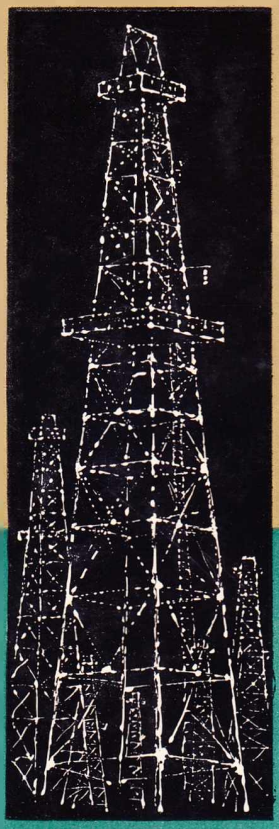
THE MAKING OF AN OILMAN



ISADOR MOLK

► The autobiography of a Talmudic scholar who migrated to the United States from Lithuania and became a pioneer in the oil fields of the Midwest

$3.75

THE MAKING OF AN OILMAN

by

ISADOR MOLK

When Itzale Molkho was only four years old he entered the *cheder* (Hebrew school) in his native Ponievez, Lithuania. He had embarked on a career as a Talmudist and would, before he reached his teens, be acclaimed an *illu* (prodigy). He could hardly have dreamed that in another twenty-five years he would be Isador Molk, American oilman.

Young Itzale left his home at the age of nine to join his brother Simon at the Yeshiva Beth Itzchok ("the Heidelberg of the Ghetto") for advanced studies. These were the early years of the present century; Lithuania was under the yoke of czarist Russia; and Jews were second-class citizens, huddled together in ghettos and terrorized by recurrent pogroms. In a moving episode, Mr. Molk describes the storming of the Yeshiva by pogromists while 2,000 Talmudists within chanted, "Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I do not fear . . . "

At thirteen he left Lithuania—alone—for the United States. Freedom, he had learned in *cheder,* is godly.

On his first day in New York the young immigrant dazzled the frock-coated gentlemen of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada, whose annual conference he had stumbled into, with his remarkable learning. He was on his way.

(Continued on back flap)

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by Isador Molk



THE CITADEL PRESS
NEW YORK

Digitized by Touro College Libraries
For Project Zikaron
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2022

FIRST EDITION

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 58-13899

Manufactured in the United States of America

Published by The Citadel Press

222 Fourth Avenue, New York 3, N. Y.

THE MAKING OF AN OILMAN

TO MY WIFE

FOREWORD

THE leap from Ponievez in Czarist Russia to El Dorado —a small town in the modern manner on the Kansas prairies—comprises one so far in space and spiritual significance as to seem almost humanly unspannable. Yet the young Talmudist made it.

This boy, whose tender years were spent in intensive study in the Yeshivah, was driven by an inner urge for freedom. He broke the ties that bound him, and came alone to the land of America which, with all its imperfections, forges no chains on the human spirit.

Here he underwent many strange and baffling experiences. His lot was one of hardship and even want, but he managed to attain a full education, complete with attendant degrees. Then an indefinable impulse lured him away from the serenity of the teacher's desk, and led him into a way of

life as remote from what he had previously known as is Betelgeuse from earth.

Almost overnight, it seemed, he passed from cloistered scenes into the hurly-burly of a newly-opened Kansas oil field. Unfitted by heredity and training for such environment, he nevertheless fathomed the mysteries attending derrick-forested areas with the same enthusiasm by which he scaled the scholastic heights of the Talmud.

Modesty, even humility, were his handmaidens. The gain of riches in itself proved no incentive. He held steadfastly before his eyes the star of achievement, and with honesty and diligence, persevered toward his goal. In the end, he won to competence, even wealth—but these triumphs seem insignificant beside the realization that here was one who came shiningly through great tribulation.

Inextricably woven into this story of a remarkable man and his incredible accomplishment runs the bright thread of a constant striving for freedom of the soul. The tale is told with the simplicity and wisdom of one who understands the philosophy of ancient religions as well as the cult of modern business.

R. A. CLYMER

Editor and Publisher, The El Dorado (Kansas) Times
Past President, William Allen White Foundation
Past President, Kansas State Historical Society

THE MAKING OF AN OILMAN

CHAPTER

I

LIFE is a story that begs to be told. I can't write of my infancy—I had none. I never learned to play. At a time when I could barely talk—I must have been about four—my father entered me in Reb Zoruch's *cheder* (Hebrew school). My parents had named me Itzale, but my classmates called me *"Gimel,"* because I couldn't pronounce that letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

I came into the world in an eventful and disturbing time for the Jew. It was at the close of the 19th century, the beginning of Reform Judaism in America, and the Zionist movement all over the world. *Haskalah,* the renaissance of Jewish learning, which originated in Germany, had penetrated the Russian ghetto. It was at the time when the Russian Roumanian Krushevan unleashed his campaign of hate

and slander against the Jews, which culminated in the Kishinev massacre of 1903. Ponievez, on the Baltic, was the town of my birth. It had a population of fifteen thousand, mostly Jews, and they were *Luftmenschen,* haphazardly employed people.

The *cheder* was just a big room with an earthen floor and a built-in brick oven, a room which served also as living quarters for Reb Zoruch, the little man with the gray beard, who was the teacher, his wife, Sara, and Rachel, their grown-up daughter. The pupils, aged from five to thirteen, sat on rough benches around a long table with Reb Zoruch at its head.

Tuition was five rubles a *zman* (semester), as from *Sukkoth* to *Pesach* (fall to spring) or the reverse. I walked the half mile to school with a candle lantern tied around my waist to light my way; and was there from dawn till dark.

The *cheder* harbored chickens, too. The rooster would fly onto the table, and peck at the *rebbe's* (teacher's) beard when he dozed. Or he'd perch on my book and seem to scan the text until the *rebbe's* wife and Rachel put him back in the built-in coop under the oven.

We studied Hebrew from the daily prayer book, then advanced to the Old Testament. I learned in Genesis that God made man in His own image, then assigned him to complete the world God created. I asked, "Why didn't God Himself complete it?"

The *rebbe* replied, "God wanted man to have freedom—freedom of choice."

Thus I learned in *cheder* that Freedom is Godly!

Promotion in the *cheder* was an individual affair. Young-

sters of ability, though their knowledge of Hebrew might be scanty, were graduated into the Yeshivah to study the Talmud and its commentaries. So I advanced into Reb Herzl's Yeshivah at seven!

The Talmud is an interpretation of the Torah—an encyclopedia of living.

After a year with Reb Herzl, I was promoted to the more advanced Yeshivah of Reb Shloime Ezra, intended for boys of thirteen to twenty, and concentrating on higher mental training and the study of the later Talmudic commentaries. The following year, at nine, I was graduated, and told that I needed no teacher—I might continue my studies by myself.

So I went to Slabodka, a suburb of Kovno, where my 22-year-old brother Simon had been studying for six years. The Slabodka Yeshivah was known as "The Heidelberg of the Ghetto."

I was born of a poor family, the youngest of my father's children by a second marriage, in Ponievez on the Navieze River in Lithuania. The town had a population of fifteen thousand. I lived on the main street, which ran up a steep hill for about a mile, with few intersections. On the hilltop was a barrel of pitch which was ignited when anything exciting had happened in St. Petersburg, and lit up the whole town. When the Governor-General visited the town, the people spread red sand over the whole street.

My father was a small man with a little gray beard. He was eighteen years older than my mother; his oldest son by his first marriage was older than she. My mother was tall, pretty, and wholly devout. At fifteen she had married an

orthodox rabbi, who left her shortly to enter a Reform Seminary. Because of his departure from traditional Judaism, she divorced him.

She consented, at 20, to marry my father because of his learning and piety—she had never even seen him till they met at the altar. He was of the old school, upright and learned, and spent most of his time in the synagogue. My mother kept a little shop and thereby supported the family.

My father was always willing to help with the chores. He carried a sack of grain on his back from the market place to the grist mill and then home to my mother, who baked bread, not only for her family, but for her shop. He brought in wood for the oven, which he always cleaned, he swept the shop, and looked to the mousetraps.

Clothes meant nothing to him, food scarcely more. He rose early on weekdays and ate before dawn. (It isn't permissible to eat after daylight before the morning service.) His breakfast consisted of a handful of grits with a teaspoonful of chicken fat, stirred together in hot water. He joined the family for the midday meal, noodles cooked in water whitened with milk; the supper was pumpernickel bread, herring and tea. After each meal he said grace, in which all joined. Not long after supper, he retired and recited the bedtime prayer: "Why should I fear? The angels, Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael surround me, and God is above me." Then he fell peacefully to sleep.

Two of my father's boys by his first marriage had gone to America in their teens. Several years later, when they failed to return for military service, my father was fined three hundred rubles for each. Since he was unable to pay, the

government confiscated his meagre belongings and carried everything into the street to be sold at auction. Friends and relatives were the only bidders, offering nominal amounts, so that the total proceeds came to only a couple of rubles. After the government officials had left, everything was brought back into the house. This torture went on for years, since they could never collect the full amount.

My mother wanted all her sons to become rabbis. My brother, David, however, persuaded her to permit him to enter the Yevraisky Utchilestya for secular studies. This was a Russian elementary school provided by the government for Jewish children only. But he couldn't go on to a secondary school to prepare himself for university, because he was considered a second class citizen—and had no money. He found employment with a publishing company of Vilno, and drifted away from home and family.

My brother Simon followed the wishes of my mother. He went to Slabodka to study for the rabbinate. After five years, although Slabodka was only forty miles away, he finally came home to spend the high holidays with the family. When my father saw him, he shouted, "Did you get lonesome for Mama's apron?"

He left before all the festivities were over, and I didn't see him again until I joined him in the Yeshivah.

CHAPTER

2

I LEFT home for the Yeshivah Beth Itzchok at Kovno after Passover. The air was fragrant, the trees and fields green with spring. My mother followed me out to the covered wagon. Though she had encouraged my going, she lamented bitterly. "My last boy is gone," she wailed.

My fourteen-year-old sister, Tobie, who was interested in the revolutionary movement and didn't want more schooling, was the only child left with my mother.

My heart was heavy, but the hope that I would soon join my brother in the renowned Yeshivah gave me strength. There were about twenty men and women in the wagon. The horses jogged along until the rain came.

Rain and mud slowed our progress, and we reached my uncle's inn at Krakinovo at midnight.

Hearing who I was, my aunt rushed over and asked solicitously, "Will you eat something? You must be hungry." I was too shy to tell her that I *was* hungry—very hungry. But before I had a chance to open my mouth, she said, "Maybe you will have a glass of tea?" Again before I could speak, she said, "You are sleepy. You better go to bed." She brought in a little pillow and laid it on the hard bench where I was sitting. I stretched out and tried to sleep, but I was too tired, and hunger gnawed at my stomach.

At dawn they rang a cowbell to awaken the passengers. We all went to the wagon, opened our packs, and had a dry breakfast; then we continued the journey. By nightfall we came to Kedan, where we changed coaches. The riding was easier from there on, for the road was hard surfaced and the wagon had benches.

In the morning we arrived in Kovno. At the bank of the Viliya river we stopped. The water had risen above the old wooden bridge, and the coach couldn't go across. The travelers put their packs on their backs and got into row-boats, which were waiting for passengers. I put my pack on my back and stepped in nervously. There were about half a dozen people in the boat. I was never in a boat before, and I sat stiffly with both hands on the floor till the men rowed us across to the opposite bank. One of the passengers, a small man with a red beard, said to me, "You are going to the Yeshivah? I have room for you in my home. Come with me." When we stepped out, he took my pack and I followed.

We walked in the middle of the muddy street for about fifteen minutes and came to a fenced-in, small, unpainted wooden cottage. I followed the man in. It was a one-room

dwelling with an earthen floor and a brick oven in one corner. Under the oven there was a coop for chickens.

The man said to his wife, a short fat woman, "I brought you a roomer."

She nodded her head and said, "I'll find a place for him."

I opened my pack and took out some more bread and was served a glass of tea. I consumed my meal in a hurry.

"Where is the Yeshivah?" I asked her. She took me outside and pointed.

I followed her directions, and came to a white stucco building. The interior was one spacious room with rows of benches and bookstands from wall to wall. As I entered, about eight hundred mature solemn voices rose and fell. I walked through the aisles looking for my brother. I recognized his melodic chant and followed it to the corner of the front row. He was standing in front of his bookstand, facing the wall, poring over the talmudic text. He was so engrossed he didn't see me beside him. I didn't want to disturb him, so I walked away in search of the overseer who was also charged with accepting and examining new students.

He was standing in a group involved in a Talmudic discussion. He was a tall, handsome man with a heavy black beard. He wore a skullcap and a black silk kaftan. He opened a book of the Talmud which I had never studied and gave me a passage to interpret. Only after I had done so, did he shake hands, and ask for my name, age, and birthplace.

"You must know Simon Ponievezer," he commented with interest. (Students were known by their given names, and

the town they hailed from.) I replied that he was my brother.

"Have you found lodgings?" he asked.

I nodded, and he added, "I'll get you some tutoring to do, to help pay expenses." Then he handed me a book, with the injunction, "Go study!"—which I began at once to do at the top of my voice.

Presently he brought over my brother, surprised and none too pleased to see me. "Did papa tell you to leave home? Mama must have felt terrible," he said. I was hurt to the point of tears, and my face showed it. He softened, and he told me, "After vespers, I'll take you with me for supper."

Still angry, I refused. "No, I still have some buns Mama gave me, and I must go to my lodging and find out where I'm going to sleep," I said, and therewith left him.

After services I went to my new home. The small kerosene lamp on the table made only enough light to see the shadows in the room. I ate my bun with tea, said grace, and got ready for sleep. "Put another board and a straw sack next to Jacob," said my landlady.

In the morning, when the strips of rags hung from the ceiling as partitions were removed, I could see that seven people had used the earthen floor as a bed—people of both sexes. But my interest was only in learning. After my morning prayer, another bun and tea, I ran to the Yeshivah.

When I entered, all the Talmudists were chanting in the same tone as before, but with more fervor. There was an air of expectancy—they were awaiting the arrival of the Rosh Yeshivah (head of the academy), and the daily lecture.

At ten o'clock, a tall, saintly man with black, curled side-

burns and a skullcap ascended the platform amid a reverent hush. He began to speak. His subject that morning was the law of marriage. He emphasized the sanctity of family life, becoming more and more involved in sophistries and abstractions. I was awed and bewildered by turns. After an hour's lecture, there was hand-raising for questions. The Rosh Yeshivah called on one of the distinguished scholars, Leizer Rittever, who quoted extensively from the Talmud and RaMBaM, refuting the lecturer on most points. A voice called, "Next, Simon Ponievezer."

I perked up. A short, dark young man stood up, resolute. In a calm, soft voice Simon quoted the Bible, the old scribes, the tractates of the Talmud, and other sources in support of the lecturer, and tore the Rittever's argument to shreds. The Yeshivah resounded with approving cries: "The Ponievezer is right!"

This day fired my imagination and I surrendered wholly to the study of the Talmud, chanting its lines at the top of my high-pitched voice. The same day Reb Moishe, the overseer, brought me the promised pupil, a robust fellow apparently much my senior, named Shloime. The overseer listened occasionally to my interpretation of difficult passages, but found no reason to correct me.

After vesper service, Simon came over and told me where I was to have my rations. It was a very large room in a boarding house. I washed my hands, and joined twenty fellow students at a long table, where an elderly woman served us pumpernickel, chopped herring, and tea. When we were through, all said grace in unison, and I returned to my lodgings.

Friday night after services parishioners invited students home for the Sabbath Eve meal. Abraham the miller invited me, and I conquered my shyness and went. The long table with a white cloth, at its head two flickering candles in silver candlesticks and opposite them two twist loaves under a white napkin, welcomed me. Abraham looked with pride at his wife, and read from his prayer book:

"A woman of worth, who can find? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband trusteth in her. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchant ships; she bringeth her food from afar."

Then he said, "Let us wash our hands, and say the benediction." We washed our hands and sat down at the table, the six rosy daughters on one side, the four sons and I on the other, the miller and his wife at opposite ends. The miller recited, "God finished his work in six days, and rested on the seventh day and called it Sabbath." He uncovered the twist and cut a slice of bread for each one. The hostess served gefuellte fish.

