leave. But when the time came to leave the yeshiva I could not bring myself to do it. I kept putting it off. I sat at my lectern, overwhelmed with grief and nostalgia.

Finally, a few days before my departure for America, I left the yeshiva. Those last days I spent roaming the countryside outside Slutzk. This beautiful landscape was a haven for me. I would take refuge there in hours of depression, absorbing the majesty and serenity that pervaded it and releasing the anguish and the longing that had overcome me. It was autmun. A soft golden light filled the air, whose translucency had become dulled, and the landscape was cast in gloom and grief: summer had departed. The fields were in mouring: the long-tended stalks had been cut and lay in sheaves in the sun, exuding their sap and drying: tomorrow, or the day after, the threshing sledge would alight upon them. The vegetable gardens were sullen: their fondled plants have been uprooted and they now lie in gray, dusty piles. The orchards stood destitute and bare: their trees have been bereft of their luscious fruits, and the remaining leaves on their branches were tinged with the first yellow of leaf-shedding. Grasshoppers and crickets—this band of gay blades who have nothing to do but sing and dance—there was a note of sadness in their chirping: the thin layer of frost that formed on the ground in early morning tells them that summer is done and winter is bearing down upon them! Fleet birds hurried to find shelter from approaching winter. They soared aloft in droves and set out for distant climes. Tender cobwebs were floating in the air, glistening in the sunlight—tapestries of dreams which the summer had shed in its departure—sailing along in its wake, seeking its trail: where had it gone? They collide, while sailing, with branch and brush, become entangled in them and quiver helplessly, quiver and tear themselves to shreds. Such is the end of all dreams! Such will also be the end of the dreams that I will shed here as I set out upon my road!

Upon my returning home at night I encountered my grandfather's pained and martyred face. After his release from prison he

had tried all kinds of occupations and succeeded at none. He finally became a night watchman in a district where residents had given him this job out of pity. As he made the rounds he sounded a wooden clapper whose sound sweetened the sleep of the good citizens who had paid him a few pennies to guard their property. As the day of our departure approached he began to visit us every night, staying until it was time for him to go out on watch. He sat bowed in a corner of our room, smoking his pipe, in grim silence, his dim eyes flickering embers of anguish. My grandfather was a man of few words, and when he began to speak about our departure, the words choked in his throat, emerging as a groan. Each time he left he would repeat the same brief, mournful formula—as though he were counting the days between Passover and the Feast of Weeks. "So today is the *n*th day before your departure!" As he went out to the street he would begin sounding his clapper. "Clap—clap—one daughter lost, another daughter lost, a third daughter and the only son of his dead elder daughter leaving! Clap—Clap—Too much for me to bear! Clap—Clap—Out of my distress I cry to God. . . ."

XIII

On the way to America I stopped off in my native Minsk, to pray at my mother's grave. I had difficulty in finding it. Eight and a half years earlier her grave had been in the first row in this section of the cemetery. In the interim the section had grown and many new rows had been added. I finally found my mother's gravestone. I sank down on the grave, my hands gripping the stone. "Mama!" I cried out and my outcry choked in my throat. A kind of Sabbatical stupor streamed into me from the gravestone in my grip. My voyage over. The circle of my life closed. My struggles and gropings ended. Misery, suffering and humiliation —gone. Grief, pain and bitterness—no more. Aspiration, hopes and yearnings—done. I had reached my destination. I had returned to the elements of my body and the roots of my soul. I re-entered the bosom of my origin. The point of my being dissolved in the point of genesis from which it had been ejected into the cosmic void. The question mark of my existence merged with the divine exclamation point from which it had split off. "Welcome, prodigal son, back to your mother!" a nearby holm-oak muttered, rustling in the breeze. "Welcome, driven birdling, to your mother's nest!" chirped a redbreast, hopping on a nearby

grave. "Greetings from your mother, I am a messenger sent by your mother to welcome you!" whispered a late daisy sprouting amid the grass on my mother's grave.

All at once—an electric wave passed through me from the chill gravestone I held, and inundated my being: I startled, as if struck by lightning. There was a burning and seething within me and a hot stream coursed through me, bubbling and rising until it burst through my eyes. I wept uncontrollably, wept and sobbed hysterically, like a child at his mother's breast. . . .

A train passed by the cemetery, noisily devouring the distance, finally to vanish on the horizon with a shriek. Tomorrow the train would bear me to unknown lands.

Pensively I made my way to the gate, tearing grass and casting it behind me as I walked and, together with this grass, fifteen years of life torn from its roots. Near the gate an old gravedigger sat warming himself in the late summer sun.

"Man is like unto a breath, his days are as a passing shadow," he intoned out of an open psalmster.

I left the cemetery, my lips whispering: "A passing shadow."

PART II

In the Sling of Fate

I

During all of my trip to America my imagination kept conjuring up a picture of my encounter with my father. The image of my father's face, which had dimmed in my memory, shone through a haze of eight and a half years as it had registered in it the night before his departure, as I lay at his side holding him in tight desperation. Only now, his melancholy look of compassion had brightened. Anticipation of reunion softened the trials of the journey—stealing across the border, wandering through thick forests in the dark of night, the ship tossed about by storm for three consecutive days.

The picture of our reunion became sharper when, in New York, I boarded the train for Boston. The entire trip I visualized my father at the station, waiting for the train to pull in. When the train arrived and I got off, he would rush over and embrace me. I could see him standing there and hear the clatter of the train wheels bringing his greetings to me: "Welcome, my son!" And my heart responded in joyful tones: "Papa! Papa!"

The train slowed down to enter the station and my heart beat faster, as though to prod the train to hurry. Through the coach window I could see faces and eyes happy, trembling with anticipation. I searched for my father but he wasn't there! I descended from

the coach, still looking and my heart scrutinizing every face in the crowd. But my father was nowhere in the crowd! I trudged to my father's home stopping passers-by on the street to show them the crumpled address transcribed in my strange tongue. When I finally got there he was not in—he had gone to work early, as he did every day, for the telegram from New York announcing the time of our arrival in Boston had been misaddressed and had not reached him.

At the entrance to the hall of a house populated with poor tenants, with one of whom my father roomed, I stood tense with anticipation. My eyes scrutinized every passer-by; perhaps father would be there, for his landlord had gone to look for him in the street to tell him of our arrival. The din of the city filled the street. Foot and wagon peddlers shrilly announced their wares. An Italian ground his organ as girls danced on the sidewalk and in the street. Boys skated madly along, holding on to one another's back in a long line that twisted and straightened, broke apart and joined again. In passing they glanced mockingly at me, eyeing my Slutzk garb which branded me as a "greenhorn," and my strange hat—a stiff Homburg acquired in Belgium after I had lost my Slutzk cap en route. They laughed and hurled at me names, which, though uttered in a foreign tongue, were clearly not complimentary.

Many tedious hours I stood and waited, rejecting the pleas of my stepmother and my father's landlady to eat and rest from the journey. I was not going to put off for one moment the anticipated meeting with my father. The hours passed. Standing there, all tensed up, my nerves on edge, the effects of the two weeks at sea overcame me and I swayed and sank to a step near the entrance to the hall. I fell into a kind of exhausted faint which lasted many minutes.

Suddenly, a figure came towards me through a rosy mist. As it approached, the mist lifted and I saw it, radiant and compassionate. I leaped up—it was my father.

In the dusk my father's face loomed up from the street. He walked heavily bent under a sack full of rags and bottles. His

face was dark and hard, with an expression of mingled humiliation and forgiveness. I shrank back, offended and silenced.

At midnight, lying on the bedding they had laid out for me in a corner of the kitchen floor in the apartment where my father roomed, I cried in silence over the alienation that screened me from my father.

II

At the time I immigrated to America the Jewish community there was in a state of upheaval caused by the clash of diverse elements, each striving for supremacy. The equilibrium which was bound to be established was postponed by the constant arrival of new groups. The most important group were the Orthodox, stable Jews who came to America and brought their tradition with them. They founded synagogues, schools, associations and fraternal organizations for the fostering of religion. These they maintained by donations, after the Old Country manner. The Orthodox had a great deal of vital energy. But their influence was limited both by their numbers and by their economic instability. Strict observance of the Sabbath and the Jewish festivals lessened their income! This, in turn, lessened their influence.

The Orthodox were submerged in the mass which constituted the majority of the American Jewish community. This mass, which appeared united from the outside, was actually divided into several distinct groups. A significant part consisted of Jews who had sentiment for religious tradition and supported its institutions, even becoming their officers. But they were forced by economic circumstances to give up some observances of traditional Judaism.

Another group of American Jews denounced all religious discipline gladly as a kind of emancipation from slavery. And then there were the spite-workers—those who belonged to the Jewish socialist movement, whose cardinal tenets then were: atheism, denial of all religious and national values, and disparagement of the Jewish cultural legacy. In this general mass, alienated from religious observances, the Orthodox element constituted a tiny, lonely and isolated minority.

To all outward appearances, my first days in Boston, when I was able to live as I had in Slutzk, were only a matter of change of locale: the synagogue where I prayed daily was always packed; the congregants gathered after the morning prayers to study the Mishna and between the afternoon and evening prayers to study *The Well of Jacob;* one group stayed on after the evening prayers to study the daily page of Talmud—everything in Boston was just as it had been in Slutzk. But in Slutzk, the learned and the pious had been in the vast majority; here in Boston, they were a small minority; so I felt like an alien in Boston.

I particularly sensed the spiritual decline of American Jews on the Sabbath. I have never forgotten the impression of my first Saturday in Boston. I compared it to the Sabbath in Slutzk, and my heart bled. Actually there was no comparison, for Slutzk, though povery-stricken, dressed up in glorious raiment in honor of the Sabbath. Even the horse grazing in the pasture, swishing his tail and leaping on his forelegs, bound so that he might not frisk beyond the Sabbath limits, was permitted to enjoy Sabbatical rest and partake of the goodness of the luxuriant meadow. But in Boston very few Jews observed the Sabbath. In the Jewish quarter through which she had just passed they trampled with weekday shoes the train of her bridal gown and interrupted with shrill weekday outcries the music of her angelic escorts on her way to her betrothed. Leaving the synagogue after the Sabbath Eve service, the observants were confronted by a tumultuous Jewish quarter: shopkeepers stood in their shop doorways, peddlers on their wagons shouted their wares. Mournfully I passed through this Jewish quarter that first Sabbath eve. As I entered our house it seemed to me that the Sabbath candles were

bowed in mourning, too. Sadly my father sang *Shalom Aleikhem,* ushering in the Sabbath. The room was too cramped for him to walk around it as he chanted, in the traditional manner. Sadly I sang with him.

III

I was seized with a longing for Slutzk. In my mind's eyes I saw it day and night, its streets, its houses, its people, its meadows, gardens and orchards—and it appeared to me like a heavenly city in an ethereal world.

My father sensed my homesickness though I never put it in words lest he construe my unhappiness as ingratitude or take it as an insult directed against Boston and thus against himself. He tried to get me to appreciate Boston, and win back my affection for himself, who had brought me there. Every night on his way home he would buy some local products—fruit, for example, the likes of which I had never or rarely seen in Slutzk. While I was enjoying these delicacies he would study my expression. If he detected the least sign of pleasure in my face his own would light up and he would exclaim: "That's Boston for you! Did you ever taste such delicious fruit in Slutzk?"

Saturday afternoons father would take me walking through town in the better neighborhoods. On such occasions father was like a king on an inspection tour of his capital with his crown prince. Having shown me the wonders of Boston, father would straighten up and lift his head and declaim: "Have you ever seen such a

magnificent city? What's Slutzk compared to Boston—nothing!" I did not dare tell him that in this magnificent city of Boston I pined for the nothing of Slutzk. I would nod agreement, though at heart I was back in Slutzk.

All my life I had been gregarious. Now that I had left my Slutzk friends behind, I tried to find replacements in Boston. My soul needed a friend desperately. I looked around all the immigrant boys like myself but found none. They had adjusted all too readily to the new country and had accommodated themselves to their new situation—one had become a peddler, another a laborer, the third a shop clerk. They were satisfied with what they regarded as an opportunity to improve themselves, and there was no basis for friendship between us. This was even truer with respect to the American-born or American-bred boys: we lacked even a common language. I had only one friend in my loneliness, one whom I met every day in the synagogue and to whom I poured out my heart—the Talmud. . . .

The synagogue was bare. Its walls seemed to withdraw into the gloomy shadow and emptiness to which they had been condemned in an alien land. The lions' heads over the Holy Ark were bowed, the royal wrath in their faces gloomy; in their roar a cry of calamity. The Eternal Light flickered feebly.

I was alone in the synagogue, sitting at the table and swaying over the open Talmud, chanting in the old country tone. Loud sounds burst in from the street—the sounds of the new life into which I have been cast and out of whose turmoil I have fled into this desolate haven. The cries reproached me mockingly! What are you doing among us, you unworldly idler?

I grew silent, my head sank down on my arms. . . .

IV

The question of my future began to vex me. My attention was diverted from my Talmudic problems to a much more serious one whose solution could not be postponed: What was to become of me? My father sought the advice of our fellow Slutzk immigrants who used to drop in. They thought it over, discussed it among themselves and concluded that my salvation lay in becoming a custom-peddler. They preached the advantages of peddling:

In the first place it gives you a livelihood, meager to begin with, but eventually plenteous. It does not require you to desecrate the Sabbath or holidays; if you want to, you can observe them. At the same time, you get an opportunity to learn the language and ways of America. To be sure, it's a small beginning—but many people began carrying a peddler's notions basket and ended up owning a business or a factory—and it wasn't a matter of luck either. However, if you want to become a peddler, you must decide to be aggressive and daring. The main thing is a peddler has to be a talker—the more he talks the better. Suppose you enter a house and the customer does not need or want what you have to sell, you can't simply leave looking for another customer who

may need and want it. You would go on looking till the Messiah comes and never find him! You have to stick with that customer until you get him to say, "I'll take it!" How? You talk yourself into his good graces and once having won his heart, you have won yourself a customer, and a good one! Do it this way and you'll get customers and make money. First you'll just make a living, but you'll end up making piles of money—and you'll be all set.

I nodded involuntary affirmation mingled with self-pity: so this is the end of the great achievements you aspired to—to be a door-to-door peddler!

Still, repugnant as the prospect was, I decided to try peddling and see whether I was fit for it. I talked to one of my acquaintances, a boy my own age, who was a peddler himself, and he consented to lend me for a day his notions basket with the understanding that we would share the profits. I chose Tuesday, a lucky day in Jewish tradition, to embark on my peddling experiment.

It was a rainy autumn day. The wind shook my basket and whipped the shoelaces dangling from my hand into my face. I trudged down the street like a doomed man on his way to the gallows. Whenever anybody looked at me I lowered my eyes in shame. I approached a house whose number was the numerical equivalent of a verse of Scripture I had in mind, timidly mounted the stairs—and couldn't bring my hand to knock at the door. At last I knocked diffidently. The door opened. I stood in the doorway with downcast face, and inquired clumsily in a low voice:

"Maybe the lady wants matches?"

"Matches?" The woman at the door responded sardonically. "Come in and I'll show you the piles of matches the peddler already supplied me with—enough to burn up all the houses in Boston!"

I tried to ask her if she wanted any of the other notions in my basket, but I couldn't find my voice. I went down the stairs, bowed and beaten, and trudged along. Before I had found another house whose number tallied with the numerical equivalent of the verse of Scripture I had in mind, I reminded myself of the passage of "the merchants of Lod," which I had studied in the Talmud and

knew by heart. In my fantasy I saw Lod and its merchants. I pretended that Boston was Lod and I one of the merchants. This parallel made peddling important enough to be discussed by the Talmudic Sages and to serve as a basis for the formulation of certain rules of commerce. When I came to the second house, I climbed the stairs with firm step, and knocked boldly at the door. When the door opened I went in and raised my voice—I was no common peddler now, but a merchant, one of the merchants of Lod! Unluckily my voice collapsed into a cough-like sound made by blowing the trachea of a slaughtered goose.

"Maybe the lady wants candles?"

"Candles?" my customer responded in a tone of amazement. "If all the days of the week were Sabbath Eve I would have enough candles for a whole year running."

"Maybe you want shoelaces?" I asked again, in a pitiful voice.

"I have plenty of shoelaces, enough to make nooses to hang Haman and all his ten sons!"

I went down the street again, mortified at my second failure, attributing it first to bad luck and then to a lack of practical skill. "You schlemihl!" I scolded myself. "First principle of peddling, you must be aggressive, bold and talkative, and you mustn't let a customer go just because he doesn't need or want your merchandise—you have to make him want it, keep after him until he says, 'I'll take it!' Ask a woman if she needs what you're selling, you can be sure, she won't touch it. 'Lady! I see that you need such and such, and I can give it to you for next to nothing—' That's the way to talk to a customer!"

I stopped seeking Scriptural verses, assumed an air of aggressive boldness, went up to another house, and knocked at the door energetically, loud enough to waken the dead. The door opened and before me stood a woman with a sooty face and dirty hands who had left her stove to find out what all the pounding was about. I made myself aggressive, bold and talkative:

"I see, madam, that your face is sooty and your hands are dirty and they need a good washing with soap—not just ordinary soap, but a good soap. I have just that, here in my basket, and

you can have it for next to nothing. As the prophet Isaiah said: 'And I will cleanse as with soap thy—' " The door slammed in my face! I never finished the verse.

That evening I went back to my acquaintance's house, and returned the basket with all the merchandise intact—not a thread or shoelace was missing. He checked his merchandise and gave me a scoffing and pitying look. I scoffed at myself: "Oh, you Slutzk unworldly idler, you good-for-nothing yeshiva student—there's no hope for you!"

I plodded wearily to the synagogue and stayed after the evening prayers to study my daily portion of Talmud. Mutely I looked at the Talmud, afraid to open my mouth lest the suppressed cry within me, about to burst forth, erupt.

The synagogue emptied. The distinguished scholars who had finished the portion of their nightly study left. Only an old Slutzker, Artche, the Hebrew teacher, remained to finish his study. He sits at his Mishna, intoning sadly, reading every chapter once in the book through a magnifying glass, and repeating it twice by heart. He is losing his eyesight, and before losing it entirely he is laboriously fortifying his memory with portions of Mishna, food for his soul in the days of blindness that were closing in on him. Upon completing his daily portion he shuts his feeble eyes, and ends his study with a portion of Psalms chanted in a melancholy undertone. Suddenly his voice rises and he begins to groan and cry out into the stillness of the synagogue: "My heart flutters, my strength fails me, and the light of my eyes is also gone from me—O God, my Light and my Salvation, the light of my eyes is gone from me!"

An autumn drizzle falls outside and covers the panes of the synagogue with tear-like drops. The synagogue sheds tears out of compassion for Artche, the Hebrew teacher, whose light of his eyes is dimming and for me, whose light of my life likewise is dimming, and for both of us, our world turns dark. . . .

V

My one day's unsuccessful experiment in peddling was enough to convince me that I had been born with no practical talents whatsoever, a fate for which there was no remedy. Clearly, heaven had ordained that scholarship was to be my trade. I decided to devote myself to study with all my Slutzk diligence, and become a rabbi. The rabbinate appeared to me the only practical way to make good in America. I set up a regular schedule of learning. But I had lost my Slutzk diligence, and I made no headway. The saying of our sages was fulfilled in me. "Torah can be acquired only in company." As I sat studying in the empty synagogue, I was seized by boredom, and sank into a sort of apathetic stupor, for long hours. When I pulled myself together, it was to stand at the window and watch the hustle and bustle in the street. Watching the shopkeepers and peddlers at their business and passers-by hurrying to their tasks, I became disgusted with my own indolence.

It finally became clear to me that I could never realize my ambition to become a rabbi in Boston. My only hope was to return to the Slutzk Yeshiva. True, the thought of leaving my father saddened me, for the wall of estrangement between us had begun to crumble and we were becoming close. But even if I could become a rabbi in Boston, I didn't want to burden my father with my upkeep.

My father was a peddler who sold two loads of commodities.

During the day he peddled rags and bottles, in the evening he peddled Hebrew lessons to Jewish boys, whom he trained for Bar Mitzvah. Every morning, after the services and breakfast, he would stick on his hat a brass badge marked with black letters and numbers against a glossy background—the badge which the Boston authorities had ordered every rag peddler to wear—shoulder his sack, and leave for work. He walked his route through the city, crying: "R-r-rags and bot-tles!" He looked up to the tenement houses, looking at the windows for a sign that one of the tenants wanted to bargain over their discards and rags. Sometimes young rowdies threw stones at him, and in the winter snowballs with pieces of coal inside, sometimes hoodlums pulled his beard, sometimes he'd be attacked in dark hallways and his pockets emptied. "Rags and bottles!" he would call again after such a mishap, his voice ringing with pain and grief, but not with bitterness or protest. He was inured to suffering and submitted to it.

My father's scared peddling of Bar Mitzvah lessons was essentially the same as the profane, except that here he functioned as a seller rather than a buyer. American Jewish boys in those days much preferred to play ball than to read the unfamiliar letter in the prayer book. They thought of my father as a kind of hangman, a cruel executioner come to snatch them from the street and rob them of the pleasure of their games and fun. When they failed to anticipate the exact time of his arrival and had no chance to hide, they went up to their apartments like condemned men for the half hour of tortuous study. Out of fear of their parents they submitted to my father, but in the end they repaid my father double for the tortures he inflicted on them.

My father made the rounds of the houses, selling pieces of his learning for pennies. His customers lived far apart, but the pennies he earned through so much toil were too precious to be spent on streetcar travel, so he half-ran, half-walked from lesson to lesson. Late at night he dragged his weary feet home. After prayers, he sat down to an appetiteless supper—work had killed his hunger. Father had a side line which he hoped would get him

on his feet: the little money he managed to save by limiting his expenditures to the barest necessities, he invested in ship tickets to be sold on installment to poor immigrants who wanted to bring over their families from Europe. He took out his little notebook and checked his accounts. He reckons and groans: this one wanted to pay but couldn't; this one could but didn't want to. The upshot was that neither was paying, and his losses were eating up his profits!

For one month a year, between Purim and Passover, Father also sold Passover necessities on the installment plan. From morning to midnight he walked the streets, in search of customers. That month he was a beast of burden, carrying bundles of matzoh, jugs of wine, bottles of whiskey, and similar Passover necessities for delivery to his customers. The night of the festival, when he sat down at the head of the table to reign over the Passover Seder he was a sore and miserable king, indeed, with swollen feet, bent back, all his joints aching, muscles cramped. Loudly he recited the Haggadah, singing cheerfully of the Israelites' deliverance from bondage to freedom, from servitude to liberty which he himself was experiencing that night, just as those who did march out of Egypt. But when he reached the passage describing the hard labor of the children of Israel in Egypt, his eyes would tear; he was in Egypt every day, body and soul. The holiday over, he drew out his little notebook to audit the meager accounts of his Passover business. The summation of these accounts was deplorable! Hard labor and a scanty profit.

My heart went out to my father at the sight of the miseries he endured to eke out a livelihood. I took myself to task for hanging around his neck like a millstone. Every time I sat down to eat his hard-earned bread, I felt like a criminal.

I felt it was my duty to relieve my father of the burden of my upkeep while I studied to become a rabbi. Returning to the Slutzk Yeshiva would help from the material point of view too —the yeshiva would give me a stipend as it did other poor out-of-town students.

While I was still considering whether or not to return to the

Slutzk Yeshiva, the Ridbaz visited America and my decision was made for me. News had reached him in Slutzk that his co-religionists in America responded generously to appeals for support of sacred institutions and enterprises. He came to secure funds for his commentaries to the Jerusalem Talmud whose printing he had been forced to interrupt for lack of funds. Shortly after his arrival he visited Boston, which was then considered a great Jewish center. The arrival of this renowned scholar was a great event. Rabbis, community leaders, and notables from Boston and the surrounding cities and towns came to the station to welcome him. He had an escort of honor, to the house where he was to be the guest during his stay in Boston. This house became a center for all Orthodox Jews. Day and night it hummed with visitors who came to warm themselves at the flame of the "Light of the Exile." All the Jews of Boston were proud to extend their hospitality to this Slutzk sage! But the rabbi's presence shed particular luster on the natives of Slutzk, who led the reception at the railroad station and were the first to sit at the rabbi's table. I was from Slutzk, too, and I felt especially close to him as a former student at his yeshiva and as one he had known from earliest childhood. But I stayed away both from the railroad station and the house where he was staying, out of a natural shyness compounded with shame at having left his yeshiva without asking his advice and without taking leave of him. His first Sabbath in Boston he preached in one of the large synagogues, which was packed for the occasion. My father and I were among the audience. As he stood on the almemar preaching, his eyes fell on me, and from the expression of surprise in his eyes I realized that he had recognized me. After the sermon he hurried over, gave me a hard pinch on my cheek that surpassed all others he ever gave me before, and while pinching hurled at me a reproof: "What are you doing here, you heathen! Why have you left my yeshiva, exiling yourself from a place of Torah to a land that consumes its scholars? Return—return to the haven of Torah—I order you to return with me to Slutzk!"

VI

Whenever a native of Slutzk returned from a trip to America, his townsfolk begged him to recount the wonders he had seen and heard in America. He was proud to have his townsfolk, including notable personages, sit at his feet like pupils hanging on to his every word. His account would be extravagant, loaded with odd Americanisms like the French words in the commentary of Rashi. He would flaunt his short and tight-fitting clothes, a very stiff derby, his wide-toed and laced shoes, and the pure gold chain dangling across his vest. "Ah, America, America!" his audience would exclaim.

After deciding to return to the Slutzk Yeshiva I toured Boston to see its sights in order to be able to tell my relatives and friends all about the wonders of this third America, as the people from Slutzk had dubbed Boston. Actually, I had really not seen Boston before—the image of Slutzk had always stood in the way. But now I was able to look directly at Boston and was pleasantly surprised. I strolled through the elegant neighborhoods, the rich quarters of the Boston aristocracy of the old families that had preserved the Bostonian traditions and I was delighted. There was a modest beauty in the old-style buildings standing side by side in rows

screening themselves from the public gaze that might infringe upon their privacy. The streets where they stood were serenely silent, the tumult of the city that was filtered through beat like a remote pulse of the city's life.

The suburbs, too, had their native beauty. It was springtime in New England. Neatly painted houses of wood and shingles, well-constructed houses of stone and brick, decorated with vines climbing up to the cornices of roofs, stood in the shadow of the broad-crested trees green with first bloom rustling melodiously, caressed by the breeze. The houses were an ample distance apart. The spaces between were covered with fresh grass, newly clipped; here and there lilac bushes opened fragrant blue-white buds. Coveys of birds returning from the south flew over the rooftops. A row of brick houses, standing on the diagonal bank across the Charles River, peered into its depth. Sunset crimson flickered softly on the red of their bricks. Their windows glowed majestically! A gate of heaven opened in the west and a hidden mysterious world peered through it, and its sublime image was reflected in the window panes, and radiated from them in awesome majesty and beauty, a spectral kaleidoscope, gleams of the wondrous light which God had brought into being on the first day of Creation and forthwith hidden. The houses gazed into the mirror of the river's deep and observed with awe the reflection of this mysterious world. The river's waves also observed this wondrous reflection in the window panes mirrored in their deep, and they donned a silky purple, a garb of glory, and floated together with the beryl-tinted clouds above westward to see the real image of this mysterious world before it sets and vanishes. A sailboat glided gracefully over the river emitting the sweet strains of a mandolin—a melody of farewell to the apparition of beauty which had appeared in this mysterious world and the boat flapped its sails to its tune and waved to it goodbye!

Sitting on the bench enjoying this view at dusk, another view, far across the sea, flashed before my eyes: Slutzk, as it really was, with its quarters so poor, that I, a native pauper's son, knew so well. Muddy, smelly courts and alleys. Dilapidated houses sunk

into the earth, up to the windows leaning on wooden props like cripples on crutches. Inside, soot-covered walls, damp with mildew, a sooty oven in the far corner of the house, belching smoke and sparks, like a monster bent on burning down the house and its inhabitants. The sooty, sagging ceiling would collapse at any moment were it not for the supporting beams! A long-legged spider spinning in the corner a web of gray threads in which ensnared flies writhe, buzzing furiously.

Startled, I rubbed my eyes as if trying to erase the traces of a bad dream. But with cruel clarity I could still see Slutzk in my mind's eye. One image followed another. Here was the market place, Jews with distorted faces, furrowed brows, and dishevelled beards, frantically push to and fro, trampling mud and dung, squeezing in among the peasants' wagons to trade with them, for cash or barter, wrangling and bargaining, quarreling, placating and imploring—their hollow eyes glinting like the eyes of hungry animals. In the center of the market place Jewish women wearing tattered and frayed shawls, faces yellow as old parchment, lips bluish-gray, sat near mounds of dust covered potatoes and rotten apples crying their wares. And at their side young girls with bushy hair, pale cheeks, and ashen eyes, stood before boxes full of costume jewelry, ivory combs, small mirrors, colored ribbons, and other notions, dinning the praise of their wares into the ears of the passing peasant women. On the edge of the market place were crowded rows of shops, whose salesmen and clerks stood in the doorways grabbing peasants by the sleeve, pulling them back and forth urging and cajoling them to buy.

I shivered; to such a horrid place am I going to return?

VII

I kept postponing the date of my return to Slutzk, pretending all the while that I had not changed my mind. Meanwhile Memorial Day approached. From the Jewish newspapers I learned what this holiday meant; I was fascinated by the emancipation of the slaves and even more so by the personality of Abraham Lincoln, the hero of that event. Lincoln's Jewish name, Abraham, his bearded face with its Jewish expression of sorrow, made him look like a Jewish prophet of old whom Providence raised up for the Americans to free them from the shame of slavery. Memorial Day morning I hurried to the Boston Commons, near the Capitol, to see the holiday ceremony.

It was late spring. A festive golden aura adorned the vernal crests of the elms, lindens and pines and their leaves sang in a rustle to the caresses of the morning breeze. This holiday, a holiday of these citizens—a variety of races and lands—who strolled among the trees, was also the holiday of these trees—also a variety of races and lands; how beautifully they flourished beside one another in this American soil, denizen and immigrant alike, at peace with one another, none to crowd his fellow out. They join these human denizens in celebrating the memory of the

heroes of this blessed land in which they have taken root. The gilded dome of the Capitol shimmers and from its blazing glow emanates a sheaf of rays like a scepter of grace extended to the denizens and immigrants, invited and uninvited to this festival. In the center of the park towers on a mound a monument of glory to the heroes of Boston who have made the supreme sacrifice for their country, a statue of a soldier on one side, a statue of a sailor on the other, and above—a statue of a maiden holding a flag—symbolizing young America bearing the banner of liberty to the races and nations that have found haven in her shadow. There was special splendor and grandeur in this monument on this "Memorial Day" morning: it was the focal point to which streamed the military units with their commanders to honor the heroes, the defenders of an exalted land.

A platoon of armed soldiers marched up, halted and defiled as a guard of honor beside the monument. I looked at their faces and was reminded of an army regiment that once passed through Slutzk. A rumor spread that they intended to wreak a pogrom on the Jews. I had looked at the coarse, brutal faces of those soldiers when they marched down our street and I was terrified. The Jews of Slutzk lived in mortal terror throughout the stay of the regiment. They were cautious not to give them the slightest excuse for an attack, and relieved when the regiment was gotten rid of finally. But these American soldiers were open-faced, disciplined, inspiring confidence.

Two soldiers placed a bouquet of flowers at the foot of the monument as the guns saluted. The bugle began slowly, lamenting those dead on the battlefield, before their time, who in their death bequeathed liberty and equality to the future generations. The bugle ended on a note of restrained joy—the joy of a people that knew how to fight for its freedom.

I left the Commons and made my way to the Public Garden nearby. I strolled along the path of this incomparably lovely garden. Round and square flower beds embroider the carpet of fresh grass with wonderful blossoms. On either side of the garden paths elms stretched their boughs overhead, birches spreading

their branches like palm fronds, crimson-leafed maples and plane trees with dark blue leaves and white-petaled lilac bushes. In the center of the garden, between gold-sanded shores fringed with poplars and willows, lay a beautiful pond. Ferry boats with sterns shaped like white swans with outspread wings sailed the pond bearing groups of picnickers. On either side to the rear swam flocks of ducks, quacking and gurgling, flapping their wings, and dipping their heads from time to time into the clear water of the pond. Bevies of pigeons and doves, whose feathers gleamed in the light of the day, capered and cooed on the green lawns, and fluttered after popcorn and peanuts tossed to them by the holiday strollers.

I strolled through the park looking at the other strollers, their bright holiday faces, secure expressions. I thought of a verse from Psalms: "Happy is the people that is in such a case."

My eyes filled with tears, nostalgic tears, while bidding farewell—not to Boston, but to Slutzk. At this moment I knew that Slutzk had left me forever. I would never return to it—never!

VIII

The Chief Rabbi of Boston at that time was Rabbi Moshe Zebulun Margolies, known as The Ramaz.

It was said of Rabbi Yohanan: when he came up to visit Rabbi Eliezer and saw him lying sick in a dark room, Rabbi Yohanan bared his arm and the room lit up. Ramaz' face glowed the same way, with its chiselled lines, delicate skin, and brilliant expression. He had a grand air and dressed elegantly. His tall figure was accentuated by a top-hat, whose blackness contrasted with the white of his long full beard and of the hair falling down to the nape of his neck where it was trimmed in a straight line. Ramaz was a modest man, but his very appearance commanded respect.

He was not the only rabbi in Boston. There were others—the same self-important braggarts as in other Jewish communities in America. For American rabbis had deserted the moral basis of their profession to foster Jewish learning. Instead they converted Judaism into a kashruth cult. This cult they made the cardinal tenet of American Jewish life. Supervision of this cult yielded a material reward—the kashruth certification fee—to which everyone aspired. The result was ugly competition; what one rabbi

declared kosher, another declared not kosher, all for the sake of profit, under the guise of piety.

Ramaz was an Orthodox rabbi who would not and could not shirk the responsibility of kashruth, a fundamental of traditional Judaism. Nor could he avoid conflict with other rabbis. But his intentions were of the highest, and he was careful to keep his name and that of the community unsullied. He also fostered Zionism and Jewish education.

Zionism encountered great difficulties in making its way at the beginning of the century in America. Some Orthodox rabbis were hesitant to help it; others opposed Zionism actively, seeing it as subversive of traditional Judaism. But Ramaz became one of the champions of Zionism. A portrait of bare-headed Herzl hung on the east wall of his home together with portraits of great Jewish scholars; he pronounced Herzl's name with reverence. He also propagated the idea of a Jewish renaissance in Palestine in both his synagogue sermons and in his private conversations. Ramaz was aided by his son, Sam Margolies, who later became a rabbi in Cleveland and died young in an automobile accident. This favorite son of his, educated both at the yeshiva and at Harvard University, was even more successful than his father in winning adherents for the Zionism cause. He was an outstanding Zionist speaker, in both Yiddish and English, at mass meetings held in synagogues and meeting halls. Eloquently, Sam Margolis brought the message of Israel's rebirth on its land, to his audiences. He interpreted the Zionism idea in terms of the Jewish tradition as well as history. Rabbi and son combined in an influential Zionist leadership, the one furnishing the stability of age, the other youthful ardor. The Ramaz' home in Boston became a meeting place for Zionists—for veteran Maskilim who had brought their ideology with them from Europe, for Hebrew inspired young men newly immigrated to America; and for American-born and educated youth. This variety of types had one thing in common: faith in political Zionism. They would all meet in the Ramaz home.

Ramaz was as devoted to the study of Torah as he was to Zionism. He foresaw that American Jewry was destined to become the

center of world Jewry, and he was concerned lest it deteriorate spiritually for lack of higher educational institutions. When the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva was founded in New York (today Yeshiva University), Ramaz became its patron. Even when he still lived in Boston he was a staunch supporter of the yeshiva: when he settled in New York, Ramaz became its chief leader and benefactor till his death.

Ramaz had taken a special liking to me while I was still in the Old Country. Let me explain: as a child I had been possessed of a passion for writing and it grew stronger with time. Whenever I looked at the title page of a book and saw the author's name in capital letters, I envied and longed to emulate him. So I decided to compose a book of my own. I got a notebook, decorated the front pages with ornately drawn flowers and blossoms like those which Bezalel had carved on his candelabrum for the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, and grape clusters like those which were brought to Slutzk for Rosh Hashanah. At the head of the page I wrote in block letters the title of the book, "Olelot Ephraim—The Gleanings of Ephraim." Below I put the author's name: "The insignificant Levite, youngest in his father's house, the diminutive X son of Y the Levite, nicknamed Z, living here in the Sacred Community of Slutzk—may the Temple be rebuilt early in our days." In this notebook I recorded scholarly novellae—first those I heard from my teachers, and then my own. The book grew, page by page, and overflowed into a second notebook. From time to time I copied excerpts from these scholarly writings and sent them to my father, who brought them to Ramaz for his opinion. Thus Ramaz had taken to me even before he met me.

Shortly after I arrived in Boston my father presented me to Ramaz, who invited me to visit him at home. I eagerly responded to his invitation. Each time I visited him I basked in his learning —Ramaz cleared up obscure passages in the Talmud for me. I had told Ramaz of my decision to return to Slutzk Yeshiva: and now that I had changed my mind I came to ask his advice as to the best way to go about becoming a Rabbi.

"My son," he replied, "wherever Israel has gone the Torah has

followed. It has followed us into our American exile, too. A modest beginning has, with God's help, been made at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva which has been founded in New York. The yeshiva provides for its students. Go there my son, study at the yeshiva, and He Who causes His Name to dwell wherever the Torah dwells will surely aid you."

Supplied with a letter of recommendation from Ramaz, I left for New York to enter the Rabbi Isaac Elchanam Yeshiva. I traveled by boat, which was cheaper than rail. I sat in a corner alone. It was noisy on the boat: people were eating and dancing in the cafeteria, the bar, and the ballroom. People roamed the deck, gossiping and joking; people sang—but I paid no heed, absorbed in my own thoughts about my father, whom I missed already, and my dubious future.

Midnight approached. The deck emptied. The passengers dispersed to their cabins and the dormitory, but I sat where I was, sleepless. I preferred to remain on deck. A white mist filled the air! It was impossible to tell the front from the rear. The ship floated like Noah's Ark, groping and plowing through this mist, hooting, sadly.

Out of the mist rose the meadow behind my grandfather's house in Slutzk, steeped in the splendor of Sabbath eve. I saw myself walking with Batya. I walked with her as in the old days. But it was not the old carefree Batya, this was a sad Batya, but all the more beautiful. She was walking at my side and sighing "I missed you—first love is never forgotten! Don't regret having come back to me—I'll help you study at the yeshiva. I'll be your Rachel—like Rachel, the wife of Rabbi Akiva, whom you told me about. I'll take in laundry, I'll cut my braids and sell them to support you."

I shuddered and opened my eyes—the dream was over.

"May I sit beside you?" I heard a sad voice ask with a pleading face. It was a stranger. She explained: "I was out of work in Boston and decided to go to New York to find a job. The dormitory is full, and that fellow over there spoke fresh to me. I told him you were my brother. Let me sit here so he'll believe it."

I looked hard into her eyes—they were honest eyes. I invited her to sit down beside me. The touch of her arm sent a tremor through my body. Eyes were staring hungrily at her. She laid her head on my shoulder and shut her own eyes to escape the hoodlum's stare.

The mist dissolved. The sky cleared and looked new. There was a pristine blue to the sky, washed in clarity and splendor. It spread over the sea from horizon to horizon, as a canopy of peace and serenity. Myriad stars twinkled, singing the song of eternity. The waves below heard the song and joined in the symphony. The waves swayed to and fro, and the ship with them—up and down, up and down, like a cradle rocked by the hand of a merciful mother.

My eyes closed. I fell asleep with the pleasant sensation of a lovely head of a girl leaning on my shoulder, her hair, blown gently by the breeze, stroking my face—caressing strokes, gentle to the touch, and transmitting a sweet, sweet tremor.

IX

The Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva's beginnings were modest. Its first location was the women's gallery of the Anshei Kalvariah Synagogue on Pike Street in New York City. There was housed a small group of boys and young men who had brought their baggage of learning with them across the ocean. Few were the students, and most of these had chosen the yeshiva as a stopping-off place. Actually they were seeking a way in the American labyrinth of life, stopped for provisions at the yeshiva, which they viewed as a kind of stocking-up point on the way to Americanization.

The Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva was different from the yeshivot in the Old Country. In the Old Country a yeshiva was an institution organically connected with Jewish life. The traditional Jewish way of life permeated the Jewish community with a sublime spirituality and it imbued the yeshiva students with love of learning for its own sake. The rabbinate, besides being a highly honorable profession, was also a dignified source of livelihood. Thus, scholarship promised the yeshiva students both status and security.

Even after the Haskalah invaded the yeshiva, some of the students who became its adherents were such only in theory; they reconciled the contradictions between the teachings of the yeshiva

and those of Haskalah and remained in the yeshiva. Those who drew the practical conclusions that the two were irreconciliable and left the yeshiva did not, however, for the most part, alienate themselves from Jewish life. They became active in Jewish life because they retained a sense of responsibility to their people, and of common destiny. The enlightenment they advocated was aimed at remedying rather than revolutionizing Jewish life.

The case of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva was different. The American Jewish community in which it was located was in an anarchic materialistic state. The yeshiva's students soon lost the love of pure scholarship which they brought with them from the Old Country. Nor did learning promise economic security: the rabbinate here was a poor and ill-regarded profession; rabbis eked out a pittance from kashruth certification, officiating at religious marriages, divorces, and funerals, and from synagogue donations. The study of the Torah at the yeshiva promised neither glory nor livelihood. And then the Haskalah that invaded the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva was not related to Jewish life, but to external American life. The new world's schools invited the yeshiva students to enter them. They responded to the invitation, though continuing to study at the yeshiva in order to receive the benefit of the yeshiva's subsidy. They cut their Jewish studies in half, to study at the public elementary and high schools. Their ultimate objectives were medicine, law, engineering, journalism, and similar rewarding careers—not the rabbinate.

The dean of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva at the time was Rabbi Nahum Dan, a Slutzk teacher who had migrated to America. He was dean, teacher of the lowest class, director and superivisor. Rabbi Dan's stoop, sparse yellow beard, and graceless appearance evoked no respect for his scholarship. He was, however, a very learned man, although his scholarship was of the Slutzk character—limited in scope, dry and pedantic—such a personality could not compete with the non-Jewish influences on his students, who were not all of the elite.

One exception, who stood head and shoulders above his schoolmates, was Hillel Rogoff. Rogoff was outstanding both in his

Jewish and his secular studies; a spiritual aristocrat and moral esthete, he was admired by all of his schoolmates. He might have become a great influence at the yeshiva had he not just then come under the influence of the Jewish socialist movement. Rogoff continued studying at the yeshiva for a while, with the intention of leaving, when he got his college degree, to join the movement to which he had dedicated himself.

During the time I studied at the yeshiva, I fulfilled the saying of the Sages about the true scholar: "You shall live a life of hardship and toil in the Torah." I came to New York without a penny to my name, for I had refused to take from my father more than I absolutely needed for a ticket. I was dependent upon the yeshiva for support: $2.75 a week—$1.75 for food, twenty-five cents for three meals a day—if they could be called "meals" and seventy-five cents for a room, and the balance for all my other needs, largely drugs for my ailing stomach; these I bought very cheaply at a nearby hospital. The room, which cost me more than 25 per cent of my stipend, was a tiny back room which was always dark, so that it was difficult to distinguish between day and night. It had a window of sorts that faced on a high and narrow space between which was like a chimney hole, admitting no sunlight—only the noise of the nearby elevated train. It was summer, and the sun's heat was absorbed during the day by the brick and stone of the buildings, at night they exuded a sweaty vapor. I was nearly suffocated; the vapor combined with the clatter of the nearby elevated line to deprive me of sleep most of the night.

A life of hardship supposedly befits Torah, because it encourages study. This was not my case. I succumbed to the practical spirit that was dominant among the yeshiva students. Before long I was seized with a desire to enroll in a school. First I had prepared to qualify. This was in conflict with my ambition for the rabbinate which still persisted; I reconciled the conflict by pretending that a general education would advance my career as a rabbi.

"Being a rabbi in America is not like being a rabbi in the Old Country. In America a rabbi must know the English language to be able to preach to the younger, American born and bred generation,

for whom Yiddish is an alien tongue. Look at the humiliating and embarrassing position of Rabbi Dan when important guests who don't know Yiddish visit the yeshiva, and he has to call on Hillel Rogoff to serve as his interpreter. Do you want to be like him?"

I decided to enroll in school the next semester. English was still as foreign to me as on the day I landed in America. I set about learning the rudiments of the language so that I should not be assigned to the lowest class at school. It was summer, and the free evening schools for immigrants conducted by the government and the philanthropic institutions were closed. The meager stipend I received from the yeshiva certainly made a private tutor out of the question. But leave it to a fellow from Slutzk to find a way out of any predicament!

I acquired a copy of the Pentateuch with an English translation, and I began to study it every day starting with Genesis, going over the text once in the original and twice in translation. I knew that the language of translation that I memorized had to be applied in conversation, but I was afraid to talk to English-speaking adults lest I seem absurd. So I chose my roommate, one of my landlord's children, to be my auditor. To him I spoke at night in the archaic language of King James. There was a dark hall in our apartment house with a small light to show the tenants the way as they climbed the rickety stairs. The stingy landlord put out the light early in the evening. I would complain to my roommate: "My anger is kindled against the lord of the house for hastening to extinguish the small luminary!" He wondered: "Since when is this skinny, thin-bearded fellow a lord of the house? And what in the world is a 'small luminary'?" Or I would ask him if he had eaten supper: "Hast thou stayed thine heart with the going down of the sun?" He was perplexed: "How and with what do you stay your heart?" Or a parade would pass down the street, and I would approve: "This array has found favor in my eyes," and he pondered: "what kind of an array was it?" Thus night after night I talked to the boy in the vivid English of seventeenth-century poetry. "What on earth is that fellow talking about?" the poor fellow wondered. When the public school semester

approached, the yeshiva supervisory board issued an order that its students were henceforth to devote the entire day to their yeshiva studies. The students were divided in their reactions: some submitted; others, myself included, revolted and decided to leave the yeshiva altogether. The introspective self-searching which this order forced me to engage in made me realize why I really wanted it—it was not to prepare for the rabbinate, but for the university. I had not yet decided what field I would specialize in at the university, but I did know that I was disgusted with the American rabbinate.

I had been studying at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva for only a half a year, and I had not developed any attachment to it. Still, it was hard for me to part from it, for it meant abandoning a lofty ideal to which I had consecrated myself as a boy.

Sadly and dejectedly I sailed back to Boston.

X

My father, endowed with a rich imagination, was an inveterate builder of castles in the air. In Minsk he accumulated the few pennies he managed to save and spent them on lottery tickets bought on installment. My mother did not approve of this extravagance—their income was burdened enough with the hush money they had to pay the informers. But my father had his reasons: Was anything impossible for God? Hadn't paupers like himself won the lottery and become rich overnight? He might be next—every man has his lucky hour! Before each drawing father's imagination ran away with him: he saw a pot of gold, himself a rich man in Minsk, a lumber or grain merchant, devoting some of his time to Jewish communal social service and some to daily studies, thus enabling him simultaneously to enjoy this world and the world to come. On Saturday morning, as he sipped his chicory after reciting the weekly portion of the Pentateuch, he would describe to my mother the affluence that was in store for them, when, God willing, they had won the lottery. His face beamed in anticipation. Later, he walked majestically to the synagogue with his Sabbath cloak on his shoulders, the empty sleeves flapping on his back—a gentlemen, not a mere water carrier.

Father continued to spin fascinating webs of fantasy in Boston. He would rise to the top in America. Here, where everything was possible, great wealth would miraculously come his way, as it had to many fellow immigrants from Slutzk, who arrived penniless in Boston and were now the wealthiest members of the community. When I left for the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva, Father's imagination immediately translated his rising to the top in America into the honors that I would bring to him when I became a rabbi.

When I told him my decision to abandon the rabbinate, he became frantic with grief. At first he tried to persuade me to return to the yeshiva: didn't I know I was ruining my life and his by this decision? Here was our chance to rise in the world together and I was throwing it away! Since when was secular school more important than a sacred Jewish one? True, every Jew in America had to know the vernacular—but a scholar like me could master it easily in my spare time. When he saw that gentle persuasion was no use, he became grimly silent. Dejectedly resentful, he would return from his daily labor and sit down to eat supper with knit brow and downcast eyes. Having eaten and recited grace, he would open his notebook, and examine his accounts in a mournful exclamation, "Father-in-Heaven!" Mine was another account that didn't balance, another one of his bubbles that had burst!

My stepmother scolded me: "Don't you see how hard your father works? What a poor, poor living he makes? May all the enemies of Israel work that hard and make such a living! How many boys of your age in America with such poor parents leave school to become peddlers, newspaper vendors, shop clerks or factory workers, anything to help out at home! But you—you're not only not helping your poor father, you're actually making him support you. You're not the only son any more, thank God; there is a baby in the crib, and another baby on the way, with God's help. All that added expense. What do you think? Who should come first—a baby or a grown boy? I am sure that when

this baby grows up, God willing, it will help papa, not hang like a stone on his neck the way you do!"

The combination of my father's grim silence and my stepmother's scolding caused me to defer entering school. I decided to leave home and find an occupation that would put me on my own feet. I would rather do the most menial work than continue to be dependent on my father's charity. But I wouldn't work on the Sabbath, and the only occupation I know that did not require that was peddling. But I had already failed at peddling. After much contemplation, I made a final decision: I would become a shohet, a ritual slaughterer. True, like the rabbinate, it was not highly respected in America, but it would be only temporary. I would be a shohet for a few years, until I could qualify for admission to a university, and save up enough money to go.

There was a man in Boston who made most of his living as a mohel or ritual circumciser. As a side line, he practiced ritual slaughtering. He had grasped the principles of American business so thoroughly, that he had become the chief mohel of Boston. He didn't wait for invitations. He presented himself to expectant parents just before the child was to be born—and he had "agents" in every Jewish neighborhood in Boston who reported to him which women were pregnant. When the prospective mother came to term, he visited her at home and talked to her and her husband. Vaunting his expertness at circumcision, which was at once an art and a matter of experience—why, Boston is full of people he had circumcised! He would try to win their confidence and persuade them to allow him to fulfill the precept of circumcision, if that became necessary. It wasn't the fee—God forbid!—that interested him, but the reward of fulfilling a holy precept—and what greater precept is there than circumcision, which entails another great precept: the preservation of a Jewish life? How so? Oh, they must not underestimate the perils with which circumcision is fraught! The least slip could endanger a child's life. But he was no quack like the other mohalim. There was no one who could cut as clean as he. Before the baby could open his mouth

to cry, he had put some drops of wine into his mouth, and the infant was placated. On the third day, when babies circumcised by other mohalim were still in pain, the babies he circumcised were already healed. On the fourth day, they looked as though they had been born that way! Responding to his hearty humor, the prospective parents served him a glass of whiskey. He drank a toast: If it were a boy, this drink was an advance on the drinks he'd have at the circumcision ceremony. If it were a girl, the drink would pay him for his trouble in coming to see them. His face glowed not from drink but from joy at the precept which the couple had decided to allow him to fulfill. Before my half-brother was born this mohel also visited our home and I got to know him. So when I decided to learn ritual slaughtering I asked him to teach me. While he preferred money to honor, he deemed it a great honor that young scholar like myself should have chosen him of all the Boston slaughterers to teach me the profession! He declined my offer to pay him a fee. He undertook to teach me at no charge and promised that within half a year I would, under his tutorship, become a "perfect cut"—a master shohet. He then poured himself a glass of whiskey and drank a toast, his face aglow, delighted to fulfill still another precept: "Raise thyself many disciples. . . ."

At my decision to study shehitah my father again became friendly to me. True, the shehitah profession did not rank as high as the rabbinate, but it, too, was considered a sacred office and a respectable occupation. My father's imagination again took flight, he saw me a successful shohet in Boston. He would sit watching with awe for hours as I practiced sharpening the slaughtering knife. It was as though I was a priest preparing to offer sacrifices on the altar. I struggled to sharpen the knife, doing it over again and again, each time the blade coming out slightly blunt or dented. But my father went around singing my praise to all his acquaintances: "What do you think of him? He is a real artist. No one can sharpen a blade as he does. Why, he turns out a knife so keen the hair splits at the mere touch of it!"

When the time came to slaughter my first chicken, my heart

pounded. I was terrified at the prospect of shedding blood. Up to now, shehitah had been only a theoretical matter for me, studying the rules and practicing sharpening the knife. But now that I was about to apply the theory, I trembled all over. I had a tender nature, full of pity for all living creatures. At an early age I had seen an alley cat that had pounced upon a chick that had fallen out of his nest and dragged it off, quivering and bleeding in the cat's mouth. I cried all evening and my parents were unable to console me. Well into the night I lay sobbing in bed, all the while hearing the sad twittering of the bereft mother bird at the top of the tree in our courtyard.

This humane feeling never left me. Every spring, my stepmother would buy a rooster and some hens to have eggs for the summer and expiatory sacrifice for the coming Yom Kippur. Every morning she would let the chickens out into our courtyard, where they spent the day pecking in the dung and rolling in the dust. In the evening she took them inside, where they spent the night in the chicken coop under our oven. I was studying at the yeshiva then, and it was beneath my dignity to tend chickens. But I left them the leftovers of my meals. Miraculously, they came to learn when I ate, and gathered at our window waiting to be fed. When I coddled them they sprawled out on the ground gurgling with pleasure.

The High Holy Day season approached and the sound of the shofar announced the arrival of judgment day, rousing all to penitence. I was aghast at the thought that the eve before Yom Kippur a rooster and a hen would be slaughtered, one in expiation of my sins, and one of my stepmother's. I was ashamed to look at them like a guilt-laden criminal standing before his victims. The night before Yom Kippur, when the rooster and the hen lay bound under the table, I tossed and turned in bed: Why should these unfortunate creatures be slaughtered so that we may live? Early the next morning I hurried to the synagogue, where I stayed a long time to avoid seeing them, all blood-stained, their throats slit, when my stepmother brought them home from the slaughter house. . . .

Now that I had become an expert knife sharpener and had mastered all the laws relating to ritual slaughter, my mentor prodded me to apply my knowledge and slaughter chickens. I kept putting off the day. I finally suppressed my humane scruples, rationalizing: "Man has been allowed to eat meat since the days of Noah—the shohet is specially privileged to provide kosher meat! Still when I seized a chicken to slaughter, my hand trembled and teeth chattered so that the handle of the knife, clenched between my teeth, jumped. I shivered as though I had malaria! My mentor jeered: "Well, say the blessing, and slaughter the hen! Are you going to stand there and wait for it to lay a golden egg?" The chicken dealer would chime in: "This shlumiel will be a shohet when the palm of my hand grows feathers! Let him be a Hebrew teacher instead and like him could slaughter childen!" Hopelessly I dropped the hen.

Finally I made it. My hand stopped trembling when I held the chicken. I bent back the hen's throat, holding it with my thumb and forefinger by the skin of its neck, plucked several feathers, recited the blessing, and slaughtered the chicken, letting the blood drip into the barrel.

When I felt the warm, sticky blood run through my fingers, I heard someone concealed within me shouting at me: "Cain, murderer whose fingers are smirched with blood!" I rushed home and soaped my hands, but it was no use! My hands would not be cleansed. I sat down to supper, and the bread I put to my mouth was smeared with blood. I spat it out, gagging! I lay down in bed, white-hot needles piercing my flesh. I closed my eyes, but behind the lowered lids I saw the hen I had murdered writhing on the ground and flapping, her feathers bristling, her throat dangling loose, a pool of blood forming under the open wound. Suddenly she leaped up before me, exposed her slit throat, and gurgled: "Murderer! Look what you have done to me!"

XI

The shehitah certificate that I brought from New York was a scroll of honor to my father. When I got back to Boston I spread it out for him and he read again and again the traditional text of the certificate, which was accompanied by a special citation. He took a holiday that day, put on his Sabbath clothes, and went off to his friends with the certificate. He showed it to them and read it aloud, translating for the benefit of those who did not know the sacred rabbinical idiom. "Not even eighteen years old, and the greatest rabbis of New York have authorized him to do ritual slaughtering—just like a veteran! Not every shohet gets a certificate like this!"

To my father the certificate was a scroll of honor. For me, it was a passport to the practical world. True, being a slaughterer was not my aim in life, but it was a temporary station to pause for respite. I hurried to visit the officials of the ritual slaughterers association in Boston, showed them my certificate, and asked them to help me get a job as shohet in Boston—any job, even one that paid a minimum salary. The officials were good enough to read my certificate and comment on it in a most friendly manner. But they added, less cordially, "Boston has a glut of shohatim, there are

seven to every chicken and animal. Even if the number of kosher meat consumers in Boston should double and triple, we have enough. And then even if a vacancy were to occur in Boston, there are plenty of veteran shohatim with wives and children looking for jobs, if any should turn up. Do you want to displace them? But don't you be discouraged! There are towns around Boston that need shohatim from time to time—married shohatim don't want to settle there for various reasons. We'll keep you in mind for one of those jobs."

I didn't want to and couldn't take away a job from veteran shohatim with families who were destitute. I wasn't one to take anyone else's place, even my own place to which I was entitled.

Difficult days followed, heart-sickening days of disappointment, until rescue came from an unexpected source: I got a job in Auburn in New York State. This job had a slight drawback: it involved being a teacher half time and a shohet half time in a little community with only fifteen families. These two half-time jobs between them didn't offer half a decent salary. Nevertheless, I jumped at the opportunity for I felt a small job was just right for me; it wouldn't keep me busy all day and I would have time to study English and the other subjects I needed to qualify for admission to a university. My father was angry at me. One of the veteran shohatim and mohalim of Boston had become interested in me as a match for his daughter, a job as assistant shohet at the slaughter-house promised, and here I was throwing away this chance by taking a job and burying myself in some remote village. It was sheer spiteful stubbornness! I begrudged him the little joy that this match might bring him!

My heart went out to my father. I wanted to explain to my father why I had to refuse the offer, so he would understand it was not out of spite, but I knew he would be unable to understand and I would only be aggravating his pain, so I kept quiet. He returned silence for silence, and we each were further offended by the other's silence.

The morning I left I told my father when my train was due to leave that evening. He nodded, and went for work. I assumed

that he would meet me at the station. But I was mistaken. I went to the station alone, stood at the tail end of a long line of passengers with their friends, at the entrance to the platform. Waiting for the gates to be opened, I looked for my father in the crowd. He wasn't there. The gates opened, the passengers said goodbye to their friends and relatives with a handshake or a kiss. I stood near the coach, dejected.

The train pulled out. Slowly it moved off to be swallowed in the dark winter night. Slowly I rode away from Boston without a word of goodbye from my father. For the second time my father and I had separated without a word. Ten years before he had stolen away from me in Slutzk, and now I was leaving him behind in Boston—leaving him without his farewell blessing, like a foundling banished by his foster parent.

XII

I didn't know American geography, and from the juxtaposition of "Auburn" to "New York" I had assumed that these two places were near one another. So I left for Auburn with two and a half dollars; one and a half dollars for the fare to New York; half a dollar for the fare from New York to Auburn; and another half a dollar for added expenses. But when I arrived in New York, I learned that the trip to Auburn cost eight dollars. I was in a quandary: where was I to get eight dollars? If time weren't short I would have written my father to send me the money. But since Purim was approaching and I had to be in Auburn in time to read the Scroll of Esther, there was not time to write to my father and wait for him to reply. In this emergency I applied to one of my relatives in New York.

This man was the son of a Slutzk tailor who had successfully carried on his father's trade in America. The needle which had brought him a bare living in Slutzk, brought him prosperity in New York. He had a clothing business which was half store, half factory. His suits became famous. He invested in real estate and stores, and his wealth grew by leaps and bounds.

He who increases wealth, they say, increases vainglory. The low

esteem in which tailors had been held in Slutzk had left in him a feeling of inferiority, which remained even after he had become wealthy and respected. He was a miser, but when it came to buying fame and honor, money was no object. He became a benefactor of the Slutzk Synagogue in New York. This helped him become one of the synagogue's chief spokesmen and everyone kudsed to him. He grew a sparse, rabbinical goatee and officiated as cantor on Sabbaths and festivals. His father had been a tailor in Slutzk all the year round, and a cantor in one of the synagogues on the High Holy Days. He was also his father's cantorial assistant, and now he made good use of it.

When he had finished praying and people came over to congratulate him, his face beamed and he replied:

"Gentlemen, prayer is like tailoring. First-rate prayer is one that is cut to measure, every fold perfectly straight in line, carefully pressed, no burns, creases in the right place. Do you think that I've given you my best goods? Oh no! I've a tremendous stock that I'm saving for the right occasion, you haven't seen the like!"

Gradually he outgrew the Slutzk Synagogue and became active in various other organizations and institutions. The size of his donations, for various communal causes grew; he groaned as he gave and sighed with relief afterward; it was like having a bad tooth extracted.

In my innocence I thought of this relative as a guardian angel who would rush to my aid. I went to his shop on Saturday night. Standing at the door like a beggar, I waited for the right moment to attract his attention. His shop was full of customers, he hurried from one to another, his tape measure dangling from his neck. Approching a customer who wanted a suit made to order, he took his measure, with every measurement announcing a figure, with a sort of sing-song, which a clerk repeated with the same sort of sing-song and jotted down in his note-book. He turned to another customer, who wanted a ready-made suit. He fitted him with a suit from his stock, then, retreating a few steps, closed one eye and squinted with the other, checking the fit from every angle. Wherever alterations were necessary, he immediately went to

work. He pulled the jacket hems this way and that way, buttoned and unbuttoned, raised the collar, pulling it towards each shoulder as he straightened and flattened it, fitted the sleeves, took the jacket off and fitted on vest and trousers, measuring the cuffs and the waist. Finally he sent the suit to the workshop behind the store for the chalk-marked alterations to be made. If a suit happened to fit, he stood the customer between two mirrors so that he could see how well it sat both in front and back, and declared positively: "This suit is made to order for you." If a customer tried to bargain with him, he protested: "Bring me a thousand suits like this at your price and I'll buy them from you and even throw in a few dollars to the bargain. Do you know what this material is? What sewing went into it? There isn't another suit like it! Look all over New York, and so help me, you won't find one. This is one of the last of a tremendous stock of suits which sold like hotcakes! It's selling at half price." During these negotiations over the suits he would also touch upon local and national politics, or synagogue, organizational or philanthropic matters—all depending on who the customer was. However, he kept returning to the suit until a price had been agreed on.

My relative busied himself with the customers until closing time. Then he noticed me at last and asked what I wanted. Blushing and stammering, I told him. With a sour face, he went to the cash register, opened the drawer, and drew out the day's receipts. He counted and assorted the bills and coins, all the while protesting:

"God in Heaven! What do they want of me? They all hang around my neck like millstones—all of them! Father, brother, synagogue, hospital, home for the aged, orphanage. I have to take care of them all! Rabbi, cantor, sexton, charity collector, beggar—all at my door. Give, give, give! Do they think I'm Rothschild? Do they think I've discovered gold mines in America? I'm a self-made man, the way they say in America. I came here with needle and thimble—there were no relatives or friends here to give *me* a single meal, one night's lodging. I had to struggle and sweat to get where I am today. Eighteen hours a day I worked

in a sweatshop. Eight dollars is nothing—but eight dollars to this man, eight dollars to that man—it adds up! Remember: Saving starts with pennies. And something else: Help yourself! Forget that you have a rich relative in New York—rely on your own hands. Be a self-made man, the way they say in America—or you don't stand a chance! There's room here for anyone who's willing to work. But there's no room for loafers. I'll give you the eight dollars—I can't refuse a poor relative—but as a loan and not as a gift. After all, you're a scholar and you know the verse: 'He who hateth gifts will live.' Promise you'll pay me back the eight dollars. Now, forget that you have a rich relative in New York, if you want to make good in America. Here it's every man for himself."

He counted eight silver dollars into my hand. I felt like a Slutzk beggar standing at the door, with trembling hand outstretched for a dry crust. I accepted the money; I didn't throw it back in his face, as I felt like doing. I had long ago come to accept humiliation as inevitable. I put the money in my pocket—it was "hot money," glowing coins, scorching at their touch, an illustration of the Midrashic phrase: "A coin of fire." I felt their scorching even after I had spent them on a ticket. These "coins of fire" were branded on my soul.

The train pulled into Auburn at night in the middle of a snowstorm. I picked up my bundle and got off. The Auburn trolley cars had stopped running, so I had to walk. The streets were buried in snow and empty. I walked ankle-deep in snow; there was no path. The wind shrieked, icy flakes hailed against my face. My feet were freezing. I kept sinking into the snow. My eyelashes were coated with hail which pricked my eyeballs when I blinked. The world was inundated and all dimensions of space were obliterated, and I wandered in this turmoil, and it seemed to me that I would always wander thus, pathless and aimless. I had only one urge: to sink down upon a mound of snow, stretch out there and freeze, congeal into the eternal, infinite conglutination, repose in the redeeming Sabbatical peace, cease in the divine nullity.

PART III

Amid Ruins

I

Finally, snow-covered and frozen, I arrived at the home of the Widow Cooper, where I was to stay. That night the frost thawed out of my body, but my spirits remained depressed. Outside, a snowstorm keened. Frost-coated tree branches clinked like glass in the courtyard. The stable door kept creaking and slamming. Somewhere a dog howled.

I lay half-awake in the morning in a flood of warm light. My mother was bending over my crib. I opened my eyes. It was not my mother, but Mrs. Cooper, my landlord. She was an elderly woman who had married off her two daughters. Now, she lavished her motherly affection on peddlers who boarded with her when they came to Auburn. The storm subsided. The snow in the courtyard, on the slopes of the stable roof, and on the tree crests, was dazzling in the sun.

I was filled with serenity that morning and it never left me all day. That evening I read the Scroll of the Book of Esther in the public hall that served the Jews of Auburn as a synagogue. The Auburn Jews came up and welcomed me in holiday spirits. My voice rang out as I read from the Scroll, coming to the verse: "The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor."

My reading was a smashing victory. The Jews of Auburn were persuaded. I was good enough to be their shohet—an office they had trusted me with in absentia. I could tell this from their cordial expressions when they dropped their coins into the Megillah plate. The deacon of the congregation in charge of the plate handed me eight dollars. I had come to Auburn without a cent, and these eight dollars were like found money. But I didn't hold on to them. They reminded me of the eight dollars my rich relative in New York had lent me. The next day I sent him a money order. I sat down to the Purim banquet with a sense of singular pleasure! This day when gifts are sent to the poor, I had cast off the mark of my poverty.

II

One of Widow Cooper's lodgers, Hurwitz, took me under his fatherly wing. Hurwitz was one of the Maskilim who came to America with the ideals of Enlightenment.

A few of the older ones continued to live the ideals of the Enlightenment. But the majority adjusted to the new way of life—which meant a basic change. This took different forms. Some of the Enlightened joined the Jewish socialist movement, and strove for a better world through class equality. The younger ones struggled their way through the universities to achieve higher status in their adopted land. Still others, disturbed by Jewish irreligiosity in America, moved to the right and joined the Orthodox elements of American Jewry. They were Maskilim in theory, —in practice they zealously fulfilled all the precepts of Judaism. Hurwitz belonged to this category.

Hurwitz was born in Radishkowitz. His father was a rich merchant. His grandfather was a scholar and had personally tutored Hurwitz in preparation for the Wolozhin Yeshiva. But being of a weak constitution, Hurwitz' studies at the yeshiva further undermined his health; he was forced to leave it after a few years. On his return to Radishkowitz, under the influence of his fellow

townsman, the poet, Mane, he began to read the Enlightenment literature. His father married him off to a girl of good family and taught Hurwitz his business while he supported him and his wife. Hurwitz devoted half a day to studying the Enlightenment literature, the rest to learning the family business. But he brought his copies of the *Hamelitz* and *Hatzefirah* to work with him and became completely engrossed in reading news of the Jewish world and the articles on politics and Jewish scholarship printed in them. Besides, he used to be visited in his father's place by his friends—bachelors with nothing to do, and married men who lived off *their* fathers and fathers-in-law. So Hurwitz spent most of his time studying or discussing intellectual matters. His father, however, had no objection—he enjoyed having his store converted into a kind of seminar.

But times changed and Hurwitz's father lost all he had. His delicate son was left with a wife and two children and no means of support. After several futile attempts to make a living, Hurwitz left for America, the land of opportunity and equality, where each one is given a chance to rise.

Unfortunately, Hurwitz' bad luck followed him to America. He tried his hand at all kinds of peddling and selling jobs—eyeglasses, pictures of saints, watches, rings, earrings, bracelets, gold and gold-plated brooches, textiles, haberdashery, lottery tickets, insurance, and so forth. He canvassed small towns for customers, but he couldn't make a go of it. Finally, Hurwitz settled down in Auburn, repairing broken umbrellas. Every day he went from house to house crying his trade and collecting broken umbrellas to repair at home. His earnings were small, not enough to support both himself and his family in the Old Country, whom he missed terribly.

Hurwitz was far from being physically attractive. Stunted in build, he looked like a boy who had suddenly stopped growing and prematurely sprouted a beard. His body was gaunt, the bones sticking out of his skin. The leanness of his face was emphasized by clumps of beard growing in the hollows of his cheeks. His reddish hair was streaked dull gray. He had false teeth; his upper

plate miraculously hung in his mouth without cleaving to his palate. He lisped and whistled as he spoke. When he grew enthused during an intellectual conversation, or when reading to the Widow Cooper and her youngest illiterate son, an installment from one of the romances in the Yiddish papers, he reached a passage describing high adventure or profound sentiment, Hurwitz read so fast he stuttered and his upper denture jumped out of his mouth.

Hurwitz had inherited his grandfather's love of people, and he looked after the needs of the tiny Jewish community of Auburn. He was clever and had a fine sense of humor. He enjoyed discovering the hidden weaknesses in people and pricking them! This wasn't a matter of showing his own superiority—Hurwitz poked fun at himself, too—but just a way of making life more tolerable. For, though Hurwitz poked fun at the Jews of Auburn, scoffing at their narrowness and ignorance, in his heart he wished them well. He gave them advice on both business and personal matters and participated in their joyous and sad occasions.

From the day I came to Auburn, Hurwitz helped me adjust to my job and get along in the community and I became attached to him like a son.

III

Having satisfactorily discharged my spiritual duty to the community by reading the Scroll, I was charged with another more material one—Passover supplies. I was a novice and had no idea how to go about it, but Hurwitz came to my assistance and volunteered to train me. He went from house to house taking Passover orders, ordered the goods from New York on credit, delivered the orders to the customers and collected the money—I went along to watch and learn. But when he offered me my share of the profits, that was too much. I had not stirred a finger, I refused to accept unearned income. Offended, he scolded me. After much persuasion Hurwitz finally agreed to accept my share of the profits as a loan to send to his wife—he had already sent her a ship ticket but had not been able to raise the money to pay the travelling expenses from her home town to the port.

Passover came and went. Every day was like a holiday to me, because for the first time in my life I was earning my own keep. Nature had endowed Auburn with beauty. There was none of the big city congestion. Broad-limbed trees lined the streets; in those early spring days they began to put forth their first leaves. Everywhere were lawns of fresh-smelling grass and flower beds. Beyond

the street where I lived fields and gardens glistened in the sun. Nearby, in a rich grassland, cows and calves grazed. Daily, the cows' mournful lowing at dusk, and at dawn the cocks' crowing, the birds' chirping and the trees' swaying in the morning breeze carried me back to my native city.

Now that I was relieved of the pressure of making a living, I began to worry about my future. I had chosen to be a shohet and teacher only as a means to an end: I wanted to learn English and other high school subjects so as to qualify for admission to a university and to save enough money to carry me through a university. But soon a new distraction presented itself.

In a short time Hurwitz had become my close friend and began to confide in me. Every evening, when he returned from his peddling route and I returned from my teaching circuit, I would sit next to him at his work bench and we would talk. His hands were busy repairing broken umbrellas: strengthening a frame that was coming apart, stretching new material over a frame, repairing a broken handle, or putting on a new one. All the while he would be telling me the story of his life with deep emotion and nostalgia. He would begin with a description of his grandfather: his learning, worldly wisdom, and humanitarian activities on behalf of his fellow Jews. Day and night he interceded with government officials, trying to persuade them, mixing wisdom with humor, to deal more leniently with the Jews under their jurisdiction. From his grandfather Hurwitz would move on to himself, reminiscing about the good old days when he was a student at the Wolozhin Yeshiva. He would describe what the heads of the yeshiva looked like, the teachers, the students, and the system of learning prevalent. He would end by telling about how the authorities had closed the yeshiva, which brought about its downfall. From Wolozhin he would take me back to Radishkowitz, and go over the wonderful, carefree years he had spent living with his rich father, never having to worry about making a living, devoting himself to spiritual matters and living in the sublime sphere of Torah and Haskalah, flying high until an evil angel smote his wings and said: Down! And down he went—not slowly de-

scending but plummeting to a fall that shattered body and soul.

Such and similar recollections he would usually conclude with a description of the poet Mane, which he invested with all the brilliance of his soul and warmth of his heart. He would recall again and again, each time as if for the first time, a stroll with him in the company of other young Maskilim:

"Tubercular, like his predecessor, Micah Joseph Lebenson, whom he also resembled in his poetry, he returned from Petersburg to Radishkowitz for the summer. One autumn evening my friends and I joined him, a company of young Maskilim, in a stroll outside the city. There is no landscape as beautiful and grand as the Radishkowitz landscape. I've been an itinerant peddler in America, and I've seen many beautiful landscapes, but none that can compare with that one.

"We went strolling outside the city, traversing fields and pastures until, tired, we paused to rest on a hillock. The sun set. The clouds on the western horizon looked like layers of burnished gold in the glow of twilight—this must be what the 'gold of Ophir' of the Bible looked like. The gold of the clouds reddened until it became purple and finally turned into a flame which lighted the whole western sky. Flickering in the gloaming, the fields, the pastures and woods lay suffused with the sadness of autumn underscored by the sadness of dusk, like the sadness a Jew feels on Sabbath at twilight. The glow of sunset wreathed Mane's tubercular face in a sublime aura. His eyes lost their sickly glow and radiated grace—they were not eyes of flesh but enchanting eyes of the soul.

"We sat silently. The sunset symbolized to us the setting of his life, the life of a young poet in the prime of its beauty and glory. Mane sat for a while looking to the west, communing with his inmost thoughts, as if he were oblivious of us—near to us in body, but far, far away in spirit. Finally he turned to us, his lips murmuring: 'The beauty of withering . . . the glory of pain . . . Withering is beautiful when it follows blossoming and when a new blossoming is to follow it—it is a Sabbath between one blossoming and another. But I?—have I had my blossoming?

This is a withering at the onset of spring! Autumn will pass, and winter, and again spring will come—

> How beautiful is the springtide!
> Who can describe its glory?
> Of man's hopes and their fulfillment
> Each day tells the story. . . .

And I? My soul will never know the beauty of springtime and my eyes will never see its glory, and my hopes will not be fulfilled—a pile of earth will cover me—me and my hopes!'

"We began to tell him words of comfort—words we ourselves did not believe—and he nodded, his lips creased in a smile that was half gratitude and half sarcasm. He plucked a flower from the hillock, and holding it in his delicate hand and caressing it with his eyes, he whispered sadly: 'I plucked a rose from among the blossoms.' " And, he, Hurwitz, weepingly recited from memory Mane's poem, " My Reflection." When he reached the last two lines,

> In vain I water its stems, in vain I sprinkle water,
> For already my hands have severed its cord of life!

his eyes turned moist and he nodded his head bemoaning the unhappy poet whose cord of life had been severed in his youth, and himself—days of his youth, his aspirations and dreams, whose cord had also been severed.

Sometimes Hurwitz would expatiate on the Haskalah. He would accompany Joseph, the hero of Peretz Smolenskin's novel, *A Wanderer through Life,* in his struggles to reform the ignorance of his people. Then he would identify himself with Samuel, the teacher in Broides's *Religion and Life.* Together they would fight for religious reform. He would pity poor Batshua of Gordon's *The Iota,* excoriating the cruel rabbi who ruined her life by annulling her divorce. " The letter of the law hath slain me!" Hurwitz would shout with his pitiful heroine. . . . He would leave Batshua in her sorrow and join Zelafhad bar Hushim of Lilienblum's *Sins of Youth* in his struggle with the rabbis for the purification of the

Jewish religion from superstition and undue harshness. He accompanied him from his native city, suffered with him in the strange town whither he had wandered in the torment of love to that mysterious girl called "N," and the doubts which consumed his heart and brought him to heresy, and concluded with him the chapter of his adventures and struggles with the desperate cry: "And who are you?" The reader will ask me for the last time. "An unfortunate man on earth!"

Such, and similar figures Hurwitz would summon from the world of the Haskalah literature for my edification. Sometimes he would end up our long evening conversations by singing one of the old-time songs popular among the Maskilim—such as "The Moaning Dove," "Compassion," "The Eternal People," "Yearning Soul," and the like. He wasn't much of a singer, as bad at making music as at making a living. He had one melancholy sing-song that he would apply everywhere—when he chanted the Sabbath Kiddush benediction, when he recited the Passover Haggadah, and when he read the installments of the Yiddish romances to the Widow Cooper and her illiterate son. But the heart he put into his singing made up for his voice. These evening conversations with Hurwitz opened for me a door to a new world—the Enlightenment. I postponed preparing for the university examination and entered that world—entered and was scathed.