While we ate, Abraham took his children to account. "Chaim," he said to his oldest son, "You are running around with Shloimke's daughter! Are you going to disgrace me and your mother?" And he slapped his face. "Isaac, you mispronounced a word in the benediction! And he slapped him on both cheeks. The oldest girl began timidly taking away the empty fish plates. "Molly! You got too much perfume on you!" he shouted. She blushed with shame. He walked over to little Annie. "Mama said you didn't go to *cheder* yester-

day!" He pinched her cheek, and she looked bewildered. "And you, Yacob, why didn't you come to the store this morning?" He grabbed Samuel, pulled his ear, and slapped him.

The boy winced. "Why did you hit me?"

"I don't know. But you know why!"

The father went on reprimanding his children while the meal was being served. When we were through eating, he chanted the hymn of the angels, and all joined in. The singing was discordant and mingled with whimpering. Then we said grace.

When I was leaving, my host said, "Don't forget to come for dinner tomorrow. You will eat with us every Sabbath." I didn't know what to say. His wife looked at me pathetically. I mumbled, "*A guten Shabbos,*" and slid out.

I wondered why such a good and godly man should choose the day of rest to reprimand his children. Perhaps he was just too busy the rest of the week making a living for his large family.

I never went there again, but instead ate my Sabbath meal with the other Yeshivah students, as on week days. When I was late, which was frequently, I would have to serve myself with bread and chopped liver or herring and a glass of tea. I'd have to pay a little more, because the woman said, "When you take it yourself, you take more."

Most of my subsistence was provided by the Yeshivah. My earnings from tutoring, together with a couple of rubles monthly from my mother, helped to take care of my clothes. Reb Moishe required of every Talmudist neatness first of all. He said, "Your collar should be white and your shoes black-

ened." If a Talmudist appeared with an unclean collar or dirty shoes, he told him, "You don't deserve your rations."

One Friday evening Reb Moishe said, "You are going to have the Sabbath meal tonight with Reb Moishe Donashevsky, the Slabodker Rav [rabbi]."

I was thrilled at the honor. I looked on the Slabodker Rav with awe and reverence, as almost divine. A man of medium height, with a ruddy complexion, snow-white hair, and a small gray beard, he had a wide forehead and deep discerning eyes. He wore a soft black hat, a black silk kaftan tied around with a girdle, and trousers reaching below his knees to white socks thrust into red slippers. At the close of the silent prayer at morning service, he once banged his hand on the stand, and announced merrily, "Don't say Tachnum! (the propitiatory prayer). It's a time of rejoicing! I have become a *chosen* [groom]!" He was in his eighties.

He remarried thirty days after losing his first wife. It is undignified for a Talmudic sage to be without a wife.

After the service, I greeted the Rabbi: "Good Sabbath."

"Good Sabbath." He shook my hand and said, "*Sholom Aleichem.*" (Peace be with you.)

I responded, "*Aleichem sholom.*" (With you be peace.)

"You are Simon Ponievezer's brother," he said, "You have a great brother. He is one of the most profound thinkers of our time."

When we came into his house, a tall dignified woman, wearing a dark *sheitel* (wig) over her gray hair, met us at the door. "Good Sabbath, my dear," the Rabbi said, "I have the young Ponievezer with me."

"Is this Simon's brother?" she asked. "So young! Aren't you lonesome for your mother?"

Her words awakened a longing in me. The Rabbi began to chant the Sabbath tune, which I hummed with him to drown my emotion.

The round table was set. The candles glowed in the center in their silver candlesticks. The Rabbi poured a chalice of wine, held it up, and blessed the arrival of the Sabbath. He sipped the wine, passed it on to me, to his wife, then to the maidservant. After we had washed our hands and said the benediction, the Rabbi passed slices of the twist bread to each. The maidservant brought in the *gefuellte* fish, then the meat course and the soup. When we were through, we said grace in unison. The Rabbi took out a Gemara, opened it, and said to me, "The Rosh Yeshivah tells me you are a smart boy. Explain this text without looking at the commentaries." I had never studied it before, and pored over it nervously. The Rabbi laid his hand on my shoulder, and said quietly, "Take your time."

Meanwhile the maidservant brought in tea, which the Rabbi's wife made me drink. Something came to me in a flash, and I began to talk, while the venerable Rabbi listened. When I was through, he asked, "Tell me what is the nature of witnesses in a divorce and witnesses in a marriage contract?"

I answered without hesitation. "Witnesses in a divorce are used as evidence, but in marriage they are part and parcel of the contract. He smiled approval, pinched my cheek affectionately, and invited me to visit him again. It was late at night when I said, "*A Guten Shabbos,*" and left.

After a year in Slabodka I hadn't even seen the town, although ten thousand people lived there besides the two thousand Talmudists. I knew only the Yeshivah I attended and the other Yeshivah in the tall wooden building on Ghost Road. When I took a walk it was to the big city, Kovno, across the Viliya River. But I didn't see much of Kovno, either; my time was devoted to study.

Once, on the ninth of Ab, a day commemorating the destruction of the Temple, when studying is prohibited, a young Yeshivah boy, Shloime Vabroisker (the Vabroisker prodigy), whom I admired, asked me to join him on a long walk through Kovno. On a day of mourning, one is not permitted to wear shoes, so my friend and I walked in our stocking feet. We trekked to Kovno and through the length of the city—a distance of four miles—till we came to the tomb of Reb Itzchok Elchonon, the famous Kovner Rav. My prodigious friend hummed a solemn tune as we walked along, seemingly enjoying himself, but I was weak from fasting and my feet were sore.

The Vabroisker was a few years older than I and a *Chassid* (mystic). He was familiar with the Chassid spiritual melodies; "he was reared on the Rabbe's table." Saturday at twilight, when Chassidim gathered at the home of the venerable *Rebbe* for feasting and song, Shloime Vabroisker would sing and dance on the table, while the *Rebbe* held his hand. He was the *Rebbe's* pet.

The Slabodka Yeshivah was *the* Yeshivah of the ghetto—the Yavne of Yore for which Reb Jochanon ben Zacchai was willing to sacrifice the temple, Jerusalem, and even the Jewish homeland. The Yeshivah was the beacon light that

guided the Jew through darkness in Diaspora. Every world movement, every disturbance was focused on the Jew, and it reflected on his sanctuary, the Yeshivah.

One summer evening, while I attended vesper service, a Talmudist ran in excitedly and exclaimed, "I just came from Kovno. I heard that the pogromists are coming to the Yeshivah!"

All the Talmudists gathered around Reb Boruch Berel, the Rosh Yeshivah, to protect him. They lifted him up to carry him to a hiding place. He raised his hand and said, "No! I'll stay here with you. *Di Lezoro b'sato.* It will be bad enough when we face it, but let's not be afraid of what might come."

I looked at the angelic figure of Reb Boruch Berel, and felt secure. My father's bedtime prayer became real to me—I saw the angels Gabriel, Uriel, Michael, and Raphael surround us.

The two thousand Talmudists from both Yeshivahs gathered here in the big new synagogue, and chanted with one voice, "Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I do not fear. God is with me." Above the chant, we could hear the clamor and the shouting of the Godless mob in Gentile tongues and the crash of stones against the building. The Talmudists were undaunted. Gradually the pogromists scattered and the tumult died.

Our Yeshivah was visited also by Revolutionists. They came on a night when most of the Talmudists studied till dawn. It was a wintry Thursday night. A mob of young men and women rushed into the Yeshivah. They placed guards at the doors and windows so no one could get in or out.

One young man, lifted above the heads of the crowd, began to speak in fluent Russian. "We must rid ourselves of the treacherous Russian Government," he shouted. "If we cannot remove the crown from the Czar's head, we will take his head off with it!"

I recognized the speaker as a former Talmudist, Smuel Warsawer. In his revolutionist role he was known as Smultzik. He had been dismissed from the Yeshivah for Epicureanism. He was said always to have a Russian book hidden under his Gemara, which he read while pretending to study the Talmud. I thought of the tortures my family had endured, and sympathized with our antagonists. I recalled that God wanted men to have freedom. But I deplored their methods. I hated revolutionists; I was against rioting and bloodshed.

My fellow Talmudists must have been as frightened as I was, but we had no place to flee to. We were afraid the Czar's gendarmes would come and arrest us all. At the conclusion of their meeting, the Revolutionists rushed out, just as they had come. When all was clear, the Rosh Yeshivah said, "It's too bad we can't burn the floor where the blasphemers stood."

I was closer to Sinai—to the Torah. The knowledge and experience I gathered was satisfying. But I wanted to see my mother—I hadn't seen her for a whole year.

On the Feast of Purim, after the recitation of the scroll of Esther, my brother Simon came over to me and said, "Mama wants you to come home. You'd better get ready to go for the Passover holidays. You're getting along pretty

well! I can't go with you—no time. I've a lot of studying to do."

"I suppose you'll be with Reb Hirshel Kovner for the *sedorim?*"

"Naturally. I eat there on the Sabbath, so I'll eat there during the holidays."

It was a distinction to be a guest at the home of Reb Hirshel Kovner, who was the son of Reb Itzchok Elchonon, the sage of the century.

CHAPTER

3

ONE morning a few days before the Passover holidays I packed my belongings in a blanket, tied it with a rope, put the pack on my back and trudged through the muddy streets to the Viliya, where I took a rowboat for Kovno. The water had risen above the bridge and large slabs of ice floated on the river.

I arrived home with my shoes blackened, a clean celluloid collar and a flannel scarf wrapped around my neck. I felt quite modish. My mother was overjoyed. "Itzale! Itzale!" she exclaimed, as if she couldn't believe her eyes. My father, too, was glad to see me. I looked at my sister, Tobie, with slight contempt. Although I'd always liked her, now she was active in the new movement, which I'd hated increasingly since the Revolutionists invaded the Slabodka Yeshivah.

The group of four synagogues in the cobblestone court was near our home, down the hill from the market place. There was the main synagogue where the rabbi worshipped; there was the little synagogue for the study of the Talmud and jurisprudence, another for the recitation of the Psalms, and the fourth was a temple for service only. I could see, from the rear window of our house, the little synagogue, where my father worshipped. There were other synagogues, academies of learning and worship, and synagogues representing various trades, scattered over the town.

I hurried at daybreak to the morning service in the big synagogue, where Reb Itzale, the Ponievezer Rav, worshipped. Not until the middle of the service did the small sprightly man walk in. The whole congregation rose. He stepped quickly to his seat, threw his *tallith* (prayer shawl) over his head, put on his *tefillin* (phylacteries), and joined the congregation. This man was the founder of the new method of logic in the study of the Talmud, called *"higoyon."*

I was anxious to discuss with him the new revelation I had discovered by following his method—a new interpretation of the tractate of Yebamoth. After the service, I approached him and told him I had just come from Slabodka. I began to dwell enthusiastically on my discovery. He listened interestedly and discussed with me the Talmudic theme.

As I was leaving, my father came in from the little synagogue. He said to me, surprised, "I was told that you were talking with Reb Itzale."

It was a triumphant day for me. Everyone looked at me

admiringly. Women told my mother, "Your little one will get ahead of your Simon." They said, "Chia Dina has a golden belly," meaning the children she bore were marvels. My mother made light of it, fearing the effect on me of too much praise.

In the evening I visited Reb Shloime Ezra, my former teacher, and told him of my revelation. Though he liked my logic, the challenge angered him. "It is blasphemy," he said, "to go over the heads of the old commentaries, the pillars of the Talmud! I don't like *higoyon.* It is Epicurean! It is unbelief!"

The tall bony Reb Shloime Ezra was of the old Valoziner school and against new thought. He did not approve of interpreting the text of the Bible directly. I asked him, "What do you think of the Talmudist who said that the sun revolves around the earth, when it has been since proven that his theory is wrong?"

He answered, "I still believe that the Talmudist is right because the Vilna Gaon, who lived about two centuries ago, said so, before his death."

"Doesn't the Talmud say," I asked, "that in some cases we prefer the opinion of the Greek Philosophers to our own?"

He answered angrily, "They could say that. They had revelation. But we can't say that. We must go by the Talmud, and the early commentaries."

I was inclined to agree with him then, as he was a great scholar and a saintly man. I remember when his brother, the famed Dr. Mehr, came to visit him, he would admonish him for not believing in other-worldliness—that is, the

hereafter. The doctor told him heatedly, "If there is a heaven, I'll be there, for I do more than you to save lives."

Reb Shloime Ezra asked him, "How can you be there, when you don't believe that there *is* a heaven?"

I thought that in this he was right.

I also visited Reb Herzl, my first Talmudic teacher, and told him about these discussions. Then I asked him, "Who do you think is right?"

He said with humility, "How can I thrust my head between two mountains—Reb Itzale and Reb Shloime Ezra?" This was characteristic of him.

I recalled the tragedy of his only son's death on a Friday —*erev* Sabbath (before Sabbath)—a day of rejoicing. Reb Herzl came to the synagogue for the Sabbath Eve service, intoning the prayers as usual; then he went home where his son's body lay on the floor under a dark cover. He chanted the hymn of the arrival of the Sabbath. The next morning he performed the service in the synagogue, waited patiently at home until sunset, and chanted the hymn for the departure of the Sabbath. Only then did he uncover his son's body, raise his hands, and utter Job's benediction "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

The next morning I went to see my old schoolmates. They looked at me with respect, as a learned Yeshivah boy. I had a pleasant feeling of aloofness—I came from the Jewish Heidelberg, Slabodker Yeshivah.

I kept thinking of Reb Itzale and Reb Shloime Ezra: Reb Itzale Ponievezer, admired and revered by the Rosh Yeshivah and all its students; Reb Shloime Ezra, scholar and

saint, who declined important positions as a rabbi because the duties would interfere with his studies. How could I determine who was right and who wrong? How hard it was to fathom the depth of the "ocean of the Talmud"! I couldn't waste time—I decided to cut short my vacation, and go back to Slabodka right after the holidays.

Our two-room dwelling had an air of festivity, it was the fifteenth of *Nisan* (April), the Night of Nights. My brother David came from Dvinsk with his wife to spend the Passover with his family, leaving their two little girls at home. I hadn't seen him since I was four years old, when my parents took me to his wedding in Dvinsk. I was glad to see David, but he was angry with me and my mother, because of my going to the Yeshivah instead of entering a trade.

David was tall and blond—his friends thought him "handsome." His wife, too, was tall and good looking. David was all business—he was now a publisher.

The material world was forgotten when my father, at the head of the table, in a white robe and a skullcap, said, "Itzale, my son, say *'manistana.'* " I began to ask the traditional four questions of the Hagadah, the story of the Redemption. My father answered, "We were freed from the land of Egypt. Once we were slaves. We were oppressed, physically and spiritually. God redeemed us, we are free. Let us celebrate."

After reciting the story of the Redemption and partaking of the bitter herbs, my sister brought in the *gefuellte* fish, the meat course, and the soup with *matzo* balls. During the prolonged feast, we drank the four chalices of wine. Full of food, drink, and Hagadah, I fell asleep at the table.

I enjoyed the *matzoth* (unleavened bread), the *moror* (bitter herbs), and the wine. I was delighted to see the family, but my heart was in the Yeshivah. I wanted to learn more. I waited anxiously for the holidays to end, then I left for Slabodka.

This time I went by train. All our friends came to see me off. The ticket agent looked at me and said, "A half ticket is enough." I wasn't yet twelve. When we came out on the platform, my mother's friends chid her, "Why did you have to buy a ticket? Everybody is going into the train without a ticket. The conductor just said, 'The *malach hamoves* isn't here.' "

The Russian conductor had used a Hebrew phrase, "the angel of death," meaning his superior. I protested. I quoted the Talmud, "*dine demalchutha dina,*" (the law of the land is law), though I hated the government that brought so much misery to my people.

CHAPTER

4

THE next morning I arrived in Slabodka. It was early. The sun had climbed only a little above the horizon. A few other people got off the train here. My brother was on the platform to meet me.

"How's Mamma? How's Papa?" he asked. He beckoned to a droshky. "I've found a good lodging for you," he told me.

The driver picked up my pack, and off we went through the quiet streets. Here and there we saw worshippers, with their little embroidered velvet sacks of prayer books, hurrying to the synagogues for morning service.

My new lodging was a two-room house with a wooden floor. Here I was to share a bed with one of the sons of the family.

Not only did I have a better lodging, but the Yeshivah increased my allowance, and my student paid me more for tutoring and looked at me with increased respect.

News travels fast. My pupil's parents, who lived in Subitz, a little town near Ponievez, must have informed him of the rumor, started by the women in the big synagogue, that I was an *illu* (prodigy). Students who had studied under Reb Itzale asked what the rav had to say to my Talmudic discovery. Some students from Knesseth Israel were sent by their dean to persuade me to enter that Yeshivah.