IV

At the same time, I was introduced to socialism by Widow Cooper's son-in-law, a well-educated tailor who lived in Syracuse and took his family to visit his mother-in-law from time to time.

In those days the needle trade was chiefly concentrated in New York, where a majority of the workers were Jewish. Working conditions were very bad—long hours, stuffy, poorly lighted sweatshops, seasonal work that was only barely enough to make a living during the season. The garment workers unionized and went out on strike. The bosses retaliated by transferring some of their shops to the small towns, in an unsuccessful attempt to escape unionization. But there was no escaping the labor movement: it also reached the smaller cities. In Syracuse it was headed by Widow Cooper's son-in-law.

He was an avowed freethinker, having sworn allegiance to socialism, one of whose cardinal tenets was atheism. He knew by heart the lectures of Feigenbaum, the high priest of atheism, and God's chief adversary on earth. Yet he had deep roots in Jewish life, and a profound love for Jewish literature. He was a cantor's son, erstwhile choir-boy, and had a fine voice. When he sang the songs of Bovshover, Adelstadt, Winchevsky, Morris Rosenfield,

and other Yiddish proletarian poets, his voice had a liturgical tone. He also played the violin, being particularly fond of *Kol Nidre*—he explained that in this sad melody he intended to express the suffering of the working class!

As a matter of principle, the Jewish socialists bitterly attacked the clergy as allies of the capitalist class. Every clergyman was, in their opinion, a hireling of the bourgeois exploiters—religion, of course, being the opium of the masses, intended to lull the workers into a resigned acceptance of their unjust lot. Now, Widow Cooper's son-in-law was an orthodox socialist, and I was a clergyman, his enemy. Nevertheless he befriended me. He liked me because of an inherent fondness for Jewish folksiness which was rooted in both of us. Besides, in befriending me he had an ulterior purpose—to convert me to socialism.

I was readily susceptible to socialist theory—not from my reading of the reformist Haskalah literature, but from my life-experience. I had grown up among poor people—my parents, grandparents, relatives, all my friends, in Minsk, then in Slutzk. My feeling for them was generally one of pity, which occasionally rose to protest the injustice of it all. But my piety, both innate and inculcated, had enabled me to justify the inscrutable ways of God—until the example of my Uncle Chone made the basic injustice of the social order quite clear to me.

I had an uncle my own age, my grandfather's youngest son. His name was Chone, and he grew up in the street, for both my grandfather and stepgrandmother had no time to look after him—they were too busy trying to make ends meet. After a few years at the Talmud Torah, which he attended with other poor children, Chone gave up school. He was a poor student—his head was like a funnel: everything went in one ear, out another—and he remembered nothing of his studies. He could barely read a few prayers. But he was the ringleader when it came to mischief always in the middle of the street fights between the Jewish street boys and the Christian gangs. His spirits rose the moment he ran out of the house after a breakfast consisting of a crust of bread.

Behind my grandfather's house were a number of vegetable gardens. Uncle Chone feasted on cucumbers, watermelons, radishes, and onions. And then there were orchards, unfortunately fenced in. Still, Chone managed to get at the apples and pears, using a stick with a nail at the end of it. After filling belly and pocket, Chone wold join his gang and lead them in exploits of play and mischief.

Every day was a holiday for Chone except for the Sabbath holiday itself. Then he had to sit down at the table and grandfather made him read the Kiddush benedictions from the prayer book. He would stumble over the strange words, and grandfather would jump on him.

"Somebody give me a stick—give me a stick! I'll crack his skull. I'll beat his brains out! The ignoramus!" Grandfather would shout, his face fierce.

Uncle Chone never waited for someone to hand Grandfather a stick. Crying, he would run away from the table and hide behind the stove. He wouldn't budge; Grandmother had to serve him his Sabbath meal there, which he ate sobbing.

When Chone reached Bar Mitzvah age, Grandfather hired him out as an apprentice to a smith. Now, being a smith's apprentice was like being sold into slavery, the whipping boy not only of the master but of his wife and children as well. This was a terrible experience for Chone. His master didn't believe in sparing the rod. Uncle Chone was a good pupil, and learned the craft. He was finally able to lift up the hammer, which weighed more than he did, and hit the white-hot iron which his master held on the anvil, in time to the smith's small hammer. His body shook, dripping perspiration, and he bit his lips in pain when sparks splashed on him from the beaten iron.

Before long, Uncle Chone was expert at shoeing horses, putting iron rims on wheels, and repairing all kinds of metal work. But the smith and his wife were miserly. The smith didn't want to squander any of his money on new clothing—that would have been a luxury for a poor boy—so he gave Chone old clothes to

wear. And the smith's wife fed Chone a starvation diet in exchange for the various services he rendered, such as carrying water, chopping wood, and tending the babies.

Being a smith's apprentice crushed Chone. The old rebellious, irresponsible, pugnacious street boy turned into an obedient and submissive smith's apprentice, who humbly accepted insults and humiliation. In the old days he was always quarreling with me; he resented my having surpassed him in school, my being friends with smart boys, and for my being Grandfather's favorite. But now he treated me with respect. His new attitude hurt me more than his former one had. I felt guilty. We were flesh and blood, so why should his life be so much harder than mine? Sometimes, he would drop in on us after a day's hard work. He would quietly sit down in a corner, looking terribly depressed. I would look at him with pity. Tears would come to my eyes when he bolted down the piece of bread my stepmother gave him. I pulled him aside into the hall, took the pantry key and got him a jar of jam which had been put by for an emergency. I knew my stepmother would beat me when she found out about it—but the sight of Chone's face as he ate the jam made it worth it.

In the Old Country it had been my Uncle Chone whose wretched life made me aware of the misery fostered by our social order. My sense of justice was outraged. But I did not inveigh against God, preferring at the time to believe with Ecclesiastes, "God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." Humanity had distorted God's righteous world.

In the New Country, I saw injustice again, as part of the world order. I had a relative here, a man who had been a wealthy and respected merchant in the Old Country. He emigrated to the United States, and ended up as a presser in a clothing shop. All day—and sometimes half the night during the busy season—he stood on his feet in the shop, pushing a heavy iron. He was a frail man, and the work gradually sapped his strength. The heat and the stench of the burning gas in the iron eventually ate away his lungs. One day, as he was working, blood streamed from his mouth and he fainted. He never got up from his sick bed. His

family had to be supported by charity. The shame of this ate his heart.

I visited him when I arrived in Boston. He lay in bed, his face pale with tuberculosis, red spots on his sunken cheeks, his eyes alternately flashing and appealing for pity. He kept talking throughout my visit—though it was hard for him to talk—telling me of what he had gone through until he got the job as a presser. "The shop! The damn shop!" he cried. I was with him at the end. Those were his last words.

V

I have always been a moody person. The least thing could change my mood. But my conversion to socialism was neither speedy nor easy. True, I'd previously accepted the Enlightenment, but that made it no easier for me to accept socialism. For I regarded the Enlightenment as essentially a new interpretation of Judaism, an attempt to revive its ancient cardinal truths. The Enlightenment did deny some of the tenets of Jewish legalism—but this denial was positive in purpose. It represented an attempt to enable Judaism to withstand the attack of modernism by ridding it of superstitious elements. But that wasn't the case with socialism at all—it was basically anti-religious. My piety was ingrained, and the loss of religion was very painful. Deep psychological layers were affected. I was left with a spiritual vacuum inside me, a muffled voice crying, as from an empty well, bemoaning the destruction of a sanctuary. At night, lying in bed, I saw the faces of my yeshiva teachers who had shared their knowledge with me, given me love, seen great things in store for me. Now they looked at me, shaking their heads . . .

And then I suffered from pangs of conscience: I no longer had the right to be a shohet, for a shohet must be pious. True, I was

heretical only in thought, and continued outwardly to observe all the religious laws. In fact, I became overscrupulous, lest my hidden heresy bringing me to acts of unconscious sabotage, I should contaminate others with non-kosher meat. But I thought of myself as a hypocrite. The Jewish code specifies that those who do not believe in the Oral Law may not be shohatim—and I no longer believed even in the Written Law, the Bible. Really, I said to myself, you are a murderer. A shohet who lacked religious sanction was no better than one of those horse skinners and dog catchers whom I so detested in Slutzk.

The High Holy Days approached; I was to be the cantor. I suffered further torments of conscience. I had no right to lead a congregation in prayer during those Days of Awe, the most solemn in the Jewish year.

Some of the awe of the High Holy Days which the month of Elul inspired in all faithful Jews in the old country remained with them after they had come to America and became transgressors out of convenience. All of the days of the year frantic pursuit after livelihood and money distracted them from their religious, traditional observances, but come Elul, the Jewish spark in them begins to flare and the Jewish soul in them begins to take stock. They recall Elul at home across the sea, when even the fish in water trembled, and all the preparation and sanctity and elevation which filled home and street, and begin to yearn for the traditional Jewish life which America had attenuated. Their faces sadden a little and a streak of Jewish charm enters them, and their eyes bespeak a noble sorrow—Jewish sorrow.

The meeting hall of the non-Jewish organization which my community rented for the High Holy Days was turned from a secular meeting place into a religious assembly house. The Holy Ark at the eastern wall and its white silk curtain, the prayer desk beside it with the lit candles on it, and the table in the center, covered with a gold-fringed, white velvet cloth, which served as an almemar, gave this meeting hall the semblance of a house of God. And the congregants, wrapped in their prayer shawls, and the prayer leader, preceding me, intoning the traditional High

Holy Day melodies, filled its air with the sanctity of the Judgment Day. Wrapped in their prayer shawls, the men of my community sat in the front pews—the women occupying the rear pews—joined by itinerant peddlers who happened to be in the vicinity of Auburn when Rosh Hashanah came, and by Jewish inhabitants of nearby towns who had come to participate in the Auburn services for lack of a prayer quorum in their localities. I looked at them, but did not recognize them. They were not as I knew them the year round, in frantic pursuit of livelihood, raging waves of *Sambatyon** which do not rest even on Sabbaths and festivals and hurl their stones upon each other because of unceasing conflict and strife, and now they had settled their quarrels, and foes became friends. They sat side by side as brothers and their sad faces were tense with fear of heaven and aglow with the sanctity of the day. And the Jewish sorrow emanating from their eyes radiated joy of the Jewish soul intertwined with the aggregate souls of the community of Israel. I gazed at their countenances—and my face darkened with shame. I was ashamed at myself: There I stood shrouded in the white High Holy Day robe and in prayer shawl, ready to move to the prayer desk to lead in the morning services and ask mercy for them—while my heart was devoid of belief in the Master of Mercy Who hearkeneth unto prayer! They had made me a prayer leader and I was deceiving them!

"*Hamelekh* . . ." I chanted the traditional opening words of the Rosh Hashanah service, proclaiming the sovereignty of Him who sits in the seat of judgment on this Day of Judgment. As I prayed, my protest against myself was transferred to the congregation. They were exploiting bosses, I the exploited worker. All year round they committed sins in their pursuit of money—now, for the High Holy Days, they had hired me for a few miserable dollars to pray to their Maker and ask His forgiveness. I had hired myself out under the compulsion of brute economics

* Sambatyon: Mythical river which hurls stones six days a week and rests on the Sabbath. According to legend, the "Ten Lost Tribes of Israel" dwell beyond the river.

—they were making me sin for bread. When the Holy Ark was opened I had an overpowering urge to turn to the congregation and shout: "You superstitious fools! There is no Judgment Day, no judgment and no Judge!"

"I fear to open my mouth in discourse"—I opened this prayer and my protest against the congregation was silenced by a reproaching protest against myself: "What do you want of these innocent Jews? Wherein have they sinned? Praiseworthy are they that had not lost their faith in a merciful God and pray to Him like children entreating their father, who grants their pleas. And you, woe to you that you have renounced your faith and cut yourself off from your community and forfeited a bountiful world."—*"Be merciful to the downtrodden who are accounted for worms."* —All the pain and sorrow of the Jewish people cried out in this prayer, and therein my own pain and sorrow—I, their prayer leader who had excluded myself from their community.—*"I will let my tears flow in a stream."* And my tears flowed, flowed—*"My heart is heated up, kindled as a fiery coal, while I muse and pray."*—My heart burned like a fiery coal and cried out in anguish—the anguish of a Jew whose soul had been cut off from his God and his people. . . .

VI

I liked the Widow Cooper's house and felt like a member of the family there. Another place where I was at home was in the household of Hilke Cohen.

Actually his name was Hillel, but he was called Hilke half-mockingly, half-affectionately—for he was a man people liked and laughed at at the same time. Hilke Cohen was basically good-natured; he had a temper that subsided as quickly as it arose. The Auburn Jews enjoyed getting people angry at one another; one spark was enough to set off Hilke Cohen's temper. He would run straight to the person he had a grievance against and tell him off, stuttering with anger. But the moment his victim breathed a conciliatory word, Hilke would put out his hand and ask to be excused for his quick temper. When a poor man, or one who claimed to be poor, came begging to Auburn, or a man who claimed to represent some institution, real or imaginary, came soliciting funds, Hilke would make a big contribution himself and go out of his way to help the visitor get contributions from other Jews in town. He would leave his shop and drive the newcomer from house to house canvassing. Hilke was delighted when someone else gave a contribution; his face beaming, he stammered his joy. Hilke was beloved by the Jews of Auburn for these two qualities —his good nature and his generosity. At the same time they poked fun at him because of his naïveté, which they interpreted

as simplemindedness. Worst of all, he was a butt for ridicule because he was dominated by his wife. Hilke was a grocer, but he knew little about the grocery business. It was his wife who really ran the store. He served as the errand boy, getting and delivering orders in his horse buggy.

Horses were Hilke Cohen's foible. His wife ran him in the grocery store, but in the buggy he was the boss. He exchanged horses almost every month. He got horses of every breed, and he was wonderful at handling them. If he happened to pick a wrong horse, he knew just what to do to get him to work; the whip for the bucking horse, soft words for the stubborn one that stopped in the middle of the road.

Every time he got a new horse he would come to ask me to join him in a pleasure trip—he wanted to show the new horse off. I didn't have the heart to refuse him. I sat next to him in the driver's seat, and he forgot all about the orders he was supposed to be soliciting for the grocery, Hilke drove down the main road out of town. As he drove he delivered a speech in praise of this particular horse—like a trader putting up a horse for sale. His stammer disappeared.

"Here's a horse for you! Fast as a deer. Why do I whip him if he's that fast? Because the whip speaks a language he understands. It tells him he can't slacken, can't slow down—or he'll get it. I whip him with my right hand, but I check him with the reins in my left. If I let him, he'd go a hundred miles an hour. You're a shohet, and a shohet knows more about livestock and fowls than about horses—but you don't have to be an expert to appreciate this horse. Look at those thighs, those hips, that mane —and best of all, those legs! What legs! They don't seem even to touch the ground. Look at him gallop!"

And Hilke put his horse through his paces, so I could see him gallop, trot, pace, walk. He was so happy over his new horse and my praise of it that he began to sing. Soon afterward, the whole experience would be repeated; Hilke Cohen had a new horse I had to see. When I asked him what had happened to the old horse, he scolded me.

"The one I got rid of, you mean? You can't call that a horse—that broken-down nag. He looked like a horse from the outside, but inside—he was just a bag of wind. I was lucky to dump him on some dumb farmer—I threw in a little cash, and got this one. Now this is what I call a horse . . ." I would nod my agreement.

Hilke Cohen's other foible was being the prayer leader. The only times there were prayer quorums in Auburn was during the three major festivals and on the Sabbaths when the memorial Mourner's Prayer is recited. Hilke Cohen was always the prayer reader then—no one challenged his right to the reader's desk. There weren't enough memorial Mourner's Prayer Sabbaths, so Hilke invented some—besides mourning the anniversary of the deaths of his own parents, he added his grandparents, his wife's parents and grandparents, and all of his and his wife's uncles and aunts. He saw to it that each of the anniversaries fell on a Sabbath; the Jews of Auburn all had to stop work and go to the synagogue on these Saturdays. They used to wonder where Hilke got all those death anniversaries from, and how they could all possibly fall on the Sabbath. But he was the boss at the prayer desk—his orders went.

I was at Hilke Cohen's home daily, because I tutored his four children, two of each sex. They were among my best pupils and I liked them for the good qualities they had inherited from their parents—good nature, generosity, and simplicity from their father, and cleverness, common sense, and modesty from their mother. The house wasn't grand; their living quarters were behind the grocery, and were badly neglected, because Mrs. Cohen was in the store all day. But their family life was a traditionally warm and homey one.

I was particularly fond of the Cohen's eldest daughter, who was a year younger than I. She was slim and had a good figure, marred only by a slightly stooped back which actually lent her a certain modest charm. Her face was somewhat long; as the color came and went in her cheeks, her blue eyes glowed and clouded over. She had a quick logical mind, and an excellent memory. Besides she was a talented violinist.

I was treated with respect at Hilke Cohen's house, and enjoyed coming there. While I tutored the children, the Cohens sat in the doorway between the store and the apartment listening with pleasure. This was the last hour of my teaching day, and after it was over I would stay to chat.

Now I have been a music lover ever since I was a child, and the violin has always been my favorite instrument. As a child I used to listen to the Slutzk band leader play the violin whenever I had a chance, and the music would run through my head day and night. I longed for a violin of my own. This longing became overwhelming when Hilke Cohen's eldest daughter played for me. She agreed to teach me.

VII

We were in love. I tutored my pupil in the dining room, because it faced the store and her parents wanted to listen in, even though they were busy. But when it came my turn to be taught, we went off to a side room for the violin lessons. Afterward we would chat for a while, and I often had the urge to tell my love, but I suppressed it. I couldn't think of marriage until after I had given up being a shohet and found another profession.

However, she understood my feeling and responded: her eyes were radiant, her voice trembled during our lessons and chats. Or was I imagining things? Why should she, American born and bred, of well-to-do parents, fall in love with a young greenhorn who spoke English poorly and made a meager living out of being a shohet and a tutor? But one night my doubts were dispelled.

It was the night before Passover. I was making the rounds of the congregation, slaughtering their Passover chickens. I saved the Cohens for last. Mrs. Cohen was busy when I arrived, and she asked her eldest daughter to take me to the stable at the end of the street and give me the chickens there that she had marked for slaughter. I escorted her home afterward. It was late and the street was deserted. Without planning it, we went back through a side street. Suddenly the silence overwhelmed us. The moist

earth smelled of spring. The trees were in early bloom, small fluffs of clouds hung in the blue sky, a full moon shone. The snow had melted, and water gleamed in the moonlight like burnished steel. I was brought back in my memory to the meadow behind my grandfather's house. I thought of Batya, and of our strolls in that meadow. All at once, a soft hand was in mine. We had come to a puddle, and I held my companion's hand while she jumped. We crossed the street, her hand still in mine, warmly clasped. My heart leaped and beat against my breast, and with each beat every sinew and vein in my body trembled, contracted, and tautened with pain and sang out of this pain. A lava-like glowing stream erupted from my heart, overflowed my whole being, rushed into my head and made me dizzy. Round and round whirled the world in a dizzy dance, and to its cadence a song of new life sang in my body and blood in rapturous tempest, and her hand clasped in mine answered this song with a squeeze bespeaking love.

I was in a quandary. I thought my situation over, and decided to give up my love. I had lost the old religious values and still had found none to take their place. I was at a crossroads. This was no time to consider marriage.

I was sick of being a shohet, disgusted with the hypocrisy and cruelty it forced me into. My only rationale for remaining at the job was that it was only temporary, until I could work out another career, more satisfying spiritually. But if I were to marry now, I would never extricate myself; I would be doomed to a lifetime of frustration and religious hypocrisy. It would end up by my becoming bitter against both myself and my beloved. I would rather die than live a life like that.

I gave up the violin lessons and affected indifference to my former tutor. My heart went out to her. I wanted to confess my true feelings and beg her to forgive me and have mercy, for I was suffering, too. But I decided to be cruel to her and even more to myself by covering my feelings with feigned aloofness. Every time I visited her home for the hour's lesson it was like a trip to the gallows. As I left I caught her looking dejectedly at me and quickened my step.

VIII

The Jewish community of Auburn was small and unorganized. Communal activities were limited to prayer services, ritual slaughter, and Hebrew teaching. Hurwitz looked after community prayer—his authority was never disputed in these matters. Once a year, before the High Holy Days, he convened the members of the congregation and consulted them on his expenditures for the coming year to which they contributed. One such meeting had selected me to be the community's shohet and teacher. Afterward I had two superiors—the butcher who supplied Auburn Jews with kosher meat paid one-third of my wages, and the parents who engaged me to tutor their children paid the rest—fifty cents per week per child for half an hour of daily instruction.

Eventually, several of the Auburn Jews turned "public-spirited" —partly out of genuine interest, partly to become leaders in the community, with all the attached prestige, and partly to simply dominate me. They insisted on organizing my pupils' parents into an association, and setting up a classroom system under the supervision of a so-called "Board of Education." This arrangement brought me a great deal of grief. I had as many classes as pupils. Although they were all in the same room at the same

time, they each had to be given individual instruction because there was a wide range of age and educational levels. Having them all together created trouble. Each pupil wanted to have his lesson first. Drawing lots was no good either, because those who lost invariably challenged the validity of the drawing. While I was teaching one student, the others would come to blows. I was at a total loss as to what to do. "Public Education" was hell for me, until I finally convinced the parents' association to restore the old system of private lessons at home.

Next, our public benefactors turned their attention to communizing ritual slaughter. They were after the butcher now, as well as me.

In the Old Country the butcher had been a fishmonger. He worked hard at it but barely made a living for his large family. His brother, who had emigrated to Auburn a few years before, sent him ship tickets for his whole family to America. He started out as a scrap-iron dealer in Auburn. Early every morning he harnessed his horse to the wagon and made the rounds of all the junk heaps in the Auburn area. At home he unloaded the junk he had bought for pennies during the day, smashed it with a hammer, sorted the pieces in piles, and sold them to metal dealers. To meet the needs of his large family, he picked up a side line—supplying kosher meat. Eventually he gave up peddling and added a wholesale line to his retail kosher meat business—he supplied non-Jewish butchers with meat. He prospered, saving enough money to be able to buy a section of land outside Auburn cheap. When the town expanded in that direction, he subdivided the land and sold the lots on the installment plan. He became rich.

In the old days the butcher used to cotton up to his kosher customers. The Jewish women of Auburn were chronic complainers, but he took all their complaints—about the quality of the meat and his high prices—in good spirit, replying mildly or with a joke. But now that he was a rich man, he began to answer the women in kind. He went too far—his fellow Jews, who still remembered him from the time when he was poor, became annoyed

at his *nouvean-riche* arrogance. They thought of forming a community council and putting him in his place. And then an agitator arrived in Auburn and started the wheels turning.

This was one of the many rolling stones who dropped into Auburn every now and then for a short stay. Stocky, with a dark complexion, he wore his beard trimmed in a half-moon, like a clergyman. His expression was ambiguous; you could interpret it as arrogant or meek. Sabbath, when the time came to read from the Torah, he ensconced himself next to the reading desk, Pentateuch in hand, to "help" me read, because he considered himself an expert. Since no one challenged him, this position of honor became his by presumption. In a few weeks he began to hinder more than he helped me. He kept interrupting my reading to correct my intonation. He became bolder by the Sabbath; his corrections louder. Finally, my patience gave out. One Sabbath, after a particularly wounding interruption, I left the desk, turned to the assembled congregation, and announced that I would not read a word until that man had left the desk and been told to keep quiet. I upbraided him at the same time, reminding him of the great sin of shaming anyone in public.

After that he became my mortal enemy. When the Auburn Jews began planning a community organization, he encouraged the movement, with the ulterior motive of using the organization to have his revenge on me. He went all over town, gossiping. Now, far be it from him to say anything against the butcher, the deacon, or the shohet—he was no gossiper. He, the butcher—certainly his meat was kosher. Still, it stood to reason that a butcher who sold non-kosher meat too, even pork, ought to be carefully supervised. And the man who had appointed himself deacon—Hurwitz—ran the office as though it was his private business. Of course, he was a learned man and of good family, but to tell the truth, he really wasn't the man for the job. As for the shohet: he would never say anything against *him,* but wasn't it strange that such a scholar should see nothing wrong in chanting the reading from the Torah wrong? The shohet spent all his time reading—not

sacred, but secular, maybe even heretical books! Now, *he* had nothing personally against any of them—the butcher, the deacon, or the shohet. But the members of their community ought to organize and impose communal discipline, conducting annual elections to fill positions of such responsibility, as other Jewish communities in America did. Auburn certainly had a capable leadership—there was no telling how far they might go!

The smooth talk worked. The Jews of Auburn met and formed a community organization and elected officers. They were overjoyed at the meeting: they were no longer anonymous individuals but a community. The oldtimers recalled the early days, and tears came to their eyes. Those had been hard times. They had left the big cities, where they could not make a living when they emigrated from the Old Country, to try small-town life. It had been hard making out in Auburn at first. Those were lonely years. They were strangers in a strange town. How they longed for the company of a fellow Jew! And how happy they were when another Jew settled in Auburn, even though he might be a business competitor. They recalled those first days and their eyes filled with tears of joy. God of Israel, Who sustains his children throughout their dispersion, physically and spiritually, has not failed them: penny to penny added up to a substantial sum, and Jew to Jew added up to a community being organized that night as a religious fraternity.

I was present at the founding meeting. But I was chilled at the sight of my secret enemy scurrying about, whispering malicious gossip in people's ears. I slipped out while everyone was sitting at the table toasting one another and eating. I knew my job was in danger from the new community organization.

Several days later my prophetic fears were justified. There was to be another meeting at which, the community officers hinted delicately, my attendance was *not* requested. I sensed that they were going to decide on my future employment by the community. My friend Hurwitz was worried. Some of the people, he told me were jealous of Hilke Cohen, imagining that he would be marrying his eldest daughter off to me. Others were jealous of

the butcher, who had eligible daughters, too, and regarded me as a fine match. Still others had been turned against me by the agitator. Everyone had a different, petty motive—but all motives converged against me.

Hurwitz urged me to go and talk to them before the meeting took place and try to win them over on my side. I decided not to, not because I was shy—my shyness disappeared when I thought of returning to Boston and becoming a burden on my poor father again—but because I felt really guilty: I really had no moral right to be a shohet in my irreligious state.

Apathetically, I waited for the results of the meeting. The night of the meeting I began to worry desperately. What was I to do if I lost this job and didn't have time to find another? I couldn't sit still, and left my room to walk downtown, where they were meeting. I walked through the streets of Auburn which were shrouded in nets of shadows of broad-crested trees and white glimmerings of moonlight—and Auburn seemed to me like a Garden of Eden from which I was about to be banished. I reached the building in which my congregation met in a rented room, and waited at the door like an accused awaiting his verdict. From the open windows of the upper story came the sound of an orchestra playing dance music: there was a dance in the huge hall there. The music was gay and the rhythmic steps of the dancers' feet were gay, too, combining to sound a gay view of life and a summation of a sad ecclesiastic truth: Seize the bits of happiness, snatch them, for soon they are gone!

I heard the proclamation of this philosophy of life, and my soul responded with a proclamation directed to myself: "Why do you stand like a beggar in the doorway? Leap upward, join the dancers, submerge yourself in the sweep of their dance, swing and sway, round and round, with a dulling of the senses—there is no above nor below, no before nor after, no questions and problems and reckonings, no distortion to correct and no faults to be rectified, no life-planning, no life-aiming—joy, song and dance—that is the essence of life!"

I stood in a trance. Suddenly I felt a hand shaking me—it was Hurwitz, who was the first one to leave the meeting that had decided my fate. He answered my look of interrogation with silence. There was no need to talk. I had been fired.

IX

Beyond the train windows a luxuriant landscape lay ensconced in the serenity of a late summer afternoon. From the horizon stretched a multicolored tapestry of fields and meadows embroidered with corn and alfalfa, and green grass strewn with wild flowers—all sprinkled with sunshine. Cows and horses grazing in the meadows stopped munching the grass, raised their heads and gazed, half in wonder, half in fear, at this smoke-breathing monster which thundered past them. Storks stood on one foot craning their necks into question marks as they gazed into space and pondered the secrets of distances and the mysteries of heaven. When the train rolled by they gazed at it in wonder, turning their thoughts to the mysteries of its flight and noise. The firmament was suffused with a sapphire blue which was striped with bright cloudlets. Flocks of birds half glided, half flew in the radiant void.

Summer in all its beauty—summer in the world—and in my heart, autumn.

Young men and women of the university boarded the train—it was vacation time and they were going to the Catskills and the Berkshires. They crowded into the coach and began a noisy conversation mingled with jokes, voices gay, faces glowing, eyes

sparkling. Soon they began to sing popular folk songs to the accompaniment of a mandolin and a guitar, beating out the rhythm with their feet. Out of these songs rose a melody of youth who had cast off the yoke of study and was running off into the wide world to bask in the beauty of nature and the bounty of life. Joy and merriment in the coach and woe and grief in my heart.

At dusk the train was winding its course amid the mountains. There was glorious pyrotechny in the west! The flare of clouds blazed in violet, red and purple. The mountains gazed at the flames of glory which the clouds canopied upon them and they bowed their heads in sacred awe. The locomotive whistle hooted with sadness and longing, and my heart responded with a mournful moaning.

Night. The road to Boston becomes increasingly short, and I awake, as from a trance to a realization dawning upon me that my trip was nearing its end, an end which is only the beginning of a new wandering in the way of life in which I was astray. I drew from my bag Smolenskin's novel, *A Wanderer through Life,* and immersed myself in reading of the wanderings of the unhappy wanderer, Joseph—my brother in sorrow, in whose sorrow I found some comfort. I read the description of his wanderings and I saw myself as Joseph, in his image and likeness:

"Day had not broken yet, and I walked along through the forest on an untrodden road that was covered with snow. The trees were tall as giants, bent with age, the heavy ice lodged in their crests gave them the aspect of demons, and the wind stealing through their branches keened like a dying soul, drowned out now and then by a flock of crows screeching like heralds of a day of wrath. I walked, my feet stumbling along, for the way was dark and slippery. From time to time I shivered all over, thinking that I had heard the howling of the wolves of the steppes and seen murderers lurking in ambush. . . .

I wandered with him in the forest, and over the keening of the wind, the screeching of the crows and the howling of the wolves I heard a moaning echo: "Whither, wretched wanderer? What is your destination?"

PART IV

Trials and Tribulations

I

What was I to do for a living now? This question confronted me all the more strongly on my return to Boston. The answer depended on another basic question: I had given up my old religion. What values were to guide me now? I put off trying to find answers to these basic questions until I had had a chance to recover from the loss of my old faith and my new love.

My father indulged me. In the morning he coaxed my stepmother to make me a tempting breakfast, and only left for his peddling route when he was satisfied that I had eaten well. Evenings he brought me fruits and sweets. But having nothing to do bored me to the point of depression. I walked the streets looking for some diversion, but it was no use—the streets were just as boring. Even the natural beauties of the park failed to relieve my boredom.

Finally, I found some relief in reading. The neighborhood book store had a good stock of newspapers and magazines. I went there every day, and sat sipping a soda and reading the socialist and anarchist periodicals and pamphlets—I did not dare to bring them home, because they were tabu to pious Jews, as missionary literature.

As I have mentioned, the Jewish labor movement in the United States considered Judaism a mortal foe in those days. The Jewish socialists and anarchists in the labor movement fought religion at public meetings as well as in writing. One favorite weapon was the natural sciences. They popularized physics, chemistry, astronomy, anthropology, in a simplified form—all to prove that Nature is omnipotent, and there is no God. Typically, a radical speaker would stand on the platform, holding two vials half filled with some colorless fluid. He would empty one vial into the other and, lo and behold, the mixture turned blue or red, or yellow! Before his audience could recover from its amazement he injected a drop of still another fluid into the vial—and it turned colorless again. Such are the wonders of nature!

Another thing the radical propagandists liked to do was ridicule religious Judaism. They wrote parodies of the weekly readings from the Torah and traditional prayers. Sometimes, a speaker who was poking fun at the Jewish religion and those who believed in it would become particularly daring. Suddenly, he would break into blasphemy, and fling an audacious challenge at the sky:

"If there is a God in Heaven, and I don't know it, let Him send down a bolt and split my skull, here, where I stand, right now!"

The audience would stare, horrified, waiting for the thunderbolt. After a few minutes of tense anticipation, when nothing happened, and the smiling speaker was untouched, the hall echoed to applause: "Hurrah for the man who beat God!" While in their hearts, they probably were grateful to the good Lord for having spared them, as well as the speaker.

In those days political Zionism appeared on the Jewish scene and began to make inroads in the United States. The Jewish labor movement declared a holy war against Zionism, though it had few followers, and was much less of an apparent threat to radicalism than was religion. But the radicals sensed that Zionism in its political and social, if not its religious aspects, would attract the ordinary American Jew. So the radicals mounted the attack. They cited every possible source they could find to prove that there

really were no such things as nations—there were only classes, and there were no differences among the same classes in different countries. Nationalism was only another tool of the capitalists to dull the proletariat's class consciousness, and to divert the workers from the central problem—capitalist exploitation. The only solution to national problems, as well as other imaginary or real problems, was social equality. This was true of the Jewish problem. The solution proposed by reactionary Zionism meant turning back the clock of history. It was plain as day that Zionism, though it pretended to be a political and social movement, was actually just another version of discredited Messianism. The social revolution alone could save the world—there was no other Messiah!

My father had a friend, a man called Levinson, who bought his newspaper at the same candy store where I regularly read the radical press. Seeing me involved in heresy, he decided to try to bring me back into the fold and make a Zionist out of me.

II

Levinson was one of the leading Zionists in Boston. A peddler by trade, he spent most of his time propagandizing for Zionism. When you come to think about it, actually he "peddled" Zionism. He stocked up on Zionist notions—brochures, membership cards, *shekel* receipts, Jewish National Fund stamps, Colonial Bank shares—and canvassed for customers door to door. He peddled Zionism much more aggressively than his own business wares. He held on to a prospect until, if he was irresponsive to appeal and plea, he would force him by rebuke and reproof to accede and purchase some of his wares.

Hot-tempered, Levinson ordinarily talked excitedly, tempestuously, with hoarse defiance. But when he spoke about Zionism he became movingly eloquent. Sometimes he spoke at Zionist meetings. He had a stoop; on these occasions it became even more marked, as though he had taken the whole burden of the Exile on his narrow shoulders. Grief lined his face; his beard bristled in alternate protest and pleading; his eyes were sad with longing for the restoration of the people of Israel to the land of Israel.

For Zionism was more than a political and social movement to Levinson: it was a religion, a new Sinaitic revelation, and Dr. Herzl

was the man of God through whom the new religion had been given to the children of Israel. Levinson always pronounced Herzl's name reverently, adding a benediction—"Benjamin Zeev, God's beloved, Dr. Herzl, long may he live, Amen." And God help anyone who said the slightest thing against Herzl in Levinson's presence! When the great man died, Levinson went into mourning; he rent his clothes, sat the seven days of mourning in stocking feet at home, and recited the Mourner's Prayer in synagogue for the soul of his hero. Soon after Herzl's death, Levinson followed his beloved leader to the grave. . . .

One morning, Levinson was waiting at the door as I left the book store. He began by asking me how I was getting along, and ended by scolding me for reading anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist literature. What could a learned young man and a shohet like myself have in common with those renegades? How my father would grieve if he were to learn of my apostasy? True, nowadays a Jew couldn't live by the Talmud alone. Of course, you had to read secular books, too, to learn more about the world in general and Jewish life in particular. But why read this common, Yiddish jargon? A fellow like me should be reading Hebrew—there was plenty of wisdom and science and poetry in modern Hebrew literature. There was a wonderful Hebrew library at the National Club on Hanover Street—open to everyone. Fellows my own age went there—I could make some good friends.

Levinson kept talking until I promised to visit the National Club on Hanover Street and get acquainted with the young people there.

The patron and moving spirit of the National Club was A. S. Waldstein. Waldstein was a student at Harvard University at the time and one of the first American Hebrew writers to be published in the European periodicals of the Hebrew Renaissance Movement. A writer whom editors like David Frishman and Ahad Ha-Am published in *Hador* and *Hashiloah* was an important figure in American Hebrew circles. But Waldstein carried himself modestly in the National Club and its literary branch, Safah Berurah, where he was active. Even when he was the main speaker at a meeting, he

spoke softly and deliberately, like a scholar, and he treated and was treated by his colleagues with friendly respect.

The place where the National Club met was nothing to look at—just small quarters in a dilapidated old brick house, surrounded by similar soot-coated structures. There was a whole row of them in the noisy business district of Hanover Street. But, inside, it was like a sanctuary: the meeting hall was the *sanctum,* the Hebrew reading room the *sanctum sanctorum,* the Holy of Holies. Every night and on Sundays, the early Zionists in Boston gathered there for meetings, to read Hebrew, and to fraternize.

III

It was from the young men at the National Club that I first learned about modern Hebrew literature. They had recently come from the Old Country, bringing with them a knowledge and love of the works of the Hebrew Renaissance. They met at the National Club to read and discuss, sometimes heatedly, the vital issues of Jewish life. The most talkative and passionate of them was Aaron Frankel.

Frankel worked hard as an upholsterer's apprentice. He was on his feet all day in a basement workshop, covered from head to toe with strips of felt and straw and hair, doing the dirty work for practically nothing; everyone in the shop considered him a wild man and a fool. He took their insults with an indifferent smile—he was above them.

But when he got to the National Club, Frankel was ruthless. He was no fool—far from it. If anything, he was often too clever. There was indeed something wild about him. He had sharply chiseled features, each seeming to assert its independence of the others. His skull sloped upward higher than normal, his hair stood up as in protest against heaven and earth. There was a certain stubborn, rebellious strength about the man, expressed in enor-

mous shoulders, fixed in Atlantean determination. His lips smiled scornfully as he spoke and folded in an expression of bluntness when he was silent—and woe to them whom he chose to castigate. His eyes flashed keenly, without a shade of tenderness. The wild expression in his face gave him the appearance of a savage who could not be tamed to civilized society and its amenities. He was all steel and sulphur. And he was fearless—Heaven itself was not safe from his attacks. He would argue even in ordinary conversation, cutting a friend short when he tried to express a contrary opinion, with the accusation that he was jabbering about something he knew nothing about.

He had journalistic talent and was quick to appraise events, movements and personalities; and if his appraisal was not always accurate, it was honest and sincere. He also had literary taste, not the most refined but sensitive to authenticity.

He condemned American practicality, with all its deceit and fraud, to which the Jews had succumbed. He himself succumbed to it and became involved in all kinds of deals from which he usually emerged the loser. He condemned American materialism in which the Jews had steeped themselves, with its addiction to food and drink and other physical pleasures, to which he himself was addicted. But in his case, his American practicality was devoid of deceit. He was an honest man, hating fraud, and he fanatically and uncompromisingly fought for any truth of which he was convinced. Literature was the staple of his soul, and he pursued it as ravenously as he pursued food for his body, devoting his heart and soul to sublime matters which offered personal and universal salvation. Two of these matters were the substance of his life and the essence of his aspirations: Zionism and the modern Hebrew literature.