The founder of Knesseth Israel was Reb Israel Solanter, one of the greatest scholars of his time, an ascetic who believed in disciplining human desires. His creed was self-denial and self-control. He had established this Yeshivah for the study of the Talmud, and as a workshop for character building. Beth Itzchok, our Yeshivah, was founded by the famous Reb Itzchok Elchonon, the rav of Kovno. He was opposed to asceticism. He believed that the study of the Talmud was sufficient to develop the mind and build character.

Students were encouraged to attend lectures at both Yeshivahs; we at Beth Itzchok were free to attend the courses of character building at Knesseth Israel. I attended lectures on asceticism there.

I still remember my first experience there. Reb Notte Hirsh, in a solemn voice, quoted the psalmist, "God probes your hearts and watches your actions." The students rose and repeated this over and over in mournful voices. The devotional continued until dark. This was the subject lesson every evening, while shades were drawn and lamps were lit in the tall wooden building on Ghost Road near the

cemetery. Every now and then a Talmudist called out a different text. *"Odom chofsi b'dimyonoi v'osur b'muskoloi"*—"Man is free in his imagination, but is tied in his deliberation." The whole body chanted with great fervor. Renowned ascetics from abroad visited the Yeshivah at that hour, and lectured on asceticism.

They practiced self-denial on occasion. One Sabbath, the morning service was prolonged till noon, and no one had eaten—it is forbidden to partake of food before service. Puddings, cut in small pieces, were brought in. The aroma of the Sabbath delicacy further whetted the appetites of the hungry students. They crowded to the table piled high with platters of steaming pudding and, with two fingers, each took a small piece. The pudding oozed with richness as they carried it to their mouths. Reb Notte Hirsh called out in an ominous voice, "God, don't bring us into temptation." All hands were stayed as one and, slowly, the hands were lowered, dropping the pieces of pudding back into the platters. "God, don't bring us into temptation," all repeated over and over. Reb Notte Hirsh continued, "We must restrain ourselves. We must learn to deny ourselves the pleasure that we like the most. What would happen if the waves didn't recede when they reached the shore, and the ocean didn't have self-control?"

I liked the study of asceticism, but my brother Simon opposed it. The Yeshivah Beth Itzchok was the outgrowth of the Valozin Yeshivah, founded by Reb Chaim, a disciple of the Vilna Gaon, whom Simon revered. The Gaon believed that the study of the Torah will broaden the mind and strengthen character. This was the reason the Gaon was the

great opponent of the Chassidic movement. He put the accent on learning, not prayer. The Gaon's disciples were of the opinion that, were he alive, he would have fought asceticism also.

Elijah of Vilna, the Gaon, was authoritative in the Yeshivah, the greatest academy in the study of the Talmud and its commentaries. It was the creation of the Gaon's disciples. The first great Yeshivah had been in Valozin. When a czarist decree closed it, the Slabodka Yeshivah took its place. The Gaon had been the bright star on the Russian Jewish horizon during its darkest days. He was, to the learned, a human angel. His knowledge exceeded that of any man since Moses. His love and piety were exceeded only by that other Elijah, Elijah the prophet.

My brother Simon was as much opposed to asceticism as to Chassidism. He was a staunch follower of the Gaon. Even in interpreting the Talmud, he used the clear, direct method of the Gaon. He did not employ *"pilpul"*—the roundabout way of clever argumentation. The name "Simon" in the Yeshivah stood for clarity. Any Talmudic dispute that was brought to him, he clarified into simple understanding. This made him popular with both faculty and students. Even the Talmudists from Knesseth Israel brought their problems to Simon. I had always had high regard for him, but after I came to the Yeshivah I revered him, and felt proud to be with him. When we walked together in Kovno, people pointed to us and said, "There go Simon Ponievezer and his brother."

Once I was preparing a solution to a difficult theme. I searched for enlightenment in the early commentaries, work-

ing on it for several months. When I consulted Simon he quoted a brief text of the Gaon and said, "Here is your solution."

I asked him, "What sort of a genius was the Gaon?"

He replied, "The Gaon was an angel."

I asked, "How could a mortal be an angel?"

He was provoked. Such was his belief in the Gaon! A human angel!

I was absorbed in my studies and did not appreciate the advantages of my new lodging. I had no time to get acquainted with the people I lived with. Neither did I write to anyone, except once a month to my parents. I aspired to research and revelation. At the moment my ambition was to learn enough to engage the Rosh Yeshivah in a difficult problem, so that he might present it before the student body for solution, as was the custom. That required a lot of study and research in the Talmud and the commentaries. Many a night I kept vigil. I scarcely took time to eat. This is the story of the beginning of my adolescence—after four years in Slabodka.

CHAPTER

5

IT was a severe winter. Deep snow lay everywhere. The Viliya was frozen over for three months, and people crossed it with horses and sleighs. The sky was steel gray.

I had not seen my parents for a long time. My brother Simon was gone, sent by the faculty to the Telser Yeshiva, forty miles from Kovno, to introduce a simplified method into the study of *higoyon.* I was lonely and decided to go home. (A good student could come and go as he pleased, for the Yeshiva had no set curriculum.) Besides, I was thirteen years old and about to become *Bar Mitzvah,* a full-fledged Jew, and naturally wanted to be with my father and mother on the occasion.

So, on a gray morning about a month before the Passover holidays I took leave of the faculty and my close friends and set out for Poinievez.

I was to be glad afterwards that I had come home while my father still lived. He had had a hacking cough that winter, but carried on as usual. On Friday of the week before I arrived home he had gone, as was his custom, to the bathhouse to cleanse himself for the Sabbath. My mother warned him not to go, but he went out the door, leaving her scolding.

The bathhouse was a one-story wooden building near the river bank. Outside, a blindfolded horse went round and round, turning a wheel which pumped water from the river into the bathhouse. Inside there were four rooms. The first had lockers for clothes and personal belongings. The second was a cooling-off room after the bath. The third room was where they bathed. There they beat their bodies with wet brooms and poured water over themselves from wooden buckets. The fourth was the steam room. Broad stairs led almost to the ceiling where the steam was the hottest. There were heated stones in an open fireplace in the wall; the bathers poured water on them and steam filled the room. My father always climbed to the very top to steam himself and beat his body with the wet broom. Then he dipped in the cool *mikvah,* "gathering of water" (ritual bath).

When he dragged himself home that Friday, he went straight to bed, shaking with chills and fever. My mother tried the usual home remedy—a woolen sock with hot ashes on his chest. He was worse the next day, and Dr. Mehr was called. He examined him, and shook his head sadly.

In a few hours my father gasped his last, with *Sh'ma Israel* on his lips: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

My brothers were called home. On the day after Purim (the Feast of Lots), Reb Itzale Ponievezer and my brother Simon extolled father's character in their eulogies, before a large assemblage in the synagogue where he had worshipped all his life. I wanted to say a few words too, but nobody asked me—maybe because I was too young.

I hadn't known my father very well. I'd been only a small child at home. But I know he was a Talmudic scholar and a righteous man. Blessed be his memory!

During the seven days' mourning, I ran every day before dawn to my father's grave. I couldn't detach myself from him—I couldn't imagine him gone forever. I'd heard of death, but it had never come so close to me.

One day I came to the cemetery when it was already daylight. I started to go through the *taharo* house (the house of cleansing), a long stone building with three openings on the long side, which stood at the entrance like a gate. My eyes caught the Hebrew words in black letters above the door: *"Kol Boeho lo yeshuvim"*—"Those who come here never return." As I stood looking at the words, submerged in morbid thought, I was startled by a policeman's gruff voice. "You got a pass?" he growled.

While I searched my pockets, he hit me with his leather club. I showed him my pass and he snapped, "Go on!"

I was angry. True, I was a stranger in Ponievez, and in a strange place—the cemetery—at an odd hour. But why did he strike me before I'd had a chance to show my pass?

I walked drearily home. The arrogance of the policeman preyed on my mind, and I felt a contempt for him and his government. I deplored the lot of the Jew in the Russian

ghetto—any petty official could punish him. Wasn't I born free? I wondered. Why should I be kept in chains?

I hated sympathy. Our friends all came to our house now and showed concern about the family, about me as the youngest in particular. They offered aid, though my mother had always been the breadwinner—my father had merely given moral support. I didn't want their help. Neither did I like my brother David's attitude. He blamed me for not having prepared myself for work, instead of spending my time in the Yeshivah.

I didn't return to the Slabodka Yeshivah, but stayed at home with my mother in Ponievez. Every morning I visited my father's grave. Most of my time was spent in the big synagogue, studying the Talmud with my brother Simon and with Reb Itzale Ponievezer.

I told the rabbi I wanted to leave the country. "Why?" he asked. "You will be a success here—a great rabbi."

I answered, "I want to feel I'm walking on my own ground."

He replied, "Don't you think you'll take along your atmosphere wherever you go?"

I learned that the butcher, who lived next door to us, was going to America with his family, and I proposed to go along. My mother was persuaded to give me her savings, about a hundred rubles; and the butcher included me in his passport, in place of one of his sons, already in America. Since I was a minor, I couldn't get a passport myself.

I was excited about going to America, the land of freedom. I began to include general subjects along with the study of the Talmud. I was preparing myself for the world,

while the plans for the voyage were being completed. I had a copy of Harkavy's Jewish-English pocket dictionary, from which I studied the languages. I read American history—and concluded that the great emancipator, Lincoln, must be a Jew, since his name was Abraham. It appeared that there was a quotation from the Bible in Hebrew characters on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. "And you shall declare freedom throughout the land, and to all the inhabitants thereof."

My mother concealed her feelings about my departure and I did the same. But I was encouraged by the thought that I might be somebody if only I had freedom.

I left the land of tyranny in May, 1907, at thirteen. There were many people at the station, but I seemed to see only my mother and my brother Simon. With the *tefillin* and the prayer book in my pocket, I boarded the train. My mother wrung her hands. There were no tears—her eyes were fixed on mine. Simon stood by, her staff, her comfort. I shed no tears.

My brother gave me his watch; and I gave him mine. They were Ingersolls and cost about fifty kopeks. We each had one. It was a necessary part of life at the Yeshivah. One had to know when to get up, and the proper time to pray.

When the train started and I lost sight of my mother, my heart went out to her. I burst into tears. Thus began a new life.

CHAPTER

6

THE train was filled with a noisy crowd, mostly bearded Muzhiks and their womenfolk in holiday mood. The butcher and his family rushed into a stall near the door, and I followed. There were crude compartments on both sides of the aisle the whole length of the train. As soon as they sat down, they opened their bundles of food, and began to eat. The butcher's wife asked me to join them, but I wasn't hungry.

I sat in the corner on the wooden bench, exhausted and depressed after the ordeal of parting. I thought of my mother, her strength of character, her self control, the abundance of energy she displayed in the struggle to live up to her convictions, her love for the *Torah,* and desire to see her sons become *"adireh h'torah"* (mighty in God's Law). I thought of my father, a staunch believer, retiring each night

with his four angels. Each week began for him with the chanting of the tale of the Chassid—Man of Faith. Had he been industrious, like my mother, he would have extricated himself from the ghetto, and I might have been spared the travail of transformation.

I sat half dozing. The whole panorama, all I had heard and learned in my short span of life, ran through my mind. I saw my legendary forebears, the Molkhos. I had heard my father speak of Solomon Molkho, whose Warsaw edition of his *Sefer Hamesfar* was a family heirloom. It was wrapped up in an old *tallith* and kept among those other worthy possessions, the "Shas," the sixty-three tractates of the Talmud. The family prided themselves and claimed the illustrious forebear. I cherished the legend. Solomon Molkho, a marrano of the Portuguese court at the time of the Inquisition, returned to the faith of his fathers, circumcized himself by his own hand, studied Cabala and became a mystic. He fled to Turkey and from there to Italy, where he prophesied the coming of the Messiah. . . . I thought, too, of the Austrian dreamer, Theodore Herzl, father of the Jewish homeland, who learned of his descent and found himself, after the Dreyfus "false accusation."

I thought of the Kishinev pogrom, when the Russian marauders broke into Jewish homes, and massacred entire families. It brought to my mind "In the City of Slaughter" and "On the Butchery," Chaim Nachman Bialik's great poems. The daughter raped! Her mother's belly cut open and filled with feathers! The grandfather comes to the synagogue and prays to God. The poet cries out, "God! Executioner! If you are a God, how can you face the old man who

prays to you, after such atrocities committed before his eyes!"

I, too, was bitter. I wanted to join the dreamers and raise my voice in protest. But I didn't know enough. I hadn't learned enough. A second-class citizen had no chance. I must go to a land where man was free! There I could be myself. Then the words of Reb Itzale Ponievezer flashed through my mind: "Your atmosphere will haunt you. It will follow you wherever you go."

The next day we arrived in the port city of Libau. We were taken to an inn, where we awaited the London boat. I had plenty of time, and wrote a letter to my mother. I went out to look for the post office, so I could mail it. On my way I met a policeman. He was bigger and better dressed than the officer at the Ponievez cemetery. This time I prepared myself—I took out my pass and held it in my hand. When he stopped me, I showed it to him. He shouted, *"Pasol!* Get going!" and shoved me on with his club. I was glad I was leaving this accursed land.

The following day we embarked, traveling steerage. It was a cattle boat, and, from my berth, I could hear the cows mooing. It seemed to me they were in the same section, and, afraid of cattle, I shivered. The butcher and his wife took me under their wing and tried to rule me as they did their own children. I tried to hide from them, and stole away on deck by myself whenever I could.

One day I was seasick, and stood gripping the rail, while my stomach turned over. A girl came over to me and held my head while I vomited. When I recovered temporarily,

she asked me, "Are you by yourself? What's your name? My name is Deborah."

I gave her my name, and told her that my father had just died, and I had left my mother in Ponievez, and I was going to America with a strange family.

She asked me, "Whom are you going to in America?"

I said, "I'm just going to New York."

"Have you no relatives?"

I said I had some relatives there, but they never wrote home, so I didn't know where they lived.

"Where are you going to stay?" she asked me anxiously.

"I don't care where I stay. I'm just running away," I replied.

I saw pity in her eyes. She said, "I've lost my father and mother. I'm going to my uncle in Johannesburg, in South Africa. He sent for me. I come from Latvia."

She had expressive dark eyes. From the way she spoke, I knew she was cultured. Her Yiddish dialect was more like German. She suggested that, while on the boat, we study English together. "Wait," she said, "I'll go get my German-English dictionary."

After the harsh policemen and the overbearing butcher, I rediscovered human kindness. I discovered woman. I had never thought of my mother or my sister as women. I remember when I was quite young getting up very early one morning to go to Hebrew school. My mother said facetiously, "What's your hurry? The rabbi is still sleeping with the rebbitzin." I was indignant. I stamped my foot and cried, "My rabbi is sleeping with a woman?"

Deborah was the first girl I had seen outside my family

circle. I was attracted to her with a feeling I had never experienced before. Her nearness was a comfort. I liked the feel of her dress against my cotton clad legs, as we sat studying from her dictionary. She read, I repeated after her. Sometimes we both held the book, her soft white hand touching mine. Her voice was musical, soothing. I forgot the Czar's policemen. I forgot Hennech. Even the sea was gentle. I was in paradise.

Deborah had a pink bow on top of her head on our last evening together, as if for a special occasion. We both held the dictionary, but we didn't study much. Her hand was soft and cool against mine. She read the words with a blank expression on her face, as though her heart wasn't in them. I didn't repeat. My eyes wandered to her pink bow, her dark curls. She looked at me, I blushed.

"After tomorrow we shan't see each other anymore," she said seriously.

I felt a lump in my throat, just as when the train had pulled out of Ponievez and I'd left my mother standing on the platform. "I'll write you," I said, forcing out the words.

Deborah was smiling again. "Don't forget. I'll give you my address before I leave the boat." And she added, half jokingly, "If you've no place to stay, let me know."

Our boat arrived at London in the morning. There was confusion—everybody was trying to get off at the same time. The butcher's wife called out, "Hennech, hold on to Itzale." Hennech grabbed my arm with his big hand, and held me in a vise. I tried to wrench myself loose to look for Deborah, and get her address. I screamed, "Let go of me!" But he held me in his grip till he had dragged me off the boat.

I never saw Deborah again.

When we'd gotten off the ship, I learned that there were two ways of going to New York—by way of Liverpool or Southampton. The *Philadelphia* was to leave from Southampton, and there was a chapel on the boat. When Hennech told me that they were going by way of Liverpool, I asked him to give me my ticket so that I could leave on the *Philadelphia* and use its chapel. As a mourner, I had to conduct services for my father for eleven months from the day of his passing. Hennech asked, "Will you be able to look after yourself?"

I answered angrily, "If I could take care of myself in tyrannical Russia, I can take care of myself anywhere." I couldn't forgive him for preventing me from seeing Deborah again.

At the railroad station, I saw a lot of people riding bicycles—the first bicycles I'd ever seen. On the train, it looked to me as if we were riding on the roofs of buildings. I saw no open fields all the way to Southampton. In Russia, all I'd seen from the car windows had been fields.

At Southampton I saw a bobby, but I wasn't afraid of him. I'd read enough history to know that the English, though subjects of a monarchy, enjoyed the same freedom as their American kin. I told him in my newly-acquired English, "I vant go to ship *Pheeladelphe.*" The obliging bobby led me directly to the ship's gangplank and watched me till I reached the deck.

Though I traveled third class, I found the berths spacious and clean and the mattresses good, a striking contrast to the Russian cattle boat from Libau. I had freedom here, no despotism, no Hennech.

I found some co-religionists in the chapel, who seemed impressed with the way I conducted the service for my deceased father. I had been trained thoroughly by the ascetics in Slabodka. I surrendered myself to Jehovah, and prayed with fervent emotion. When I was through, there was a hush. More and more people came to the service each day.

A man asked me where I was going. I told him New York, and that I had parted in London with the family I started with. He asked me, "Have you any money?"

"What do I need money for?" I asked.

"You will have to have ten rubles to show when you get off the ship," he said. He took out ten rubles, and handed them to me.

I thanked him. "I'll give it back to you after I show it to them," I said. He only smiled.

I made friends on the boat. When I wasn't conducting services, I often studied English from the dictionary which Deborah had given me.

After more than a week of sky, sea, and seasickness, the ship cast anchor in New York harbor. The passengers were told to get in line and show their vaccination marks.

When I got off the boat at Ellis Island, I showed the immigration officials the ten rubles. Afterwards, I ran with the ten rubles in my hand to find the man who gave it to me. An officious-looking man stopped me.

"Socialist!" he yelled. "Where are you running to?" and he grabbed my arm. "I'm from the Jewish Immigration Society," he said, and tied a tag to my blouse.

I tore off the tag and handed it to him. "Keep your number," I said, "I'll keep my name."

I wanted a complete change. I did not want to bring

with me the atmosphere of the Yeshivah, so I traded my conservative clothes for garments of the masses. I wore a dark blue cotton blouse and trousers to match.

I found the man I was looking for and returned the ten rubles, which he took reluctantly. Then I started out along Park Row with my *tefillin* and prayer book, Deborah's dictionary, and ten kopeks in my pocket.

I walked like a man out of prison. I saw a lot of people hurrying; I saw policemen smiling; I felt I was among friends. I strolled along aimlessly, trying to read the signs.

CHAPTER

7

PRESENTLY I turned down a side street, and kept on walking, past old tenement houses, till I came to a large sign between two windows on the first fioor—"Yeshivah Reb Itzchok Elchonon." It was a two-story building on the East Side of Manhattan, named after the same famous rabbi who had founded my Yeshivah, Beth Itzchok, in Slabodka. I walked up to the front door and entered.

There was an assembly of about sixty rabbis, all in holiday attire of long black frock coats with white scarves and high silk hats. It was the annual conference of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada. All the most famous and respected rabbis of both countries were present. They were preparing for the morning service. I felt that I was in a homelike environment and walked straight

to the cantor's stand. I pounded on the stand with my hand, as was the custom in Jewish gatherings when one had something to say to the audience. I wanted them to be quiet and listen to me.

The rabbis lifted their heads in astonishment. One of them tried to push me away with his elbow. From my appearance, age, and dress, they didn't consider me qualified to conduct a service for this dignified assembly. I began to intone the introductory prayers. There was silence, as when I conducted services on the boat. They recognized the *mussernik* (ascetic).

After the service, the rabbis surrounded me and shook my hand. They asked me how long since I had left Slabodka Yeshivah. Instead of answering, I asked them to explain two contradictory passages in the RaMBaM which had just come to my mind.

The RaMBaM is a summary of the entire spiritual and intellectual content of the Talmud by the twelfth century scholar Moses ben Maimon, known universally as Maimonides.

The entire assembly became involved in the discussion. They didn't stop for breakfast. I was hungry and went out. I took an orange from a woman with a basket, gave her my last ten kopeks, and waited for change. She said, "No change, it's five cents in American money."

I went down to the basement and ate my orange. When I came back, the rabbis were still discussing the problem I had raised. Reb Nachum Dun, the overseer, asked me, "Where do you live?"

"I haven't found a room yet, I've only just arrived."

"Have you any relatives here?" he went on.

"I have half-brothers and a half-sister, but I don't know where they live. They never wrote home," I told him.

He asked me to enter the Yeshivah and receive the regular stipened of three dollars a week. One of the rabbis must have overheard our conversation; he nudged the overseer, and said, "Give him four dollars."

Then Reb Nachum Dun said, "We'll give you the highest stipened." I remained there.

The Yeshivah consisted of boys and men from thirteen to forty, perhaps a hundred in all. Most of them were refugees from the European ghettos, a few American born. Many of the ghetto fugitives were already renowned as scholars.

In the Yeshivah, the younger set were the elite. They had been the most energetic in the Talmudic academies of Russia, and were dissatisfied with the lack of secular studies and the narrowness of Talmudic instruction. They were not allowed to study anything but the Talmud and its commentaries. Even the study of Hebrew was limited to the prayer book and the Bible, for fear of their reading impious and sacriligious books. Among the younger Talmudists were the Kulyer *illu,* Solomon Metz, who became a conservative rabbi in Washington, D. C.; Irving Chestman, the marvel of the Yeshivah of Rhadin; and a son of the Burzer rav, Harry Linfield, one of the compilers of the Jewish Encyclopedia.

Metz said to me, "I remember you from the Slabodka Yeshivah." So did Linfield. The older group didn't know me, but had heard of my brother Simon. All this made the atmosphere congenial.

Nachum Dun introduced me to a boy of my age, saying, "Here is one of our young American students. You help him in his study of the Talmud, and he will help you with your English. You can stay at his house till you find a place of your own."

Here in the New York Yeshivah they had set hours for the study of the Talmud, and they encouraged the students to prepare themselves for high school and college in their spare time. In Slabodka secular studies were prohibited. The first few weeks I devoted to Talmudic studies, accustoming myself to the new environment, and studying English with the help of my young pupil. The English studies began when I came home from the Yeshivah, and extended well into the night, even after we'd gone to bed. Many times I woke up my coach and asked him to enlighten me about an English expression that had just occurred to me.

I had my meals with my pupil's family, paying his mother part of my stipened. My hostess was thrifty, and the meals were frugal but wholesome. These people were friendly and I was satisfied with the arrangement. One morning before we left for the Yeshiva she said, "Boys, come home early for supper. We'll have fresh tea." We set out happily, looking forward to the treat.

CHAPTER

8

DAILY contact promoted intimacy. Nachum Dun came over one day with Harry Linfield, and said, "Ike"—which meant me—"Harry wants you to take a room with him." I agreed.

Harry and I walked along lower Monroe Street, where Italian pushcarts lined the curb. We noticed a "room-to-let" sign, walked up to the sixth floor, and rented the room. It had a cot, a small table, and two chairs, A gas jet hung from the ceiling. The rent was five dollars a month.

I said to Harry, "The room looks dark."

"How do you know? It's almost evening," he replied.

"If light could come in, they wouldn't need three windows in a small room," I argued.

"Well, we wouldn't be in the room in daytime, and for evenings we have the gas light."

My logic proved sound. Light was shut out by the surrounding buildings.

We took turns sleeping on the cot. One slept till the wee hours, and the other the rest of the night. While one slumbered, the other was absorbed in his studies. Sometimes when I was sound asleep Harry would nudge me and say, "Sleep faster, I'm through with my lessons." When the month was up, I suggested we move.

We then rented a room on Grand Street, a more desirable neighborhood. There were no pushcarts. Grand Street was then the Fifth Avenue of the lower East Side. Our room was on the eighth floor of a bank building with an elevator. We had only one bed, but it was wide enough for two. We also had a washbasin with hot and cold water. Our room was separated from the rest of the apartment and opened directly on the hall.

Every day I bought a half-dozen rolls at a penny a piece. If I found day-old rolls, I saved a penny. With hot water from the faucet in place of tea, and with my six rolls a day, I made my three meals. On the Sabbath, and on special occasions, I went to a basement restaurant on Delancy Street for a regular dinner. Plenty of bread and pickles were on the table, free, and there was no charge for the appetizer—chopped liver or herring—and tea. The restaurant charged only for the soup and meat. For these two items I paid thirteen cents.

Sometimes I went upstairs to David's Eldridge Street Restaurant and had a meal for fifteen cents. When I asked the proprietor why he charged so much, he replied, "Do you realize my wife and my daughter Molly do the cooking, and I, myself, do the waiting?"

I divided my hours of study among half a dozen subjects, and so did Harry. While I studied mathematics and modern languages, he absorbed Greek. It made no difference to me whether I used the table, bed or floor. Harry always studied at the table. I didn't waste time at my meals. I studied while I ate, and ate while I studied.

Every semester, the Regents' examinations for the State of New York were given in Grand Central Palace. The examiners allowed three hours for the first examination paper, two additional for the second paper, and an hour and a half for the third. If there was time left over from the first examination, it could be applied to the second and the third.

When I bought my textbooks, I didn't know the range of my subjects. Having no guides or teachers, I studied each from cover to cover. When I took the Regents' examinations, I first asked for an elementary algebra paper. I answered it in a very short time. Then I asked for an intermediate paper. I also answered this without using up the full time. Next I tried the advanced algebra. I did the same next day with plane and solid geometry. To my surprise, I received a card from Albany stating that I'd passed all my subjects, with a merit rating in advanced algebra. It was, indeed, a happy ending to my first year in this country.

The next semester I took examinations in French and German and first-year English. I passed. About six months later, I took examinations in second-and third-year English, and in the Three-Year-Special. I was again surprised. Though I flunked in the second and third, I passed the Three-Year-Special and received full credit for three years of English.

In my next examination I took enough points to com-

plete the necessary requirements for a high school certificate. I also passed fourth-year English with my composition on "Macbeth and Lady Macbeth" and a critique on Burke's speech "On Conciliation With America."

Grand Central Palace, where I took my examinations, was about twenty blocks from Rabbi Margolies' synagogue. I knew him from the Yeshivah, and decided to take a walk and visit him. I found him and a number of learned members of his congregation studying the daily *blatt* (leaf) in the tractate of the Gemara *Toharoth*—Cleanliness. I joined them in the discussion on cleanliness and holiness. When we were through, one of the men came over and engaged me in conversation. I told him that I had recently come to the United States, and was attending the Yeshivah. He asked how I fared and I told him. He took out several bills from his wallet and said, "Here's a hundred dollars. You'll need it."

I didn't take it.

Later I mentioned the incident to Rabbi Margolies. He said, "You are a foolish boy. If you are offered money and you don't take it, there is something wrong with you."

I said, "As long as I am getting along on my stipend, why take money from a stranger?"

The Henry Street Yeshivah hadn't had a Rosh Yeshivah (chancellor) since it was founded. But it had a dean, Nachum Dun. In my second year there, they installed Rabbi Abraham Aaron Yudelevitz as the first Rosh Yeshivah. His functions were simply to keep in touch with the students as a councillor. Rabbi Yudelevitz had formerly been rav in Kapulye, Russia, and Manchester, England. He was to lec-

ture on the Talmud and *Poiskim* (jurisprudence), and had the authority to issue diplomas to those qualified. As he was of the old school, his lectures on the Talmud were unpopular with the young *higoyonists,* of whom I was one. He couldn't meet the avalanche of their questions. He was a jurist, not a *higoyonist.* Rabbi Yudelevitz appointed some of the critics to lead the discussion on the different tractates of the Talmud, and limited his lectures to *Poiskim.* Among those appointed were Chestman of Rhadin, Metz of Kulye and myself.

I led the discussion on the tractate of *Gittin* (divorce). My discussions became popular. Here I had the first opportunity to get acquainted with a genius—Schepsel, a recent immigrant from Lithuania. When I asked who was left among the great young Talmudic scholars in Europe, he answered, "Not very many. I know of only one—Simon Ponievezer." I also met at these discussions an American boy, Jacob Katz, who later became my roommate and close friend. He was to become conservative rabbi and chaplain at Sing Sing prison. Through his father I finally located my half-brothers and half-sister, who were living in Paterson, New Jersey.

I devoted most of my last two years at the Yeshivah to the study of *Poiskim,* a prerequisite for the rabbinate. I wanted to earn my diploma as rabbi, and I applied for an examination. Because of my youth, and my having been at the Yeshivah only three years, the Yeshivah officials inquired of Reb Itzale Ponievezer regarding my qualifications. One morning Nachum Dun gave me a letter from Reb Itzale. The letter stated that, knowing me—my character, my

erudition, my ability to penetrate the most difficult passages of the Talmud—he could vouch that I would make one of the finest rabbis in the land. And as soon as I had passed my examination in *Poiskim,* I should be qualified for the rabbinate and receive *smicho* (a diploma).

After several weeks of questioning and drilling by Rabbi Yudelevitz and his assistants, in the intricate passages of *Yoire Deoh* and other *Poiskim,* the rav of Manchester and Kapulye, the Rosh Yeshivah, Abraham Aaron Yudelevitz, affixed his signature to a long, detailed diploma, and put his seal on it. He was the first authorized Rosh Yeshivah of the Yeshivah Reb Itzchok Elchonon, now known as Yeshivah University. And I was the Yeshivah's first *musmoch* (graduate as a rabbi). I was not quite seventeen.

My mother's wish was fulfilled.

CHAPTER

9

I LEFT the Yeshivah. My sister Tobie had just arrived from Europe with her husband. They were destitute. They had been married at my brother David's house in Dvinsk before leaving for America. My mother did not want my sister to go to a foreign land with a man, unmarried. They were living in the East New York section of Brooklyn.

I had only a place to sleep. Chestman suggested that I join him in DeWitt Clinton High School; he would give me the dime he was getting from his father for carfare, and we'd walk to school together. I had my high school certificate, but no personal contact with any American educational institution. I accepted his suggestion, and presented my certificate to the registrar of the school. He referred me to Dr. Paul Abelson, the dean of the history department. I

knew Dr. Abelson, as a lecturer in the Educational Alliance on the lower East Side, whose lectures on American history I attended every Friday night.

He placed me in the second semester of the senior class, telling me jokingly, "I will admit you if you'll change your name from Ike to Isador. You must have picked the name 'Ike' because it was easy to spell." He was right. For the same reason I spelled my last name "Molk," instead of "Molkho," my true family name.

Chestman and I walked about sixty blocks from the lower East Side to DeWitt Clinton High School on Amsterdam Avenue and Fifty-Ninth Street. I lived on the dime. But I was happy, my spirit free. I was learning much. In some subjects, such as mathematics, I was advanced. In the sciences I was behind. Once, at a test in biology, my paper called for the description of a "bean." I asked a classmate in kneepants, "What is a bean?"

He said, "It is right in front of you on the table."

I said to myself, I could write an "A-plus" composition on Macbeth, but I didn't know a "bean" when I saw it! I had heard very little spoken English, since in the Yeshivah they always talked Hebrew or Yiddish. But in the assembly, I outsang the whole student body. And when they raised the flag, it was to me the Holy Scroll.

Once the teacher asked me to go to the blackboard, and solve a mathematical problem. As I stood in front of the class, I weakened, and almost fainted. When I recovered, I was embarrassed. The teacher thought I was scared because I couldn't solve the problem. Actually, I was weak from hunger and the long daily walks to and from school.

One afternoon I felt so tired that I decided to ride home from school. When I'd walked upstairs to the elevated station, I found I had only four pennies. I waited till I could borrow the other penny from some friend. To my surprise, my friend and fellow student at the Yeshivah, Benjamin Fleisher, came up. He was changing trains on his way home from New York University. On the train, he asked me how I'd made out in my examinations, and I told him I'd passed all my subjects, and would enter Long Island Medical School when I had enough money. He scribbled a hurried note in Hebrew to his friend, Reb Shloime, Chairman of the Board at the Stone Avenue Talmud Torah (Hebrew School) in Brooklyn, handed it to me, and told me to see Reb Shloime.

I asked him, "How did you make out in your examination in Law I?"

He said, "I failed. It means I've lost the whole year. And the worst part of it is, I was sponsored by society women who thought of me as a second Louis Brandeis. What a disappointment for them!"

"How could you give so much attention to my situation," I asked, "when you're in such a predicament yourself?"