This man of savage power in appearance and character was the external Frankel. Within, was a hidden Frankel, soft and tender, harboring sentiments and emotions susceptible only to the esthete, gentle to people whom he had condemned or considered as asses, and ever so much concerned about his friends, sharing their troubles and their joys.

I discovered this hidden Frankel when I met him at the National Club. Among the visitors at the club were several Maskilim to whom the Haskalah literature was everything in life and its authors veritable angels, compared to whom the great authors of the new Hebrew literature were midgets. He would argue with them at every opportunity, accusing them of provincialism, Philistinism, and the like, venting his sarcasm on them and pulverizing them. I was also a devotee of Haskalah literature and in my conversations with him I would laud it and its authors. However, when he argued with me, he argued politely, careful not to offend me, and in a friendly, warm tone. As he argued with me, he sought to enlighten me in the modern Hebrew literature and urged me to study it at first hand. I took his words to heart and I began to devote myself to the modern Hebrew literature.

IV

I sat on a solitary bench in a public park reading the new Hebrew literature all day. It was a new world for me, a haven from boredom and despondency. But I could not escape reality; I was distressingly confronted with an offer of a job as a shohet in Boston.

My father had a friend, a landsman from Slutzk, who was about to open a poultry shop. This man asked me to be his shohet. His generous offer was not completely disinterested: I was unmarried, and could get along on a smaller salary than a shohet with a wife and children to support. I gave him an equivocal answer, hoping to think up some reason to refuse that my father would accept. As opening day approached, the butcher pressed me for an answer. He could not understand why I was so hesitant. Did I think he really needed me? He had had many veteran shohatim apply for the job—men who could pluck as well as slaughter, which I could not. *They* knew he was a good businessman, that his shohet would be fixed for life. And the only reason he wanted *me* was out of philanthropy, because I was a landsman. This was a tremendous opportunity for me! If I let it pass, I'd be sorry—but a lot of good that would do me then!

Finally, I told him that I could not accept his offer, for personal reasons. My Father refused to accept this refusal. What did I mean by "personal reasons"? Had he discovered diamonds in the rags he bought? Or had he won a sweepstake? It wasn't that he begrudged the food I ate at his table—when I became a father I would understand! But it was the way I was still drifting. Was there any future in reading secular books day and night? It was time for me to get established, to be married, according to the will of God. To throw away the chance of a lifetime for "personal reasons"! I ought to bear in mind what the Sages had said: "He who loses what is given him is a fool."

I explained that I was disgusted with a profession that called for me to take life that I had not given, and that I never intended to go back to being a shohet. At this, my father suspected that I had lost my faith. He began observing me to determine my views and behavior in respect to religion. In a few days his suspicions were confirmed.

One night I came home from the National Club to find my father sitting at the table with an angry face. He didn't return my greeting. I left him to go to bed to avoid talking with him while he was angry. But he flung a question at me: "Did you go to synagogue this morning?"

"Why this morning?" I asked, with an air of innocence.

"Did you pray in the synagogue?" he repeated, in a steely voice.

"Why else do people go to the synagogue?"

"Did you put on your phylacteries?"

"Phylacteries are worn at prayer."

"I can't force the walls of the synagogue to move to testify against you, as Rabbi Eliezer did—but your phylacteries are silent witnesses."

He took my phylactery bag out of the drawer, drew the arm phylactery from the bag, unwound the strap, and stretched it out on the table. In the center were two knots that my father had tied, obviously to test me. They were clear proof that I had not put the strap around my arm that morning.

I couldn't look my father in the eye. In the silence the clock's

ticking was heavy and muffled. I fell apathetically on to my bed. I could hear my father talking to himself:

"I have raised an apostate . . . He was a crown on my head, the pride of parents and the praise of teachers and now . . . my crown has fallen . . . my honor is gone . . . O Father in Heaven . . ."

V

An uncle of mine from Bobruisk had settled in Boston shortly before I left for Auburn. When I returned to Boston he introduced me to some of his landsmen from Bobruisk. I especially liked one of them, whom I often visited at home. I was there so much I was almost a member of the household.

This man was a scholar of the Habad wing of Hasidism, whose learning was unassuming. A tobacco and cigar wholesaler, his earnings fluctuated. Most of the American Jews I came across were primarily interested in earning a living. But this Hassid was an exception; his chief interest was spiritual. Having spent two-thirds of the day in looking after his material needs, he devoted the rest to spiritual matters. From work he went directly to the synagogue where he studied his daily portion of the Talmud, the Zohar, and the Habad Hasidic classic, *Tanya*. After dinner he concluded the day reading for relaxation the writings of those Enlightenment authors who had not renounced their faith. For he saw no contradiction between sacred and secular writings of this calibre.

In general, looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses, he saw the beautiful everywhere. To him the ugly and evil were but a veil hiding, as befits, the glory of God. The perceptive eye, he believed, could see through the veil of ugliness and evil, the beauty and splendor of the infinite divine light that fills and encompasses

all the worlds. A man could achieve such a vision of beauty by developing his capacity for mercy; for mercy is a divine quality. Once he had enriched his sense of mercy, a man would be able to see the sparks of the infinite divine light, even in fallen souls. For every act *per se* is from God, who is the prime cause of all activity, and without whom action is unthinkable. Moreover, the very vitality of evil *per se* emanates from the hidden Supreme Good; after undergoing many transmutations, and transmigrations, evil is incorporated and sublimated in the Good.

This Habad Hasid was tolerant of differences in belief and opinion; particularly, he was sympathetic to the Zionists and socialists. After all, he said, both groups were God's emissaries in the mission of redemption—that of Jewry and of mankind, as a whole. True, most of the socialists were outspoken heretics—but not really. Their "heresy" contained elements of faith and service, and whoever possessed these elements was no real heretic. They did not realize that, unknowingly, they were God's emissaries; their ignorance, however, did not detract from the truth of their mission—"Would that men forsook me, but kept my Torah," say our sages.

Everything about the man was simple and forthright. There were no sharp edges in him. Even his appearance was moderate, balanced. His features were regular; his beard neat; his eyes direct and clear.

His wife was completely different. She had been a beauty in her youth, and had retained much of it in middle age. It was a kind of gypsy beauty: lustrous, glowing black hair which contrasted with the graying streaks in it; flashing black eyes; nimble and frivolous as a young girl, soaring gracefully in her walk and work. Every muscle and nerve in her body vibrant and alive. Sensitive and temperamental, she was sharp and sarcastic, castigating everyone. Her husband and she were like fire and water—like that harmonious union of fire and water out of which Heaven was created. He loved her as himself, and he was her pride and glory.

They had two daughters; the elder, Rose, was about my age. The best qualities of both parents were equally represented in

her. Rose was slender and lithe. She spoke with warmth, feeling, and humor. Her looks were captivating, her personality attractive, particularly her radiant smile.

At that time Rose was in mourning for a brother who had died young. She had devoted herself to him like a mother, and told me how handsome he had been, how clever, like a bereft mother recounting the praises of her dead child. As she spoke her eyes filled with tears. Rebelling at her father's philosophy, she exclaimed:

"Papa says, 'Evil *per se* is from the Supreme Good.' Is the death of a child who can never have sinned also from the hidden Supreme Good? Did you ever see a child in his death agony—his helplessness and plea for mercy—are these, too, incorporated in the hidden Supreme Good?"

VI

I had always longed for a woman to replace the mother who had died when I was a child. I looked for a mother in every woman —this need now drew me to Rose.

Tensely I anticipated the evenings when I could visit her. My heart pounded when I knocked at her door, the sight of her happy face filled me with joy, and leaving was painful. I knew from sad experience that this attachment, which, in my present condition, could not culminate in marriage, was doomed to a wound-inflicting severance. I tried to stay away, but it was no use. I read for hours in the park, but my heart wasn't in it. My eyes couldn't focus on the words; when I looked up, the park looked drab. I walked down the street in the evening and unexpectedly found myself standing before her house. I simply couldn't overcome my desperate need for Rose's company.

Finally, I decided to make our relationship an open, straightforward, brotherly one. Rose sensed my intent and immediately responded, for she had been disappointed in love herself and was determined not to fall in love again. Every once in a while she hinted at her disappointment; finally, during a stroll through the park, she told me all about it.

It had happened when she was a high school girl in Bobruisk. One of her schoolmates, an active young socialist, tried to convert her to Marxism, and they fell in love. They became engaged.

But the secret police got on her lover's trail, as a subversive radical. When his father learned of the danger, he insisted that his son emigrate to America. The boy agreed, being only too pleased at the prospect of attending a university in America—something virtually out of the question for a Jew in Russia. Sadly parting, Rose and her lover agreed that she was to follow him to America when he was established there, and they were to marry. Soon she came to Boston, where he had settled—but he married someone else. It was the old story. In America he had given up socialism. He had lost all his revolutionary ardor—his ambition now was to attain a sound position that would give him security and prosperity. So he married a rich man's daughter and studied medicine—being supported by his father-in-law, an industrialist whom he would have accused in the old days of living off the blood and sweat of his workers.

Rose, too, lost her romantic notions in America. One mistake in love was enough. She wasn't going to marry for love, but for good and solid reasons. Marriage, she declared, was a business proposition, and the man who wanted to go into partnership with her would have to put up tangible assets—not high-flown love talk. Love was deceiving—and so was socialism.

Still, Rose said, she was glad to have been in love, even for a short time. Love had been a divine revelation. She was also glad to have had her disappointment in love. Paradoxically, it was a kind of preservative that would keep her first love fresh.

VII

My uncle, whom I mentioned before, was a master ladies' tailor. In Bobruisk he had employed a number of workers in his shop. In Boston, however, he became a worker himself, in the shop of a young landsman, a former apprentice of my uncle's, who had prospered in Boston. Two of my uncle's sons also worked in the shop with him. The younger, Velvel, was my age.

Velvel was already an expert tailor and an ardent member of the Jewish Socialist Bund when he arrived in Boston. He knew life and was good at organization. Besides, he was a real humanitarian, giving part of his salary to help support poor relatives and landsmen and philanthropic institutions.

Seeing that the workers in the clothing shops in Boston were being exploited, Velvel laboriously organized them into a trade union and called a strike. Although one of the youngest workers, he was elected the strike leader, to plan strategy, marshal his forces, and execute the strike campaign. Finally the bosses, who at first had refused even to negotiate with him—that brazen, impudent, arrogant brood!—capitulated. Velvel set forth the settlement conditions and wrote an agreement which he made them sign.

My uncle was unhappy about the whole thing. In the first

place, he had been a boss tailor in Bobruisk himself, and the strike was an attack on the boss system. Secondly, he felt he had to stand up for his boss, who was an ex-apprentice of his. He felt guilty in the boss's presence when the strike was over, and decided to try to make up with him for his son Velvel's recalcitrance.

So my uncle decided to make a match between Rose and his young boss. True, Rose was of good family and his boss was only a tailor, when you came down to it—but a prosperous tailor was a somebody in Boston.

My uncle's young boss was a dandy. He had a number of elegant suits, which he kept well pressed. He wore a different suit each day of the week. A heavy gold chain hung across his vest in two semi-circles, held in one pocket by a gold watch, in the other by a silver-bladed, pearl-handled pocket knife. On the third finger of each hand he wore a diamond-studded gold ring. He showed off the chain and rings, keeping both hands in his trouser pockets—all except the middle fingers with the rings on them—pulling back the hems of his jacket so that the chain and rings were visible. Everything about him was smooth: his dress, his lotioned hair, his shaven face, his blue-grey eyes, his smile, showing off gold-filled teeth, and his conversation, larded with English. There was actually something effeminate about the man. . . .

I began meeting him at Rose's house. So long as I was unaware that my uncle was trying to match them, I was friendly to him. We both had something in common—an inferiority complex which we tried to cover up; he with ostentation, I with scholarship. But when I found out my uncle's intentions, I couldn't bear the sight of the young man. I left the house the moment he entered. I was actually jealous of Rose; I imagined them sitting together, kissing, his smooth eyes gloating over my loss—he had the money, and he had the girl, both!

Abruptly, I stopped visiting Rose altogether. I spent sleepless nights, disturbed by nightmares. Days, I would try to read unsuccessfully. I looked at the people strolling through the park and sailing on the pond in swan-shaped boats. There were lovers

there, too; at the sight of their flushed faces I would be overwhelmed with self-pity.

A blond blue-eyed boy sailed a boat attached to a string in the park pond. A mild breeze puffed the sales, and moved the boat toward the little island in the center of the pond. Dreamily, he stood watching as his ship set out on a voyage across the sea to faraway legendary isles, where it would be loaded with coral, ivory, and ebony, the gold of Ophir, precious gems, and pearls. Suddenly, the string fell out of his hand, and the breeze carried the ship away. Desperately, he put out his arms toward the ship sailing away from him. "My ship, my ship!" he cried. . . .

My heart cried with him: "My ship! my ship! . . ."

VIII

The old urge to write, buried for some time by practical preoccupations, returned to me during this idle period. Only now I began to write poetry instead of scholarly essays. The poetic muse transmitted her poetic spirit to me through an organ grinder.

One evening I was walking home from the park through one of Boston's better neighborhoods, when a raggedy man came toward me pulling an organ. He was middle-aged and thin, with a bent back, a gaunt face where the cheekbones protruded, and skin the color of old parchment. But his features were delicate: his eyes were enormous, dreamy, deep blue.

The organ grinder parked the organ at the curb and ground out a melancholy tune. He shut his eyes, his head sank to his chest, his whole body trembled, as though the organ handle were connected to a musical machine inside *him,* and he were producing the music, rather than the organ. When the tune was done, he took his hat off and held it up, waiting for a window of mercy to open on him. His eyes wandered up and down the stories of the house, but it did no good. The windows of mercy remained shut. No one threw him a coin. He moved the organ and set it opposite another house. His next tune was even sadder than the

first—like a prayer of a poor man in his distress to the noblemen of the world: "Turn from your luxurious chambers—heed the cry of a breadless pauper! I do not begrudge you what you have, all I ask of you is: toss me a few crumbs from your rich table!" Again there was no response. He walked down the length of the street, stopping before each house, but everywhere it was the same —no one opened a window, no one threw a coin into his upraised hat.

Finally, the organ grinder parked his organ at the street corner, leaned his elbows on it and cupped his head dejectedly in his hands, his dusk-lit face expressing soul-dejection.

My heart filled with pity for him and hidden strings quivered sadly in my soul as if the grinding organ of that poor man were playing within me, protesting his humiliating misery and asking mercy for him. I hurried to him, drew my pennies from my pocket and placed them on the organ—a gift from one pauper to another—and went my way. I went—but his figure hovered before me and a sad melody filled my soul. I fled to the bank of the Charles River, sat down on a nearby bench and gazed at the beautiful sunset in its resplendent revelation in this glorious landscape to dispel my sorrow—but in vain. The figure of that poor man hovered before my eyes and I saw in him a symbolization of the image of the world. The sorrow of a poor man and the sorrow of a poor world combined in my soul into a melody as sad as the melody of that organ.

I took out a notebook that I carried around in my pocket to jot down notes on my reading, and wrote a poem spontaneously, of a man and a world both poor, forsaken, forgotten, vainly asking for mercy, and of a poor poet who answered their cry and protested their humiliating misery.

A hand touched my shoulder. I looked up, startled. It was Rose. The sadness in her eyes was too much for me to face—I averted my eyes. She sat down next to me, her arm touching mine.

"I have a complaint," she reproached me. 'Why do you stay away from our house? We've begun to miss you."

"I haven't just begun to miss you. I've missed you from the

first day I stopped coming. But I did it for your sake—believe me, Rose. Rose, I can't marry you—I have no job and no prospects. Take that lucky fellow my uncle is trying to match you with. He can offer you money and position, and I can't. I don't want to stand in your way. I want to leave before it's too late."

An ironic smile creased the corner of Rose's mouth. She nodded: "But it's too late already."

IX

Word got about in Hebrew circles in Boston that Menachem Mendel Dolitzky was coming to town. It was decided to give a public reception in honor of the poet whom J. L. Gordon, then the king of Hebrew poets, had named his heir apparent. True, Dolitzky was coming to Boston to sell some Yiddish novels he had published, and at first the radical young Boston Hebraists boycotted the preparations for the reception. They viewed Dolitzky's penchant for writing trashy Yiddish romances as disgraceful for a Hebrew poet—and they didn't think much of his poetry, either. It was definitely outmoded. But finally, the youngsters decided to forgive Dolitzky because of his past importance, and joined the preparations. I was a member of the planning committee, and was singled out to deliver a formal address of welcome to the guest of honor and present him with an inscribed gold fountain pen.

When I was a yeshiva student I thought there was nothing grander than an author. I saw the square letters of the Hebrew book as godly letters, which were handed down from Sinai, and its author as a sublime, almost divine, superhuman being. The only Hebrew author I had ever met was the Ridbaz, author of a

commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud; I imagined every other author would be a man of God, like the Ridbaz. Even after I had given up my religious studies, books and authors remained sacred to me.

I had never even hoped to see a Hebrew writer in person, and here I was to greet a poet! A poet was something of a prophet, I had learned from *Ha-Igron,* the Hebrew-writing primer. Like the prophet, the poet received his inspiration in nightly visions, in meditations, amid fear and trembling and perception of still voices. And the author of this book is none other than Dolitzky, the poet, who had certainly experienced the poetic inspiration he describes, as I had myself, in small measure, at dusk along the banks of the Charles River. In those days I was enthusiastic over the newer Hebrew literature. Still, I remained true to the Haskalah writers, principally J. L. Gordon. It was enough for me that Gordon approved of Dolitzky.

The reception turned out to be a dismal affair. Entering the hall I felt the melancholy that had settled everywhere—on the sooty walls, the dim gaslights, the chandeliers and globes, covered with cobwebs and fly offal. The same melancholy sat on the faces of the Maskilim who comprised the audience. They were gloomy because the occasion reminded them of vanished dreams and days and climes of long ago, when they were young, from which they were banished. The universal black mood was only intensified by the appearance of the guest of honor. I looked at Dolitzky, and felt personally affronted. Indeed, this was no superman at all! Why, he looked nothing like the Ridbaz!

Dolitzky's fat, fleshy body was bloated with a kind of huge flabbiness. His head, broader than it was high, lay heavily, helplessly, between his shoulders. His dirty gray hair was stiff and bristling. There were deep furrows in his heavy-muscled face, which wore an expression of utter pessimism. His dead eyes were cold, fixed, resigned. He mounted the platform to recite some poems; his voice had a leaden clang. He read with no emotion at all: even the poems, which were affecting when read silently, became clichés in rhythm as their author recited them. I sat there

funereally all evening. When I went up to the platform to present Dolitzky with the fountain pen, my welcoming speech was like a dirge. It was eminently fitting that the evening should end as it did: a lame pale boy leaning on crutches sang Dolitzky's elegiac "On Zion's Ruins." . . .

X

Dolitzky had agreed to see me in his hotel the next evening. It was a dilapidated building, in one of the narrow streets in the Jewish West Side of Boston neighborhood. I found him sprawled out on a threadbare couch, tired and depressed after a day spent going from house to house soliciting subscribers for his Yiddish book. He looked grim. It had been a hot summer day; towards evening the air was stifling and humid. Dolitzky lay there sweating and panting. Outside, the heat rose from the pavement in waves, streetcars clattered back and forth over the iron tracks, and wagons and coaches rattled across the cobblestones. Dolitzky's books lay on a bench in the corner opposite the couch next to an open valise; the gilded letters of his name on the bindings stared at the exhausted poet.

While I struggled to overcome my shyness and hand him the poem I had written on the banks of the Charles River, for his opinion of its merits, he smiled sarcastically:

"Have you read Mendle Mocher Sefarim's *The Book of the Paupers*? You remember the pauper—author, that is to say—who canvasses the rich people in Odessa trying to sell subscriptions to the book he carries around with him in manuscript form

—and how Fishke, the pauper, joins up with the author, and the big-hearted people give Fishke more money as a handout than they give the author for a subscription? I'm that author. Fishke was right: 'author' is just a new-fangled way for saying *schnorrer,* beggar. Then why do I write novels? I have a stomach to fill.

"You can't reproach a poet for giving up the Muse when he has a wife and children who don't appreciate his heavenly flights when they're hungry. A poet may be willing to sacrifice himself —but he can't allow his family to have empty bellies on his account. Hell is preferable to that."

His harsh voice softened. Dolitzky was silent a moment, then asked: "You told me last night you wanted to talk to me. What about?"

I handed him the poem and asked him to read it and give me his opinion of it.

I studied Dolitzky's face intently as he read, to get his reaction. My heart was pounding. He looked at me, the same sarcastic smile as before creasing the corners of his mouth.

"Stop it," he said bitterly. "There's no glory in it. The devil with poetry! Don't be a fool poetaster! You know what happens to Hebrew poets in this country: First stage—Hebrew poet. Second stage—Hebrew teacher—or rather cattle herder, with the children in the role of unwilling cattle. Third stage—you write trashy novels for servant maids and teamsters. You're young, you can get into the university here. Learn an honorable profession that will give you a decent living. Do anything, be anything—peddle candles and matches—sell windbags and bubbles, if you must. Be a tailor, a shoemaker, a cobbler—anything but a Hebrew poet in America!"

The street lights outside sifted pallidly through the drawn window shades into the room. Dolitzky did not get up to turn on the gas lamp. He was in the mood to talk and preferred the dark.

"I came to America. I couldn't endure Russia any more. Pogroms, persecution, oppression, restrictions, humiliation—living

in Russia was like living in a snake pit for the Jews. It took me a long time to decide to come here. It's very hard leaving a country where you've been born and raised, have studied, have gotten some reputation, and are at home, among your own—the largest and finest Jewish community in the world. Gordon helped me make up my mind. Change your place, change your luck, he thought. He told me I'd have more scope in a free country. The American Jewish community was young; I would sing new songs there.

"So I took his advice. He wrote me across the ocean: 'Go forth to life and to do battle. . . . for the dreams I have dreamt and you shall yet dream.'

" 'Do battle'? With whom? Against whom? What for? In Russia there were people one could fight—respectable enemies. We fought the battle of the Enlightenment and Zionism against our Orthodox brethren; but even the most fanatical of them were men of stature. We may have thought their opinions damaging, but we knew they were solid, stable. They had a tradition to fight for, and you had to respect them for fighting.

"But here in America? If we only had some of those fanatics and reactionaries from the Old Country here! They at least were loyal and devout Jews. Here we have a pack of boors, ignoramuses, whose only thought is to 'make a living,' with nothing spiritual about them. You can despise or pity people like that—you can't fight them. And then there's no one to fight *with* you. The Jewish intellectuals? Heretic Socialists, heroes of Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av balls; or else professional careerists, uninterested in their own people. The few immigrant Maskilim are like those lean stalks of corn in Pharaoh's dream. The harvest of their enlightenment is meagre: a little pedantic grammar, Hebraic crossword puzzles, the elucidation of obscure allusions in Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Bible, and similar trivialities.

"Then, there's nothing to fight *for*. The Enlightenment and Zionism are disembodied spirits floating in chaos in this country —in the Old Country they were concrete ideas directly related to Jewish life and tradition. So there you are: in America, the He-

brew poet has no one to fight against, no one to fight with, and nothing to fight for. There's no place for him here—he's pushed aside into a corner."

Dolitzky stopped, the words choking in his throat. Silence filled the room, except for the pendulum of the old clock on the wall. Finally, he controlled his emotions and resumed.

"There was one fight I couldn't avoid: making a living. What was a man like me to do in America? Become a door-to-door peddler? A Hebrew poet with a reputation? I tried all kinds of jobs. There was only one that wasn't dishonorable—Hebrew teaching.

"There are two kinds of Hebrew teaching in this country. There's the private kind and there's the public kind. A Jew rents a room, usually in a basement, hangs up a gilt sign reading, 'Expert Teacher, Alphabet, *Maftir,* Bar Mitzvah'—and he's in business as a teacher. He doesn't make enough out of just teaching, so he takes on a few side lines, more or less related, either because of their sacred or their beneficial character and he puts on his sign an added inscription: 'Expert Mohel, Expert Marriage Performer, Expert Matchmaker, Expert Evil-Eye Exorciser, Expert Hemorrhoid Remover,' et cetera.

"On the other hand, if you know how and when to pull the right strings, and grease the right wheels, you can get a job teaching in a proper Hebrew school and have your salary paid by the public charity funds. I gave up private teaching and became a public school teacher. But if you think the magic name 'Dolitzky' opened all doors for me and got me a decent job in a good school, you're very much mistaken.

"I was looking for a Hebrew school job once in the middle of the semester, when they were particularly hard to come by. I looked through the 'Religious Help Wanted' section of the Yiddish newspapers. One day I saw something that looked promising, and rushed to the address listed. I found several people already there before me. They were sitting on a bench in the hall waiting to be called into the office to be interviewed by the so-called

'Chairman of the Education Committee.' I took a seat. As I sat there waiting for my turn in this contest I remembered another contest, in the Old Country, where I had won the literary prize given by the B'nai Zion Association in Moscow for my poem 'On Zion's Hills.' . . .

"I looked around at my competitors: bearded and smooth-faced, lean and fat, they all had one thing in common—they didn't sound like, or look like, men of learning. My fellow contestants!

"Finally, it was my turn. I walked into the office shamefaced. The Chairman of the Education Committee was sitting at the head of the table—a man with a coarse face, pointed beard, a wily look in his eyes.

" 'What's your name, friend?'

" 'Menachem Mendel Dolitzky.'

" 'Russian or Galician?'

" 'Russian.'

" 'Have you ever taught children before?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Can you read Hebrew?'

" 'They say I can even read the small print.'

" 'They say? Who's *they?* In America *they say* doesn't mean a thing. I have ears, thank God. Let *me* hear you read the small print in this prayer book. . . .'

"Finally, I got disgusted with Hebrew teaching and became a Yiddish writer, scribbling fantastic romances for the rabble. It's hack work, but it requires talent, imagination, insight into human nature, a little art and a lot of work. There are devotees of the Yiddish novel—they're the ones that pay me generally. But in hard times I have to throw my books into a valise, and go out soliciting handouts for them from door to door, among people who won't or can't read them. You want to write novels? That's the third stage for the Hebrew poet in America."

A knock on the door interrupted Dolitzky's long speech. He got up, turned on the gaslight, and opened the door. The hotel owner had brought a bundle of just-arrived books—volumes of

Dolitzky's collected poetry for distribution among the Boston Maskilim. He gave me a copy in appreciation of my speech of the night before. Then he continued, somewhat more mildly.

"But don't you listen to me! Write, young man, write! Your poem shows promise. Who knows, maybe there is still hope, we may have fresh young Hebrew poets in this country. Maybe I'm exaggerating American Jewry's defects. Maybe I'm accusing myself, under disguise, when I accuse them. They came to America, oppressed, crushed, impoverished, rootless. They found themselves strangers, everything foreign to them—land, language, way of life. They struggled hard to overcome many obstacles, and that age-old will to live gave them the strength to succeed. It's amazing how they established themselves here: beginning small in petty business, ending up big, everywhere in the economy—factories, trades, professions. It's unbelievable!

"True, there are many things wrong with American Jewish life. But still, its very survival is a feat serving to be commemorated. When the marranos built a synagogue in Amsterdam they put a phoenix there, as an emblem of their resurrection. The phoenix is the immortal bird that arises from its own ashes. The phoenix should be our emblem in America, too. And this material success of ours is certain to precede a victorious conquest of the spirit. That's the way it was with every Jewish settlement —Babylon, Persia, France, Germany, Poland, and Russia—they all began the way American Jewry did, and we'll achieve a spiritual renaissance such as they achieved."

The tears came to his eyes.

"We were the first. We came too early to America, when the material conquests of the American Jews were still in a progressive stage and could not divert their minds and efforts to matters of spirit. And we came too late in life, in middle age, lacking youthful enthusiasm and vigor and faith in victory. We gave up with the excuse that there was nothing to fight against, with or for. We isolated ourselves in a Maskilic unworldly corner we procured. However, it was a sacred corner. We preserved in it the sacred Hebrew banner we had brought from the Old Country. This sacred banner we now

commit to you, the youth, to your keeping. J. L. Gordon's charge is now addressed to you: 'You who go into life—go and make battle!' You will win no easy victory—a difficult struggle lies ahead—and when you are triumphant, do not forget us—the guardians of the Hebrew banner—and do not despise us—the forerunners—do not despise us or deprecate the sorrow of our solitude and the humiliation of our defeat! A little understanding—understanding—and forgiveness."

XI

I made up my mind to learn a trade.

The idea appealed to me, because I could make a living and marry Rose, whom I had gone back to. Besides, I'd have a chance to propagandize for socialism. I wanted to be like the Russian Populist Socialists, who "went to the people"—going off to remote villages to bring the message of socialism to the peasants by sharing their lot as "brothers in suffering." I would be a "brother in suffering" with the workers.

I considered all kinds of trades, and finally settled on becoming a street car conductor—it could be learned quickly and paid decently. Soon after this decision, I went to the city transit authority office, full of high hopes for saving the proletariat for socialism.

I was sent to the end of a line of applicants to wait my turn for a physical and psychological examination. I looked at these future fellow tradesmen, and as I discerned their non-Jewish countenances, I felt myself a stranger among them, a wandering Jew among gentiles. I looked at their faces and my soul recoiled: some were bloated, pock-marked, some hard and grim, some sallow with the dark yellow tinge of alcoholism, and all coarse and brutish. And there was an added human estrangement in the

Jewish estrangement which I felt in their midst. I especially felt it when they began talking to each other, street talk spiced with vulgar jokes and obscene, blasphemous diatribes. I felt strained and tense among them, like one banished and thrust among strangers, pushing himself into an alien domain.

My shrinking posture and the foreign accent in which I answered the interrogating official made me a butt to my companions in line. They began talking about me, at first in hints and then openly, flinging remarks aimed to anger and infuriate me, finally taunting me to my face. I felt as though I were standing on live coals. I ignored their insults, keeping my face and eyes down, afraid to see their opinion of me. When they saw that I wasn't fighting back, they pulled at my sleeves and jacket, and shoved me around, until I felt thoroughly disgusted, as much with myself as with them. A mocking voice cried inside me: "You'll never escape being a teamster—it's your hereditary taint. Your grandfather drove a wagon, and you'll drive a street car." My eyes were covered with a film of tears. This proved my undoing: when I was summoned into the office and asked to identify colors at a distance, I couldn't see them clearly, and failed the test.

Leaving the office, I felt as though I had been let out of hell. I was glad to have been rejected and spared the ordeal of working with these vulgarians. At the same time, I felt guilty at having betrayed socialism. At my first meeting with them I had turned up my nose at the toiling masses. How could I ever become one of the world reformers and change the social order?

I decided to try again.

Next I tried cigar making, which I chose for the same reasons as street car conducting: you could learn to make cigars very quickly, and if you were a fast worker, you could make a good living. The owner of a small cigar factory agreed to teach me the trade for a consideration, and to give me a job at the standard wage when I had learned it.

The factory was a small room with panelled walls and ceilings, all faded and covered with dust and mildew. The room was crowded with work tables, benches, molds, boxes, containers, car-

tons, bunches of tobacco—lying around in piles and hanging from the walls—as well as discarded shreds of tobacco leaves. The air had a pungent, humid smell that made your eyes smart and your throat rasping dry. Workers with gaunt, jaundiced faces and eyes the color of cigar ash bent over tables working at a feverish speed. One worker opened the tobacco-leaf bundles and assorted the leaves; a second rolled filler rolls and packed them into the molds; a third wrapped filler rolls in soft, pliable tobacco leaves. To relieve the monotony they talked—about their family troubles, mounting needs, rising prices, the synagogue, lodge affairs, politics. It was not a very edifying conversation. Looking at them and listening to their talk, my heart turned over: That's what I would be like!

I sat down at a table, and the boss explained the principle of making filler rolls, which is the fundamental skill in cigar making.

"This is how you make filler rolls: First, you pick proper roots and leaves; then you crush and blend them, rolling until you've got a filler roll. Then you put the filler roll into the mold. Make sure it's a perfect fit, not too tight, not too loose. Remember: if it's too tight, you'll get no smoke no matter how much you draw on the cigar; if it's too loose, you burn your tongue by the time the smoke comes through. If it's lumpy, it may puncture the leaves it's wrapped in; if it has dents, it may bend and break. The main thing in cigar making is to love your work and have a steady hand."

I listened faithfully and tried to apply the theory to the cigars —but theory is one thing, practice another. The leaves I crushed and blended crumbled in my hand; I worked long and hard until I managed to shape a filler roll. And then the filler roll turned out too big or too small, or, knobby or hollow, too thick or too loose—never right. I could tell by my teacher's expression that he wasn't enjoying my work. Finally, he decided to let me sit around the shop for a couple of days, observing.

While sitting around the shop an episode from my early childhood dawned in my memory.

Soon after we arrived in Slutzk from Minsk, my father decided to train me to read the Song of Songs at the coming Passover services in the yeshiva synagogue where my grandfather prayed. My father spoke to the deacon, who agreed and assigned that reading to me. Every evening, after my father returned from work, wretchedly tired, he sat down with me by the oven and taught me the traditional melody for the Song of Songs. First he would chant, and then I would repeat it after him. Listening, my father would picture me standing there on the synagogue almemar, a child of seven chanting like a veteran, with so sweet and heart-rending a voice. The worshipers would ask one another: "Whose boy is this?" And someone would say: "Why, it's Aryeh the coachman's grandson!" And they would all praise me: "May his mother in her grave rejoice in her child!" My father's face softened at the thought, his eyes sparkled.

My father was happy at the prospect and decided to use some of the hard-gained money he had saved for Passover to buy me a costly length of cloth and have the tailor sew me an elegant suit. His son wasn't going to look like a pauper when he stood on the almemar to chant the Song of Songs for the whole congregation to hear. But when we got to the synagogue on the long-awaited day, the deacon took my father aside and told him something he hadn't had the heart to tell him before: He had assigned the reading to another boy whose father was well-to-do and prominent in the congregation, and whom he couldn't refuse it to—particularly since he was a native of Slutzk, and we were newcomers. The unspoken argument, of course, was even more effective: we were poor, and they were rich. *This* argument was, in fact, irrefutable.

My father sat through the service in a state of terrible humiliation, not daring to look at my unhappy face. As he read the Hallel psalms and came to the verse: "He raiseth up the lowly out of the dust, and lifteth up the needy from the dunghill," Father's voice broke, and his eyes filled with tears. After the Hallel, the favored boy mounted the almemar and chanted the Song of Songs. He read poorly, but triumphantly, his eyes flinging a sarcastic look at me every now and then.

Sensing my father's grief, I repressed my tears. Besides, I didn't want that boy to gloat. I swore revenge: I would beat that boy not only in chanting the Song of Songs, but in everything else!

That entire episode came vividly back to me now, as I sat observing the cigar makers. Something deep within me rebelled. Come what may, I wasn't going to become a cigar maker! I was going to be true to myself. "The world of the spirit is my home, the soil of my soul, and any ideal that is bound to distract me from it is illusive! True, the spiritual world in which I had become rooted since my early youth has been destroyed, but a new spiritual world has been revealed to me—a world of thought and vision and poetry calls me—out of the books in which I am immersed its voice reverberates. I will enter this world and entrench myself in it with obstinate tenacity, not to be dislodged by any adverse force. You, my contender of old, of my distant youth, turn your mocking eyes from me—this is not the place befitting me, the domain suited for me—another domain is assigned to me—the sublime world where there is no distinction between rich and poor—there I will possess a place of honor and sing a new Song of Songs in which I will excel you. Be at ease, my comrades of old from *heder* and yeshiva, do not bemoan me and do not pity me—I will rise—and you will see me in my ascendance as you saw me in my decline! And you, my wretched kin, look not upon me that I am placed so lowly—at the end I will be elevated to lofty heights. I will not weary or falter, I will not rest and acquiesce—seven times I will fall and rise, seven times I will fail and rally, until I have reached those lofty heights, and in my rising you will rise with me."

I jumped up, grabbed my jacket and hat, and ran away from the cigar shop. As I fled, the boss flung at me the epithet: "Lunatic!"

XII

My father entered the hospital. He had a tumor which the doctors thought was malignant and they ordered an operation. I learned of this when I came home one evening and rushed over to see him.

Father had stopped talking to me ever since he found out I no longer prayed. I had dismissed him as a fanatic. But when I learned that his life was in danger, my anger at him turned against myself. On the way to the hospital I kept reproaching myself for having made my father unhappy.

My father's bed was in a large, crowded ward. The dimly lit room smelled sharply of carbolic acid, iodine, and chloroform. The sickly pallor of the patients' faces stood out against the background of white linen. They were a conglomeration of all nationalities, religions, and races, joined under one roof in a universal brotherhood of poverty, illness, and fear of death.

I stood at the ward entrance waiting for the bell to ring the beginning of visiting hours. Looking through the ward, I located my father's bed. At the sight of him my heart constricted. Unaware of my presence, his eyes were focused upward, staring with a frightened gaze at the shadow of death hovering above.

He put on his skull cap and drew a psalmster from under his pillow, opened it, and read softly to himself in the dim light. Looking at my father, I saw myself again as on that night when he left for America—a young orphan not yet reconciled to his orphanhood—and my heart told me that he was about to leave me and double my orphanhood, and I held on to him—NO! I will not let him go!

I rushed to my father's bed, grasped his hand, and threw my head on his chest. His gnarled hand sank on my head; its touch was tender and light. He spoke with warmth.

"Don't cry, son. A man must never give up hope, not even when there's a sharp sword at his throat, as our Masters say. God, the Compassionate, will have compassion on me and my poor family. What does it matter to Him If I live in His world a few years longer? Do I step on His toes, do I demand luxuries? All I ask of God is to allow me to be a father to my children—to help you find the straight and narrow path again. Don't cry, son. But, if you want to make your father happy, repent. If you repent, perhaps God will grant me a full recovery."

Father was silent for a few moments, then spoke again with roused emotion.

"You are the only son of your mother, may her soul rest in peace in Paradise, and I also consider you an only son. There are no distinctions among children, and I am father to your two brothers, as I am your father—a father's heart has ample room. Nevertheless you are my favorite son because of your learning. How could your brothers, raised in this country, ever become scholars like you? I was angry when I learned you had turned heretic. But it was not out of anger that I stopped speaking to you. It was because I did not want to offend you—for I was duty-bound to respect you as a scholar, though you had turned heretic. Even when only the fragments of God's broken tablets are placed in the Ark—it is still a holy Ark! I was angry at you, because I had hoped you would become what I wanted to be but couldn't, and that through you God would make up to me for my failures.

"My father, of blessed memory, was a simple man of poor

family, but upright and God-fearing. He eked out a living as a water carrier. I was born to hardship and raised in want. When I reached school age, I entered the Talmud Torah for poor children, because my father couldn't afford a private tutor. The rabbi and his assistants were free with the rod and the strap on us poor children. But I did not mind the pain because I was learning God's Torah.