He answered, "Here is where the man and the friend come in."

"As long as you have that strength, you'll never despair," I commented.

He told me he'd gotten married. "To whom?" I asked.

"Shepsel's sister. He is a great man—a genius."

When I handed his note to the Board Chairman, he looked at the signature, then read: "This young man is an

'illu.' He has the graces of a 'Gaon.' It is unfortunate that the crown has fallen from our head. He has mysterious abilities, a serene and noble soul, and a pure heart. Do for him all you can."

Reb Shloime introduced me to the principal of the school, Dr. Kapelowitz, who led me to a room where there were about fifty boys and girls of different ages, ranging from seven to fifteen. He told me, "This is an irregular class, and you will find it difficult to discipline. Try your best." He explained that I was to teach them the declension and conjugation of simple words.

I took a piece of chalk and, with my back to the class, wrote on the blackboard the word horse*—*Soos*—ass; *Soosi*—my ass; *sooscho*—thy ass, masculine; *soosech*—thy ass, feminine . . . Then I asked the class to decline each word as I pointed with the stick. I stood facing the board, repeating the words diligently, while the student's chuckles and giggles became louder, ending in uproarious laughter. I turned around. The pupils were demonstrating playfully.

The principal came in, astounded at the tumult. He asked me, "Why did you pick a word that has a double meaning? It's lucky none of the members of the board are around. I want to give you a chance, but you must use better judgment."

I realized that the children who had been in public school the whole day came to Hebrew school, tired, at an hour when they should have been playing outdoors. Also, their different ages made it more difficult for them to con-

* The word *soos* in Hebrew means both horse and jackass.

centrate on a dull subject. I should have to make special efforts to hold their interest.

For several weeks, Dr. Kapelowitz locked the door of my room when the board came for inspection. At the end of the first month, he handed me a check for thirty-five dollars —the first substantial amount I'd ever earned. And he assigned me a regular class. I had evidently made progress.

The new class was an advanced class in Hebrew of boys, all of one age. It was easier to keep order. Each day we had a singing period. I had never hummed a tune in my life and I didn't know any Hebrew songs. I was distressed.

Tommy, a Negro janitor in his early thirties, had been working at the school a long time and knew all the songs. Once he came in to fix a window while we were singing and he saw me struggling—off-pitch—with all the discordant voices. He began to sing in a clear tenor voice, *"Od lo ovdo sikvosenu"* ("We still hope to return to our land, the land of David") and the whole class followed.

Although I didn't realize it at the time, Tommy always managed to find work in my room at the scheduled singing period. There was an unexpressed friendship between us.

A few months later, Dr. Kapelowitz informed me that the board had voted me one of the finest teachers they'd ever had and raised my salary to ten dollars a week. When the new method of teaching *Ivrith b'Ivrith* was introduced in the Stone Avenue Talmud Torah, they selected my class for the test.

I was greatly interested in my work, and saved money, but I wanted to continue my studies. I waited anxiously for the summer to end, so that I could enter medical school.

In the fall I matriculated at Long Island Medical School in Brooklyn, an hour's ride from the Talmud Torah. All went well the first two weeks. I attended college, and taught in the Hebrew school from four to seven. When I was assigned laboratory work, my schedule conflicted with my teaching. Without a source of income, I couldn't continue the expensive course in medicine. I had to give up my medical studies. But I had enough money saved to take a course in another profession at Ohio State University, where the tuition would be sufficiently low.

CHAPTER

10

AT Columbus, I turned in my credentials and was registered as a freshman at Ohio State University. I wanted to take forestry, and Dr. Ramsour, dean of the agricultural department, made out my schedule beginning with chemistry. I asked him, "Don't you think I ought to omit chemistry this semester? The class is already four weeks ahead of me." I'd gathered from the boys at school that chemistry was a stiff subject—"Dr. Evans will flunk you, if you even misplace a period," they said.

"I advise you to take it. Chemistry is the backbone of the course," Dr. Ramsour told me.

I asked a short, stocky young man where I could rent a room. He said, "You can share my room, I'm staying at Mrs. Ramsey's across the street from the campus. It was a bed-

room in the attic with two windows, a full-sized bed, a table, and two chairs. Though there was no provision for cooking, we managed to prepare and eat our meals in our room. Our dinner menu consisted always of chicken, and a lima bean soup which we cooked with canned heat on a tripod. When the liquid in the can was consumed, the fire went out—and the dinner was done. To conceal the improvised cook stove from Mrs. Ramsey, we put it in a tin box.

We divided our chores. When one washed dishes, the other had to cook twice—we considered cooking easier than washing dishes. We could attend classes while the dinner was cooking. Lima beans were not suppose to stick; nevertheless we always found the bottom of the pot burned.

Saturday night, we bought provisions for the whole week: a chicken, which the butcher cut up for us, big enough to make six dinners, eggs from a neighbor. I remember once buying two dozen, giving her a quarter, and waiting for change. She said, "I haven't the penny. I'll have to give you another egg!"

One Friday night, Rosenthal, a senior student whose father was an official in the synagogue, invited me to have the Sabbath meal in his home. I accepted, and ate there frequently in the weeks to come. The meals were good, and the people were friendly. I liked a guest from Marietta I met at their table. He was an oilman named Windel, who visited the Rosenthals when he was in Columbus on business. A talkative man, he seemed to take an interest in me, and we chatted together a lot.

The Rosenthals asked me to eat with them every Sabbath, but would accept no pay, so I declined. Since I didn't

cook on the day of rest, I decided to have my Sabbath meals downtown.

I got along well in all my subjects except mechanical drawing. I hadn't the patience for minute precision. In the beginning, I also lacked precision in chemical laboratory work. In fact, my classmates were wary about working close to me, especially when I had to use the Bunsen burner.

I was surprised when we lined up for our reports after the first semester. Dr. Ramsour pointed me out and said, "Isador, I have good news for you. In spite of the fact that you lost four weeks of the semester, you made good grades in all your subjects, including chemistry."

In the second semester, I took more units, because I expected to change from forestry to engineering. I realized I wouldn't make an expert forester. When I went out camping with the boys, they knew more about trees than I. Most of them came from timber country and I came from the Yeshivah. I knew several different names for each species of trees and leaves, but they knew timber.

I did the cooking at camp. Professor Fleager, who taught forestry and cooking, was impressed with my culinary art. He asked me, "How many points have you in cooking?"

I naïvely said, "None. But I've been doing my own cooking at Mrs. Ramsey's."

My funds were getting low, and I looked for a chance to earn some money. I pruned trees for seventeen cents an hour, and peddled soap. I made friends with a veterinary student who owned a horse and buggy. We drove out together to sell soap. I would sit in the buggy and hold the reins while he went into the houses. The end of this ven-

ture came one day when we stopped at a farm house, but the horse kept on going—straight to the pigpen. I was frightened; pigs were strangers to me. I jumped out of the buggy and ran, leaving the horse with the pigs.

Once when my roommate and I came home for dinner, Mrs. Ramsey met us at the door, fiery with anger. "Were you trying to burn my house down? I didn't give you permission to cook in your room! You'll have to move."

We rushed up the stairs. Our room was full of smoke. We had bought a fat chicken. The fat ran over and caught fire.

When our landlady's temper had cooled, I said to her, "Mrs. Ramsey, you wouldn't want us to move now. The school year is about over."

"Well," she said, "you can stay, but do your cooking in my kitchen."

I passed all my freshman subjects, and had a good start for the sophomore year; but my funds were exhausted. So I went back to New York to resume teaching.

CHAPTER

II

I WENT first to the Stone Avenue Talmud Torah in Brooklyn. The school was now in a new building. Tommy, my Negro singing friend, was the first to greet me. His black eyes glowed. "I knew you'd be back," he said.

I had no difficulty in getting my job back. I was assigned the boys' confirmation class, preparing them for *Bar Mitzvah.* I told the principal I was taking the job for the vacation period only, since I wanted to return to college in the fall.

My sister Tobie's husband was working at the I. Miller Shoe Company. They had a little girl now. Another young couple lived with them in their three-room flat. I saw much of my sister, and we discussed letters from home. Seeing her so often, made me feel closer to my mother and Simon.

A friend of mine, who was principal of the Hebrew school in Syracuse, asked me to come there and teach. He said I could continue my studies at the University at the same time.

In the latter part of September, I took a train to Syracuse. On the train, a couple approached me. "I'm Dr. Berman," the man said. "Aren't you the teacher from Stone Avenue Talmud Torah? We're on our way home to Utica, after visiting our folks in Brooklyn. They live near the Talmud Torah."

I told them I was on my way to Syracuse—to the university.

"We need a teacher in our Reform Hebrew school in Utica," Dr. Berman said.

His wife interrupted, "We have a college near Utica, in Clinton—Hamilton College, only thirty minutes' ride on the Interurban. I can assure you that you will get the position—I'm the secretary of the board."

My ticket was for Syracuse, but I stopped off in Utica with Dr. and Mrs. Berman. I was assured of the position in Utica, but I was uncertain about Syracuse.

Mrs. Berman called up Rabbi Louis Haas and Sam Abelson, the chairman of the board. They came right over, and I was hired. Rabbi Haas took me to his mother, and I made my home with the Haas family.

In the morning I took the car to Clinton, nine miles from Utica. I walked up the long, steep hill to Hamilton College, presented my credits at the office, and was placed in the sophomore year. Dr. Streicher, the president of the college, helped me make out my schedule. He included ethics, which

he taught. He told me to get his revised Book of Job in poetic form—it was used as a text in ethics. I had no classes that day, so I bought my books, and returned to Utica.

At four o'clock, I began my teaching with a talk to a joint session of the three classes of the school, in the presence of Rabbi Haas and the members of the board. Then I fixed the hour for each class, and assigned the lessons for next day.

Each school day, I took the Interurban car to Clinton. The atmosphere at the college was friendly and home-like. The classes were small and conducted informally. The professors called the students by their given names. When a dignitary came to chapel at the convocation hour, he was introduced at opportune moments, to various students by their professors. When the instructors or their wives saw me trudging up the hill with an armload of books, they invited me into their homes to rest up. They even asked me to room with them. Nearly all of the students lived in the dormitories on the hill, near the campus.

Governor Sultzer spoke in the assembly during his campaign. I was particularly impressed by a remark in his speech. He said, "Young men, if anyone tells you that the gates of opportunity in the United States are shut, point to Governor Sultzer. I'm going to be governor, and I'm going to be in the White House."

It struck a responsive chord. It gave me courage. I, too, was striving toward a goal.

I remember when Dr. Streicher introduced Oscar Straus, ambassador to Turkey. "That great, noble man, who comes of the race whose middle name is philanthropy. No more do

we say 'Roman charity.' We say 'Jewish charity.' " It seemed to me he was looking straight at me when he said it. What a contrast! What a change from my recent background! In Russia, when I heard the word Jew mentioned, it was always in a derogatory sense. Here it was exalted.

Dr. Streicher spoke in beautiful Churchillian English. He was an intimate friend of Vice-President Sherman, a resident of Utica.

When I came to his class next day, Dr. Streicher, that tall, dignified old gentleman, looked even taller to me—as though his head were above the clouds. I said to him, "Yesterday you spoke of Jewish charity. You know the Hebrew word for charity?"

"Yes," he said, *"Zodoko."*

Then I told him, "The meaning of *zodoko* is righteousness. It is right. It is a privilege. It is more than a duty. It is justice tinged with compassion."

I was profoundly interested in the discussions with Dr. Streicher in his class. I had studied Job in the original Hebrew, and knew it almost by heart; but I never studied the eternal Job from the philosophic and poetic angles. I had studied it literally as I had the other books of the prophets. "Why should a good man suffer? Why did God plant a sense of understanding in man, to know that he ought not to suffer, and then, God makes him suffer?" I felt strongly that Job never existed. There is even a dispute in the Talmud as to whether he ever existed.

Though I didn't intend to graduate at Hamilton College, I enjoyed its lofty spirit. I did have problems, though, in Utica. I was fond of young Rabbi Haas, who was cultured

and friendly. But his domineering mother went against the grain. When he and I came home late, she scolded us both.

I asked her once, "Why do you holler at me?"

And she answered, "I like you just as I do my son. I holler at him, and I holler at you."

The memory of my mother came back to me. I'd never heard her use harsh words.

The self-importance of Mr. Abelson, the chairman of the Hebrew school board, also irritated me. He once interrupted me in the classroom, questioning my translation of a passage in the Book of Isaiah. I asked him not to interrupt me in the middle of my teaching. That offended him. I said, "I resign." He ran into Dr. Berman's house next door, and had Mrs. Berman, the secretary, write a note accepting my resignation. He came back promptly with the note of acceptance.

I continued with my college studies, but didn't teach any more. I moved away from Mrs. Haas's, and went to live at the home of the orthodox rabbi's sister, Mrs. Kamin.

The next day the parents of my pupils held a meeting. They were outraged at Mr. Abelson's unwarranted assumption of authority. They wanted me to resume my teaching at the school. This I refused to do. They asked me whether, if they rented a hall to hold classes, I would teach. I consented. Mr. Abelson was deflated, and chagrined. He was a king without a people. The students had left the Hebrew school. He called me in to talk matters over, and asked me to come back to the Hebrew school. I refused.

He realized that I had to complete my studies for the semester at college, and he offered me enough money with-

out teaching, if I would leave Utica. I accepted his proposition, but I couldn't find a moderately priced room on the campus. A lawyer, parent of one of my pupils, was incensed over Mr. Abelson's deal. He told me, "You cannot sell your residential right. It's against the law."

I continued my schooling, and now found time for a little writing. I wrote articles which were published in *The American Citizen* and other English-language periodicals. When one of my articles, "The Survival of the Jew Despite Prejudice," appeared in the same publication with one by Oscar Strauss, with my photograph alongside his, I was very proud.

Through an advertisement I secured a position as principal of the Hebrew school in Middletown, Connecticut. Middletown is the home of Wesleyan University. After one semester at Hamilton, I reluctantly took leave of my friends on the campus and boarded a train for New York on my way to Middletown.

CHAPTER

12

BACK in New York, I wrote to Bennie Press, a Middletown tailor who was the president of the Hebrew school there, inquiring about the salary. I had received attractive offers in New York and had the chance to complete my studies there. But I preferred to go to Middletown, because the cost of living would be less than in the metropolitan area, and I had tasted the advantages of college life in a small town. In reply, Mr. Press informed me that the Hebrew school in Middletown would pay me a satisfactory salary, and I should also have the opportunity to earn additional funds by private tutoring in the home of a wealthy family, which he described.

The following day I took the Fall River boat and reached Middletown at five A.M. I walked along the quiet streets

and came to a large one-story frame house, bristling with annexes. It was decorated with red, white, and blue lights. It fitted the descriptions I had been given—the owner was an extremist and ultra-patriotic. This was the place where I was to tutor.

I walked up on the porch and peered through a window. A bareheaded man was bent over a big book which lay open on the table. He was swaying and chanting in the singsong of the Talmud. Now I was positive I had come to the right place. (He was studying the Talmud in an undignified manner—it is unorthodox to study or even touch the Gemara without wearing a hat or a skullcap.)

I was accustomed, from my years in Lithuania, to enter a house without knocking, so I simply tried the door, found it unlocked, and walked in. I said "*Sholem aleichem,* Mr. Gobel."

"You must be the teacher," he exclaimed. "I talked to Bennie, and he told me you were coming. You are here at the right time. Can you help me out on this passage?"

He was studying the tractate of Sabbath. I enlightened him. He told me I could perform my morning service there, and have breakfast with him.

"You must wonder why I am studying Gemara without a hat. I have the highest respect for the Bible and the Talmud, but I am modern and no fanatic. I believe also in the New Testament. Jesus was a noble man. When I went to Europe, the first thing I did was to go to Rome and visit the Pope."

He went over to his shrine where he kept the Scroll, the *Sefer* Torah, and took out the crucifix which the Pope had

given him. He told me that his boys customarily attended service at the synagogue on the Sabbath, and on Sunday morning sang in the choir of the Catholic cathedral. He went on to say, "I want to give my boys and girls a thorough Hebrew education."

I listened, but I did not care to discuss the matter with him. Mr. Gobel appeared to me as a second Micah—the prophet who made peace with the local God. My ideal prophet is Elijah. He didn't compromise in his religion. When he saw the Israelites bring their sacrifices to Moloch, he cried out, "How long will you have two opinions in religion? If the idol is your God, worship him. If Jehovah is your God, worship Him. Either have one or none."

After breakfast Mr. Gobel asked me when I could start giving lessons to his children. I told him after I had made my plans at the university.