"I left the Talmud Torah and entered a yeshiva. My father's relatives, seeing that I loved the Torah and that my father could not support me while engaged in its study, agreed to pay my way and to share my board. I was overjoyed. The pages of the Talmud were like Paradise to me. My father supplied the yeshiva with water at no charge—that was his poor man's gift to the scholars, of whom I was one. Every time he poured water into the barrel in the corner of the yeshiva and saw me sitting before the Talmud and heard me chanting my studies, his face lit up.

"One cold winter day Father slipped and fell; the water spilled over him, and that night he caught pneumonia and almost died. He recovered at last, but was an invalid the rest of his life. His lungs had been affected, and he coughed day and night. The doctors forbade Father to work; he stayed idle at home.

"Hard times set in. There was no bread in the house, no firewood. We were all hungry and cold. Winter passed, spring—Father's cough became worse. No cure was in sight. One day, walking from the yeshiva to eat at the home of one of my relatives, I saw Father trudging through the street, a beggar's sack under his arm. My face reddened with shame. I took Father home and never went back to the yeshiva. I picked up his pole and buckets, and harnessed myself to the yoke.

"For a long time I tried to escape the water-carrier's yoke. Finally I became reconciled to my fate and stopped questioning God's will. Yet, whenever I passed a synagogue and heard the voices of the young students studying Torah, my heart ached. I vowed that if God granted me a son I would consecrate the child to Him, as Hannah had done with the prophet Samuel.

"I kept my vow. After coming to America, I lived in loneliness,

depriving myself of family life, because I did not want to take you from your studies. I wanted you to come here well grounded in scholarship and imbued with piety."

The bell tolled the end of visiting hours. I left, promising to return the next day. My father answered sadly: "Yes, return to me, my son, and return to your Father in heaven."

XIII

The summer passed. The sky, as I caught glimpses of it from the train, was dirty with tattered clouds. We passed bare fields and meadows where withered stalks and grass roots were browned among wild thistles. The roadbed ran along muddy ponds and lakes. Falling leaves floated through the air, to scatter on the ground. The trees were bare. Coveys of birds flew overhead, migrated south. I was traveling in the opposite direction—north, to a remote village in Canada, where I was to be the shohet and Hebrew teacher to the only Jewish family living there.

I could see my father's face as we parted at the railroad station. He was happy—his son had repented and resumed a sacred calling. Poor man, he did not know his son was doomed to hearsy. I had not told him why I was returning to ritual slaughter for a living. It was not out of repentance, not out of fear of God—but out of fear of death. The doctor I had consulted about a stubborn cough warned me I was in danger of contracting tuberculosis. One of my lungs was defective, and my body was low in resistance.

I was offered a small job in a Canadian village, and seized the opportunity—I might recover in the country where I would not have to work too hard and would get wholesome food. I no longer

had any interest in dedicating myself to a cause. I simply wanted to live, to eat well and breathe fresh air. The strong will to survive that had driven my ancestors, poor people but tenacious, to accept years of suffering simply to live—that will awoke in me. Life, even a dog's life—the life of a petty religious functionary in a God-forsaken village, with all the hypocrisy, humiliation, loneliness, and monotony that was involved—anything, to recover my health. But my father, poor man, had no idea of my true motive; I let him believe I had repented.

And then I thought of Rose, and envisioned her face when I said goodbye. She was standing at the door of her house, after we had returned from our last walk in the park. This park in which we used to stroll on summer evenings—the carpet of red sand covering its paths glowed in the gleam of a setting sun and a dawning love, and with our every step it resounded with a foreboding of happy days ahead of us. But as we walked there on that autumn evening, the sand carpet was gray and smutty, and echoed our step with a crunching of dry autumn leaves which sounded like a sentence pronounced upon blossoms of youth and love doomed to a similar end. I had kept from Rose, too, the real reason why I was going to Ahmic Harbor. I made up a wild story: it was only a temporary job—I meant to open a business out there or become a farmer, settling down on one of those homesteads the Canadian government was giving free to all pioneers. I mustered all the powers of my imagination and described the idyllic future in store for us at Ahmic Harbor. I promised to send for her; we would establish a home in the area, and live happily ever after.

Rose was silent; her only response was to press my hand, trembling. I could see her now, as she looked when we parted, her head bent, her eyes wet. . . .

Someone was looking at me with amazement—it was a young man passing through on his way back from the smoker. In a moment we were shaking hands and calling one another by name. He was a fellow townsman, the son of my grandfather's neighbor in Slutzk. He was one of the crowd that used to meet at Grand-

father's house every Saturday for a good time. In Slutzk we had been enemies; we had both been in love with Batya, and hated one another. But here, riding together on an American train, all that hostility was past. We shared the memory of a common homeland, a common experience from which we had both been uprooted, and we were delighted to see one another.

He sat down beside me and rushed into conversation before the train pulled in at his destination, the next station, where he had gotten a job in a brick factory, a trade he had learned in Slutzk. He had only recently left Slutzk, and I enjoyed going back there with him in memory. He told me about what had happened to everyone: the youngsters who had grown up, and were now men, and those who had died and been buried in the peaceful graveyard by the river bank. Time and place shrunk, and I was back in my blessed homeland, sipping again the blessed cup of childhood and early youth, sipping its sweetness and bitterness—a bitterness palatable, after years of seasoning, at a second sipping.

The conductor called out the next station. My townsman rushed to his coach to fetch his luggage. As he left, he remarked, "I'm surprised you haven't asked about Batya."

"I know, I know," I replied. "I've heard all about her."

I was lying. I hadn't heard about Batya—but I didn't want to hear anything. I preferred the world of my imagination to that of reality. I did not want reality to obscure the romantic image of Batya, and from now on, also of Rose, that I kept in my memory.

A Canadian customs officer had boarded the train at the last station. He came into our car and asked the passengers to open their baggage for inspection. I opened my bundle, he glanced at its contents and left: it was all poor quality, and duty free. My other life-bundle was of a similar inferior quality.

PART V

In a Strange World

I

God bless Julia Brown, whose husband, Yudel, hired me to slaughter his fowls and tutor his children. When I arrived at Ahmic Harbor, Julia Brown greeted me like a mother, and she treated me with constant kindness during my entire stay. She was a lovely person, in spirit as in body. Her eyes were deep blue, her hair a warm silken brown. Her features were refined, her face shone with a delicate pallor. Julia Brown was always smiling, even in moments of pain. Her walk, like her voice, was calm and slow. The gentile women in Ahmic Harbor were fascinated by her Jewish beauty. They were on the most intimate terms. Whenever the village women and farm wives came to Yudel Brown's store, they were sure to drop in on the apartment behind the store for a chat with Yudel's wife. They confided their innermost thoughts and feelings to Julia Brown. She befriended them out of no ulterior motives. True, her husband's business benefited from her universal friendship, but Julia Brown acted as she did simply out of a natural friendliness to all persons, regardless of religion.

Julia Brown, who had been born and reared in a pious small Jewish town in Courland, Russia, had retained her Jewish identification in Ahmic Harbor. She had been thoroughly imbued

with Western culture prevalent in Courland; yet here, in Ahmic Harbor, after all these years she still felt as though she were living in an alien world. As best she could, she tried to keep the same kind of traditional Jewish house her parents had kept in the Old Country. Still, her house servants and the clerks in her husband's store who boarded with her, and the children who dropped in to play with her children, and the farm wives and village women—all brought the gentile world into her home. Julia Brown was most conscious of this intrusion on the Sabbath. As she lit the Sabbath candles, and recited the traditional blessings with uplifted palms, her fine blue eyes clouded over. And it was not uncommon for her husband to be called to the store from the Sabbath meal after he had recited the benediction over the wine. There would be some urgent customer in the store who was not satisfied to dicker with a clerk—he insisted on the storekeeper himself. Whenever this happened, Julia Brown would lower her eyes to the floor in humiliation. In her home town the Sabbath had really been a day of sanctity and rest. She would open up the copy of the Old Yiddish *Women's Guide to the Bible* that her mother had given her when Julia left for Canada. Her lips moved in silent concentration as she read the homely explanation of the portion of the week.

Before he settled at Ahmic Harbor Yudel Brown had begun, as many early immigrants to Canada did, as a village peddler. Periodically he would stock up in Toronto with various items of merchandise: men's clothes, women's clothes, cotton, wool, cloth goods, and so forth. These he would take with him on the train to the station in northern Ontario nearest to his rounds. When he arrived there, he would take out the things he needed immediately, storing the rest at the town's inn. He made a huge bundle, half again as tall as himself, tied it securely, put his arms into two leather straps, hitched the whole thing onto his back, and set out —looking for all the world as though the pack was part of his body. Thus burdened, Yudel Brown walked from village to village, and farm to farm, looking for customers. The roads in northern Ontario are wretched even in the summer; in the rainy season and the winter they are practically impassable. It was

miserable walking, the pack on his shoulders felt like a huge dead stone; his back and knees buckled. He was always wet—in the summer with sweat, in the fall with rain, in the winter with freezing ice.

And then there were the snow storms that suddenly sprang up, blinding Yudel Brown's eyes with white flakes. He stumbled along blindly, his hair frozen to the very roots. When the storm stopped and he could see clearly, he found he had lost his way.

It was hard traveling—it was even harder being alone and far from home. For weeks at a time—sometimes for months—Yudel Brown wandered from place to place sleeping over in farms and villages, eating his meals with his customers. And all the time he longed for the sight of a familiar, Jewish face.

Usually, village peddling meant hard work and small returns. But Yudel Brown was lucky; his shrewd common sense brought him success. He heard about the famous Muskoka lakes of northern Ontario where vacationists flocked to the resorts on the islands and densely forested lake banks. Yudel Brown got hold of a large rowboat, filled it up with vacationist supplies, and rowed off to the summer resorts. There he got high prices for his merchandise. Afterward, Yudel worked out a winter route—the timber camps where the woodsmen lived in barracks during tree-felling time. The timber men were hired on contract by the main timber company in Canada, which had a monopoly for northern Ontario. The foremen were under strict orders to keep peddlers out of these camps, because of the number of shady characters who fleeced the timbermen out of their pay. But Yudel Brown built up a reputation for honesty; besides, by slipping a bonus to the foremen, he gained access to the timbermen. In dealing with customers he was willing to be paid in kind, accepting for barter furs from the animals they trapped—badger, seal, beaver, otter, polecat, lynx, fox, and so forth. The value of these furs depended on the market; Yudel Brown kept a sharp eye on the fluctuating prices of the furs he received and sold.

Having built up some capital, Yudel decided to give up peddling and start a store in one of the villages on his former route. Of

all the places he had seen he liked Ahmic Harbor best, though it was quite small. It had two virtues: there were no other store keepers to compete with; and the village's harbor made it the communication center for the whole area. Every day a freight ship made the round trip from Burke's Falls, which was near the railroad terminus, to Ahmic Harbor.

Yudel Brown began small, with very little merchandise in a modest store. But his store acquired a reputation, and farmers came to buy from far and wide. Eventually, Yudel bought a big lot near the harbor and built a brick house with two wings: one wing was a store big enough to stock a variety of merchandise, the other a very large apartment, with rooms enough for his family, servants, and clerks, as well as a place to put up visitors, relatives from Toronto, and itinerant peddlers. As busines grew and he acquired more funds than were needed for capital investment, Yudel began to lend money to the farmers on interest.

But the more you have, the more you want. His wife Julia was dissatisfied with their situation. She urged her husband to move from this isolated village where the children were growing up like gentiles because there was no Jewish environment and they couldn't get a proper Jewish education. They all ought to settle in Toronto, where there was a good-size Jewish community. Yudel nodded and promised to move, but he was always finding different obstacles in the way. Essentially, he would have liked to have lived among Jews in Toronto. He took the family there every year for the High Holy Days on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and he always enjoyed the visit. He walked around the Jewish quarter watching his fellow Jews at their daily occupations, his face beaming. How good to be among your own! And when the cantor chanted the sad High Holy Day melodies, Yudel was overcome by emotion, his eyes filled with tears. He outbid the other worshippers for the privilege of having read to him the choice selections from the Torah, and, as he vowed to contribute his bit to philanthropy, he added a private vow: he would give up Ahmic Harbor and come back to Toronto to settle among his own people. But, returning to Ahmic Harbor, Yudel would discover various

reasons for delaying the move and postpone keeping his vow.

Yudel Brown, who lived in Ahmic Harbor by volition—in the end he stayed there by compulsion. He had a heart attack—apparently the years of carrying heavy loads had secretly damaged his heart, and now that he had reached middle age, his heart occasionally refused to function properly. He would be overcome with a fit of faintness as he stood in the store dealing with a customer, and would have to hurry to the back room where he would collapse on a couch, his face white, eyeballs staring, half dead. Julia revived him with drugs that the doctor had left behind for just such an emergency; Yudel's chest heaved, his arms and legs shuddered, his eyes rolled. His whole face grimaced, as he groaned hoarsely with pain.

The doctors prescribed a quiet existence in Ahmic Harbor, where Yudel Brown could live with a minimum of tension and excitement. They warned him not to dare to think about moving to Toronto—life would be far more strenuous and he might be sure to expect an earlier end. It was at this point, when it became evident that they would have to stay in Ahmic Harbor permanently, that Julia Brown persuaded her husband to hire a person to serve in a dual religious function—to slaughter fowls so the family could have kosher meat, and to tutor the children, so that their Jewish education might not be neglected.

Yudel Brown had an acquaintance in Boston whom he asked to find a young man fit for this holy service. His friend selected me, and served as the go-between in the negotiations. I grasped this opportunity as heaven-sent. In a short time I had recovered my health, though my spirits continued low.

II

I had always been a lover of nature. In the Old Country, every time I passed, on trips to and from Slutzk, the peasant villages, with their muddy streets and tumbledown straw-thatched houses, they looked to me like charming habitations and I was permeated with a nostalgic desire to live there. When I was still a *heder* boy, the Biblical and Talmudic passages having to do with agriculture sent my imagination dreaming about Jewish farmers living in homes surrounded by field and forest—just like the peasant villages I had seen. And when I came to the books of the Enlightenment, my dreams about living in the country got an additional impetus—it would be like living in Bethelehem of Judah, as described in the romance *The Love of Zion*. Life in the country would be one peaceful pastoral idyl.

Ahmic Harbor turned out to be quite unlike Bethlehem of Judah. Instead of the classic babbling brooks and crystal lakes, there were muddy puddles. There were no joyous hills and lily-decked dales—only an autumn-dry hill running down to the harbor, and the pasture grass in meadows at the outskirts of the village had turned brown. No calves skipped and gamboled, no flocks of sheep grazed peaceably on the lea—instead a herd of pigs grubbed among the reeds, crows settling on their backs, wondering disconsolately why the winter was so slow in coming. It

was the end of fall, when travelers in northern Ontario are few and far between, and Ahmic Harbor was the picture of desolation.

However, one thing Ahmic Harbor did have, and that was a forest, a true forest primeval with trees of all descriptions, some species being famous. Strikingly green in the summer, a brilliant snow-white in the winter, these trees were in great demand commercially. Every winter a powerful timber monopoly imported thousands of timbermen to extract thousands of feet of lumber. They cut the trees down, and lopped off branches with ax and saw. Neighborhood farmers hired out to the monopoly to transport the logs via sled to the river-like bay of the lake that ran into Ahmic Harbor, where the logs were piled in huge mounds on the snow-covered ice of the harbor. In the spring, when the ice melted, the logs would be pushed down rivers and streams, where they were shipped inland by train or sailed across the ocean in the holds of ships.

Most of the timbermen were French-Canadians from Quebec Province, imported to Ahmic Harbor at the end of the fall. From the harbor they were sent on to work camps in the area. In Ahmic Harbor they stocked up for the winter—Yudel Brown was their supplier. They collected in his store to bargain with him and his clerk in the foreign nasal accent, shouting at the top of their lungs—the store was as noisy as on market day at the fair. Having concluded their business at the store, they strolled across the street to the saloon and enlivened Ahmic Harbor with their carefree singing and dancing.

The French Canadians kept coming from Quebec and going to the camps in shifts. And then there were the hunters, for late fall was the hunting season. The forests were teaming with wild life, large and small, forever preying on one another, multiplying generation after generation. The lovers of hunting would be seized with the hunting fever, and would come from nearby and distant cities and towns, with their rifles and dogs, to Ahmic Harbor and went off from there into the woods. They were particularly keen on hunting deer—deer flesh was tasty, the skin made a good rug, the branch-horned skull was a beautiful thing to look at above

the fireplace. There was nothing to give a house a woodsy feeling like a well-mounted deer's head with the outstretched neck, sharp horns, and protruding eyes lending a lifelike effect.

But hunters are insatiable; they wreaked havoc among the deer and threatened the flocks with extermination. The government was forced to pass laws backed up by severe penalties limiting deer-hunting to two weeks at the end of the fall! During this time hunters could bag two deer apiece. The hunters streamed into Ahmic Harbor during the season to stock up on supplies and tools and hire guides who knew the woods. They, too, gathered in Yudel Brown's store and in the saloon across the way. And Ahmic Harbor was full of tumult and the barking of hunting dogs, as they wildly sniffed the woods.

The local villagers and farmers were permitted to hunt deer all year round for their personal needs. But when the hunting season came they went off into the woods with the outsiders, just for the love of it. One of the hunters from Ahmic Harbor was a young fellow called Tom. He and I became close friends, and Tom became a kind of patron for me—he ordered all the village boys to treat me with respect. Tom was an artist at heart and recognized a kinship with me. He insisted that I go hunting with him—it was the greatest fun in the world. I was curious and agreed. It wasn't that I shared the universal passion for hunting—a Jewish boy reared in Jewish tradition—and so brutal a sport! No, it was my love of nature. The forests around Ahmic Harbor, exploited by people looking for wealth and selfish pleasure, offered me innocent enjoyment. I had been refusing the forests' silent invitation for fear of getting lost. There were many cases of people losing their way in the forest and dying from hunger, or going out of their minds. There would be no danger of that with Tom.

The first time I saw the magnificent world of the forest close up was on a cloudy day in the late fall. There was a light drizzle and the day was a dull grey—the bushes and clumps between the trees, which in summer blossomed with wild flowers and berries, were bare now. The tree tops barely swayed in the wind; though strong in the harbor, the wind could not penetrate the dense

forest. We heard sporadic bursts of rifle fire somewhere at the edges of the forest, followed by distant echoes. The forest trembled.

We heard a rustling in the woods; Tom listened a moment, then led me toward the sound. Between the trees we saw a glade surrounded by bushes, sloping down to a ravine. A bubbling brook ran down the ravine over mossy stones. Tom put out his hand and stopped me in my tracks, his finger on his lips—I was to keep quiet. Something brown was moving through the thicket, appearing briefly, then disappearing as it merged with the shifting color of the bushes. Finally, a doe appeared. She stepped over the brook and stood at its verge, ears and nostrils quivering, looking about her. Tom lifted his rifle, but before he could shoot, the doe had disappeared into the thicket again. She returned in a short while followed by a young fawn. The fawn lowered its head to the brook, extended its neck, and lapped the water; the doe stood next to the fawn with head raised, heedful of danger. Looking at the doe, I understood why the deer is a symbol for beauty. The dappled skin, lovely legs, graceful neck, upright head, proud horns, the innocence and peace in the deep eyes—all were a perfect representation of the ideal of modest beauty. Tom took aim again; overwhelmed with pity for the animal, I grabbed his arm.

A shot rang out; the bullet that struck the fawn stopped in my throat the words pleading for mercy that I was about to utter. I had spoiled Tom's aim; the fawn, not the doe, lay bleeding on the earth. The doe fled into the thicket, leaving the wounded fawn quivering near the brook, her head rising and falling, her eyes frightened with pain and amazement at her mother's desertion. Tom plunged his knife into the fawn's chest, trussed up her legs and threw her over his shoulders. We went back to the village.

"What damn foolishness made you grab my hand when I shot?" Tom asked angrily. I did not answer. I was too moved at the sight of the delicate creature slung across his shoulders, head hanging down, a cry of pain congealed in its glazing eyes. At this very moment the doe might be emerging from the thicket to stand, uncomprehending, beside the stream where her fawn's blood formed a pool on the earth. . . .

III

My two pupils in Ahmic Harbor were Willie and Hymie Brown. Hymie, the younger, was a seven-year-old, and he was still at home most of the time, under his mother's influence. Willie, who was about eleven, went to public school, and moved in a gentile environment. His pretty schoolteacher led him through the wonderful world of English culture with the other boys and girls from the village and farms. After school hours he played outdoors. Willie had been born in Ahmic Harbor. He had first seen the light of day there: Ahmic Harbor's main street stretching peacefully between two rows of elevated sidewalks, its backyards with their gardens and stables and pig pens, the forest on the horizon, the Ahmic Lake bay running into the village between green trees, the fields and meadows around the village, shimmering green in summer, gleaming white in winter—all these were deep in his heart. They were the scenes of his childhood and would never be forgotten.

When school was over, Willie ran outside to make up for two-thirds of the day he had lost. He rowed his boat down the Ahmic Lake and went swimming and fishing. He was a good fisherman, and every once in a while got a big catch. The sight of the fish leap-

ing, suspended in the air hooked to his fishing hook, set his heart pounding with joy, and the gold sunlight reflected on the fish's fins delighted him. Sometimes Willie went into the woods, his dog, Caesar, at his heels. There he gathered wild berries, ate his fill, and crammed the rest in his pockets. For dessert, he drank the sap that dripped into the buckets, tapping the maple trees. This, Willie decided, was the ambrosia that his schoolteacher meant when she read the children stories from Greek mythology. Willie strolled through the forest; from time to time he let out a loud shout, to listen to the rebounding echo; when it came, Caesar barked back, only to have his own echo mock him. Suddenly, Caesar deserted his master, and was off in a flash chasing a squirrel frightened from its hollow by the sound of their footsteps. Or else Caesar would bound into the thicket, returning with a snake between his teeth. Willie impaled the snake on a forked stick and carried it in triumph back to the village.

In the winter, Willie skated on the frozen bay after he and his friends had cleared off the blanket of snow from the ice. They had great fun sledding downhill and snow-shoeing.

Evenings, Willie joined the grown-ups around the pot-bellied stove in his father's store. Yudel Brown's store was the village meeting place; here the old-timers and village leaders collected nightly to discuss important developments in world and village affairs. They sat themselves on the counter, according to the town hierarchy, the most important people in the middle, the rest ranging down the sides. The smoke from their pipes curled upward and there was the dull thud of chewing tobacco juice as it landed on the floor, and the air was full of talk. The village was far from civilization, but the villagers were all aware of what was happening in the outside world. They found food for all argument in all manner of subjects: politics, military tactics, economic issues, philosophy. The elders of Ahmic Harbor debated each of these matters with high seriousness, each strenuously attempting to present his views and formulate by his reasoning their solution. They often disagreed, but usually heard one another out—except, that is, when the bone of contention was politics. Then, the Liberals and Conser-

vatives would heave at one another—the Conservatives attacking the government, the Liberals defending it; the former lauding Disraeli, the latter Gladstone. From matters of state they would pass on to village affairs. Here they had much to complain about: the lack of street lights and home telephones, the shame that the church had no year-round priest and choir. Inevitably, this led to personalities, and the old-timers fell to berating individuals; they spiced their fault-finding with preachments and caustic comments, which were received with general acclaim. The meetings ended with games of dominoes, each of the elders playing the storekeeper in turn. They made Willie happy by letting him play, too. He loved the game as much as his father did, and was even better than Yudel Brown at it.

Willie enjoyed the grown-ups as much as he did the children. He had grown up among them. They were a part of his life. True, there was a society of Jews that his parents had told him about, but it was a faraway and legendary world to Willie. And when he was taken to Toronto for the High Holy Days with the whole family, he felt like a fish out of water. He could barely wait for Yom Kippur to end so he could board the train for home. But a short time after I arrived in Ahmic Harbor to teach him about Jewish things, Willie began to take his Jewishness to heart.

IV

Willie wasn't happy about his Jewish lesson at first. He came to my room straight from school for the Jewish hour under duress —he was losing a precious hour of play. The days were growing short, and by the time he was through there'd be no more time for fun. With a scornful face and angry eyes he read from the prayer book in a reproachful voice—here his friends were free to run outside and I was keeping him cooped up to read words he couldn't understand! Every time a gang of boys passed outside the window his eyes looked up. The words in the prayer book he read with a mournful voice seemed to apply to him; in them he was appealing to his friends for help: "Oh, see our suffering, and take our part, and redeem us quickly, for Thy Name's sake! Oh, dear friends, redeem me quickly!"

But nobody answered Willie's cry for help—except Caesar, who hung around outside my closed door, angry at me for imprisoning his master. Caesar had been waiting around all day for Willie to get through with school and come out and play. At the sound of Willie's voice, Caesar stood up on his hind legs and scratched on the door with his front paws, at first barking and then whining pleadingly.

But it wasn't long before Willie's attitude toward his Jewish studies and his Jewish teacher changed. He came to enjoy the strange new Hebrew words, and their mystic allusions. Willie was sensitive to the ways of nature; he began at this time to wonder about the forces beyond and above nature. He discussed these esoteric matters with his friends, and they told him what the Sunday school teacher taught them and what the visiting minister preached to them in church on Sundays. But Willie couldn't accept their explanation—he was afraid to accept it, out of an innate fear of the man on the Cross. But soon Willie knew enough Hebrew to begin reading the Bible. The myths and tales in the Bible were a source of inspiration to him; he was fascinated, heart and soul. Everywhere around him he saw scenes from the Bible. The forest of pine and maple and berry-laden shrubs stretching on either bank of the silvery Magnetewan River winding its way to Lake Ahmic was like the Garden of Eden. The two sons of Irish Dixie got into a fight. The elder knocked the younger down, and would have killed his brother if Dixie hadn't separated them with a pitchfork—just like the fight between Cain and Abel. Johnson, the innkeeper, slept with his maid and she bore him a son; his barren wife drove maid and child out of the house—that was the story of Sarah and Hagar all over again. Wild Jim was always fighting with the other village boys, and shooting birds with his bow and arrow—he was the spit and image of Ishmael. Everywhere Willie looked, he saw the Bible.

After the regular Hebrew hour was over, Willie would ask me to tell him stories he loved to hear—legends from the Talmud and about famous Jews. He particularly enjoyed hearing about my home town, Slutzk. I took him with me in my imagination far, far across the ocean, to the days of my youth. I would describe everything that happened to me, and all the kinds of people I knew in those days. Willie never tired of listening.

My stay at Ahmic Harbor was like an interval in my life, unconnected with either past or future. I was not concerned, as I had been in the past, with the purposeful direction of my life during this period—the important thing was to regain my strength.

I wrote Rose a farewell letter, describing my condition and the necessary conclusion I had kept from her when we parted in Boston—that we had to break off relations. For days after composing this letter I carried it around in my pocket—I didn't have the heart to mail it. Finally, I handed it to the postman, just as he was about to lock up the mail pouch and take it to the ship waiting in Ahmic Harbor to return to Burke's Falls. A few minutes later I changed my mind and ran after him to get the letter back. But it was too late—I saw the postman throw the pouch to the captain. The ship left the dock, the long blast of its siren sounding in my ears like the proclamation of a harsh sentence. I stood on the dock, my hands cupped over my eyes against the noonday glare, and gazed after the ship. The ship's smoke curled upward and gradually melted in the air. I left the dock with a feeling neither of pain or sadness, but simply an emptiness inside me.

V

In time, Willie and I had visitors during the lesson and story-telling hour. The first to be allowed in the room was Caesar, who lay down at Willie's feet, and listened as attentively as his master, as though he too understood. Every now and then, there was a low growl from deep in Caesar's throat. . . .

One visitor attracts another. Caesar was followed by Willie's little sister, Sadie, and Sadie brought still a third visitor with her—her doll. Sadie sat on the small rocking-chair she had carried in from her own room, and, rocking the doll in her lap, listened to the wonderful things Willie and I were talking about. Our words sounded to Sadie like magic, the abracadabra that witches spoke in the fairy tales that the servant woman, Lisa, told her every day. As Sadie rocked rhythmically in her little chair tending her doll, she sensed the enchantment of the wonderful things Willie and I were saying. We, for our part, were delighted to have so appreciative an audience.

But this pleasant idyl never lasted. An uninvited guest burst into my room, grabbed Sadie in her arms, and carried her out, against her will. That was Lisa. Lisa didn't like me; Sadie's fascination with my lesson and story hour she felt as a rebuke to herself. Every

time Sadie came to my room, Lisa found some pretext to separate us. With Sadie gone, beauty and grace were gone from the room.

There was large and masculine look about Lisa. She was as wide as she was high, muscular and heavy—the floor boards creaked when she walked. Lisa had albino features; their sharpness emphasized her perpetual scowl, and their whitishness dulled the flaxen blondness of her hair. Behind heavy glasses her gray eyes flashed threateningly. Lisa was an old maid. She had been engaged to be married as a girl, but her lover had played her false. At the last moment, just before their marriage, the father of a girl he had seduced had forced her lover into a shot-gun marriage. Lisa swore never to marry, and from that day on hated all men: "Men are like dogs, chasing one bitch after another. They all ought to have their heads smashed in!" But when she turned middle-aged, the maternal feelings she had long repressed became overwhelming. Unable to satisfy her needs in her own children, she began to take care of other people's children. She kept after them, with gifts of toys and sweets and desserts, as well as with kisses and hugs. The little ones responded to "nice Aunt Lisa." When she came to work at Yudel Brown's house, she poured all her attention on Sadie. If she got the idea that the family wasn't giving Sadie her due—particularly when they scolded Sadie for being naughty—Lisa would upbraid the culprit, taking Sadie's side. Sadie, of course, loved her protectress. She threw her arms around Lisa's neck, and included Lisa's name in her bedtime prayers.

Despite her masculine appearance, Lisa had a truly woman's voice, soft, gentle, and particularly lovely when she sang. Every evening, her day's work done, Lisa took Sadie into her room and there sang her the most wonderful children's songs, old and new. Sadie loved to sit on Lisa's lap and listen. Afterward, Lisa regaled Sadie with marvelous fairy tales, the two of them sitting alone in the dusk. Sadie listened with a trembling heart, while envisaging in the dusk that filled the room the wondrous images and the mysterious fairyland, related and described in those tales.

Sadie was a beautiful blond child. She felt as though she was the center of the whole world, and the world was like a wonderful

palace that some Aladdin had evoked by rubbing his magic lamp—she was the princess for whom it had all been created. The sun, the sky, the flowers, the morning breeze, the birds, the bees, the butterflies—these were all gifts that the genie called God had produced specially for her. During her visits in my room she listened as I told Willie about God. She came to me before going to sleep, slipped into my lap, and begged me to tell her more about this God—what did he look like? What did he say? I taught her the whole bedtime prayer and she added my name to those whom God was to bless, immediately after Lisa's.

Sadie also used to visit me when her mother and Lisa were busy with the housework. Then it was she who was the teacher, and I the pupil. She taught me everything she had learned from Lisa—all the songs, all the fairy tales. She knew them all by heart. I particularly enjoyed the fairy tales. Together we climbed up the beanstalk with Jack, and ran away from the sleeping giant with his hen that laid the golden eggs, the bags of gold, and the wonderful harp that played by itself. She took me with her to the king's ball where Cinderella appeared dressed in the gown that the fairy godmother had given her. How happy we were when the glass slipper fitted on Cinderella's foot, and she could have her prince after all! . . . . Sadie took me along to visit Tom Thumb, whom we accompanied admiringly on all his exploits. She taught me the speech of the birds and the beasts and fish; she took me by the hand through all the wondrous world of childhood.

Sadie was particularly fond of the story about Grandfather Alknov and the Three Golden Hairs. Sadie told it to me word for word as Lisa told it to her: about the poor coalman's son, upon whom the three Sisters of Fate bestowed good fortune, and how he finally married a princess, and how her father, the king, tried twice to kill him, and how he left at the king's command to find out where Grandfather Alknov lived and to fetch three golden hairs from his head.

"So he came to the banks of a river, and there was a raft on it, and a ferryman.

" 'Where to?' asked the ferryman.

"He answered: 'To the house of Grandfather Alknov to fetch three golden hairs from his head.'

"Said the ferryman: 'For a long time I've been waiting for a messenger such as you. I've been sailing this raft back and forth, and no one has come to take my place and relieve me. If you promise to ask Grandfather Alknov when my work will be done, I shall take you across the river on my raft.'

"He promised to do so.

"He came to a great city that lay in ruins, and he met an old man leaning on a cane.

" 'Where to?' asked the old man.

"He replied: 'To the house of Grandfather Alknov, to fetch three golden hairs from his head.'

"Said the old man: 'For a long time we have been waiting for a messenger such as you.' And he brought him to the king.

"The king said to him: 'We had a tree once, and it bore the Apple of Youth, and every old man who ate an apple from that tree became young again. But it's been twenty years since that tree bore any fruit. Ask Grandfather Alknov what to do so that that tree will bear fruit again, and I'll give you a big reward.'

"He promised to do so.

"He came to another city that was in ruins, and met a man burying his father and crying.

" 'Where to?' asked the man.

"He replied: 'To the house of Grandfather Alknov, to fetch three golden hairs from his head.'

"Said the man: 'A long time since we have been waiting for a messenger such as you,' and he brought him to the king.

"The king said to him: 'We had a fountain and the water of life flowed from it, and every sick man who drank of it was healed, and every dead man upon whom its water was sprinkled came to life again. It is twenty years since the fountain has stopped flowing. Ask Grandfather Alknov what to do so that the fountain will flow again and I shall give you a big reward.'

"He promised to do so.

"He came to a golden mansion and it was the house of Grand-

father Alknov. He found a witch sitting in the corner and weaving.

" 'Whom are you looking for?' asked the witch.

"He replied: 'Grandfather Alknov, for I must fetch three golden hairs from his head and ask him three questions.' And he told her the three questions.

"She laughed and said: 'Grandfather Alknov is the sun—and he is my own son. In the morning he is a small boy, at midday—a grown man, and in the evening—an old man. Come and hide in this empty barrel, or else he'll roast you to death and eat you up. I'll fetch you three golden hairs from his head and ask him the three questions.'

"Grandfather Alknov came to his mansion through the western window.

" 'Who is here, Mother?' he asked. 'I smell the flesh of a man.'

"She replied: 'You are mistaken, my son. There is no one here.' She brought him his supper. After he had eaten his fill, he laid his head in her lap and fell asleep. She plucked a hair from his head.

"He woke up, and asked, 'What is it, Mother?'

"She replied: 'I had a dream,' and she told him about the marvelous well which, she said, she had seen in her dream.

"He said: 'A toad is nesting in the mouth of the well. They must kill the toad, and remove the nest, and the water will flow again.'

"He fell asleep again. She plucked a second hair from his head. Again he awoke and asked, 'What is it, Mother?'

"She replied: 'I had a dream,' and she told him about the marvelous tree which, she said, she had seen in her dream.

"He said: 'A snake is coiled at the base of the tree, and it is sucking the tree's marrow. They must kill the snake, and the tree will bear fruit again.'

"He fell asleep a third time, and she plucked the third hair from his head. Again he awoke, and asked, 'What is it, Mother?'

"She replied: 'I had a dream,' and she told him about the ferryman whom, she said, she had seen in her dream.

"He said: 'He's a fool. He must hand his pole to the first person who comes along, and jump ashore, and he'll be free.'

"So the coalman's son went back to the king, his father-in-law, and gave him the three golden hairs and told him about the tree and the marvelous well. The king was astonished, and cried: 'What, is there a water that brings people back to life—and an apple that restores youth—and I knew nothing of it! I must go and find them.' And so the king went forth to find them. . . ."

Sadie kept thinking and thinking about this story. She connected it with things she knew about from her daily experience, and there were things she couldn't understand. Finally, she asked me to explain. There were two very old men in the village, called Dixie and McCarthy. Sadie saw them sitting on the bench outside her father's store, leaning on canes, their backs crooked, bodies emaciated, faces shrunken. "Why," she asked me, "didn't Dixie and McCarthy eat the Apple of Youth that grows on the marvelous tree, so that they would become young again?" She saw her father lying in a faint on the couch, and her mother frantically tending him. "Why," Sadie asked, "didn't they give Daddy some of the water from the marvelous well?" Sadie had a friend called Susan who used to come to her house to play. Susan died suddenly, and Sadie asked me: "Why don't they sprinkle some water from that marvelous well on Susan's face, and she'll come to life again?"

"Because," I replied, "the snake is still coiled at the base of that tree, and the toad is still nesting in that well."

"Why don't they kill them?"

"That's a mystery, Sadie, and when you grow up, you'll understand why."

Poor Sadie! She never grew up to understand why. The three Sisters of Fate had decreed that the toad should stop up the well of life when she most needed those waters. Sadie contracted diphtheria. The young doctor they rushed from the nearby village was inexperienced, and at first he diagnosed her sickness as a mild inflammation of the throat. By the time he realized the severity of the disease, the poison had entered Sadie's bloodstream, and the antitoxin he injected was too late to be effective.

We all spent that night at Sadie's bedside, listening to the rattle in her breathing and watching the quivering veins in her neck and the heaving of her little chest. Outdoors there was a snow storm; Caesar howled in his dog house. Yudel Brown recited Psalms in a subdued voice. Julia pleaded tearfully with God, and Lisa read silently from an open hymnal that she held close to her near-sighted eyes; she could not speak. Fragments of words came to Sadie's lips: "Alice . . . take my hand . . . take me with you . . . Jack, take me down from the beanstalk . . . the giant is chasing me . . . I'm afraid . . . Tom Thumb is stuck in my throat—take him out—I'm choking . . . kill the toad . . . give me a little water from that marvelous well. . . ."

Sadie's eyes opened and met mine. There was a flicker of recognition. "I'm tired," she said. "I want to sleep . . . recite the bedtime prayer." I recited the bedtime prayer, and she repeated it after me, word for word. When she reached "The Lord our God, the Lord is One"—the word "One" got stuck in her throat, she became quiet, and fell asleep.

Outside, the wind roared and Caesar howled. From the next room we heard Lisa singing. She had snatched up Sadie's doll and run into her room. There, half mad, she sat rocking in a rocking-chair, the doll in her lap, singing:

> We shall meet in the sweet by and by,
> We shall meet on the beautiful shore.

VI

Tom was an artist at heart. His father was a blacksmith, the only one in the region, and all the villagers and farmers came to his smithy to have their horses shod and their utensils mended. Tom was still a boy when his father took him out of school and put him in the smithy to help out and learn the craft—it had been in the family for generations. In a short time, Tom surpassed his master. If a rebellious horse kicked at Tom's father while being shod, all Tom needed to do was run his hand over the beast's neck and speak a few soft words to get the horse to put out his leg willingly. And his workmanship was with precision and perfection. He derived from his work creative satisfaction and esthetic joy. The blowing of the bellows when he pumped them up and down; the golden glow of the blown fire lighting up the dimness that pervaded the smithy; the clang of the hammer beating the iron upon the anvil; the whizzing sparks flying from the white hot iron at his hammer's beat, like sparks from a shooting star; the hiss of the water when the hot iron bar was dipped in it—all these were like soul-stirring music to Tom.