Before I went to the university, I stopped at Bennie Press's store and introduced myself to him. Then I walked up the hill to the college.

I turned in my certificate at the dean's office, where I received full credit for all past work. I was told that in order to graduate, I had to have eight points in classical languages. I only had seven—four in Latin and three in Greek. "Can I substitute Hebrew?" I asked.

The dean said, "Yes. But we have no one to examine you."

The president suggested that I go to Berkley Divinity School and have Dr. Vanderbegard, the president of the school, give me an examination; the university would accept his findings.

I went there directly. The tall, slender ecclesiastic opened the Book of Psalms in Hebrew, with English translation, and asked me to read the Hebrew and translate into English. Instead, I read the English, and translated into Hebrew. He was greatly impressed, and commented, "You know more than I. Instead of one credit, I'll give you four credits. And after you settle here, I'd like you to help us with our work. We need a man like you in our teaching." I was much flattered.

I ran back to the university with the credits, and a personal letter from Dr. Vanderbegard in a sealed envelope. I was proud to enter a university where Woodrow Wilson had taught.

I rented a room near the campus from an elderly woman, with two maiden daughters teaching at the university. My meals I enjoyed at the home of a member of the congregation.

The same evening, I went to the Hebrew school, arranged the classes, and assigned the lessons for the next day. I taught four classes, which were held from four o'clock until eight daily, except on the Sabbath, when there was no Hebrew school. On Sunday the classes were from eight in the morning until noon.

Presently I met a student who was also a violin teacher. He told me that he'd like to learn Hebrew, but that his hours of teaching conflicted with the Hebrew classes; and asked whether I could tutor him privately. I said, "Yes, if you'll give me lessons in playing the violin. "I've always wanted to learn to play."

He agreed to the bargain.

It took me several weeks to establish myself in the new routine. I liked my work. Everything was congenial. What pleased me most was my venture with the violin. In the silent hours of the night, the only time I had, I practiced scales, unconcerned.

The study of ethics at the university appealed to me. We took the New Testament as a text. Having been born and reared in a Jewish orthodox atmosphere, I knew little about the New Testament. Pious Jews don't read it. Now I had a chance to widen my "sphere" in a new religion. The instructor and I, in the presence of the class, became involved in many lively discussions. I questioned the unnatural belief of "Love thy enemies," of "turning the other cheek," of having somebody else suffer "to absolve my sins." He asked me about Joshua's statement that he executed all the instructions that Moses gave him, who was in turn, commanded by God. "Can you believe God told Moses to carry off the beautiful women, whenever they conquered a town?" I was convinced that my teacher had a point there. No prejudice entered into the discussions. I was glad I had taken the course, and I gained a broader view of ethics.

At the Gobel home, however, the discussions were more heated. I contended that the Talmud is a direct outgrowth of the Torah. And Mr. Gobel argued that the New Testament is a development of the Old Testament, and that the Talmudists hindered the progress of the Torah. They were ultra-conservative.

Our discussions had no bearing on the teaching of his children, of whom he had eight. The oldest was a boy, nineteen, and the youngest a girl of six. Mr. Gobel had his own

orchestra, his eight children. A retired United States Army Band leader came from New York every week, specially to teach them. Mr. Gobel was an austere parent and demanded formality of his children. All sat stiffly at the dinner table, in formal dress with high stiff collars. It seemed to me they all picked up their forks and laid them down on their plates at the same time—it was like the German Army on the march, only this was at the dinner table. I was amused.

The Hebrew lessons took much of my time, and I couldn't do justice to my own education. That depressed me. But after I learned to play short pieces, the violin was my consolation. Many a time I called out the immortal words of the poet-king David, *"Haksivo el rinosi ki daloisi meoid."* "Accept my Song. I am distressed."

I thought of the plaintive tone of the violin that carried the Jew through his suffering in Diaspora. It is not the coarse scraping of Nero, fiddling while Rome burned. It is like the typical Negro spiritual, born of hidden suffering in the South—an outcry from the depths of his heart to the God of mercy.

Each night I played the violin longer and longer into the early hours of the morning. Between pieces, I could hear restless stirring in the rooms downstairs. One morning after I had played nearly all night, the landlady's daughters met me at the foot of the stairs. They had been waiting for me—with drawn faces. Both talked at once: "Mr. Molk, you will either have to move or give up your violin!"

I was so upset by this that I took my "Stradivarius" and broke it on one of the two lions' heads in front of the porch,

and stayed on with my elderly landlady and her two maiden daughters for the summer.

As time went on I saw more and more of the Gobels. Frequently, Mr. Gobel came in the evening with his horse and buggy and took me for a drive. Generally he drove to the Christian cemetery, where his sepulchre was located. Above the gate of his plot were the engraved Hebrew initials, *peh nun,* which means, "Here you are buried." Below was his name in English letters.

I was too busy teaching to do justice to my studies. Nor did I get as much money for my private tutoring as I had expected. The violin which had given me so much pleasure, was broken.

Then a shocking thing happened.

The home where I had my meals was strictly kosher. The family had moved there from New York City. My host was a good, pious, and serious man, and his wife was a lively, attractive woman. They had two children, a boy in grammar school and a girl in high school. An intimate friend, a renowned cantor from New York, was a frequent visitor, and ate at their table. My host's wife glowed in his presence. He was fine looking and he had personality. I learned to like him.

He was conducting the closing service on the Day of Atonement in his temple. While he stood in his stocking feet, dressed in the sacred robes, a young woman with an infant in her arms walked up to the cantor's stand and, confronting him, shouted, "You are the father of this child!"

His wife and children were among the worshippers. He

calmly took off his robe, *tallith,* and skullcap, put on his shoes and his street hat, and stalked out of the temple.

Later that night his body was found in the East River.

I grieved for my cantor friend. And I felt sorry for my hosts. I knew how much this might mean to them. But the shock was life—I had learned about life in the raw.

A few days later I picked up my college credits and bank savings, and took the Fall River boat back to New York.

CHAPTER

13

I NEEDED a year or more of uninterrupted study to get a degree in education, but I couldn't work and study at the same time. Because the limited amount I saved had to do for the whole school year, I again looked for a Western university, where tuition and living costs would not be so high.

Columbia, Missouri, appealed to me. Missouri State University had one of the finest schools of journalism in the country, and I wanted to major in the subject. I also considered Valparaiso University in Indiana. There they had four semesters, each of twelve weeks. There was no long moratorium on learning, neither did the university go in for sports. Valparaiso was the poor man's Harvard.

I decided finally, to complete my studies at the University of Missouri. Columbia proved to be a small, quiet,

typical college town. I presented my credits to the dean of the School of Education, who pronounced them satisfactory. I asked whether I'd be able to graduate within the coming year. "You'll have to go to the administration building and see the president, Isador Loeb, regarding your preliminary credits," said the dean.

I found the president, a small man in a tan suit, extended my hand, and introduced myself. He told me coolly, "See me Monday." It was then Friday.

I inquired where I might find a room, and was directed to Loeb's near the campus. It was the home of the president's brother. Several students roomed there, and some had their dinners there, too. I rented a room upstairs together with another student, and had my dinners there.

Monday morning I went to see Isador Loeb. He looked over my certificates, and found a deficiency in my high school credits. He refused to accept the four years of Hebrew, for which I had been given credit at Wesleyan. He told me I couldn't graduate with my class unless I made up the required credits in Greek.

Provoked, I left for Valparaiso, Indiana, and went to the university where the vice-president reviewed my credits and registerd me as a senior. I rented a room near the campus with Julius Harris, a sophomore. We did our own cooking on a pot-bellied coal stove. All the other students had their meals at the university.

I took a full schedule. The abstract courses in psychology and philosophy helped to organize my thinking. Astronomy enriched my imagination. The subject that interested me most was structural geology. Here I was down to earth.

What possibilities it offers for research! What rewards Mother Earth pays to the one who learns to know her! We know more about the heavens above than about the planet beneath our feet.

The study of geology opened new vistas. It gave me vision. I saw a goal. I didn't care for a profession anymore. I knew that all I wanted to do was to complete my studies and get a degree. Mother Earth would provide for me. I became an optimist—I believed in myself.

I had taken forestry as an escape from my Yeshivah environment, when I wanted a complete change. But the subject was light; it offered no mental challenge. And besides, I would never make a forester; I was not a woodsman. I tried engineering, but I was not good at drafting. Medicine is a humanitarian and universal profession. It suited my purpose; but I had no money for such a long and diversified course. Geology was a revelation!

The new outlook prompted me to write a poem entitled "My First Week in Valpo," which was published in the first issue of the college paper that year. It won many friends for me on the campus. It was a contrast of moods before and after a week at Valparaiso. Here I studied psychology, which defines emotion—an activity within an activity. I studied geology, which defines magma—a solution within a solution. Definitions of minutes and magnitudes—mere terms—but they led me to find myself.

The residential population of the city was 5,000, and there were twice that many students. The University was co-educational. Aside from visiting speakers, social activity was limited.

I took every opportunity of spending time in the geological laboratory, making charts and studying rocks and fossils. Every night, weather permitting, I went up on the roof of the observatory with students and instructors, to look through the large telescope at the constellations. I usually stayed there six hours at a time, in order to see a complete cycle of the celestial sphere.

The professors became so overwhelmed when explaining the heavenly bodies, that they, themselves, seemed actually to soar in the heavens. I remember one of them running all over the platform, as if he himself were a comet.

I was equally inspired. Once, when we had two days off between semesters, I took a trip to Chicago with my friend, Abe Perlo. In the loop, I saw people rushing madly about. The night sky was clear and beautiful, but nobody looked up. I said to Abe, "No one is looking at the stars—just as if there were no stars."

I was impressed with the personality of Professor Lee F. Bennett. When he lectured on geology, talking of eons of time, of development, and of fossils, he himself became petrified. But one day he deviated from the theory of spontaneous evolution to the Old Testament story of instantaneous creation. Immediately his face became animated, as he dwelt on the man Moses. "The strength of Moses is expressed not merely in his creative and descriptive laws, not in his fight for freedom against physical and spiritual slavery. It manifests itself in the emancipation of the human mind. Moses released the finite world into an infinite universe. He gave the mortal a soul. And his own people he not only freed from the shackles of bondage, but he taught

them how to live with their fellowmen and how to eat. He gave them a prescription for cleanliness, and for chastity of family life. He gave them a social code of behavior. No wonder his people survived after losing their land. They had the Torah, and they lived in it as the people of The Book."

He concluded with great fervor, "Moses looms supreme, as the greatest figure of all time in the galaxy of immortals."

I found Professor Bennett interesting, but Professor J. E. Roessler in the German class was even more pleasing. He had a radiant personality. Professor Roessler taught higher mathematics and advanced German. (I took German VII and German VIII.) The professor was an elderly gentleman of Nordic countenance. His hair was gray, his complexion ruddy. The joy of life was reflected in his face. There were about eighty students in the class, but it seemed to me that, whenever I looked at him, he was smiling. When he recited Schiller's immortal poem, *"Das Lied der Glocke"* ("The Song of the Bell"), he was transfigured. Each word seemed wrought in glowing metal by the hands at the forge. At the end of every recitation, we sang a German song. When Professor Roessler led the singing in Heine's *"Die Lorelei,"* he was actually the lover singing to the *Mädchen.*

Julius Harris, my roommate, majored in Latin and history. He had one class with me in advanced psychology. Two girl students who lived downstairs also majored in Latin. The landlady kept a sharp eye on them. Whenever a male student came to study with the girls, she remarked sarcastically, "Here comes another cousin." But she didn't object when they came up to our room to ask Harris to help them with their Latin. She had confidence in me and

she wouldn't doubt Harris, because he was my roommate. But they disturbed me. I suggested that he go downstairs and study with the girls, and we do psychology together before going to bed. He agreed, and I had the room practically all to myself. I studied by night and recited by day.

Harris was a jolly young man. When I was morbid he cheered me. At times he amused the whole class. Once Professor George W. Neet wanted to illustrate memory. He asked the class, "Who can remember what he had for breakfast a week ago Sunday?" A number of students raised their hands. Then he asked, "Do you remember what you had a year ago on that day?" Only a few raised their hands. "How many remember what they had for breakfast ten years ago?" None raised his hand except Harris. He arose. Everyone waited expectantly.

He said, "I remember exactly what I had for breakfast ten years ago. Coffee and rolls."

The professor looked at him incredulously. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," Harris said.

"Harris, how can you remember what you ate ten years ago?"

"I've had the same breakfast for the last twenty years."

The class laughed uproariously.

Among the renowned visitors at the university was Dr. Stephen S. Wise. The occasion was the dedication of the new Liberal Arts building. He was surprised at the immense crowd that came to hear him. He asked, "Did you

all come to see how a rabbi looks?" A ripple of laughter passed through the audience.

He talked on education. He began with Milton's definition, and delivered a philippic against the poet for putting war on the same level with peace in preparing for life. He talked for more than an hour. His articulate words and forceful phrases held the attention of the audience. There was a continuous hush. When he was through, the crowd went wild with enthusiasm. That same evening, he left for Burlington to deliver a talk at Indiana State University. Vice-President Kinsey and other members of the faculty went along with him to hear him again.

The next day Dr. Wise was the topic of discussion. In the English class they discussed his diction. They discussed him in the education class. In psychology class they analyzed his mind. In physiology they studied his brains, and in anatomy they dissected him. This went on for several weeks.

I didn't remain for graduation. I needed the few dollars I had for my fare to Chicago. I knew I had passed, and left an address for the forwarding of my diploma.

After forty-eight weeks in Valparaiso, Abe Perlo signed my college annual, *The Record—1916,* and I signed his, and we both left for Chicago. He was on his way to Indiana State University to take a post-graduate course in history. I couldn't go anywhere. I'd had forty-eight dollars at the beginning of the school year, and now I had four left. I needed ten more for a ticket to New York. Perlo insisted on lending it to me. I took the ten dollars as a loan, but I never returned it, for I lost track of him. This is the only

debt I haven't paid—I still hope to find him. Meanwhile I must console myself with his written words. "It is earnestly hard to part! Why? Because of the genuine friendship that has grown up between us, a friendship which disregards minor differences."

I parted with Perlo and took the train for New York. I was happy. I had two diplomas—one for the rabbinate and one in education. But above all, I now had a goal. I was thinking of a man I'd met at Sabbath dinner with the Rosenthals in Columbus, Ohio—an oilman from Marietta.

CHAPTER

14

MY sister now had two children, a girl and a boy. I told her that I'd graduated and that my diploma would be mailed to her. She said, "If Mama knew it, how happy she would be!"

I sat right down and wrote a letter to my mother. "Dear Mama: I am writing this from Tobie's home. After you read it, forward it to Simon in Wabolnik. Mother, rejoice with me in my accomplishment. It is hardly seven years since I left you. I was young, thirteen, a stranger in this land. I had to work my way through. Four years ago I received *"smicho"* from the Yeshivah. Now I've received a diploma from Valparaiso University. I've worked and studied to adjust myself to a new land, in a new environment. I feel that I have accomplished a lot. I feel that I am somebody.

And I am ready to do something. I am going to do it, and do it in a big way. I know that you won't take me for a utopian, and will understand me. I will keep my feet firmly on the ground, and success will come from the earth. Like Jacob of yore, I saw rocks wherever I went, and like him, I've turned the stumbling blocks into stepping stones. Like old Jacob, I saw angels, and like him, I saw the angels first ascend from the earth, and then descend. Yes, I am a dreamer, but I am practical, too."

Later, I wrote a brief note to the Rosenthals in Columbus, asking for the address of the oilman whom I'd met at their home. Instead of an answer from them, Mr. Windel, the oilman himself, came to see me. He said, "Since I met you at Rosenthal's, I've wanted to see you again. I talked about you whenever I went to Columbus. When they told me you'd asked for my address, I came to see you."

He invited me to Marietta to live with him. Since he was in the oil well supplies and oil business, I would have a chance to get into the same business. He added, "You can repay me for living in my home by teaching my children.

I accepted his proposition, and accompanied him to Marietta, arriving next morning. It is an old town, and was the boyhood home of Vice-President Charles G. Dawes. Marietta also has a fine college. Two navigable rivers flow within its borders, the Ohio and the Susquehanna. In the spring, when the rivers rise, the section where the working people live is generally under water. Across the old wooden bridge is West Marietta, a small town on the West Virginia side noted chiefly for its saloons near the bridge.

Mr. Windel introduced me to his large family. His children, all grown, lived with him in a two-story frame house

on a hill. I had dinner with the family around a square table in their big kitchen. Mrs. Windel, a large, talkative woman, was most cordial, and seemed glad to have me there. As soon as we were through saying grace, Mr. Windel rose from the table, ready to leave. He said to me, "You stay here and get acquainted."