And yet, once Tom mastered the blacksmith craft, the latent artist in him craved for an expression in workmanship of greater

artistry. Tom then persuaded his younger brother to take his place at the forge and he himself turned to the art of boat-building.

That part of northern Ontario was a great summer resort that attracted tourists from near and far. It was thickly wooded and the forest shaded peacefully the tourists' cabins and villas, in glades on river and lake shores. It lavished upon them succulent berries and fragrant scents and entertained them with songs of the lark and red-breast and whistle-finch and similar birds at day, and with the song of the whip-poor-will at night. Moreover, Magnetewan River and Lake Ahmic, these silvery mirrors that reflected the sapphire azure of the sky, interspersed with ebony cloudlets, and the thickly spreading trees with their over-lapping branches skirting their banks—they offered tourists abundant sportive pleasure: bathing, boating, and fishing. Thus, when the tourist season came, summer vacationists flocked to the forest bordering Magnetewan River and Lake Ahmic, and they needed boats, for sailing and fishing and transportation, and Tom supplied them with his hand-made boats.

Boatmaking was a skill Tom taught himself. He began by making row-boats and worked his way up to small motor-boats, of which the vacationists were very fond. Tom was completely immersed in his work, saw after every detail himself, continually improving the craftsmanship of the boats, regardless of expense—he really wasn't interested in the money, but in the work itself. He chose the best wood, and soaked and steamed it to make it pliable. Then he constructed the skeleton and ribs, and laid the boards along the ribs, overlapping so well that they constituted an organic-like unit, as though cast in a mold. After fitting the rudder and installing the motor and the seats, he dyed the boards a reddish-brown, shellacked their surface and polished it until it shone like a mirror. Tom repeatedly reminded his buyers, while closing the deal, to take good care of their boats; they were to scrape the barnacles off the bottom and sides, take good care of the motor. He gave them other similar instructions.

Usually hard work toughens a man's hands, but Tom's re-

mained soft, showing no sign of his work. His face, lean and pale, was gentle and bore an expression of dignity overcast with melancholy. Making small boats did not sufficiently satisfy his artistic aspirations. One day he fashioned himself a fiddle. He practiced playing it every night, and in a short time he was playing like a violinist with years of training behind him. Tom knew and cared nothing about musical notes. He had his own musical notes, imprinted in his soul, perceptive to his ear, and by them he played various works, including his own compositions. Then he got together a group of young folks from the village, taught them to accompany him on harmonica, flute and drum, and made a band out of them. He conducted the band at dances he played for from time to time.

Tom's dances became famous, and young people from Ahmic Harbor and neighboring villages attended them. Besides playing and conducting the band, he conducted also the dances, which were held in a barn. He stood on a stool in the middle of the floor, his black hair tumbling down over his forehead, his deep black eyes glowing, his face ablaze, playing his violin and conducting his band, while nodding his head and swaying his body, and called out the steps: "Take your partner, and swing her about!" The dancers swung around the floor in a kind of delicious intoxication to Tom's inspired calling. But he never danced himself, keeping his distance, like an artist. Tom stayed away from the girls; he preferred not to get involved in any affairs of the heart, since he considered marriage to be a millstone around the artist's neck.

From time to time Tom would disappear—no one knew where. Ahmic Harbor was a dull place without him. There were no more dances, and the young people went around bored. The boat he was working on stood unfinished in the shed, waiting the master's touch. After a few weeks Tom would return to Ahmic Harbor—no one knew where he had been. He'd come slinking back, head and shoulders bowed, face overcast, eyes dull and angry. For a few days Tom hung around the saloon with the old drunks gloomily

drinking his bottle alone. All day he sat submerged in his dark thoughts in the saloon; at night he went home and played his violin for hours. His melancholy outpourings were heard all over the village. Eventually, Tom went back to his work, his boats, and his dances, as though nothing had happened.

Those days I was suffering the after effects of a broken love affair. This was my third such experience and I had anticipated the pain. The uprooting of my love for Rose from my heart inflicted upon me a wound that did not heal easily. I felt the depth of my attachment to her, and how hard it was going through life without her sympathetic support. In my depression I decided to write her a conciliatory letter. I was going over the letter in my mind when I received news from Boston that the farewell letter I had sent Rose had made her sick; she had spent several weeks in the hospital and was just now recuperating. I realized then that it was fate, and was consumed with regret for having rejected this lovely person, and, even more, for having caused her pain.

Tom and I drew exceptionally close to one another. We had something in common; we both aspired to do great things and we were both prevented—he by his attachment to his roots, and I, by my detachment from mine. Both of us regretted the waste of our talents, his in boat-making, mine in teaching. We had something else in common: unhappiness in love, due to our own failings. Like me, Tom had love affairs from time to time, but shrank at the prospect of marriage. At that time he was suffering the after pangs of one such experience—he had been in love with a beautiful girl. When he rejected her she went off and married someone else—and now Tom was bitter about the whole affair.

Thus, we were kind of brothers in distress. Every morning I visited him at work and bemoaned my lot—and Tom reciprocated. He'd finish by crying: "The devil with all these seductive and deceptive dreams! All they do is to distract and dislodge a man from the practical world!" As he spoke, working full blast, chisel, auger, and hammer cried agreement with their master: "The devil

with all these dreams and fancies! Every man should be satisfied with his limited space he occupies in the world!"

Evenings I visited Tom at home, and he took out his violin and played his latest compositions. We could not look one another in the face, embarrassed by the unmanly tears that welled in our eyes.

VII

Next to befriend me in Ahmic Harbor was one of the old-timers, a man called Truex. His friendship wasn't completely disinterested at first. Truex wanted to convert me to atheism; he regarded himself as its apostle in Ahmic Harbor.

Truex originally hailed from the United States, and he came to Canada to settle on a plot in the Ahmic Harbor region that he received on a grant from the government. He was halt: he had been wounded in one leg; and walked with a heavy stick. The old-timers in Ahmic Harbor were very fond of Truex although they inwardly resented his free-thinking. Just for the fun of it they insisted that he had run away from the United States during the Civil War to avoid military service, that an officer had shot him as he fled, and that he had settled in Canada to cover up his shame. They never made this charge in Truex's presence, however, out of a healthy respect for his stick and dog—many people had had occasion to regret encounters with these two inseparable aids of Truex's. Still, Truex knew what was said about him—it was common knowledge. During the nightly gathering of the old-timers in Yudel Brown's store Truex described the battles his company in the U. S. Army had waged. As he spoke his eyes shone,

shaven chin quivered, and he punctuated his words by pounding the floor with his stick. When he came to the incident of his wound he went into great lengths. The old-timers listened intently, as though it were the first time they were hearing the story.

"One night, just before a big battle, I was on guard duty near a forest in no man's land. It was a rainy fall night, and a strong wind was blowing. The cranes that had nested in the forest for the night were shrieking mournfully. As I stood guard I thought about the news I had received from my home village—my mother was dangerously ill and on the verge of death; I was bitter at the commanding officer of my regiment who had refused me permission to see my mother before she died. War hardens soldiers' hearts, making them indifferent to death, which they see all around them. But I was all upset at the thought of my mother's death, and miserable that the officer's stubbornness would keep me from seeing her before she died. In the wailing of the wind, the sighing of the trees in the forest, and the shrieking of the cranes, I heard my mother's voice complaining that her youngest son was not at her deathbed, and would not be at her funeral. Finally I couldn't bear it any more—I slipped away and went back home, about a hundred miles from the battlefront. I took a roundabout route, for I was fearful of being picked up by one of the guards who were on the lookout for deserting soldiers. I walked nights and slept days in hiding places in the hills. The seventh night I reached home: my mother died the next morning at dawn. When I approached her bed she put her palm in mine. Looking at me, her face lit up and she whispered something my ear couldn't catch. She fell into a peaceful sleep, occasionally waking for a moment to whisper softly and again fall into a sleep. At dawn, my mother awoke. Her voice returned for a moment, and I heard her say quite clearly: 'God bless you, son! Be worthy of your uniform.' She fell asleep and never woke again.

"After the funeral I hurried to the nearest city and gave myself up. I was sent back to my regiment at the battlefront. I was court-martialed, found guilty of desertion, and sentenced to death by a firing squad in thirty days.

"While I was in prison awaiting execution the President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, came to my camp. He was touring the camps after his usual fashion. The lieutenant of my regiment, who felt sorry for me, told Lincoln what I had done and my sentence. That night, the night before I was to be executed, Lincoln came into the army prison where I was imprisoned accompanied by the regimental commander.

"He fixed his good, sad eyes on me, and said: 'Truex, why did you betray your duty and desert your company before battle? Didn't you know that would cost your head?'

"I answered his question with one of my own. 'Mr. President, did you have a mother?'

" 'Certainly,' he replied. 'Did you think a stone gave birth to me?'

"I asked him again. 'Did you love your mother?'

"Lincoln replied: 'A man who doesn't love his mother isn't a man.'

" 'Well then, Mr. President,' I said, 'since you feel that way, put yourself in my place, and ask yourself what you would have done in this case.' And I told him the whole story.

"Lincoln listened with tears in his eyes. After a moment of silence he put his hand on my shoulder and said: 'Listen here, Truex, if I commute your sentence and let you go free, what reward can you give me?'

"I replied: 'Mr. President, 'if you are referring to money or the equivalent I could give you everything I had and strip myself naked, and it wouldn't be enough.'

" 'No,' said Lincoln. 'I'm not referring to money or its equivalent. There's another reward that's worth all the gold and silver in the world. It is fearless courage in battle in the war we are fighting for our country, that we may root out the curse of slavery and to proclaim liberty and equality to all its inhabitants, without discrimination between white man and black man. If you promise this reward to me—not me but yourself, the land of your birth—I shall set you free, and you may return to your regiment. And when you come back from the war, alive, come to me and

tell me with a clear conscience: 'Lincoln, I have kept my word!' But if it should be your sad fate to give up your life on the field of battle—then say it in your heart as your soul expires—I shall hear it wherever I may be.'

"I kept my promise to Lincoln. My regiment fought in many campaigns, and in every one I fought bravely, till finally I was wounded in the leg. This was at the fierce Battle of Chickamauga, in the foothills near Chattanooga.

"Our army detachment stormed a hill it was charged to capture, but was unsuccessful in the attempt. Each time we advanced artillerymen, under cover of bush thickets, rained upon us fiery hailstones and we were repulsed. Our commanding officer finally devised a tactical attack. He moved us quietly in the dark of night, by hidden paths coursing through ravines and clefts covered with wild growth. We made our way crawlingly, scaling a hidden up-slope, through a maze of rugged and crooked windings. Having reached the summit of the hill, our commanding officer aligned us and charged our ranks to attack the enemy from the rear. It was a savage attack and lasted all night. Our soldiers were mown down right and left, and still the onslaught did not abate. We fought for each foot of ground with rifle shots and butt and bayonet thrusts in hand-to-hand fighting. We skipped over bodies of slain and injured, falling and rising again, thrust back and making our comeback, to storm the positions of the enemy. Hour followed hour, and each hour—an eternity, and the battle continued with obstinacy and cruelty. One passion overwhelmed us all: a lust to subdue, to vanquish, to kill or to be killed. Man turned beast, dominated by a ravenous hunger for prey. Groans of wounded resounded all around and no spark of mercy flickered in any heart, a primitive bushman subjected us to his rule and proclaimed to us a cruel life-tenet: Kill—and live. Woe to the vanquished! Thus the battle lasted all night. Finally, we captured the hill and at sunrise the flag of the Stars and Stripes was raised on its summit to the sound of the bugle, and it waved majestically, in grandeur of victory.

"In this battle I was wounded in the thigh. I was operated on,

and came out with one leg shorter than the other. I received a discharge from General Rosecrans himself—an honorable discharge certifying that I had fulfilled my duty to my country by my bravery at the Battle of Chickamauga. I still have that paper in a vault at the Burks Falls Bank, where I know it will be safe.

"When I left the hospital I decided to go to Washington to present myself to Lincoln, as he had commanded. But when I learned that he was about to take part in the dedication of a military cemetery at Gettysburg, I decided to go to Gettysburg and see him there.

"I was young, I have forgotten many things since then, but I still remember that dedication as though it were yesterday.

"In the distance you could see the Alleghany Mountains in their gray autumn colors. Thirty thousand people stood crowded around Cemetery Hill, their eyes on the platform where the dedication would take place. They came in holiday spirits—a public day of mourning is half a holiday. But when they got there they became quiet and a feeling of awe descended on them. The war was not yet over, although there was a feeling that the end was near. Here, at the graves where men of the North and men of the South lay buried together, hostility vanished. Those who alive, had fought one another, had made peace here in death. All had sprung from the same dust to which all had now returned, to rest side by side.

"Dressed in a fine coat, a glossy top hat on his head, wearing white gloves, Lincoln rode a powerful horse at the head of the procession. A country man, something of his past clung to Lincoln's clothing, his great height, the breadth of his shoulders, the length of his legs. But he stooped, and there was great anguish in his face. A man of infinite mercy, he was forced as President to send tens of thousands of men off to war to be killed, for the sake of future generations.

"Lincoln climbed the platform, accompanied by a number of famous men, including Edward Everett, who was to be the chief speaker. There was a sign for quiet. It seemed as though the dead were listening too. Everett spoke for two whole hours, brilliantly

and eloquently. The whole audience was fascinated—except myself—I had been in battle and all his fancy words didn't mean a thing to me. Finally, Lincoln was asked to speak. Actually, it was not a speech but a few closing remarks that Lincoln had jotted down. He got up. I shall never forget what he looked like. Depression and low-spiritedness seemed to have shrunk his height, his face was furrowed with sorrow, his eyes—you never saw such eyes in you life! For five minutes—no longer—he spoke. A man can achieve immortality in five minutes. He didn't have an orator's voice, but its tremulous quality moved your heart. His words weren't grand, but their truth and simplicity took your heart. I felt as though he were saying exactly what I felt."

Truex got up, standing in the middle of the store, in front of the old-timers, leaning on his cane, he recited Lincoln's Gettysburg Address word for word. When he came to the end he repeated each word, tapping the floor with his cane for emphasis. "That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Truex was overwhelmed by his feelings and could not continue. Finally he regained his self-control.

"There was a grand reception in Lincoln's honor in the governor's house. For a whole hour Lincoln stood there shaking hands with everybody who came up to see him. I was in line, too, and when I put out my hand and he looked at me, he recognized me at once.

" 'You're Truex aren't you?' he cried out.

" 'Yes, Mr. President,' I replied. 'I've come here at your command to tell you that I've kept my promise, and I've brought two witnesses with me, a lame leg, and an honorable discharge.'

"He shook my hand again, shook it hard. 'Thank you, Truex, thank you.'

"Believe me, I can still feel that handshake."

VIII

Truex had been an outdoorsman since his youth. He lived in field and forest, and his roots in them went deep. Truex kept his distance from city life, or anything bearing the slightest resemblance to it. "Cities," he said, "were fine places to live in, if you thought only of their convenience, and the physical and mental pleasures they offered—comforts lacking in villages, and certainly out of the question in inaccessible farms." Still, Truex wanted to have nothing to do with city life. "People who lived in cities," he declared, "led narrow, cramped lives, they had no roots in the good earth. They had lost contact with natural things; they had no idea of the joy of creativity, of eating the fruit of your own labor. City culture, based on fraud and competition, corrupted human nature. For a healthy mind in a healthy body, a man had to live a unified life, at one with nature, the source of both mind and body."

This love of nature, which to Truex was really a religion, he had first-hand, not out of any books. He had been born with it, so to speak, and it had grown inside him. His parents were pioneers, strong of body and soul. After years of working on a rented farm, they settled on a plot set aside by the American government. It was wild land, virgin soil in the midst of a forest belt where all

that grew were thorns and nettles. It was a long struggle until the farm could support them. There Truex was born in the early years, and there he grew up. He never went to school—they were far from civilization—and his father taught him to read. But the fields and forests gave Truex an excellent schooling. He gained wisdom and experience first-hand, from nature and life itself. Only a boy, he learned to train a wild ox to the plow; saw and axe responded to his hand. He trapped animals and birds. Distance from society was compensated by closeness to nature. Truex learned the language of inanimate things: the soughing of the corn, the neighing of the horse, the lowing of the cow, the sound of the woodpecker, bees buzzing, frogs croaking, crickets chirping—he could distinguish them all, all had a meaning for him.

Eventually, other pioneers settled in the wilderness, the settled land expanded. With the arrival of newcomers, civilization advanced. Forests were cut down and villages sprang up in their place. The villages became towns. Urban society replaced the rural one. The land that the first settlers had homesteaded became valuable, and the newcomers offered large sums for it. The old-timers became avaricious and sold some of their land. They were forced, because their farms had shrunk, to produce for the market, rather than for their own personal needs. There was no longer the pleasure of subsistence farming: working the land lost its spiritual value.

When Truex grew up, he resolved to be a pioneer like his parents. He would find untouched land in some remote place and work it. Truex located such an area in northern Ontario. But, before he could leave, his father died, and Truex, the son of his parents' old age, had to work the family farm to provide for his old mother—all his other brothers had married and left the homestead. When his mother died and Truex was discharged from the army, he gave the family land to his brothers and went off to northern Ontario and settled on a tract of land he procured from the Canadian government as a homestead.

It was primitive country, and he became very much attached to it. He came empty handed, his sole property his cane, and the

tract of land he procured—all forest land. But his pioneering spirit and the training he had received in his youth stood Truex in good stead. At the end of five years he had cleared and cultivated the number of acres required by the Canadian government. He received a deed of ownership for the property, and married a Canadian girl from a distant settlement. She, too, came of pioneering stock, and she worked by his side, doing man's work as well as woman's. Year after year, the cleared area grew larger; soon their farm became a model for the whole region. The new colonists who streamed into the region applied to Truex for help and advice.

In his old age Truex sold his farm and settled in Ahmic Harbor. His only daughter had married the mail and harbor master in Ahmic Harbor, and Truex's wife urged him to sell the farm and settle near their daughter. At first Truex refused—it was hard for him to leave the homestead where he had put in so many years of labor, and he had an aversion for any place that bore the slightest resemblance to a city. Still, he too longed to be near their daughter, and finally he consented to his wife's pleadings. But, after a few years in Ahmic Harbor, Truex decided to homestead again, on a plot nearby. His wife, however, refused to go back to the isolation and hard work of homesteading in her old age—particularly since the money they had gotten from the sale of their old farm was enough to support them in comfort for the rest of their lives. So Truex compromised: he spent the fall and winter in Ahmic Harbor with his family, and lived alone on his new homestead during the spring and summer.

It was Truex's practice to return to his homestead a few days after Memorial Day. It was an American holiday; but though he had become a Canadian citizen many years ago, he still thought of himself as an American. When Memorial Day arrived, he put on his uniform, threw his Civil War rifle over his shoulder, and paraded down the streets of Ahmic Harbor, limping out to the graveyard on the outskirts of the village. There he stood at attention, presented arms, and saluted the dead with a volley. He marched back to the village, singing as he limped:

"John Brown's body lies a'moulderin' in the grave.
John Brown's body lies a'moulderin' in the grave.
John Brown's body lies a'moulderin' in the grave.
His soul goes marchin' on.

"Glory, Glory Hallelujah!
Glory, Glory Hallelujah!
Glory, Glory Hallelujah!
His soul goes marchin' on.

"The stars above in heaven are a'lookin' sadly down.
The stars above in heaven are a'lookin' sadly down.
The stars above in heaven are a'lookin' sadly down.
On the grave of old John Brown.

"Glory, Glory Hallelujah!
Glory, Glory Hallelujah!
Glory, Glory Hallelujah!
His soul goes marchin' on."

IX

This song was a public announcement in Ahmic Harbor that spring had returned. It was Truex's parting song. He was migrating home with the birds. When the leaves began falling from the trees, and the birds flew south in flocks, Truex returned to winter in Ahmic Harbor.

There he spent his time reading. He had all kinds of books, both old and new, and he read through the winter, sitting in front of his glowing pot-bellied stove. He read conscientiously, just the way he plowed his farm, straight up and down, turning the sod over carefully, breaking up all the lumps in the earth. He concentrated on his reading, submerging in it all his senses and thoughts, forgetting everything but his oven and pipe, both of which he kept well stoked. Evenings, Truex harnessed his horse to a sleigh and went for a ride, his dog running happily at the side, over the field and forest.

At first Truex's reading had consisted exclusively of scientific works, mostly in the natural sciences. When he became an atheist he turned to the books of the heretics—these became his new bible. He was a vehement unbeliever; the village church was an abomination to him, and Truex never crossed its threshold on any occasion whatsoever. If he was part of a funeral procession and the

coffin was brought into the church for the last ceremonies, Truex remained outside. As the prospect of his death grew imminent, he drew up a will providing that his body should not be taken into any church, no priest should officiate at his funeral, nor any cross be set up at his grave—these were superstitious symbols and ceremonies, and he despised them. As a self-constituted prophet of atheism, Truex refused to keep quiet. At the old-timers' nightly gatherings in Yudel Brown's store, he publicly branded all religions as superstition, poking fun at the idea of God and his Messiah and the various miracles described in the Old and New Testaments. As proof of the silliness of these popular notions, he cited verse and text from agnostic authorities. The old-timers, despite their dislike of Truex's heterodoxy, were fond of him personally. He was a very social-minded man, the first to help out any person in distress. Any poor widow, any farmer whose luck had run out and whose farm was to be foreclosed, or just any person in trouble—Truex sprang to their aid, canvassing door to door for money donations. The people of Ahmic Harbor forgave Truex his irreligiosity because of his humanity.

It was his atheism that attracted Truex to me. Seeing me sitting in a corner of Yudel Brown's store poring over books and pamphlets that were like Greek to him, he concluded they must be profound works and that I was a good candidate for freethinking. He invited me to visit him at home daily so we could read his books, and talk about them—I would, he assured me, find them to be eye-openers. I agreed, sensing an opportunity to study the English language. For, with all my awareness of the necessity of studying English, I had postponed doing it from year to year. Most of the books Truex and I read together contained nothing new for me, either in their outrageous content or mocking tone. I disliked them, but they did help me learn standard English.

In time Truex became my patron. He had a sharp eye for human character, as well as the ways of nature, and quickly sensed my depression. It was due, he perceived, to a basic hypersensitivity, accompanied by a weakness of will that led me to run from life. He decided to help me. He would teach me the way of the world.

"A man needs a strong will. He has to control his feelings, before they undermine his life. By a strong will, I don't mean any kind of will—there are all kinds, and some are not particularly worthwhile. I mean a will that has its roots in the demands of natural existence—demands that force you to bend all your mental and physical powers to conquer life. For life means battle, open and concealed. Why, just look—the seeds you sow in the earth, they don't all take root. The seeds that do are the victorious—for the seeds fight among themselves, and the stronger use the weaker as fertilizer for themselves. That's nature's way, there's no mercy given or taken—its a law that runs throughout nature, including the human animal. True, human beings have to practice justice, so as not to live like parasites off the death of others—a kind of 'live and let live philosophy'—but any man who lets his will to win deteriorate is lost. Let me tell you something that happened to me in battle.

"Our regiment was sent out to take an enemy position by a bayonet charge. I was fighting in hand to hand combat with an enemy soldier. Our bayonets got stuck together, and neither of us could budge. We stood there, fixed in one position, knowing that the slightest movement, the slightest sign of weakness on the part of either man, would send the other man's bayonet plunging into his chest. We stood that way a long time. Finally, we both stepped back, as though by silent agreement, to attack once again, decisively. You can see what happened—Truex is still alive!

"When I was pioneering I had many similar experiences—I could go on forever. But in general, my friend, that's the secret of life. Take this lesson to heart and live by it. Otherwise, you'll be just another one of those many people who cry but nobody listens."

There were times when Truex invited me to come along with him on his rides. It was mid-winter in northern Ontario. The air was frosty, and the ice particles stung like white-hot needles, but Truex wrapped me up in his fur coat and threw a bear skin over us both. All my aspirations to reform the world, and myself with it, disappeared as we flew over the snow in his sleigh. I wanted to

fly on, without thinking, with no goal, no purpose, no end in sight. A gold-tinted brightness radiated from virgin snow, enveloping fields, meadows and forests. It filled the air with a white clarity, dazzling in a brilliant light not of this world—an emanation from some sublime sphere. I floated in that clarity, while sipping it with every fiber of my soul. It intoxicated me, and I sank in my intoxication in a white dizziness and dissolved in a white dream. The whole world discarded its corporeal substance and emerged a dreamy essence, and as in a dream, like an echo from another world, far, far away, I heard Truex's singing voice:

Dashing through the snow
In a one-horse open sleigh
O'er the fields we go
Laughing all the way.
Bells on Bobtail ring,
Making spirits bright,
Oh, what fun it is to sing
A sleighing song tonight.

X

At Christmas time the lumberjacks in the nearby labor camps came to Ahmic Harbor, either to celebrate the Nativity in the local church and enjoy a week of relaxation and change of scenery, or to stop over in the village on their way home. Their arrival broke the winter quiet of the peaceful village.

The silence was broken, too, by the continual sound of rifle shooting. Every year, in honor of the Yule season, the village innkeeper ran a shooting match. Each contestant paid the innkeeper a fee which entitled him to a volley; those who hit the bull's eye got a prize—either a turkey, or its equivalent in money. All day the air resounded to the shooting and shouting of rifles and riflemen.

Liquor is conducive to merriment. After the contest the contestants all retired to the saloon. A long liquor prohibition was enforced upon them in the camp, and they got roaring drunk at the first opportunity. The lumberjacks sang and danced to the accompaniment of mandolin and harmonica. Whiskey being a lubricant of long-suppressed contentiousness, old friends who had begun by toasting one another ended up yelling and fighting, and the Nativity of the Prince of Peace became blood-stained.

Truex and Tom saw to it that the lumberjacks, long isolated from society, were provided with social, in addition to liquid, pleasures. They arranged barn dances for them. The barn where the dances took place was like paradise to them, and, like that entrance, it was guarded by an angel with a flaming sword, in the form of Truex, and his cudgel, who with sharp eyes and sensitive nose would discern the drunkard and wave him aside—and there was no gainsaying the cudgel. The result was that even the most dedicated drinkers stayed sober the night of the dance. The daughters of Eve were worth the sacrifice.

These barn dances were climaxed by an evening of a dramatic performance and lecture. Truex and Tom were assisted in preparations for that event by Becky, a Scotch schoolmistress in a nearby village. Becky was responsible for the dramatic performance. She began working a full two months before Christmas, visiting Ahmic Harbor on certain evenings to direct the play she had selected as proper for the occasion. Becky had excellent taste; she was meticulous about having every movement and gesture of face and body both vital and natural. She worked with the actors to avoid any trace of artifice.

But there was always a problem finding a satisfactory lecturer. Very few people in the region were both literate and capable of public speaking. Of course, a priest was available—but you didn't dare mention his name to Truex; if a priest spoke, you could count him out.

However, that year Truex found a lecturer who met his qualifications—myself. He proposed my name to Tom and Becky, and they immediately invited me. But Becky didn't care for the subject I suggested—"The Autocratic Government of Czarist Russia." Instead Becky proposed that I speak on "The Jews and Their Religion." Truex was at first opposed to this subject—in his view Judaism was no different from any other religion, all equally being based on lies and deception. Finally, Truex gave in. For Becky argued cogently that the only Jews in the region were itenerant peddlers who made the rounds of the farms and work camps. Since these peddlers were occasionally caught in the act

of cheating, and people tended to generalize and attribute that action of individuals to their religion, permitting them to cheat a non-Jew, and the audience would almost certainly hold some lumberjacks and farmers who had anti-Semitic prejudices, my speech could enlighten them as to the true nature of Judaism, and that would be a fine thing.

I hesitated to accept the invitation. I had never lectured in public before, and I was timid about my faulty English. But Truex insisted that I should accept, and advised me to write my lecture and deliver it from script and I finally agreed.

So I began working on the lecture. I had lost my faith and did not want to elaborate on theological tenets in which I no longer believed. So I decided to talk about the social ideas in Judaism. I extracted typical excerpts from the Bible containing attacks on the moral deterioration of public and private life, as well as selections urging the reformation of society into a kingdom of righteousness, justice, and lovingkindness. I wove in illustrations and images of my own in the style of the King James translation of the Bible. I practiced the lecture until I was quite fluent in it.

But when I got up on the stage that evening and spread the pages of my speech on the lectern before me to read them, I suddenly was struck dumb. It wasn't stage fright; it was simply that I recognized that my lecture contained nothing to interest this audience, either in content or language. I was about to fold up the pages, stick them in my pocket, and descend from the platform when my eyes met those of Truex and Becky, looking at me half in remonstration, half in pleading. I couldn't deny that look. So I stayed where I was and began to speak—not my prepared speech, but spontaneously:

"Many centuries ago there lived a great Jewish poet called Ibn Gabirol. This poet was in love—in love with God. To Him he composed many hymns of praise. The most beautiful of these hymns was one he called 'The Crown of Kingship' and the most precious jewel in that crown was a verse that I should like to translate freely for you from the Hebrew. It goes:

You are God, and all your creatures serve You,
And your glory is none the less for those who
serve others, than You,
Because the aim of all men is to aspire to You.

"These lines are a beacon of truth piercing the darkness in which human thoughts grope in search of a way of life. I, who stand before you this evening, am one of the descendants of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I have been raised and educated in the Mosaic faith. You who hear me affirm the Christian faith. And in this wide world of ours there are countless millions of others who adhere to still other religions. If you were to ask me which is the *true* religion, I should answer, 'They are all true. For they all aspire to God, and aspiration is all.' We are all of us like a man lost in dense forest who finds his way out with a pocket compass. Every religion is such a compass for men astray in the world. The compasses are all different, but all have one thing in common: they help us to indicate our positions in the labyrinth of life and chart a course to the mysterious exit—an exit which is also the mysterious entrance—that we call God. So, if we see a man prostrate on the road, astray in the labyrinth of life, let us not ask him which compass he uses. Let us rather help him to get up. If he is hungry, let us give him bread; if he is thirsty, water; if he is hurt, let us bind up his wounds; and then let us send him on his way, wherever it may lead. Let us not force him to follow the direction that *our* compass points to. Let him go and let *his* God be with *him*. Yes, my friends, every religion serves as a compass for men. Even a freethinker, a man like our good friend Truex, has a compass of his own, though he does not call it religion. His compass too indicates his position and helps him to charter a course and he is moving toward the same common exit as the rest of us, though he does not call it by the name of God.

"I am a Jew. Perhaps some of you have never seen a Jew before in your life. Look at me: I am a creature no different from you—a human being like you, bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh.

"The English nation has a wonderful poet, a man called Shakes-

peare, and he created a Jewish character called Shylock in one of his plays. Now Shakespeare did not know any Jews, and this ignorance led him to produce a faulty portrait of Shylock. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's poetic genius illuminated the depths of Shylock, whom he has cry out in despair:

" 'I am a Jew: Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?'

"Take these simple words to heart—simple but lofty in their simplicity. And when you meet a Jew, think of these words and remove from your hearts the suspicious hostility that his strangeness may arouse in you.

"Think of these words if you meet a Jew who is not a decent person—say, a cheating peddler. Remember that the Jew is a human being, too, with the same passions as other human beings—and not every man can master his passions at all times. Every social group contains people who because of circumstances or the weakness of their own personality cannot master their passions. They become corrupt and immoral. We Jews have persons like that in our group—we are no worse or better in this respect than any other group. But no group is responsible for all the individuals in it; they are responsible for themselves, as individuals.

"I am not trying to justify any peddler who cheats, just because he happened to be born a Jew. Still, you must remember that the will to survive is very strong, and it makes people commit transgressions for a piece of bread. That's all most of these peddlers make—just enough for a piece of bread—and sometimes they have to cheat to earn it.

"There is something else you must remember: many people are waiting to share this one's piece of bread, people the peddler leaves far behind—wives, and children, and old folks brought over from the Other Side, all dependent on this one man. And

sometimes the piece of bread has to be even broken up and sent across the ocean to poor relations.

"But you may ask: 'Why do they pick on peddling and storekeeping and trades like that—why don't they do good hard physical labor, like us? It's not their fault, friends, you mustn't hold it against them. Peddling and storekeeping and the like don't come naturally to us—originally we were a people of farmers and skilled workers when we lived in our own country. Open up your Bibles and you'll read all about Jews tending vineyards and working as craftsmen and laborers. We were forced off the land and out of the crafts for many centuries—and the work of centuries can't be repaired in a few years. Business occupations which we were forced into have become second nature to us.

"Still, let me tell you that not all the Jews in the New World are peddlers and storekeepers. In New York and Boston I've personally seen tens of thousands of Jews working in factories and shops, and here in Northwest Canada there are pioneer Jewish farmers. Have a little patience, friends! America has given us a wonderful gift—freedom. Let freedom work! It will heal the wounds made in our bodies and souls in the course of centuries of persecution and humiliation, till we become like you, fine upright toiling people.

"Friends, American freedom was bought very dear by your forefathers, not that you should possess it alone, but that you should share it with others, with those who come to live in your midst. If you limit the rights of others, you limit American freedom. You may think to yourselves: 'He's a foreigner, who is he to tell us how valuable freedom is, and how to guard it? But it's the prisoner let out of jail after years of imprisonment who most appreciates the meaning of freedom that we take for granted. I am just a released prisoner, my friends. I came here from Russia where my people are repressed and deprived of basic human rights. I have been in this free country for six years, yet I am still impressed by the freedom of America every hour of the day—I bless it and I bless those who gave it to me. Here I stand, a lone Jew before an audience of non-Jews, gentiles, and I can speak to you as a

friend, I can say whatever I want, and you all listen to me with patience, even, if I am not mistaken, with interest. Is that surprising to you? To me it is the most surprising thing in the world. I never would have been able to do that where I come from. Even more: here I can walk down the street in a non-Jewish village and on the roads in its outskirts and meet someone who is not Jewish. We say hello to one another, even if we never met before—and I'm not afraid of him. There's no sign of dislike or contempt in his face—just good will and friendliness. That's another very surprising thing to me.

"Now I have told you what was in my heart, and it is time for me to leave the platform. I am thankful to you for listening to me, and to those who arranged for me to speak. I thank you all from Ahmic Harbor for your wonderful hospitality. I pray to God it may continue. You English love the Bible; the Old Testament is sacred to you, as well as the New, and the chief commandment in the Old Testament is to love the stranger. How human the explanation is! 'For ye know the soul of the stranger, inasmuch as ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.' This commandment is incumbent upon all of us. We are all strangers in the land, wayfarers lodged for a brief lifespan. We are all strangers, but brother strangers, in the words of the last prophet to rise in Israel, who concluded prophecy and summarized its teaching in the following words: 'Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us all? Why should we scorn one another?' "

I finished. The audience was a blur to me, I could only make out two faces: the face of Truex, every wrinkle and furrow beaming with satisfaction, which he accentuated by pounding his cane on the floor, and the beaming face of Becky, who presided at this evening. Becky took my hand and shook it hard, a gracious smile on her lips, two teardrops hanging from her eyelashes.

XI

Besides running a store in Ahmic Harbor, Yudel Brown lent money to villagers and farmers. His rates were low, so he was generally preferred to the other lenders in the area. Yudel still remembered his early years as an itinerant peddler when he used to walk miles to earn a few cents. Now, the notes in his drawer, symbolizing as they did his rise in the world, were worth more to him than all the merchandise in the store. He took them out, studied them, computed their value in comparison with the property serving as collateral, and felt like a landed gentleman surveying his estate. After each heart attack he hurried to inspect his notes again. While inspecting them he was cast in gloom: the notes were sound, but could not be exchanged for a sound heart! As he folded them up and replaced them in his drawer he did so with the consoling thought that, at least, his wife and children would be provided for when he was gone.

Yudel Brown had agreed to lend Becky's father some money, his farm to serve as collateral. Now he asked me to come along with him on a trip of inspection. I was glad to go—it offered me an opportunity to see Becky again. We were going on Sunday, when she would be sure to be at home. Ever since the evening

of my speech, Becky had been in my thoughts, in all her grace and charm. I could still feel the warmth of her handshake. I had thought of going to visit her in the village where she taught, but on second thought it occurred to me, "What will the Browns think of their shohet and Hebrew teacher visiting a gentile girl?" So I leaped at the chance to see Becky under unexceptionable auspices.

We drove to Becky's home by sleigh; the driver took a short cut over the frozen Lake Ahmic and Magnetewan River. Lake Ahmic, blanketed with a layer of virgin snow was ablaze with the golden sunshine strewn like a sparkling gold dust upon its white surface. Entering its wooded enclosure was like being transformed into a sublime sphere. It radiated an ethereal whiteness which infiltrated to the heart, diffused in the body, and disseminated a sensation of physical lightness, a feeling of hovering in the air.

Having crossed the lake and entered the domain of the Magnetewan River, skirted on its banks with a thick snow-covered primeval forest, it seemed like a passage-way to a legendary wonderland where winter resides in a charmed white castle. It is there also that Becky resides—Becky in her wintry white purity.

The house where Becky lived was a simple one, not particularly large, seeming to shrink in contrast with the high, wide barn standing next to it. It made a poor outward appearance. The log walls contracted under the sharply inclined roof. Nor was the house prepossessing on the inside; the floors and walls were of unpainted wooden boards, most of the furniture consisted of plain wooden practical objects made by the master of the house, and the few that had the semblance of artisan workmanship were dilapidated. Still, everything about the house had a modest beauty: the floor fairly shone, testifying to the constant scrubbing and cleaning of a zealous housekeeper; a mountainous Scotch landscape was displayed on a rug attached to the wall, the multi-colored embroidery dazzled cheerfully in the winter light and Sunday calm of the household.

As we stepped into the house the fresh warmth of the fireplace beat into our faces. The members of the household were seated at the dining room table, listening to the master of the house read

from a large Bible. He was a man of late middle age; hard work had roughened his face and scattered white hairs through his red beard. He was wearing an odd-looking striped shirt, whose pleats ran down to his knees, and an embroidered fringed jacket reaching to his thighs—this was the Scottish dress he had taken with him to Canada as his Sunday best. He had worn it for years, and it was shabby and faded, but he wore it with the dignity of a priest in his sacred vestments. Becky's father read from the Bible in a festive voice, which he raised and lowered according to the nature of the sentiments expressed in the sacred text. The members of his household listened in pious silence. Having finished the portion of that Sunday, he shut the Bible with a kiss and turned to us.

Our host greeted us cordially, then descended to the cellar, whence he returned with a fat jug of apple cider. He invited us to share it with him. Becky brought out glasses and the master poured the glowing liquor, and its aroma volatilized in the warmth of the house. He deprecated the cider: Canadian was nothing like Scotch cider, where you could actually taste the winds and the mists of the Scotch highlands. Still, though he was the one to say so, you had to admit that this was the next best thing, since it had been made by a Scotsman—they were the only ones who knew the secret of brewing good liquor. It wasn't too bad, after all. As we drank, our host apologized for not having received us properly when we came in: it was his practice never to interrupt a reading of the Holy Scriptures, come what may. There was no need for him to tell *us* how holy the Bible was, and with what devotion it must be treated. We were the children of the Old Covenant, who had given God's sacred book to the world. Bible reading was a tradition he had carried with him across the ocean from Scotland; it was particularly important to observe it in the New Country, as a bridge with Old Country tradition.

Canada, our host went on to say, was a fine big country, but you could never compare it with Scotland. All of Scotland was beautiful, and the highlands were the most beautiful part of all. You might say it was the original Garden of Eden. Of course the good Lord had transferred the Garden of Eden from earth to

heaven after Adam and Eve's primal transgression, for the pious to enjoy its delights after their death. Still, a vestige of that divine glory remained—in Scotland. Why, then, we might well ask, had he ever left paradisical Scotland to move to Canada? It was the curse of Cain! Fratricide—one of those feuds between clans that make Scotch history so bloody. A feud was behind his coming here. This was how it was:

"We were four brothers, myself, the eldest, and my two middle brothers were married, the youngest still a bachelor. We all worked side by side on our father's farm, sharing each according to his need, no man covetous of any other. The fame of our farm spread through the countryside as a model traditional Scotch household where the master's word is gospel. They say a man's house is his castle—that was certainly true of Father. He was king of his household and farm, and we all obeyed him. When he grew old he retained control of the house and entrusted the domain of the farm to the youngest of us—not because he was the favorite son, but because he was the best farmer of the four brothers. Our farm improved from year to year. There wasn't another farm in all the Scotch highlands like the McBride Farm—one as fertile, as peaceable.

"In time my youngest brother fell in love with a girl from a lowland clan with which our clan had been feuding almost from the beginning of history—the feud growing more terrible every generation. Father had a terrible temper, and God help the man who had to bear the brunt of his anger. But the youngest son fell in love with a girl from the clan with whom the McBrides were feuding. He told Father that he loved this girl and had decided to marry her. Father swore outright that if his son were to marry a daughter of that enemy clan, Father would send him out of the house at once, and disinherit him when he died. But, dead or alive, Father's curse would cling to him and his seed throughout all the generations.

"But my brother had a temper, too. He swore that whether or not he married the girl, he would have nothing more to do with this house and this farm, now and forevermore—he was leaving

and would never return. He packed his things, threw the bundle over his shoulder, and left the same day.

"For a few years my brother went from place to place hiring out as a farm worker, unable to settle down in any one farm. The rest of the family tried to make peace between father and son, but they were as obstinate as they were hotheaded. Father insisted that his son could come back if he gave up the idea of marrying the girl, and our brother replied that he would return only on condition that Father gave up his opposition to the marriage. All our intercessions were in vain. Meanwhile, our brother disappeared, and his whereabouts were unknown.

"Our father was a man of powerful body and mind, seeming in a marvelous fashion to grow stronger with age. But a short time after his youngest son disappeared, Father took to his bed and died. With our brother gone, the farm began to deteriorate. While Father was still alive and we worked shoulder to shoulder, we were able to eke out a meagre livelihood. But with Father gone, we could no longer get along. We began to find fault with one another, every man thinking he was pulling harder than the others, and receiving too small a share. Seeing that we were doomed to bankruptcy if things continued this way, we divided up our heritage, each of us taking possession of his share of the property.

"Our farm was small; when divided into three parts, each of us had his input doubled and his output halved, and we all had a hard time making ends meet. The years passed, children were born and grew up, our needs growing with them, and we became slaves to our farms. There was no word from our youngest brother, it was as though he had sunk into the sea like lead.

"Finally, we received official word from the Ontario Provincial Government in Canada that our youngest brother who had settled in northern Ontario many years before had died. He had left me his property and money for traveling expenses, which would be sent me on receipt of my agreement to emigrate to Canada and maintain his property. He had remained a bachelor to the day of his death, and concentrated on developing his farm—he had a natural love of the land and devoted all his passion to it. I was

in a dilemma: it was hard to leave my native Scotland, harder still to leave the farm where I had been born and reared. The place where you spend most of your life becomes a part of you, and leaving it behind is like abandoning your own body. Still, I did not hesitate very long. I divided my property between my two other brothers, took my family, and sailed off to Canada."

Our host lowered his head and was silent, a cloud of melancholy resting on his face. Then he continued:

"The wise man learns from experience. The farm I had inherited from my dead brother was large, but I had grown-up sons and I wanted them to continue the family tradition and remain farmers. I was afraid that if the family farm were divided among my sons after my death, there would not be enough to maintain each of them. They might decide to abandon their heritage. Luckily, there was a farm as large as mine adjacent to it and for sale. I bought it; now there is enough land to support my children and grandchildren. That is why I am applying to you, Mr. Brown, for a loan. I am mortgaging my own farm—including its building, animals and tools—to pay for the land I have bought."

Becky's father went off with Yudel Brown to show him the property he was offering as collateral for his loan—he assured Yudel that it was worth double the value of the loan he requested.

Becky took me to see her study. All the walls were lined with bookcases, containing mostly books of poetry, of which Becky was particularly fond. The portraits above the bookcases were of famous poets and musicians. The study held a small piano, and next to it a book rack overflowing with piano and vocal music. While her father and Yudel Brown were negotiating a loan, Becky and I negotiated an exchange of tutoring. She wanted to learn Hebrew so as to be able to read the Bible in the original, as it had been spoken by the Lord's prophets. The Bible was holy to Becky for two reasons: first of all, it contained divine tradition; and secondly, it treasured divine poetry, poetry that had been the foundation of English and American verse. Becky sensed that the King James translation of the Bible had captured the beauties of the Hebrew original only in part, and she wanted to secure access to the

complete text. So she offered, if I was willing, to give her one lesson in Hebrew a week, to come to my home—the village where she was schoolmistress was quite near Ahmic Harbor. She could repay me either in money or in kind—a weekly lesson in classic English poetry. She had sensed my poetic inclinations from my Christmas lecture—there was nothing like English poetry to help me develop my latent gift.

Becky's father and Yudel Brown returned from their tour of the farm. We gathered from the look of satisfaction on their faces that negotiations had concluded satisfactorily. So had my own with Becky—I accepted the second alternative, to study English poetry. Yudel Brown was tired and fearful of a heart attack. He asked permission to lie down on a couch opposite Becky's study to rest. Becky's father readily agreed; he was in a good mood and asked Becky to sing some Scotch songs, to her own piano accompaniment. Like Scotch liquor, Scotch songs, he asserted, were incomparable. Becky consented and entertained us with several ballads. She concluded her impromptu recital with several of the songs of Robert Burns, of whom she was particularly fond. In the creeping dusk of the brief winter's Sunday, the lilt of Burns' farewell to Scotland rang through the house in northern Ontario:

> Farewell to Highlands, farewell to the North,
> The birth-place of valor, the country of worth,
> Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,
> The Hills of the Highlands forever I love.

XII

Becky was a beautiful girl. Her hair, burnished red like the color of the maple leaf in the fall, was combed straight back and tied together at the nape with an evenly plaited knot. Her features were harmoniously shaped, though not of the chiseled type; her smile was modest, open, and frank. Becky's eyes were a bright, clear blue: "Here I am," they seemed to say, "take me or leave me, just as I am." She was slender, but vigorous. Becky walked quietly with a slow pace, expressive of a sense of stability she had inherited from generations of country people, secure on their land.

Though sensitive, Becky was not emotional. She had a strong streak of clear, straightforward common sense, which protected her from over-intellectuality. She loved poetry, and all the English poets. But, typically, she preferred Robert Burns, the Scotsman, to all the rest. In her view, most of the others were poets of the book—they did not live their poetry. Whereas Burns, the farmer, lived *in* nature and *in* life; he lived his poetry. There was simplicity in it—and that, she said, is what makes true poetry. Burns' very lack of "civilization" was his virtue. For, being over-civilized is a fault in poetry, as it is in life. Becky had seen this to be true from her own experience. She had left country life to secure an education, which she considered indispensable both to improve the world and to sublimate her own life. But she had come to the

realization that urban life was a falling off from, rather than an improvement of, life in the country. Now she was about to return home—to her roots and the roots of her fathers, the good earth, the source of all life.

Becky made a wonderful teacher. She stripped every poem of its figurative enclosure and bared its basic idea and emotion. The essence of the poem shone forth in a fresh—and true—light. A brave new world opened up for me: Becky made English poetry perfectly lucid, human, close to the reader—I felt completely at home in it.

Meanwhile, Becky was making rapid progress in her study of Hebrew. Showing remarkable grasp and powers of concentration, before long she was able to read the Assyrian script. She knew the Bible very well in its English translation, where it was as much a part of her intellectual background as was English poetry. Still, the Hebrew original of the beloved classic was a great revelation. Becky was struck with the beauty of every idiom. Paradoxically, this contact with the Semitic roots of Christianity produced some consternation in the even tenor of Becky's life. There was a trace of sadness in the cast of her features, a sadness that even intruded into her smile. A certain confusion showed itself in her movements, an insecurity expressing unease of spirit.

Becky and I were strongly attracted to one another. The days between our weekly meetings were a lifetime of waiting for me. My life was torn from my past and future and like a grey gossamer hovering in the air on an early autumn morning, quivering in its chill, it drifted towards Becky, yearning for her radiance and warmth.

XIII

In the northern Ontario countryside, the end of winter is a harder period than winter itself. As the days grow longer and animals stir, sensing the coming of spring, a flurry of storms and frosts make a last, belated appearance. It is a second winter cycle and within its span is compressed winter in its entirety, with its full force and fury. However, it is of short duration. Early spring begins to encrouch and the snow begins to melt. At this time of the year, the roads around Ahmic Harbor are in bad condition. Communication between Ahmic Harbor and the neighboring villages and farms by snowshoe and dogsled continues for a time. But eventually, it becomes impossible to travel, and Ahmic Harbor is completely isolated, with nothing coming in and nothing going out.

This isolation produced a kind of enforced Sabbath quiet. In Yudel Brown's store the gatherings lasted from early in the morning till late at night. Conversation revolved around such purely local speculation as when the snows would vanish, the ice would melt from the rivers, the first ship would be sailing into the port from Burks Falls, and the earth would be dry enough for spring plowing.

The year I was in Ahmic Harbor Yudel and Julia Brown suffered a great hardship. It was a Leap Year according to the Jewish calendar, and the packages of matzoth that they had ordered from Toronto, as was their annual custom, lay in the railroad station at Burks Falls, a one-day trip from Ahmic Harbor—and there was no way of getting to them. All public transportation had stopped. The matzoth were indispensable for celebration of the Passover holiday. Besides, they represented an important symbol for the Brown family: they were their contact not only with the Jewish religious tradition, but also with the Jewish community of Toronto —and here the matzoth lay in Burks Falls, inaccessible.

Out of sympathy for the Browns, I volunteered to go to Burks Falls on foot and fetch the matzoth. It was terribly hard struggling through the slushy snow, your legs sank with every step, the soft snow offering no proper foothold. Still I enjoyed the trip. For, plunging through the snow, I sensed spring in the air. The trees were turning green, the sun shone soft, and early robins back from their distant migrations sang in the treetops. The approach of spring and the Passover holiday filled me with joy. I was delighted to be able to return to Ahmic Harbor with the package of matzoth strapped to my back, bringing heart's ease to the Browns.

Traditionally, those who perform a righteous deed can suffer no harm. Apparently, this refers only to those who do good deeds for pious considerations. I, having acted out of humanitarian motives and foolishly gone unprotected against the elements, was seized on my return with the same fits of coughing that I had brought with me from Boston to Ahmic Harbor. Sitting down at the Passover seder table and reading the Haggadah in the prescribed loud and cheery voice, I found myself growing hoarse. My voice sounded hollow as though it was coming out of a deep, empty jug. The cough stayed with me through the week-long holiday, and after. The spring sun dried the soggy earth, the grass sprouted, flowers bloomed, the air warmed up—but my cough grew worse, rather than better. Julia Brown lavished attention on me, but none of her home-grown remedies helped.

About that time Truex was getting ready to leave Ahmic

Harbor to summer at his farm. He invited me to stay with him for a few weeks. He was sure the visit would rid me of the cough —his farm was in the middle of a pine forest, and the smell of pines was an infallible cure for winter sickness. Truex knew that from his own experience. He had often left Ahmic Harbor with a hacking cough, only to lose it after a few days at his farm.

At first I hesitated, for the usual reason: "What would the Browns think of a pious shohet, staying at a gentile's house? But when Julia heard about the invitation, she volunteered to supply me with kosher food and vessels, enabling me to accept.

XIV

Truex had good reason to be fond of his farm. He had built himself a miniature paradise in the midst of the northern Ontario forest. He lived in a log cabin smelling of newly cut trees; the cabin gave the effect of literally growing out of the forest. There were two wings: one contained its kitchen, dining and sleeping quarters for himself and occasional visitors. But most of the house consisted of a large living room, with a brick fireplace that took up the front wall. Above the cornice hung horned deer heads, projecting magnificently from the wall. The walls on either side of the room were covered with the skins of deer, bears, and wildcats, hanging alongside an assortment of rifles. This gave the house a woodsy, outdoors feeling. Around the fireplace and all along the walls stood couches and easy chairs; in the middle of the room a huge table containing a variety of urns and pipes of different shapes gave the place the feeling of a museum.

Truex's farm stood alone in the middle of the dense forest and on a clearing in the form of an elongated quadrangle that stretched from the lake bank, sloping in the middle to a ravine in which a murmuring brook wound its course. Part of the farm was set aside for beds of flowers and vegetables; on the remainder Truex grew

fodder which he transported to Ahmic Harbor at the end of the summer. Truex was a man of the soil, and he kept farmer's hours, working from sunrise to noon every day. After lunch and a nap he went fishing or hunting. When he shot a deer he skinned it, cut it into chunks, salted and packed the flesh, and put it at the bottom of his well to keep cold. Evenings Truex spent milking his cow, cooking dinner, and tending to the household needs. After supper he sprawled out before the glowing fire, pipe in mouth, an open book in his hand. That hour of intellectual relaxation was worth more to Truex than an eternity in the Hereafter he so vehemently denied.

I tremendously enjoyed my stay at the farm. The peaceful landscape flooded me with a sense of purity and well-being.

Saturday night we had a welcome visitor. It was Becky, whom Truex had invited for the week-end. She was careful not to betray her feelings toward me in conversation. Becky kept busy cooking, baking, and tidying up the house, pretending all the time to be indifferent to my presence. Even when we were alone walking in the forest or fishing on the river, she spoke only of trees, flowers, animals, and other natural objects with which she was at home. Or else she discussed her favorite poets and Biblical characters whom she now saw in a new light. I sensed her caution and exercised a similar restraint to conceal my own feelings.

The next week-end Becky came again. I was sad; it was hard leaving a place where I had spent two weeks of unmitigated pleasure. With Becky's arrival my sadness deepened. It meant the end of our meetings. The village school where Becky taught released the children in the spring, and Becky was about to return to the family farm until the fall term.

Becky and I returned on Sunday evening from a boat ride on the lake and we were both cast in a nostalgic gloom: tomorrow morning we would part till the end of summer. Sitting side by side, rowing together, as though by unspoken agreement we turned to the longest way home, rowing along the wooded lake shore. The twilight blaze in the west dimmed. The inflamed cloudlets glimmered like dying embers. The violet of the sky faded in a hazy

lavender. The trees skirting the shore gazed at their reflection in the crystal-clear water and saddened; the twilight gold that decorated their foliage faded away. A deep silence pervaded the lake and its bordering forest and it resounded with a faint twittering of birds, accompanied by a quacking of a wild goose late in returning from a hunting hike to its night shelter.

Becky began to sing one of Robert Burns' songs, as her voice vibrated with heartstrings tremors:

> Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,
> Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise:
> My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,
> Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.

Tears came to Becky's eyes, and she stopped. Lowering her head, she sat silent. Finally, she recovered her self-control and with eyes and voice lowered ruminated, as though talking to herself:

"If Mary in her grave heard this song that her lover composed in her memory, how sweet her dreams were! Poor girl—to die in the prime of life! Poor? Perhaps not. Robert Burns gave her immortality. She was lucky to die carrying her love with her to the grave. It is the one who has to kill her love while she herself lives on who is really to be pitied. I envy Mary—I wish I could share her fate."

The barriers of religion and culture, race and birth, heritage and tradition, were leveled. All special considerations disappeared; the consequences did not matter. Past and future merged in a present, newly created, a timeless reality. Only I and she exist in this reality, and we stand in awe before its godly revelation, its eternity. Our souls flutteringly embrace each other, yearning to fuse into oneness, moaning in pain and bliss, in anguish and exhilaration.

At last we gave utterance to the secret concealed in our hearts—a sacred secret, universal, perpetual, from eternity to eternity.

XV

It was a stormy night. Trees in the forest bordering Truex's cabin, swept by the whirlwind, swayed violently and rustled tempestuously. Branches crackled and cracked. The lake seethed and foamed with rage. Sprawling full-length on a couch near the fire, Truex talked on, sucking at his pipe.

"As I have said, the bookworm thinks he can squeeze life between two book covers—all he has to do is contract it. But it just can't be done. The only thing a bookworm puts into a book are life's illusory reflections. He thinks that books supply him with life-nourishment; actually he feeds on book dust and rot. Life can't be squeezed into any book, nor can you make it serve the purposes of any philosophy—I don't care how grand it is. Life mocks both the philosophers and their philosophy, simply ignores them, pushes them out of the way. The reformers live somewhere off in a special world of their own that has nothing to do with real life, in a Hereafter that will be neither here nor after.

"Life has its own teaching; it can be learned in a minute. Live life for its own sake, for the pleasure of living not for any ulterior motives beyond life. The aim of life is not to have an aim. This is a simple truth, so simple that people find it hard to accept. But,

at the same time, life means ceaseless battle, the survival of the fittest, the strongest—pity the weak loser!—so the enjoyment of life means the enjoyment of the fruits of victory, which come only to the winner."

The wind suddenly stopped, a deep silence permeated the atmosphere, followed by a flash of lightening, followed immediately by a second and a third, pressing close on one another's heels. Each flash tore a brilliant zig-zag through the air. At the end came a peal of thunder that left our ears humming.

Truex got off his couch and poked around among the embers to uncover the live coals. He threw some fresh wood on the coal bed, and when they had caught fire lay down on the couch again and went on.

"You know, of course, I've not been talking just to hear the sound of my voice. I'd like to give you some good advice. I'm your friend and I feel it's my duty. But before I begin let me tell you what your weakness is. My friend, you've got a timid heart, you run away from the battle of life, you're afraid to fight. You willingly give up the things that are men's due in life, just so you won't have to accept responsibility. You're not like the other bookworms—you really love life, want to enjoy it; you know you can't put, or find, life in a book. Books aren't a substitute for life for you. They're a temporary refuge, where you think you can recover your strength before going out to fight again. But if you postpone your departure from that refuge, if you stay with your books too long, the end will be you'll get stuck in them, whether you know it or not, and you'll end up a bookworm like all the rest, living off book dust and rot.

"You're a reformer, you believe in socialism. But this is simply an unconscious transposition of a failing in yourself you've refused to admit: you haven't been able to take your place in the world, to sink roots in it, because you've lacked the will. Now you're supposed to be preparing for a university and professional training; but at the rate you're going, you won't really settle down in life—you'll just turn to some other book and some other reforming delusion."

It was raining hard outside. Truex cleaned out his pipe and relit it. Sucking at it, he said:

"You may argue that there's nothing you can do about it. 'That's my nature,' you'll say. No such thing. Psychologically, the distinction between natural instinct and habit is very vague; many things ordinarily considered to be natural instinct are really nothing but habit. A person who may be under the strong influence of a bad habit should adopt a good habit that's exactly the opposite of the bad one, and it will counteract its influence. It all depends on will power. That's your solution, too, my friend. You've been running away from the battle of life. What you must do is rush right into it, into the hardest part of it—fight, fight to make a place for yourself!

"Listen to me. Settle down here, on the plot next to mine. Become a pioneer farmer. All this land around here is free for the taking: clear it, work it for five years, and the government will give it to you in perpetuity. You may think you're not strong enough to do that kind of hard physical labor. Listen to what Truex says: it's not brute strength that counts, but strength of mind, and that comes from the will. If you will it, you can be strong—if you don't will it, you stay weak. I once had a weak body, too, and look at me now. I'm an old man, but hard work has kept me as strong as I ever was.

"Listen to me, and I'll help you. With the help of our friend Tom I'll build you a house and a barn. If you don't have the money for the tools and the implements, I'll lend it to you, and you can pay me back when you have it. I'll teach you the work, too. All you need is to find someone to be the mistress of the house, and I guess you'll find a wife among your own people who'll be willing to go along with you and be a helpmate. If not, you can always find a girl around here—you're an enlightened man, and you know that distinctions of religion and nationality need not be a stumbling block in the way of people who love one another."

A red flush suffused Becky's face. I guessed what was in her heart from the feeling that filled my own.

The rain moderated. It fell gently off the roof of Truex's cabin, on the tree tops, and into the lake, happily foretelling the approach of a luxuriant summer. My heart sang within me.

XVI

The Jewish peddlers who made the rounds of the farmsteads and work camps in northern Ontario those days were variously treated. Some of the farmers enjoyed contact with the visitors, who broke up the monotony of isolated rural existence. Other farmers disliked the Jewish peddlers whom they suspected of having designs on their wives and daughters. Still, however suspicious a farmer might be, he was sure to greet the strangers with the traditional backwoods hospitality. The only exception in this respect was a man called Hyman who made peddlers keep their distance from his farm. He sicked his wolf hounds on any chance visitor, who would be lucky to escape whole. A number of Jewish peddlers took up the challenge, but were forced to retreat, flying on bitten legs. They, in turn, warned the new peddlers to steer a wide path around the Hyman farm as he was not a Hyman but a Haman!

But one day a farmer passing through Ahmic Harbor delivered a letter to me from that very Jew-baiter Hyman. It was an invitation to be good enough to visit Hyman at his farm—he needed my help on a very urgent matter. Would I tell the bearer of the letter what day would be most convenient for me—Hyman would send one of his sons to fetch me to the farm, and to return me

home the next day. My curiosity was aroused. What in the world did the anti-Semite want of me, of all people? I sent him a return letter agreeing to visit him and setting a date. On the appointed day one of his sons, a middle-aged man, picked me up and drove me to the Hyman family farm in his two-horse carriage. We drove very fast; on the way Hyman's son talked of various matters, finally getting to the subject of his father.

Father Hyman was a pioneer in this area, one of the first settlers—and the best. In his youth he had a powerful body and spirit, both. Now in his old age, he seemed to be as vigorous as ever physically. He was like a mighty oak tree, whose strength increases with age. Plowing, reaping, chopping down a tree or taming a wild foal—no youngster could keep up with Father Hyman. But since Mother had died, Father had stopped working the farm, and had fallen into a depression. For long hours on end he sits alone in a corner of the house or some isolated spot outdoors, not answering questions. If anyone asks him what to do, he just waves his hand: "Do what you want!" Something crazy had gotten hold of Father; and he knew, though he wouldn't explain why, that Father had summoned me for no good reason. He asked me to excuse Father in advance for calling me on a wild goose chase.

I reached the farm toward evening to find the old man standing at the gate waiting for me. Chasing away his howling dogs, he greeted me and took me into the house. His son was right: this was a man like a mighty oak, indeed, but stooped and was growing downward. His face was leathery, hard, and lined, the roughness emphasized by a stubby, grey beard. His eyes were dead and frozen, but reflected an inner anguish and stared with a dumb plea for mercy. The moment I laid my eyes on Hyman my heart was touched. I sympathized with the man, despite his reputation as a second Haman among the Jewish peddlers.

It was Sunday, and all Hyman's sons and daughters, with their wives, husbands, and children, had foregathered in the family homestead for Sunday dinner. After introducing me all around, Hyman invited me to sit next to him for the meal. The dinner was

preceded by a solemn grace. Throughout the meal the family conversation was limited to two subjects: farm life, and the sermon they had heard in church that day.

But Hyman sat silent and morose throughout the lively conversation, barely tasting his food, urging me now and then to try the dishes that he understood Jews were allowed to eat. I was amazed: here was a man who never permitted a Jewish peddler anywhere near his property who knew accurately just what foods pious Jews could and could not eat!

When dinner was over, Hyman took me up to a room on the second floor, and locking the door behind us, made himself comfortable in one armchair and bade me sit in the armchair opposite him. He took out his pipe, filled it, lit it, and began puffing hard. After a moment, he said, his voice trembling, "I am a Jew."

"A Jew?" I looked at him closely through the smoke screen he had set up with his pipe.

Hyman began speaking Yiddish.

"Yes, that's what I said. I'm a Jew—a renegade Jew, but a Jew nevertheless. I've troubled you to come here to ask you to do me a favor. I'm an old man who wants to rejoin the Jewish community —I left it because of circumstances beyond my control. I heard about you from Truex, my old neighbor, who visited me recently. I've decided to ask you to help me do something that I feel has to be done. First, let me tell you something about myself. . . .

"I was born and raised on a large estate in the Ukraine. The owner of the estate, a Russian nobleman with a great deal of property, lived in the capital, and left the estate in the care of my father, who was his agent, and lived there all year round. Part of the estate consisted of fields of wheat, barley, and rye, and vegetable gardens; the rest was pasture land and forest. There was a lot of work; Father did some of it himself and hired the village farmers to do the rest. He managed the estate authoritatively. Twice a year the Russian nobleman visited Father; at the beginning of the spring, when Father gave him a prospectus of the work for the coming season, and at the end of the fall when Father gave

him an accounting of the crops that had been raised and harvested. The nobleman examined neither the prospectus nor the accounting —he knew Father's diligence and good sense, as well as his honesty, and relied on Father in everything. There was good reason for his confidence: the crops improved from year to year, and the village farmers who helped out praised Father to the nobleman whenever he visited, both for Father's ability and his humane treatment of them.

"My father was a learned man, and every Sabbath the Jews who lived in the neighboring villages gathered in our house for prayers. Father read from the Pentateuch—I can still remember his resonant voice. He was also a very charitable man: he used to put up the itinerant fund-raisers in our home, and give them a handsome gift, himself. For the High Holy Days, Father took the whole family to the nearest city so as to be able to worship with his brethren. He sent a yearly contribution to the rabbi which took the form either of money or of crops. This was to go to some humanitarian purpose—either for the aid of the poor, or of the religious functionaries.

"Eager to see to it that I had a Jewish education, Father brought a tutor from the city who stayed with us until I was thirteen and Bar Mitzvah. But I was barren ground for learning. Once I was Bar Mitzvahed I gave up my Jewish education and devoted myself to secular matters. I began to tag along after my father in his work on the estate. I inherited two of my father's virtues—love of the earth, and common sense. In a short time I was helping Father on the estate like a veteran. Though giving up my religious studies, I remained a pious Jew: I was careful in my prayers and in observing the Sabbath and other Jewish religious observances. But village life was second nature to me, and when I went to the city with Father for the High Holy Days and found myself in a completely Jewish atmosphere, I felt out of place, as though uprooted from my natural soil.

"One day the Russian nobleman died and the estate, together with the rest of his property, passed to his heirs. Every inheritance

is the cause of bickering among heirs, and this was no exception. There was a series of suits and counter-suits. Finally, the heirs decided to sell all the property, including the estate, and Father lost his position as steward. He decided to settle in a village and continue the same kind of work. Outside the village was a plot whose owner lived in the city and had let go to waste—the farmers used it as pasture land for their beasts. My father suggested to the owner that he rent Father the property. The man agreed; but before Father could set to work an unexpected misfortune befell him: Jews were forbidden to live in the villages in the Pale of Settlement of Russia. Perhaps the government officials might have been disposed to accept a bribe and then shut their eyes to Father's illegal presence in the village. But the farmers were powerful in local government circles, and one day government officials came and loaded our furniture and household utensils on to wagons. We climbed on top, and off we went to the city.

"Father tried his hand at various occupations in the city, but he was a failure in each of them. Commerce is usually tainted with dishonesty, and Father simply wasn't cut out for any kind of chicanery. He lost all his money and was left without a cent. In dire straits, he joined up with a grain dealer, for whom he became a buyer and seller. Father prospered. Still, he hated the work: it meant lying about the quality of the crops to get the most money out of the buying and selling transactions, and Father saw himself as an accomplice in fraudulent transactions.

"Those were the days of mass migration to America from Russia and the Am Olam movement to settle Jews in the New World as farmers had just been founded. Reports reached us that the United States and Canadian governments were setting aside free land for emigrants who wished to homestead. So, when I arrived at military age, Father decided to sneak me out of Russia and send me off to America as his emissary. There I was to settle on a plot of farmland where later he and the rest of the family could join me. But no man knows the end of his life's span and while I was busying myself in America trying to arrange matters, Father found a narrow plot in the city where he

was living—just four by four, a burial plot in the common grave yard. Mother soon followed him.

"Father had a relative in Toronto with whom he had grown up as a child. They had stayed very close, despite the miles between them, corresponding frequently. When I set out for America, Father told me to go straight to his old friend so that he could keep an eye on me in the New World. Father's friend, when I told him of my mission, explained that it was no easy matter: I needed a large sum of money to buy animals, implements, and food enough to last for years, until the farm could supply our needs. Since I had no funds, I had no choice but to work in a shop or factory for a time until I could save enough capital. This was good common sense and I took his advice. Besides, I had another, more personal, reason for preferring to stay on in Toronto for awhile: my advisor's daughter, a girl of my own age with whom I had fallen in love at first sight.

"So I stayed in Toronto, working in various shops and factories —I kept changing jobs all the time, the way a prisoner likes to change prisons. I had been brought up on a large estate, with plenty of room to move about in, and I found city life terribly confining. It had been bad enough living in the provincial capital our family had moved to in Russia—it was even harder in Toronto. Finally, I could stand it no longer. I took the few dollars I had managed to save up, packed a bundle of merchandise and went off to peddle in northern Ontario.

"Peddling gave me a chance to be out in the open countryside. Besides, I made a better living at it than I had cooped up in Toronto. Yet I wasn't satisfied: my father's death had relieved me of the mission of starting a family homestead, but the love of the earth was in my blood. I couldn't wait to go back to farming, though I had no money. I decided to give up peddling and homestead immediately. When I reached this province, I quickly chose a plot to settle on—the very one we're living on today, greatly enlarged.

"Dick Anderson and I were the first to homestead in this area. Dick was a woodsman in a labor camp, where he rose to be fore-

man because of his ability to handle men. The average foreman was a tyrant, but Dick was easygoing and ran his camp with a gentle hand. He was easy on the Jewish peddlers too, treating us hospitably, though he made sure we weren't charging the men exorbitant prices. I happened to come along to the camp where he was foreman, and after making some sales, got into a long, friendly conversation with Dick. When he found out that I was dying to become a farmer, he confided that he was about to homestead himself. He talked me into taking over the plot next to his own, offering to help me along and teach me the ropes. I agreed. In a short time we were good, close neighbors.

"Pioneering was hard work those days; since I did not have the means to hire skilled help, I had to do everything myself. It was even harder being all alone. My place was far from civilization, or any road leading to it, and I was completely isolated. Summers, when I had my hands full with work from dawn till the stars came out, I was outdoors all the time and could relieve the loneliness in activity and enjoyment of nature. But winters I was imprisoned inside the house, all I could see around me was ice and snow, and the dullness was fearful. There were times when I was snowed in, practically buried alive, and had to shovel my way out through mountains of snow to the barn where my horse and cow were mooing and calling for me. After feeding them, I would stay there for awhile, just for the sake of their dumb company. Still, my love of the earth that I inherited from my father and my subbornness that I inherited from my people kept me going. I don't move from here, come what may!

"Truth to tell, I might not have been able to hold out if it hadn't been for Dick Anderson. He was a saint; he loved all people, regardless of their religion. Dick kept his promise. He helped me clear a plot, build a house and barn, plow, and sow and reap, and all. His door was always open to me, and he kept urging me to join his family at dinnertime and I was happy to accept his invitation. Mrs. Anderson was as generous as her husband, and as warm-hearted. She treated me like a mother. Their

eldest daughter, Susan, who had inherited her parents' good qualities, was like a sister to me. Whenever I entered the Anderson home, I walked into a warm family atmosphere where I was like one of the family.

"It's hard being a bachelor, particularly for a farmer, and most particularly for a pioneer farmer. Eventually, I went off to Toronto to talk things over with the girl I was in love with. I proposed marriage—we had seen a great deal of one another in Toronto, and I had reason to believe that she cared for me. But my trip was wasted: she couldn't bring herself to follow me to an isolated homestead far from civilization, and there do hard work she had no experience with. She put me off—on the pretext that she needed more time to think over my proposal. I left and never returned. Human life is fated.

"Susan was good looking as well as good natured. Her beauty lacked the tender grace which was characteristic of my relative's daughter's beauty—it was rather vigorous and harsh, but it was compensated for by a naturalness, simplicity and innocence instilled by nature, close to her in the rural life in which she was reared. In Toronto Susan was in the shadow of my cousin's beauty; but when I returned to my homestead, angry with my relative's daughter for having put me off, I saw Susan's beauty as though for the first time, and I was fascinated with her. My feelings toward her changed from those of a friend to a lover's. The same change took place in her, and I decided to propose marriage.

"I knew that a religious union between us involving conversion on either side was out of the question. Susan's parents were pious Christians, and they had raised her in an orthodoxy that excluded any possibility of religious conversion. For my part, though I was no longer an observant Jew, the very thought of apostasy was enough to agitate me and set me quivering to the core.

"So my marriage proposal to Susan contained the specific proviso that our marriage be based on mutual religious toleration. We would live together each in his own religion, she as Christian, I as Jew, and neither would have any religious claims on the

other. She accepted this condition and we both kept it—albeit it was extremely unpleasant to Susan and a source of deep suffering to myself.

"As I had foreseen, Susan proved a loyal helpmate, devoted to me with her heart and soul. She was more helpful than I had ever imagined she could be. Beside the household, she helped out in the garden and field; she was apt at whatever she turned her hand to. Susan was a real 'woman of valor,' in the phrase of the Proverbs. She was always anxious to increase constantly our holdings. When our children grew up, she persuaded me to take over another homestead and thus expand our property. She was as important for the success of this enterprise as I—if not more so.

"Meanwhile, I retained my Jewish identity—superficially, at least, for in fact, Christianity was dominant in our home. That's the way of the world: a man may be master of his house, but it is dominated by the woman's spirit. So was my house dominated by Susan's spirit, which was Christian through and through. I lived in a totally Christian environment, and my Jewishness gradually diminished.

"This didn't happen all at once, but gradually, as the result of one compromise and concession after another. We had children, and it was natural for them to grow up and be reared in the Christian tradition of their mother and general surroundings. When our settlement enlarged, the leaders engaged a priest and decided to build a church. The priest came to our home for a donation. It would have been unmannerly on my part to have set myself apart from the other settlers, and an act of injustice to Susan, for whom the church was a strong spiritual need—so I contributed to the church building. On Dedication Day, Susan prepared to leave for the celebration. She didn't ask me to accompany her, but I sensed her unhappiness: she would be the only husbandless wife at the occasion. I was afraid of what people would say; again I compromised and went along to the church dedication. Next, Susan got herself and the children ready for church on Sunday—the same thing happened. I went that Sunday, and the Sunday afterward.

"I was no longer an observant Jew, but as I entered the

church all the hatred for apostates that I had inherited from my father rose up in me and I berated myself inwardly for having turned traitor to my people. I hated myself, and my self-hatred was fiery hell to me. When the priest and the congregation began to worship their God, my feeling changed into one of offensive humiliation mixed with a desire for revenge. And my voice in the communal chanting, I choked in my heart over the Biblical verse that Jews on the Other Side used to recite whenever they passed a church: 'Ye shall abominate it and despise it, for it is a thing of loathing.' Secretly, I ordered a prayer shawl and phylacteries sent me from Toronto through my relative there, and every time I returned from church I closeted myself in my room and there, putting the prayer shawl around my shoulders and binding the arm phylactery around my left arm and setting the crown phylactery on my head, I prayed. I prayed to my God and the God of my fathers to forgive me for my trespass under compulsion. I grew old, and my prayer book grew old along with me; but you may still see the traces of tears on its yellow pages. . . .

"With the growth of the settlement, Jewish peddlers began to make their rounds. As a Jew I longed to put them up in my house and treat them with brotherly hospitality. But as a father I was forced to be cruel and to keep them at a distance. Once I took in a Jewish peddler, but never again: I could see anti-Semitism staring out of my children's angry looks. Where did they get it from? Had their mother, who loved me deeply, given it to them—or that wonderful man, their grandfather, Dick Anderson? No. They knew all about my being Jewish, although I practically concealed it. I think their hatred of Jews stemmed from an awareness of their own Jewish origin. They detested that Jewish peddler for reminding them of their own blemish—their Jewish origin. Realizing this, I compromised still again and gave up the company of Jewish peddlers so as to keep my children's anti-Jewish feeling from bursting into the open. That was why I set my dogs on the Jewish peddlers. Believe me, it was like setting the hounds of hell on myself. Every time my dogs chased a peddler

away from my door I sent an anonymous donation to a rabbi in Toronto, as a form of expiation.

"That's how I passed two-thirds of my life on this homestead. I came here empty-handed and in time became a man of substance. Wealth is gratifying: it gives a feeling of comfort and security, and I derived a similar gratification from my rural life, which I loved. My married life was wonderful: Susan was a loyal companion through life; she was the apple of my eye. My children, too, were a great source of joy. They were fine people, honest, good-hearted, and they treated me with the respect due a father—not out of fear but out of love. Still, all these good years I have suffered. I was like one of those secret Marrano Jews in Spain in the Middle Ages that my father used to tell me about. Only my suffering was greater than theirs because I was alone in my misery. And now I want to be free of this sorrow before I die. That is why I have called you.

"When Susan died, I began to think of my own death, and resolved to die as a Jew, though I had not lived as one for so many years. I was petrified at the thought of being buried next to Susan in the Christian graveyard, the priest reciting the burial prayer with its address to their Messiah, my dead father standing next to him, looking at me, and shaking his head: 'Woe to you, my son! You have lived as a Christian, and you are buried as one.' And then the thought of the Cross being set up over my grave. I see that Cross before me waking and sleeping, like a monster with arms stretched out to seize and torment me. . . . At that sight I feel as though I'm going out of my mind. I want just one thing in life now—a Jewish burial. That's why I've troubled you to come here. I am writing a codicil to my will which I am entrusting to the district judge. He is an old and close friend. He is to open the sealed codicil and read it to my family prior to my funeral. I want you to carry out the terms of my will. For I am ordering my body to be given to you for a Jewish burial in Toronto. I am leaving the judge money enough to cover the costs of the trip, burial plot, gravestone, a fee for a poor Jew to recite the Memorial Prayer after my soul for a year, and a sum

for charity. You can tell the Jewish community leaders in Toronto not to have any misgivings. I was a marrano Jew—but true at heart to my God and the God of my fathers. I was a Jewish sinner, but one who never went so far as to convert. My death will atone for my sin. . . ."