I got right up. "I'd better go along with you," I said. "I came here to learn the business."

We went to his pipe yard. There were stacks of different sizes of new and second-hand pipe. In the back part of the yard, were piles of old iron. It was a busy place. Men were unloading a car of pipe on the track, while others were loading a car of junk. A farmer came along with a load of junk to sell. A truck drove in to pick up pipe. All hands were occupied. They needed more help with the loading and unloading. I volunteered and began to roll a joint of pipe. Mr. Windel put his hand on my arm. "Don't do that. If you want to work, put on overalls. Let's go into the office."

He introduced me to his bookkeeper. Then he said to a man whom he addressed as Professor, "Meet Isador, my children's teacher from New York." I resented being called a teacher—I hadn't come for that purpose. And I didn't even care to enter into conversation with the Professor.

I told Mr. Wendel, "I'd better get overalls."

He said, "Wait, my lease man will soon be here, and he will take you out to the oil fields." He left me in the office, and went back to the yard.

Restless, I went out, too. Mr. Windel was busy weighing oily metal, which he'd just bought from a peddler. He said to me, "Here, I'm going to teach you the business. I'm

honest. Everybody knows that. But you have to do a little scheming if you are in the junk business. Did you notice that I cheated this man? I didn't give him the right weight." He continued, "How can I stay in business, and sell red brass I've bought from a peddler for twenty for eighteen cents a pound? But if I don't give him twenty, he'll sell it to a competitor who'll take off a lot more from the weight than I did. I only took off enough to give me a profit of ten per cent gross, which is, I think, a legitimate profit. That's the junk business."

I didn't want to discuss it with him. I thought to myself, "Cheating is cheating."

Then he asked me, "Did you notice that I used rough language, and did a little swearing? If my boys did it, it would make me mad. But I did it on purpose to teach you that you have to be rough in this kind of business."

I told him I didn't like that either. I asked him, "Do you have to scheme in the pipe business, too?"

He said, "Sometimes you have to do it."

"Do you mean to say that there is no honesty in business? Maybe in the junk business you deal with a lot of irregular characters," I said. "But I don't have to get in the junk business in order to go in the oil business. I think there must be a direct way."

"If you are Rockefeller and have a lot of money," he replied.

I hadn't known Mr. Windel very long, and I didn't care to argue. I believed him honest, but I didn't like his methods. I said, "Mr. Windel, let's go over to your oil wells."

We got into his roadster and drove about ten miles, until

we came to a hilly field. I saw a few jacks bobbing up and down. He said, "This is the forty I'm interested in. I've three partners. There are seven wells on this forty, and it makes ten barrels net. It is forty-two gravity oil, no water. We didn't develop the lease ourselves. We bought it from a major company. We'll soon have it paid off. Then we'll get a contractor with a Star machine and drill a new well."

I asked him, "How much does a contractor get?"

He said, "About two dollars a foot."

"How deep do you have to go to get a well?"

"About six, seven hundred feet," he said. "I'll take you later to another lease where the well is two thousand feet deep."

We drove a few miles, and came to a farmhouse. At the well nearby a truck and a machine were pulling rods. I asked, "What are they doing?"

He said, "The cups or the balls and seats must be bad, and they're pulling them out to replace them."

"How much is the well making?" I asked.

"When it's pumping good, it makes between five and six barrels a day."

"What is a barrel of oil worth?"

"It depends on the gravity," Mr. Windel said. "Oil from this well is forty-four gravity, and is worth three dollars and a dime. Of course, this isn't net. The farmer gets an eighth royalty."

I asked, "Are there any new wells being drilled around Marietta?"

"Yes, my brother-in-law, Sam, and I have an interest in one. It will be twenty-three hundred feet deep."

"Could we go out there now?"

"It's shut down. We're waiting for casing. We're now six hundred feet deep. I'll take you out there sometime," he said.

I found the afternoon extremely interesting, and felt I learned a lot about the oil business.

The family were at the table, waiting, when we came in. That evening I got acquainted with Mrs. Windel and the children.

After the long day of travel and meeting and talking with new people in strange territory, I was tired. Mr. Windel took me upstairs into a large room. There were four beds in it and about as many school desks with seats. He told me I was to sleep in the bed in the corner. His boys slept in the other beds. This was also used as a study room.

The next morning, I gave all the children a lesson. The girls I taught Hebrew grammar and composition and the boys a chapter in Jeremiah. Four of the children were already in college, two were in high school, the youngest two in grade school. After spending about three hours in giving the lessons, I walked over to Mr. Windel's office. He obligingly took me out to the yard, and familiarized me with the different activities in the supply and junk business.

This went on for a few weeks. Whenever I mentioned getting overalls to get started, he'd say, with a wave of his hand, "You got plenty of time. You ain't starving!" I began to doubt his sincerity, and decided to look for disinterested friends. I'd made the acquaintance of an elderly gentleman, a Mr. Weiss. He was an ardent *chassid* and a Talmudic scholar. I had many lively discussions with him.

Through Mr. Weiss, I met Dr. Fein, an oculist, who had studied in the Yeshivah at Telse. We met and talked over Talmudic themes. I also made the acquaintance of some professors from Marietta College. I saw them frequently, and we discussed the morals and ethics of the scriptures.

Some of my friends advised me to go to the new chemical factory which had just opened nearby, and inquire about a position. Though this was not really my aim, I went, but was told they needed only salesmen. I didn't appear to be a salesman to them.

Several months passed and I was still where I'd started. Mr. Windel had disappointed me, and my scholarly friends couldn't help me. One day I said to Mr. Windel, "I must leave. I didn't come to Marietta just to be a teacher. I could stay in New York and get paid, if I wanted to teach. You said you were going to help me get into the oil business. You haven't done it, and I'm not sure you can. I've been here four months and have nothing to show for my time. I think I could lease land and try to promote it, and then get a contractor to drill a well, the same as others do. I don't need to be a Rockefeller to start out that way."

Mr. Windel looked surprised at my outburst. The next day, he said to me, "Isador, I think I have something for you. My wife and I didn't sleep the whole night, thinking about you, and we decided on something. I ordered some patriotic pictures for you to sell. We'll see what you can do."

Thursday, the pictures came—a hundred of them—Wilson in the foreground with Washington and Lincoln in the background. Friday morning I awoke early. I took

the whole hundred and went over the bridge to West Marietta. I didn't want to humiliate Mr. Windel by peddling in town, since I was known there as his scholar-teacher. I rapped at every door. Each time a woman would open the door, and I'd show her the pictures, she'd say, "Ain't they nice, how much are they?" When I said twenty-five cents, she'd tell me, "If you make it fifteen, I'll buy one."

I was tired and discouraged. I stopped in one of the saloons to lay down my load and rest. Meanwhile I displayed my stock. The men at the bar came over to look at the pictures. The bartender said, "Young man, how many you got?"

I said, "A hundred."

"How much you selling 'em for?"

"A quarter a piece."

"Here's twelve dollars and a half. Let me have fifty."

This gave me a boost. I took the rest of the pictures under my arm, and walked across the street to the second saloon. I went right over to the bartender, and told him about my luck in the other saloon. He bought the rest at twenty-five cents.

I had doubled my money. I was happy. I went home before sunset, in time for the Sabbath.

When Mr. Windel heard of my salesmanship, he ordered four hundred more pictures. The next week, I took the Interurban, first to Lowell, then to Beverly. I stopped at all the saloons and disposed of my entire stock with little difficulty. I came home with a fifty-dollar profit. Mr. Windel said, with a little envy in his voice, "You see, I

made a businessman out of you. I ordered five hundred more."

I said, "Mr. Windel, I'm sorry. I'm not going to sell any more pictures. I didn't come here to be a picture salesman."

He said, "What will I do with them when they come?"

"If you can't cancel the order, have your son Ralph sell them on his way to Harvard. I've decided to leave."

He was shocked. "Where are you going?"

I said, "I'm going into the oil business—out West."

"Ain't you afraid of the storms and tornadoes out West?"

"They don't both me," I said.

I went to see Dr. Fein, who was level-headed and had a sense of humor. I remember, once an old lady, a relative of Vice-President Dawes, came to have glasses fitted. It didn't take him long to find the proper lens for her. She was in her late nineties, and her vision was very poor. Her hearing was also bad. When she put on her new glasses, she said, "I can see the world again! You are a great doctor. What is your Alma Mater?"

He answered, "Telser Yeshivah."

"Oh yes, Doctor, I've heard of it."

Dr. Fein smiled. He knew that she was just saying it to be polite—Telser Yeshivah was a seminary, not a school for optometry.

When I told Dr. Fein about my conversation with Mr. Windel, he assured me I'd done the right thing. "I'll introduce you to Mr. Gold from Clarksburg, West Virginia," he said. "He is in the same business as Mr. Windel. He went out to Kansas and made a success in the oil business. I've heard he'll be here today. You wait, I'll get him over here."

Presently Mr. Gold arrived. He was a small man with dark eyes and hair, and talked with an air of prosperity. "You come with me to El Dorado," he said, "and I'll put you in the oil business right away. I've heard that you're a rabbi and a teacher. Have you learned how to slaughter chickens? There is no *shochet,* (ritual slaughterer) in our town."

I said, "That's easy. I know the laws. All I need to learn is the mechanical work. I can get a few lessons from the *shochet* here, then I can stop over in Pittsburgh on my way to El Dorado and see Chief Rabbi Sivitz. He'll get his *shochtim* (slaughterers) from Pittsburgh to teach me how to slaughter chickens and he'll give me *kabola.*" (*Kabola* is an authorization to slaughter fowl, etc., ritually.)

I remained another week in Marietta, practicing with the *shochet.* I had time to think. I reflected that my six months' stay there, though it hadn't led to much, had still not been an entire waste of time. I'd learned something of business and learned also about people. I'd been, for the first time, primarily concerned with people instead of books. I thought of a man from Indiana whom I'd met at Dr. Fein's. A godly man—his head always covered—he wore a skullcap under his street hat. He told me once about a "big deal" he was negotiating. It involved dismantling of an oil property of twenty-five wells, exceeding a hundred thousand dollars. "That's quite an undertaking," I said, "and a lot of money. Suppose you can't go through with it?"

"Well, he said—as if any businessman should know, "I write Lee Green, my brother's name, instead of Louis Green in the contract. And if I don't go through with it—what can they take from my brother?"

Mr. and Mrs. Windel were still talking about the storms in the West. They didn't want me to leave. I disregarded their arguments and wasted no time getting to Pittsburgh.

On my way to see Rabbi Sivitz, something unusual happened to me. I had arrived at two A.M. I asked a couple of men where I could find a moderately priced room to stay over night. They led me to a dark street, grabbed my satchel, and ran away. I started yelling, and a policeman came. He called the station, and the men with my satchel were caught. The patrol wagon came and took us all to jail.

I had no way of proving who I was, and they put me in a cell, so I'd be there in the morning to identify the crooks in court. I took out some letters from my satchel to convince the desk sergeant that I was respectable. That didn't satisfy them. They said I must have someone from the city to identify me. I didn't want to wake up Rabbi Sivitz at two o'clock in the morning.

We finally compromised. I slept upstairs in the Captain's apartment, where I had a good bed, and breakfasted in the morning. Court was held at nine o'clock. I identified the men and they went to jail. I went to see Rabbi Sivitz.

He was an elderly man of medium height, somewhat heavy, with a bushy white beard and expressive eyes. I told him my story, and showed him the letters from Reb Itzale Ponievezer and the Slabodker Rav, and also my *smicho* from the Yeshivah in New York.

"I've heard all about you," he said. "You stay here with us until you are through." Then he called his wife. "We have a guest. He will stay with us for awhile."

I remained at their home for a month, and had my meals with them. Rabbi Sivitz introduced me to Jacob and

Abraham Levitt, the *shochtim* of Pittsburgh. I went with them every day to the slaughter house and to different poultry markets. They took a great interest in coaching me in the mechanics of preparing the knife flawlessly. They taught me how to slaughter various fowls. After a month of teaching and practice, they gave me *kabola.* They stated in their certificates, that "in awe and humility" it was their duty and privilege to grant me *kabola;* and that they felt honored to "voice praise to a *Gaon* like me, who could be a rabbi and leader in the greatest Jewish congregation."

Rabbi Sivitz examined me and gave me the final *Kabola.* He stated that if I had been going to accept a position as rabbi, he would have written in more vigorous terms of praise than the *shochtim.* But knowing that I had merely studied the mechanics of *shchito* (slaughtering) to use it for myself, not to make a profession out of it, all he could say was that he vouched that "a great and noble soul, like me, would do everything properly." He himself would eat from my *shchito.*

Mrs. Gold phoned to Rabbi Sivitz's home to say that she and her two sons had arrived, and were waiting for me at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. I told her I'd be right over. I thanked Rabbi Sivitz and his wife heartily for their hospitality and told them I'd never felt so much at home since leaving my mother.

I met Mrs. Gold and her two sons in the lobby of the hotel, borrowed fifty dollars from her, and bought my ticket to El Dorado, Kansas.

CHAPTER

15

WE arrived in El Dorado at six A.M. on a day in the fall of 1917, and went directly to the new, still uncompleted hotel. Mr. Gold had made reservations—two rooms for the family, and one room for me. "We'll have to stay here till our house is finished," he said. He was building a two-story brick house.

After my experience in Marietta, I thought I had better have a definite understanding with Mr. Gold before I started. I called him aside and told him, "I came here to get in business. As you want me to make my home with you, I will be glad to teach your boys and attend to the *shchito;* I eat kosher myself. I don't expect, nor will I accept any remuneration for this work. Now, Mr. Gold, as I

told you before, I came out here to get in business. I'll try it by myself, but any help you can extend will be appreciated."

"All right, all right," he said. "Come over to the office, and I'll take you out in the field."

Mr. Gold was industrious. He had started out in the oil field junk business in Clarksburg, West Virginia. Gradually he'd got into the secondhand oil well supply business. He then joined a driller and became a drilling contractor. They drilled wells for Mr. Gold's rich in-laws, who were already successful in the oil well supply business in Ohio. In 1915, at the height of the oil boom, Mr. Gold drilled wells for them in the El Dorado zone, and developed one of the richest properties in the field. He always managed to retain some interest in the leases where he drilled and eventually became a successful oil man in his own right.

Mr. Gold was a sociable fellow, descended from a self-respecting and upright Lithuanian family. His father had been a *shochet,* a truly pious and conscientious man. It was told of him that when his hands became unsteady, and he first failed to kill a rooster according to ritual, he put away his knife and exclaimed, "I'm through. No more *shochet.*"

When young Gold came back from service in the Czar's army, he married Dina Sachs, who came of a family reputed to be learned and well-to-do.

Mr. and Mrs. Gold gave serious attention to the rearing of their two boys. Aside from regular schooling, they tried to give them a religious training in keeping with family traditions. The boys were intelligent and well-behaved, and the preliminary tutoring at the hotel was pleasant, but we

couldn't get well started until we moved into their new home.

El Dorado had just passed the peak of the oil boom and still had the appearance of a frontier town. Many people slept in barns. Only Main Street, Central Avenue, and a few side streets near the business section were paved. Only Main and Central boasted sidewalks. Most of the buildings were one-story frame structures. Our hotel was one of the few brick buildings in town. El Dorado had five banks; and two railroads, The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, and the Missouri Pacific.

The influx of oilmen had swelled the farming community from about four thousand to twenty-five thousand. The people were rough; they had flocked here to get rich. The merchants on Main Street charged exorbitant prices, and showed no courtesy in their dealings. There were no traffic regulations, and, in consequence, much speeding. Everyone was restless, excited about the new gushers coming in.

I walked about in a daze. One day, while crossing Main Street, I was hit by a car. When I opened my eyes, a doctor was bending over me and we were surrounded by a crowd of people. The doctor said, "You are hurt."

I said, "No."

"What?"

"I am killed!"

He took me to his office, and put several stitches in my chin. Then I was taken back to my room at the hotel. When I came to, I saw that my trousers were ripped, and the dime

I'd had in my pocket was gone. Mrs. Gold said, "Now, you can't go further down, you'll have to go up."

It took me several months to recover from the accident and regain my courage. I was too self-conscious to venture out with a bandaged chin.

A month later, we moved into the new house. I still had to go to the doctor every day for dressings. I was depressed at my unlucky beginning. I couldn't bear to stay alone in my room, and haunted the living room downstairs. My pacing the floor and the medicinal odor of my dressing irritated Mrs. Gold. She said to me, "Mr. Molk, I wish you would stay in your room. I can't stand the smell of your medicine."