XVII

The boat slipped out of Ahmic Harbor and sailed the Ahmic Bay—and I was on it.

No, I wasn't accompanying the dead body of that marrano to a Jewish burial in Toronto—he was still alive. I myself was the dead and I was taking my dead self not for a Jewish burial, but for a Jewish resurrection.

The boat sailed out into the lake and tooted a farewell to disappearing Ahmic Harbor and my heart joined in a meditative farewell: goodbye, Ahmic Harbor, that harbored me in your peaceful shelter and bid your upright inhabitants to extend to me their lovingkindness—I am leaving you never to return!

Beyond the boat a silvery strip stretched on the lake surface, glowing in the noon sun. It glistened in its foamy whiteness for some time and then turned grey and finally merged with the crystal clarity of the lake without leaving a trace. Traceless is the track of a boat in water and equally traceless is the track of a man in the world.

I took out of my pocket the lease I had received from the Canadian government and read it. It entitled me, after five years of cultivating a required number of acres, to a homestead adjacent

to Truex's, to take possession of it. I tore it up and threw the pieces into the water. They twisted in the air as they fell into the boat's wake, and with them fell pieces of a torn lease on life and love.

The boat sailed up the Magnetewan River. Like a crystal path it traversed a thick forest. On either bank groves of pine and maple trees. A villa came into sight among the trees. A young woman stood at the door. She stood and looked at us passing by, and then waved her hand. I sat drowsily, and my hazy imagination transformed the sight of that villa into the sight of the house I planned to build on my homestead on the lake shore and the image of that young woman into the image of Becky, standing at its door, gazing at me and waving her hand. The boat passes and I, leaving her behind, and she disappears in the distance. The cry of the cuckoo bird was heard in the forest and my hazy imagination transformed it into a distant cry of Becky: Where are you?—I startled, crying inwardly: "Becky! Becky!"

The memory of our farewell was painful. I had gone to Becky to tell her we could never meet again, but the joy in her face at sight of me made me dumb. I tried to divert our talk to the subject of leaving, but she kept describing the wonderful prospects in store for us after we were married and living on our own farm. We would share the blessings of the good earth, and she would be happy in my developing poetic talent—I would be another Robert Burns, a Hebrew Burns.

Poor Becky! It never occurred to her that I was to prove as unfaithful to her as Burns had been to the numerous girls he courted —as I had already been so many times. I didn't have the heart to tell her the truth. So I made up a story to the effect that my father had taken to his bed and I was going to Boston to stay with him until he recovered. Becky had a trusting nature, and it never dawned on her that I might be deceiving her. She took my words at their face value, lauding my sense of filial duty—the most important duty of all. Still, a shadow crossed her beaming face.

We went for a walk; Becky's voice trembled and she barely could keep from crying. On our return, as I was about to leave her, she finally burst into tears—just as Batya had in the dusk at

Slutzk. I forced a goodbye smile. I knew that the rest of my life I would be hearing Becky cry. . . .

It was the fate of the marrano Jew, whom I had seen in all his anguish, that had brought me to this decision to leave Ahmic Harbor and escape a similar ill-fated destiny before it was too late. Besides, news came during those days of the pogroms that had been wreaked on the Jews of Russia. The terrible tidings leaped at me from the headlines of the Yiddish newspapers where they were described in detail. I was frantic at these events. All the people of Ahmic Harbor with whom I had been so close now seemed hostile strangers to me, as though they, too, had been responsible for the pogroms. I longed to return to my own people and live among them, mourning with them for the victims of the pogroms and joining hands with those who were loyal to the idea of Zionism. The pogroms showed me the tragedy of Jewish life in the Diaspora. The same thing happened to me as Lilienblum described: "At that moment my eyes were opened, and I was another man." Only in my case, I was not another man, but myself again.

And yet, despite my sudden alienation from the non-Jewish Ahmic Harbor inhabitants, I was seized with a feeling of nostalgic gloom which increased with every passing mile. I visualized these non-Jews among whom I lived and saw them again in their simplicity and uprightness and the generous hospitality they extended to me and was sorry to leave them. However, that feeling of nostalgic gloom engendered a feeling of gratification. I recovered a precious thing I had lost: brotherly love that has no regard for religious and racial differences. In addition to the sum of money I had saved up to enable me to study at some university, I am taking with me that precious thing I had recovered, treasured in my soul. To the images of Batya, Hilke Cohen's daughter, and Rose, that I harbor in my imaginary world, another image is added—the image of alien Becky. It will lodge with them, without a dividing partition.

XVIII

En route to Boston I made two stops: first at Niagara Falls, and then at Auburn, where I visited my old friend Hurwitz.

Stopping at Niagara Falls, I went to see the waterfall and as I looked at it, standing close to the brink where it plunged to the precipice, I was overwhelmed with awe and amazement.

I looked at the cataract and saw in it a symbolization of my life: at first a gentle flowing amid tranquil banks, and then a violent leaping to a deep precipice. I gazed at the wonderful rainbow reflected in the cataract and it radiated to me a message, presaging a turbulent flowing, gradually growing serene and a final submerging in a boundless deep.

"Mister, can I have a dime? I'm hungry, I haven't had a bite to eat all day." I turned and saw a Jewish lad looking at me pitifully, his sunken cheeks, burning eyes, and emaciated body all bespeaking poverty. I took pity on him and invited the boy to have dinner with me. At the table, as he devoured the food, he told me a hard-luck story: he had been a worker in a Toronto factory. There he had fallen dangerously sick and had stayed in the hospital for months. Recently, he had been discharged from the hospital, but the doctors ordered him not to do any hard physical

labor until he had completely convalesced. He had no relatives or friends in Toronto to support him during the convalescence period, so he had looked around for light work. Not finding any in Toronto, he had gone around hunting work in the neighboring cities—but in vain. By the time he reached Niagara Falls he was penniless.

I was reminded of how Hurwitz used to help out the poor Jewish boys who wandered into Auburn to find work. So I proposed that the poor boy come to Auburn with me, and I would pay his fare. I offered to speak to Hurwitz in his behalf. His eyes lit up at my suggestion and he showered me with thanks. I was overwhelmed with joy. On my way to join the community of my Jewish people I was privileged to perform a cardinal Jewish precept: to help a brother in need, a son of my people.

It isn't considered polite for one guest to bring another one along. Still, when I turned up at the Hurwitz home with my newly met friend, Hurwitz, at the tale of hard luck he told him, immediately anticipated my request and invited the boy to his board and bed for a night. Hurwitz promised to take the boy with him on the rounds of persons who might find him a job the next morning. Again his eyes lit up and he showered Hurwitz with thanks and blessings.

Next morning when I got up I looked at the bed next to mine where my new friend had been sleeping—and he wasn't there. I looked about me and noticed that the window was open at the bottom—I had opened it from the top on going to sleep. My clothes were thrown helter-skelter on the floor. I jumped out of bed in fright, picked up my coat and looked through it—the pockets were empty. I stood there thunderstruck, the tears rolling down my cheeks. My hard-luck pick-up had stolen all my money, the fruit of my toil in an isolated village—and with it, my future university career. I had gone to Ahmic Harbor empty-handed—and was returning empty-handed!

Alas! What am I to do now?

XIX

My father suffered a stroke that left him with a partial paralysis. After lying in the hospital for several weeks and undergoing various examinations and treatments, he was sent home again. The doctor who attended Father whispered to my stepmother that Father's cure lay in the hands of the Doctor in Heaven.

The paralysis gradually crept through his body, stopping briefly only to resume, but never receding—like a cat stalking a bird, sure it will not escape. Father's muscles—those that were still sentient—trembled under the constant strain of the creeping paralysis. Father felt his end draw near, and though his life hadn't been a particularly happy one, leaving the world was hard—with a wife and seven small children dependent on him. All day father sat at home in the armchair upon which my stepmother seated him with great difficulty every morning. There was no income, and the family faced hunger and want. My stepmother prayed to God, but the gates of heaven remained shut to her cries. However Jews are a compassionate people. A gate of mercy was opened in the hearts of friendly neighbors and acquaintances and they offered her help, but she refused to accept.

My stepmother came from poor people, but they had always worked for a living and would rather die than put out their hands for charity. During the day she worked as a washerwoman, and evenings she ran around trying to collect old debts due Father. Eventually, Father's sickness grew so serious and he required so much attention that attending him, as well as caring for the children, took up all the time she had previously spent as a washerwoman. By now, all the debts that could be collected were collected—the debtors seeming paradoxically to regard the payment as a form of donation; the rest were hopelessly irrecoverable. There was no way out—Stepmother had to apply for charity, which she accepted with a lowered head and redly blushing face.

Father understood the nature of his illness and that he was going the way of all flesh. He began to prepare for the final journey, provisioning himself with Bible and commentaries, Talmudic legends, religious and ethical precepts compiled in *The Well of Jacob* and *The Life of Men* and similar sacred books. He sat in his armchair, the holy books before him, poring over them and at that time it seemed that his sufferings left him. With the fall of evening he stopped his studies to recite Psalms. The children returned from school. Occasionally they would distract their mind from the gloom that pervaded the house due to Papa's sickness and indulge in childish hilarious play. My stepmother would angrily shut them up: "What's there to be happy about?"

But father, hearing her complaints, remonstrated with her: "What if the children are having a little fun in the house? Do you begrudge them their bit of pleasure? If it's me you're worried about, the sound of their jubilant voices while at play is better medicine than any of the medicines I have to swallow!"

When Father began to read the Psalms aloud everyone in the house became quiet. For he poured into his reading all his anguish, not for himself alone—for he was about to leave this miserable world—but for the poor children who were about to be left orphans. What was to be with them when he was gone? At the sound of Papa's sad voice, the little baby sister ran over to him and, sitting at his side on the floor, hugged his paralyzed

leg. His leg was paralyzed, but would become sensitive to her hugging, and transmit it to his heart, and, at its touch, a spring of mercy would gush from its depth and overflow his eyes.

I heard about Father's mortal sickness toward the end, when I was living temporarily in a city not far from Boston. I had come there after many trials and tribulations that followed the misfortune I suffered in Auburn. My father insisted that my stepmother tell me nothing about his sickness, though he longed to see me—I was terribly unhappy those days, and, Father knowing that he could do nothing to help me, did not wish to aggravate my unhappiness. A father's compassion does not stop even at the verge of the grave! His right hand trembled, and it was hard for him to write. Still he forced himself to correspond with me in a shaky handwriting, in which his vibrating fingers infused his heart vibrations. Finally his letters stopped, and my stepmother, disregarding Father's wishes, wrote me about his sickness. I rushed to come to Boston.

I could spend only a few days with Father, but they were enough to show me fatherhood in a new aspect of lovingkindness and graciousness. When our conversations turned to my distressing difficulties, Father comforted me: "Heaven's mercy is boundless." He even consoled me when in the course of our conversation he sensed my concern about his condition: "Don't you remember what our sages said: that a man should not lose hope even when the sharp edge of the sword is on his throat?" Father was happy having me near and joked a great deal, jokingly he said: "God certainly won't break His word. There is a verse in Psalms saying explicity that the life span of a human being is three score and ten years. Do you think that God wants me in heaven because He is in need of a prayer-reader to read the Torah in one of the congregations up there, or a water-carrier to supply him with celestial water, or a rag man to collect some of the rags that accumulated in one of the heavenly mansions? It will be no loss to God if He lets me finish my quota of years—I've been no expense to Him. All I've taken has been a few crumbs from under His table here on earth."

When the day of my leaving drew near, Father turned sad. He hid his feeling, but it was visible on his face. When he spoke to me his voice shook, particularly when, from time to time, he repeated: "So you are going to leave in a few days?" I sensed his grief and lied to him. "I've a pressing appointment in New York, but I intend to return to Boston to spend another few days with you before going back to my job." He knew I was lying but preferred to believe it, and smiled. Still, the day before I was to leave, as I lay sleepless in bed, I heard Father's crying, interjected with a sobbing plea "Father in heaven, have mercy on me!" I heard his crying and buried my face in my pillow to stifle my crying about to erupt—my crying and outcry, in protest against that "Father in Heaven" who dealt so mercilessly with my Father.

The next time I hurried back to Boston, I found Father no longer sitting in an armchair but lying on a burial slab. I did not recognize him—his face looked so serene, relaxed in Sabbatical rest. He affirmed Rabbi Mayer's version of the Biblical phrase: "And God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good"—very good refers to death. The days of my father's sufferings were ended. He attained the day for which he prayed on holidays in the "grace after meals." "May the Merciful One grant us the day which is a day of unmixed happiness." Happiness was reflected in his face and made it radiant. The water they poured on his body for purification was really unnecessary: Father had been purged by sufferings. Nor were the shrouds that shrouded him necessary—he also affirmed Rabbi Mayer's second version of the Biblical phrase: "God made for Adam and Eve coats of skin—not of skin but of light." Shrouds of divine light that emanate from misery and pain enfolded his body as he expired.

My stepmother and seven brothers and sisters straggled after Father's coffin through mounts of snow that had piled up in the grave-yard. The cold penetrated their tattered clothing and set their teeth chattering. My stepmother cried, and my brothers and sisters cried with her, realizing that they were orphans now, and that they will return from the cemetery fatherless. They clung to me, their older brother, pleading for mercy. I, their older

brother, realized that I too had been orphaned—orphaned of my father and of a great part of my life that was about to be buried with him. But I had no one to turn to and plead for mercy. I cried, overwhelmed by the grief of my orphanhood—but my cry was suppressed, strangled in my throat, and I was silent like a stone.

PART VI

Finis*

* Translation by Dr. Gershon Gelbart.

I

It was not my intention to tell in these pages simply the story of my life. I wanted rather to give an account of the vicissitudes, the struggles, the agonies of soul and body that I endured while searching for a course of life to follow.

The story of that period of my life seemed to me worth telling for the reason that its significance is not confined to myself as an isolated individual but is applicable to the Jewish personality in general. Once I recognized in this specific case its universal Jewish implication, I no longer regarded it as a private matter and set about to share it with the public.

This story is based, for the most part, on events and incidents within my own experience. Various personalities have found their way into it only because events cannot be dissociated from people. No man lives in a vacuum. His inner self is necessarily affected by the personality of others with whom he carries on intimate contact. As the events were being recalled from the depths of oblivion, the persons involved emerged along with them and came to life in the process.

Nor is this story of my adventures and struggles completely up to date. That morning at the Hurwitz home in Auburn, when I stood shedding bitter tears over the loss of both my money and

my future, was not the last of it. Neither did the story end six years later, at my father's grave in the Boston cemetery. There is a sequel of ten years, which I left blank deliberately. The reason I kept that period of my life in the dark is that I could not find it in my heart to expose it to the light.

When one raises the curtain over a period of his life, and his memory and imagination enable him to present it in a dramatic form, he, from being the spectator, turns into the character in the play, losing himself in the stage personality. He thus resumes his old role and relives it, complete with its lights and shadows, its joys and sorrows.

Those periods of my life which I did unveil and which I was then forced to relive, were dominated by shadows and sorrows. But with it, they did at least yield some lights and joys. None of these are to be found in the period which followed. This period is exclusively one of dark terror, of bottomless suffering and unceasing anguish, an unbroken series of providential visitations, unrelieved by a single ray of light. I must beg to be spared the ordeal of lifting the curtain.

II

I accepted my miserable lot from a sense of submission to destiny, whose justice is beyond questioning. This sense was bequeathed to me by my father and both grandparents. These suffering ancestors accepted their lot without a murmur, unshaken in their belief in the dominance of Providence and its ultimate justice. One must not question the attributes of the Almighty as a righteous judge. In me was fulfilled the saying: "The behavior of the father is the heritage of the children."

It is human nature, when misfortune strikes, that sooner or later one is bound to come to terms with it. This, however, is true only so long as the misfortune is unvarying in degree. If it grows in violence, then it is quite a different story.

It was just then that I took my university degree in pharmacy. I had chosen pharmacy with an eye to settling in Erets Yisrael at some future time. This was my most cherished dream and aspiration ever since I had fallen under the spell of Zionism. Now, at last this opportunity was knocking at my door, yet my misfortune would not let me take advantage of it, and so I set out to apply my training to extricate myself from my misfortune.

My pharmaceutical studies equipped me with a thorough knowledge of all the deadly poisons. I was familiar with the specific

lethal action of each one, the degree of pain and the length of the agony it produced. One among these was known to induce death painlessly. I was working at the time, half days, in a drugstore, and had access to all the poisons whose sale is restricted. Secretly I helped myself to a dose of that particular poison, and then went on to settle my affairs and to get ready for the appointed hour, when I would take the poison.

That hour, at last, was at hand.

I proceed to lock myself in my room and close the drapes on the windows, a precaution against the lures of the pleasant spring morning. Nothing must be permitted to delay the end.

I go so far as to stop the pendulum of the clock—its ticking might persuade me to keep my own evistence going.

I let pass in review the panorama of my life. It appears to me as one long succession of wretchedness, hurt and humiliation. And my heart overflows with a sense of self-pity.

Soon this sense of pity has vanished and in its place has come a sort of calm, a cool and serene calm. Somehow, my being extends itself, reaching out to the farthest limits of infinity, and is lost in a being infinite and universal, a being without form or name.

I do not know how long this sensation lasted, but under its effect I was carried off to a faraway place, a scene remote but strangely familiar.

I am sitting in the corner of a courtyard, by a tumble-down fence, and look out into a world filling with dusk.

In the west, the sky is on fire. Patches of clouds are blazing fiercely. The treetops are aflame. The gilded dome of the church steeple glitters, showering sparks. Window panes twinkle. The tiles on the rooftops are bathed in a yellow glow. A water-drawing slanting beam, hinged to a post near a well, looms up high, gleaming reddishly.

How familiar is this magnificent view! Somewhere I have seen it. Yet it seems new, as if revealed to my eyes for the first time.

Birds atwittering in the treetops. A beetle buzzing in the air. A cricket chirping among the thistles. The humming noise of a city. The strains of a beggar's fiddle in a corner of the courtyard.

These sounds, too, are so utterly familiar. These, too, I have heard at one time. And they, too, seem new. I hear them as if for the first time.

A flash of recognition startles me. This is the scene of my earliest years. I grew up in it from infancy. And now it sinks beyond the horizon, slipping away little by little, leaving me behind deserted, my heart overwhelmed with nostalgic emotions.

Evening shadows are lengthening, inching up toward me from the tree in the courtyard, from the walls of the houses, from the pickets in the enclosing fence. And as they creep toward me, I am gripped with terror—so puny and helpless am I, so lonely, so forsaken.

Terror strikes me, and I come up with a start. The thought of my mother leaps to my mind. Is she, too, about to desert me now, alone with the scene of my youth? I will not let her abandon me—so puny and helpless, so lonely, so forsaken.

In utter panic I start running for our house, rush up to my mother sitting there in the corner, and throw myself in her lap, clinging to her with all my strength. I burst out sobbing, "Mother! Mother!"

The sobbing is cut short by the sound of shattered glass. The poison vial has fallen from my hand.

III

I went out and began roaming the streets, careful to walk unhurriedly, with measured step, to keep from breaking into a headlong run. My impulse was to flee.

I lift my eyes up to the sun, and its warm light flows into me like a stream of soothing syrup, of a sweetness that is almost tangible. A verse from Ecclesiastes runs through my mind: "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."

A pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun, having just caught a near-fatal glimpse of the dark abyss.

A pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun, and the deep azure of the skies, and the air in its crystal lucidity, and the trees in their spring greenness, the delicate buds of the plants, and the flowers in the freshness of their bloom.

And how pleasant it is for the eyes to behold the faces of passers-by, softened by spring, and radiating a brotherly smile. These are my brothers, these erstwhile strangers, now brought so close to me. And I never knew I had such near and dear kinsmen in the world!

As my body and soul become drenched with sunshine, an inner light rises up to greet it from the dark abyss of my being. This

is the light which God saw, that it was good, and with which He irradiated the marrow of every living creature. It is the source of goodness to be found in all creatures, linking them all together as one. This link I have now come to sense, and this sensation causes tears of joy to roll from my eyes.

I now head for the city park and stroll through its walks.

The broad stretches of lawn, the rows of trees, the clumps of shrubbery, the riot of color of the flower beds, all combine to form a carpet of luminous splendor—a blend of spring's transluscence and the sun's brilliance. The eye cannot have its fill!

And as the eye cannot have its fill of the radiance, so the ear cannot get its fill of the symphony of sounds. Its music is made up of the cooing of the turtledove and the twitter of the robin, of the chirping of the cricket and the buzzing of the mosquito, of the rustling of the leaf and the stirring of the flower stalk, of the murmur of the stream and the crunching of the gravel underfoot. And my soul sings out in response: "O give thanks unto life, for it is good, for its mercy endureth forever!"

Life is good just as it is, with all its pain, its misery, its degradation, for its very essence is permeated with the light divine, the goodly light.

I shall go back to life. I shall return to absorb once more its blows and humiliations. Mountains of pain, of misery, of degradation, for one single gleam of the divine light! Blessed art thou, O life, unto me. I have made a new covenant with thee, an everlasting covenant, to endure until my last day on earth.

IV

Now that the cup of poison is broken, there is no way out but to drink the cup of sorrows. . . .

My affiirmation of life demanded that I should dedicate all the powers of my mind and body to one supreme life goal. This goal was not merely something to provide me with a *raison d'être,* but rather to fill my life with a spiritual content that would render it worth while in my eyes. To attain this goal, I must first drain the cup of sorrows. . . .

All my life I have been given to fits of weeping. The well-spring of my tears has always been gushing and free-flowing, inexhaustible. Even so, never had I been so flooded with tears as while draining this cup of sorrows. . . .

Much laborious effort and deep probing went into the search for a suitable life goal, but at last I found it—the vocation of a Hebrew teacher in America.

Actually, I did not have to look for it. It was nothing new, for I was engaged in Hebrew teaching all along. This, however, had been until now in the nature of a temporary occupation, a job to work at while training for a profession that would be free from the insecurity and degradation that marked Hebrew teaching in America. My pharmacist's training now provided me with a

comfortable and respectable means of livelihood. More than that, it was now possible for me to realize my heart's desire which had prompted me to choose this profession in the first place—my dream of settling in Erets Yisrael.

The more I read and the more I heard about Erets Yisrael, that new land resurrected from its ruins, the more it rose in my imagination, an ever-present vision of peerless splendor and majesty, by day and by night. And it filled me with a passionate yearning through and through.

Many years were to elapse before I was granted the privilege of making a pilgrimage to the new land of Israel and to behold it with my own eyes. I saw it then in its stark reality, unretouched by the brush of the imagination, in the disenchanting light of reality. But when I left, I felt as if I were departing from the Garden of Eden, to go back to a living hell, doomed once more to its tortures.

And yet, notwithstanding the prospect it offered of settling in Erets Yisrael, I gave up pharmacy in favor of Hebrew teaching in America.

I did this not because Hebrew teaching had prospered and gained in prestige, in the meantime. No change for the better had occurred in its lowly condition. I did so only because it promised to provide me with an ultimate goal in life.

In the years I have lived in America, I have witnessed the continuing growth of a flourishing Jewish community, a community destined to exert a decisive influence on the rest of the Jewish Diaspora. No less substantial is bound to be its share in the upbuilding of Erets Yisrael through the contributions of its wealth and energy.

True, this amazing growth has been mainly in the material sense. Yet material growth is not unrealated to spiritual growth. Those same vital forces, so creative in the material sphere, are equally effective in the realm of the spirit, and to foster this creative process is the great mission of Jewish education in this country. A great and difficult task indeed, but wholly within the bounds of possibility.

Whatever the reason for the failure of Jewish education in America, in no way is the Jewish child himself to blame for it. I had ample opportunity to get to know this child well during my years of teaching. He is excellent human material, free from the dross which ghetto life used to deposit in his counterpart across the ocean. What is more, through the public school he comes into possession of an American culture which, potentially, is a blessing for Jewish education, for he is thus better prepared to absorb the best and the highest that Jewish culture has to offer. The great enemy, then, of Jewish education in America is not the make-up of the Jewish child but the utter contempt in which it is held by unworthy parents and teachers. What it needs is inspired and enthusiastic teachers, and above all, a spirit of dedicated pioneering, of *halutsiut*. *Halutsiut*—that is the essential dimension of Hebrew teaching in this country, not unlike the bold vanguard pioneering carried on in Erets Yisrael. Here you might call it rearguard pioneering. I took upon myself this pioneering task, and along with it, its inescapable burdens.

I had not the slightest doubt about my qualification for this type of *halutsiut,* neither on the score of the tenacity nor the power of endurance which it required. These qualities had served me well in my heavy ordeals throughout life. I could not have kept going without them.

If, at first, I did question my qualifications it was on account of my deficiency in another resource which, to my mind, was a *sine qua non*. This resource is spiritual wholeness and a harmonious conception of Judaism.

My mind was broken up into too many separate sovereignties, mutually contradictory and at odds with one another, each claiming exclusive obedience. This multiplicity of sovereignty prevailed also in my conception of Judaism. As a result, my Jewish outlook, too, became subject to conflicts and contradictions.

This is the way I saw it. The basic objective of any teacher is to help his pupils to acquire a spiritual wholeness. A Hebrew teacher must strive to impart, in addition to this spiritual wholeness, a Jewish outlook that is integrated and harmonious. How

to go about imparting these two qualities to my pupils when I lacked them myself? Can a teacher inculcate in his pupils something he doesn't have himself? I grappled at length with this doubt as to my qualifications for being a Hebrew teacher. It lingered awhile, but finally it left me.

V

That doubt left me, having been displaced by another doubt, as soon as its negative proof was established. I first became skeptical about the very possibility of spiritual wholeness in a man of independent spirit, as well as about the possibility of an absolutely integrated conception, at least on the level of a cosmic philosophy. My skeptism soon turned to a firm certainty.

A Hasidic rabbi once put it very well by interpreting this biblical passage: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My path is hid from the Lord?" There should be a pause between "is hid" and "from the Lord," meaning that all the contradictions derive from the Lord Himself.*

God made the universe and man the subjects of conflicts and contradictions, and man has presumed to seek various devices to resolve and reconcile them. But all these calculations are fundamentally erroneous and false. For the very concept of "being" implies contradictions, while "not being" means harmony. Reality signifies conflicts; only in nothingness there is unity.

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*In this Hebrew passage from Isaiah 40:27, the words *nisterah is hid* may also be rendered by "was contradicted."

The very act of creation consisted of the creation of conflicts out of harmony, of contradictions out of unity. Man's soul is but one atom among many in the total mass of created beings, and this soul far more than the rest, is invested with a totality of those atoms. In it, as in a mirror, are reflected the individual conflicts and contradictions of all those untold myriads of beings. These then are added to its own, to form its own special amalgam.

To be sure, these conflicts and contradictions are susceptible of harmonious integration. But this integrated whole, inclusive as it is of all the conflicts and contradictions, encompasses their tragic nature as well, the tragedy of an irreparable fundamental split. It is from this tragic element that the *Weltschmerz* is distilled, and the sense of universal beauty flowing from it.

It is not, the, the teacher's mission to impart a spiritual wholeness, nor is it the Jewish teacher's task to impart, along with this spiritual wholeness, an integrated conception of Judaism. The task consists of imparting a sense of that harmonious totality, along with the *Weltschmerz* and the sense of universal beauty—the distillation of conflicts and contradictions.

In choosing Hebrew teaching as my supreme life goal, I decided to combine with it the writing of Hebrew poetry on American soil.

The first steps in my poetic career were hesitant and exploratory, but in the end I hit upon its proper course.

American Hebrew poetry may be compared to a trailing branch of a creeping plant which, as it runs along the ground, puts down its own roots. As a limb it remains attached to the trunk, the trunk's roots supplying it with its main nourishment. But at the same time it draws nourishment from its own roots as well, blending both elements within it. Thus, in fact, the trunk and the branch nurture each other.

American soil is one vast battleground. A new life is being forged on it, out of a clash of elements violently torn from their context and matrix and wrenched from their ordered categories and equations, so that they might be recreated in a new organic form.

There is something sublime in this drama of the struggle of the titans, at once sublime and tragic. One people—the Indians—being extirpated from American soil, its ancient homeland. Another—the Negroes—trampled, pushed around, cast down. And a third—the Jews—struggling to preserve something of its own character in the midst of this new existence. This drama, with its aspect of the sublime and the tragic, holds great promise for American Hebrew poetry and, indeed, for Hebrew poetry in general.

Like Hebrew teaching, Hebrew poetry in America, too, partakes of the nature of pioneering.

I felt myself equally qualified for this kind of pioneering as well. I had come to feel at home in America, gaining an intimate knowledge of the country through the study of its literature and, even more, through the various types of people, Jews and gentiles alike, with whom my rovings brought me together.

Poetic inspiration may come in the midst of an abundance of happiness, yet it is more apt to come amid an abundance of sorrow. As for me, surely mine has been a superabundance of sorrow.

When a heart is broken, strings stretch across its fractures playing a melody notated within that broken heart in fiery musical notes.

I am a man that hath seen pain and affliction, and his heart is broken.

New Orleans, Louisiana

GLOSSARY

Aggadah — The homiletical and folkloristic section of the Talmud.

badhan(im) — Jester(s)—specifically, one whose task it is to make a wedding assemblage laugh when it is time for mirth and weep when it is time for tears, to call the wedding dances, etc.

Berkowitz, I. D. — Born 1885; Israeli novelist, translator and editor; son-in-law of Sholom Aleichem.

Bundists — Member of "Bund," underground socialist organization in Czarist Russia.

Cantonists — Youths conscripted for military service to the Czar under a system instituted in 1805. Cantonists had to serve until the age of 43 and were sometimes conscripted as early as the age of seven or eight. The purpose of this system was not only to get soldiers, but also to wean the boys away from their faith to the Russian Orthodox faith.

Eliezer, Rabbi — Talmudic sage who, in debating a point of law, called upon the walls of the synagogue to prove the correctness of his opinion.

expiation sacrifice — Expiation ritual performed on Yom Kippur Eve by every Jew. Either money is used, which is then given to charity, or cocks and hens—by males and females respectively—which are then slaughtered and eaten as the last meal before the fast.

Gibeonite — The Gibeonites are the "hewers of wood and drawers of water" of the Bible. See Joshua 9.

Gordon, J. L. — Secularist Russian-Hebrew poet, 1830-1892.

Habad — A Hasidic sect, followers of Rabbi Shneour Zalman of Liadi. The name "Habad" is formed of the initial letters of the Hebrew words: *H*okhma—wisdom, *B*inah—understanding, *D*aath—knowledge.

Hadran — Aramaic word meaning "Encore!" or "Let us repeat!" Designation of the discourse delivered at concluding the study of a tractate of the Talmud.

Haggadah — The story of Passover and the songs and prayers recited at the seder.

Haigron — Hebrew textbook of Hebrew letter writing.

Halakhah — Jewish law.

hallah — Sabbath and festival bread.

Hamelitz; Hatzefirah — Russian Hebrew newspapers of the period.

Hashiloah — Hebrew monthly magazine edited by Achad Haam.

Haskalah — "Enlightenment"; modernizing or secularizing movement in Jewish Life.

heder — Literally: "room"; figuratively: the Jewish elementary school of Eastern Europe.

Hillel — Talmudic figure noted for his gentleness and liberalism.

householders — Synagogue: In many towns the Jews of various trades, occupations and classes had their own "class" or "guild" synagogues.

	The Baalebatim — "householders" — were the relatively well-to-do merchants.
Kabbalah	Jewish mysticism.
Kiddush	Ritual performed over wine or other spirits before each Sabbath and festival meal.
kosher	Ritually clean or fit.
"The Life of Man"	A simplified, popular edition of the Shulhan Arukh, the Code of Jewish Law.
Light of the exile	A great Jewish scholar whose authority was recognized by all Jewish scholars.
Maskil(im)	Adherent(s) of the Haskalah movement.
Megillah	"Scroll"; specifically the Book of Esther, which is read publicly on the Festival of Purim.
Megillah plate	A plate placed in the synagogue into which congregants threw coins for the reader of the Megillah on Purim night.
Midrash Rabbah	Book of homiletical discourses on the Pentateuch.
Mishna	Hebrew sections of the Talmud which introduce the topics of discussion dealt with in the Gemara section, which is in Aramaic.
mitzvah	Commandment; precept; good deed.
mohel; mohalim	Ritual circumciser(s).
Mussar	Morality and ethics.
oven	A Russian type of stove made of brick, which was used for both heating and cooking purposes, with a flat top which was used for taking naps. It was hard, but warm in the winter.

Ramaz	Acrostic of the initial letters of his Hebrew name: *R*abbi *M*oshe Zebulun.
Rashi	Acrostic of the initial letters of the Hebrew name of the medieval French-Jewish Biblical and Talmudic commentator: *R*abbi *S*hlomo *I*tzhaki.
Ridbaz	Acrostic of the initial letters of his Hebrew name: *R*abbi *Y*aakov *D*avid *b*en *Z*ev.
Sambatyon	Mythical river which seethes and hurls up stones six days a week and rests on the Sabbath. According to the legend, "The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel" dwell beyond the Sambatyon.
"Sale of Joseph"	Dramatization of Joseph's sale into slavery by his brothers (see Genesis 37), which since medieval days has been traditionally staged at Purim time.
sandek	Godfather.
seder	Home service and ritual supper on the first two nights of Passover (in Israel only the first night).
Shammai	Talmudic figure known for his sternness and strict interpretation of the law.
shehitah	Ritual slaughtering.
Sholom Aleikhem	A Sabbatical hymn recited on Friday night upon returning from synagogue.
Shomer	Yiddish author of sensational novels.
Simhat Torah	"Rejoicing of the Torah"—a celebration that takes place on the last day of the Festival of Sukkot, when the annual cycle of the

	Torah reading is completed and the new cycle begun.
Talmud Torah	Hebrew school.
Tanya	Basic text of Habad Hasidic movement written by Rabbi Shneour Zalman, founder of Habad.
Tishah B'av	Fast day on which the destruction of the Temple is commemorated.
Talmud	The Amoraic discussion of the Mishna.
Tosefot	Commentaries and discourses in the Talmud.
"Well of Jacob"	Compilation of homiletical folkloristic portions of the Talmud.
yeshiva; yeshivot	Talmudical academy(ies).
Yom Kippur	Day of Atonement.
Zohar	Basic text of Jewish mysticism: authorship traditionally ascribed to Rabbi Simon Bar Yohai.

(Continued from front flap)

chapters. In rich prose Lisitzky recounts his early years, his "green" years in the United States and in Canada, describing his experiences, the psychic struggle of a poor immigrant.

He sketches some features of Jewish life in America of the time and draws personality portraits both in rich colors and tempered hues."

Of the numerous exalting reviews by Israeli critics, we quote from a letter by Yehudi Yaari, leading Hebrew novelist, to Professor Simon Halkin:

..."In my opinion this is one of the few biographical books that will last forever. It is a classic in the full sense of the word. The events it recounts are soul-stirring; its descriptions of nature are rare in Hebrew literature, and the language is exceptionally polished. There are not many biographies that adhere so to the truth as this book. In every line that you read you have a feeling that the words are being transmitted from the speaking heart to the receiving heart without any barrier between. We may be grateful for the addition of this book to the body of Hebrew literature ..."

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Excerpts from reviews of EILEH TOLDOT ADAM
by Ephraim E. Lisitzky

(IN THE GRIP OF CROSS-CURRENTS *is the English rendition of this great book*)

Chaim Toren, outstanding anthologist and critic:
EILEH TOLDOT ADAM *is a very human book, sad and depressing in the truth of its portrayal of life and the battle for existence. There are not many of its kind in Hebrew literature as far as content and form are concerned. This is the book of man's struggle with himself, his environment, and his fate. Every page is steeped in pain and protest, unsatisfied aspirations and longings. I do not hesitate to state that in our biographical literature this book is worthy of a place beside Bialik's* YATMUT. *Both lifted from the circle of their lives and gave us to drink of the wine of misery, sadness, and humiliation of their childhood . . .*

Immanuel Bin-Gorion, outstanding publicist and critic, *Davar:*
". . . His way is wonderful and clearly marked off from strait to strait. His autobiography, EILEH TOLDOT ADAM *is a new Hebrew sprout in the eternal literature of "confession," and provides an answer to the perpetual human "Why?" We see again a Solomon Maimon knocking at the gates of the world. But this time it is not the man of acute mind, but the man of simple faith (faith even in manifestation of "heresy"!), a Jew by extraction, education and purpose, a symbol of a man living by his tribulation.* EILEH TOLDOT ADAM *is one of the few books in Hebrew literature that, in their very conception, belong to world literature; a life story that has remained, by the author's will, a fragmentary chapter which is actually the whole man."*

"All my life I have borne a crown of thorns upon my head, and contrived to conceal it from all eyes under a Sabbath hat. Now I doff this Sabbath hat. I no longer fear to reveal my crown of thorns—it is a crown of glory that has been placed upon my head."

"This confession, which is hidden away in the corner of the first page of EILEH TOLDOT ADAM, *is the seal of truth of the personality of the author . . . a Hebrew writer and poet in the far off Diaspora of America . . a wail of grief and an outcry of loneliness and desolation, of unfulfilled longings, rise out of the autobiography. Behold, this wailing of a man, crowned with thorns and grief, is of every man . . . (This man, in his tale of wondering and vicissitude) has come to tell us of the fate of a whole generation, the generation of the later period of the* Haskalah *that encountered a new reality fraught with human drama, the drama of a mankind steeped in* Weltschmerz. *"Yes," Ephraim Lisitzky remarked to me,* EILEH TOLDOT ADAM *was written in blood and tears. I tried to have my individual grief mirror the grief of all Jewry, all humanity . . ."*

I. M. Lask, journalist and translator, the *Jerusalem Post:*
"Ephraim E. Lisitzky is one of the leading Hebrew poets of the United States. He has written an autobiography which is considered one of the best Hebrew books ever produced there, and an excellent work in its own right . . ."

Yitzhak Shalev, poet and critic (on a broadcast on *Kol Israel*):
". . . If there is a book designed to rouse the wellsprings of compassion in the heart, it is . . . EILEH TOLDOT ADAM *. . . it is difficult to find a more stirring Jewish document, not only in the sadness of the events retold, but also in the manner of the telling, which represents an effort to overcome, by force of art, abandonment and defeat in life and to find a purpose in the chaos of fate. This autobiography is drenched in tears to the same measure that it is rich in talent, and at times you do not know what is more abysmal here: the weeping, or the will to transmute this weeping into a permanent creation and thus give it release and consolation . . ."*