That was too much for my morbid and independent spirit. "Mrs. Gold," I said, "the first day I came out here, I told Mr. Gold I didn't expect anything except food and shelter, and would do what I'd agreed without pay. But if I can't feel at home, I don't want to stay here. Good-bye!"

"I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it!" she said, fretfully. "Don't tell Charlie!"

I regretted the incident. She was a good woman, and had treated me in motherly fashion. I finally decided to stay on.

A few months later, Mr. Gold came home for dinner one day and told me enthusiastically, "I've got good news for you—we just spudded in a wildcat and I'm figuring you in for a sixty-fourth!"

I was encouraged. A month passed and I heard nothing about the wildcat. I asked him how the well had turned out. With a wave of the hand, he said, "A dry hole."

Many more times he told me the same thing, but each time it turned out to be "dry."

My wells never came in. I began to think I'd have to follow the advice of Hillel the Elder, *"Im ein ani li mi li?"*—"If I am not for myself, who is for me?" I decided while still with the Golds, to go into the junk business, when fully recovered. In the meantime, I might familiarize myself with the junk and secondhand supply yards in El Dorado and also with some of the promoters and "lease hounds."

I would walk along Main Street and discuss things with these men. I'd learned a little about the junk and supply business while in Marietta. I concluded now that most of the men in the junk business got there because they were incapable of anything else. And being in the business, they were prepared to grab the opportunity when a war broke out, or a boom came along. This was how they made their money. I didn't care for the high-powered promoters.

I strolled one day to the north end of Main Street, where I noticed an empty lot with stacks of red bricks. The shack on the lot had been moved back almost to the alley. A robust young man at the door munched *kosher wurst* (sausage) and pumpernickel. As I approached, he extended a hand in greeting, and exclaimed, "You must be the *shochet* Gold imported."

"I am, and my name's Isador Molk. What's yours?"

"Dave Stein."

"Gut Shabbos," said I.

Stein and his partner were preparing to put up a brick building. "I came here when the boom started, several years ago," he said. "I'd been in the same kind of business

before with my father, back in Illinois. I made out pretty good here, and I'm worth maybe nine thousand dollars, but not in cash. I got iron, metals, pipe, tires, old rope. My shack in the back is almost filled up," he added proudly.

I felt like Heinrich Heine when he saw Napoleon. I wanted to fall on my knees and pay him homage.

As I was getting ready to leave, Dave said, "Wait, I forgot to tell you. I may be a millionaire tomorrow. My partner and I are supposed to have a thirty-second in the big Derby well south of town—they're going to drill in tomorrow. I suppose they'll beat me out of it. You know my partner? He's a great promoter—he got that lease for the Derby."

"How did you get to know him?" I asked.

"My father used to sell rope to his father-in-law, back in Illinois. Well, I took a lot of chances. They always beat me. The hell with the oil business, I'll stick to my junk. Tomorrow I'll sell my rope to Jake Biddle from Pittsburgh. By the way, do you know his brother Louie? He has a big yard near the Missouri Pacific station. You ought to meet him. He's a nice fellow. Well, I'll soon have to sell out. I'm going into the Army. How about you?"

I told him I'd just registered.

He threw out his chest and said, "March! left, right, left, right." Then, "Be sure to see my father. He'll be here next week. He prays three times a day. He never misses. I put on my *tefillin* every day, except Saturday, when you're not supposed to."

I was glad I'd seen him. He boosted my morale. He seemed a good-hearted lad.

I came home in time for the Sabbath dinner. At the table, I told Mr. Gold of meeting Dave. "He's a fine man," he said.

"Do you know his partner?" I asked.

"Louie Robb? Yes."

"What do you think of the big well they expect on the Derby lease?"

"It will be dry."

"What do you think of Mr. Robb?"

"He's a big talker, but never gets anywhere."

I said, jokingly, "I, too, may go into the junk business."

"But you'll stay with us?"

"Yes. I don't think anything will interfere with my staying here."

He told me, "You ought to meet Max Sokolsky, Rosie's husband. She's my wife's cousin. He works in the department store. He wants to go into business so that he can go back to his wife." Then he added, "Be sure to be at the office at nine o'clock tomorrow. I'm going to make a location for a new well. You'll go with me."

That Saturday night, I took a walk on Main Street, to see Max Sokolsky. On my way I stopped in front of a pawn shop, which also had men's work clothes. The proprietor, a short, plain man, was standing in the doorway. He greeted me and we began to talk. "I'm Sam Berger," he said. "So you're Gold's teacher."

I asked, "Where do you come from?"

He said, "Originally I came from Ponievez."

"You're my *landsman!*"

I learned he had operated Rothstein's jewelry store,

near Shloime Ezra's Yeshivah. He knew my brothers. I became interested in my *landsman,* and forgot about seeing Sokolsky.

"I wanna ask you something," he said. "For how many years is a senator elected?"

"Six," I said.

"I know we are voting for senators every two years."

"A third of the senate is elected every two years."

"You're wrong. Wait." A Negro passed by. "Bud, c'm'ere. I wanna ask you something. For how long is a senator elected?" The Negro opened his eyes wide. "Ain't a senator elected for two years?" Sam asked.

The Negro scratched his head and answered, Yyeh."

"See," my *landsman* said. "He ought to know. He's a real American."

I took a liking to Sam Berger. He was friendly with everybody. After that first meeting, I saw him often.

Early the next morning I went to Gold's office. "We'll take Mr. Molk, and teach him the oil business," Mr. Gold said to Mr. Smith.

We drove about six miles south, across a small bridge, and up a rocky hill. I noticed a couple of wooden derricks. The beams were moving up and down fast. We got out of the car and walked from the nearest rig about a thousand feet. Mr. Gold stopped to look at the flat rocks. He tried to pick one up. It was buried in the ground. I said, "Mr. Gold, it looks like a boulder."

He bent down till his nose touched the ground, and sniffed. "This is a good location. Let's drive a stake," he said to his partner, with an air of authority. "Now, Mr. Molk, we can go."

I had to smile.

After we came home, I thought about what had happened. I went back to my geology. How many eons it must have taken for the outcrop! And how many streams must have flown over it to bring about the erosion! How could it still retain the oil for Mr. Gold to smell? Thank God for a sense of humor!

Eight months passed. One morning, in desperation, I walked four miles out of town, stopped at a filling station, and asked the attendant if he had any junk to sell. He said, "We have an old gasoline pump. You can have it for a buck. There's a lot of metal in it."

I said, "I'll bring the money as soon as I sell it."

The pump weighed about one hundred and fifty pounds —mostly iron, with some brass. I grasped one end with both hands and pulled. The other end plowed a furrow in the muddy road—I had to rest frequently. It stuck several times, and had to be dug out of the mire. Exhausted, I dragged it into the first junk yard I came to. "What'll you give me for it?" I asked.

"It isn't worth very much," the junk dealer said, "It's mixed iron—cast, malleable and a little brass. I'll have to break it up and clean it."

He handed me two dollars and a half. I felt prosperous. I trekked back to the filling station, and paid the man his dollar.

This was the start of my business. As I look back, I see in it my entire career—from junk pump to oil wells.

While I was at the filling station, a man in a model T Ford asked the attendant, "Does he buy junk?"

I said, quickly, "Yes."

He took me to his car and showed me several hundred pounds of metals, which had to be cleaned. "You can have it," he said, "for ten dollars."

"Will you trust me?"

"You look like an honest boy. Do you want me to take it in to town for you? I'm going to El Dorado anyhow."

"That's fine," I said. "I'll go along with you."

It was late and the junk yard was closed. We unloaded it in the yard, and the man left. I went to the junk man's home a few blocks away, and told him about the metal I'd brought. He went with me to his yard, sorted out the junk metal and paid me twenty-one dollars. I asked him if he'd take me out to the man I bought it from, so I could pay him. He agreed.

I began to make more and more of these little deals. I didn't tell the Golds about my small transactions. But my faith in myself was renewed. However, I didn't want to carry on this way indefinitely.

One morning I went to see Dave Stein, and told him, "I hear you're called up and are selling out. Will you give me a chance to buy this place?"

His answer was, "I got most of my stock sold. I'll take four hundred dollars for what I got left, including the scale and tools. You can use the yard and the shack for nothing, until the building is finished and rented. I want two hundred dollars right now, and two hundred you'll put in my account in the bank after I leave for the Army." I asked him to give me an option till next day, and I'd see whether I could raise the money. He said, "Agreed."

In the afternoon I went to see Charlie Gold at his office

and told him, "I've a chance to buy out Dave Stein. He wants a deposit of two hundred dollars now, and two hundred after he leaves for the Army."

"You may have to go too."

"I haven't even gotten my questionnaire yet," I told him.

"Why don't you talk to Max Sokolsky? He would be a good partner for you," said Mr. Gold.

"I don't think he has any money."

"But he has more experience in business than you. If you'll be partners, I'll endorse a note for both of you. You can take it to the Kansas State Bank, with my endorsement, I'm sure you'll get the two hundred dollars."

"I don't know Max," I said. "But if I go into partnership with him, I want to sign the checks myself."

"That's all right. I'll call Max, and have him come right over," said Mr. Gold.

Max Sokolsky came in—a man in his late thirties. His dark eyes flashed in his Slavic face, and his hair was parted in the middle and slicked down. He used Russian phrases with a Cossack gusto.

Mr. Gold said, "Max, I'm going to sign a note for you and Mr. Molk, if you go into business together."

I didn't much care for Max as a partner. He was servile when he wanted something, mean if he didn't get it.

I asked Charlie Gold to have his bookkeeper draw up a contract between Max and me, specifying that I was to sign the checks and handle the bank account.

The next morning I talked to the cashier of the Kansas State Bank, introducing myself as a man with a college and seminary diplomas. Then I presented the note. The cashier

told an assistant to go with me, and look at the place I wanted to buy.

The bank assistant looked around, and then picked up a piece of old three inch pipe with a lot of holes in it, and asked me what it was. With my knowledge of chemistry, I told him, "It must have undergone the process of decay."

"If you don't know that this is a useful piece of pipe, and that it has been specially perforated to be used as an anchor, how can you succeed in this business?"

I said, "I was truthful. I told you I'm just starting in business. Don't you think I could learn? I've learned a lot in my life. I just learned something from you."

He walked off.

I went directly to the Farmers and Merchants Bank. I didn't ask Mr. Gold for his endorsement, and I didn't tell the cashier about my diplomas. I told him I'd bought out a business and needed a thousand dollars working capital. Without more ado, he made out a thousand dollar note for six months, and I signed it. "I can have Mr. Gold endorse, too, if you wish," I told him.

"It won't be necessary," was the reply.

He gave me a deposit slip, and I opened a checking account.

This could never have happened in Russia. All the avenues of opportunity would have been closed to a Jew. Wealth came only by heredity. There was no chance to get ahead on your own merits. My brother Simon, with the capacity for accomplishing great things, was helpless—he could hardly eke out an existence.

I told Max about getting the loan from the bank, and he commented, "You are a *charosho chalevek**."

When Mr. Gold heard of it, he said, "A thousand dollars? I'd better deal with them, too."

Max and I went over to Dave's. I wrote a bill of sale, had Dave sign it, and gave him a check for two hundred dollars—the first check I ever signed.

* A good man.

CHAPTER

16

DAVE'S partner, Louie Robb, was busy with the carpenters and masons in front. They were pouring cement, and putting in the foundation for the new building. Max, dressed like a clerk, was busy back in the yard marking prices on tires, and other junk that could be salvaged. I was in the shack, setting up the books.

A man came in to sell a car. "Max, see how it runs. I can't drive," I told him.

He hopped in the car and drove it to the alley and then backed in; the back alley was the only approach to the junk yard. Max asked him, "What do you want for it?"

"I'll take forty bucks," the man said.

Max motioned to me, with a jerk of the head, to go give him a check. I made out check number two. He immediately put a chalk mark on it—one hundred fifty dollars.

Shortly after, a customer came in, "Do you want to sell this car?"

I asked, "What'll you give me for it?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Wouldn't you give any more?"

"If you'll throw in a spare tire, I'll give you a hundred and ten," the man said.

I turned to Max. "What do you think?"

No, we have one price," my partner said.

The customer turned to go. I stopped him and asked him for his address, should I decide to sell it to him. I didn't like the "one price" in used material. All you can base your price on is the need of the customer, and what you have put into it.

Another man brought in Manila rope. I looked up Dave's price list to find out how much to pay, and told Max to separate the oily rope from the clean. I weighed it, and paid the man five cents a pound for the clean rope and a penny for the oily rope.

"I'm through here for today," Max said. "Give me a check for ten dollars, I'm going to buy some work clothes."

I gave him a check.

Farmers and lease workers came in with iron and other metals, and I had a rush of business while Max was out buying work clothes. He didn't come back. It was getting dark, so I locked the shack, and went home for supper.

I washed up and sat down at table. Mrs. Gold asked, "How did you do, Mr. Molk?"

I said, "We did a good business."

"Charlie was right in getting you and Max together. He'll be a great help."

"I hope so. So far, he's already drawn ten dollars, and hasn't done much," I said. "I don't feel that I have a partner. I'm running the yard myself."

A barbed wire fence separated me from the Bender and Kruger junk yard. Just after I took over they put up a scrawled patriotic sign which read: "Sell us your junk and help us win the war." They took advantage of their foreign status to claim draft exemption and at the same time pretended they were helping to win the war, just to get more business. Their tactics nauseated me.

I was a novice and they tried to outsmart me. Once, during my experimental ventures before I had the yard, they sent over a peddler with a sack of "tinfoil" to sell to me. It amounted to seventy-five dollars. I borrowed the money in small sums from a crippled shoemaker, from the grocery man on the corner and from my *landsman.* When I tried to sell the "tin foil," I learned that it was tea lead. To add to my sorrow I was seventy-five dollars in debt and didn't have the money to pay.

Now that they were my neighbors they had free-wheeling. While the building was in construction, my customers had to go through the alley to get to my yard. If one stopped in front my competitors pulled him into their own yard. On the Sabbath, when I didn't do business, my customers waited in the yard till sunset. My neighbors pulled the fence down and coaxed them in. They gave a vagrant fifty pounds of rope, had him weigh it at the city scale and change the figures to five hundred. When he brought it he mixed it up with the rest of the rope in my yard before I had a chance to see it, and handed me the ticket. This went

on for quite a while, until I became suspicious and checked the tickets with the copies of the city scale. I ignored them, and went my own way.

I had been very busy the past few weeks, loading rope and rags. Max was out on his "big deals." I rushed home for my meals and ate hurriedly. I didn't pay attention to the table. Once I noticed a newspaper under my plate. I was hurt. Mrs. Gold was a particular housekeeper. I realized that my clothes were soiled and that I dirtied her white tablecloth. But I didn't want to be discriminated against. I said, "Mrs. Gold, you won't need to bother putting paper under my plate anymore. I'll sleep in the shack at the yard and have my meals somewhere else. But I'll come to teach the boys."

She looked shocked. "Did you tell Charlie?"

"I'm too busy," I said. "You tell him."

"I'll give you some pillows."

"Thanks. I won't need them, I got sacks of rags in the shack."

She didn't think I'd mind if she put paper under my plate. She wanted me to stay. Of course, she didn't want her husband to know that she was the cause of my leaving.

The following Friday night, just as I was getting ready for bed in my shack, I heard a knock. I opened the door, and to my surprise, there stood Reuben Silver, the husband of Mrs. Gold's cousin. He said, "I missed you at the Golds. I came purposely to see you. I want you to come to Tulsa."

"I may have to go to war," I said, "I have been wondering about not receiving my questionnaire. Last Sunday I suggested to the postmaster that he let me help him search

for it in the post office. We looked for it and found it. It was more than a month late. The post office is a mess. I hope they'll soon have the new building."

"You are an ordained rabbi. They can't take you," he said.

"I won't claim exemption."

"How about your eyes? How long have you been wearing glasses?" he asked.

"Since I was thirteen. But I can see well."

"How are you getting along with Rosie's husband, Max?" he then asked.

"No good. I'm about through with him. He doesn't want to work. He's out for his 'big deals'."

"Well, I guess I'll be going."

"I hope to see you sometime in Tulsa," I told him.

"When you come don't forget to see my mother-in-law, Mrs. Diamond, also Marion, my brother-in-law. I told them about you."

He left, and I went to my bed of rags.

I was busy. My partner, in his corduroy pants and leggings, made his appearance about eleven.

"I have a chance to buy a carload of used pipe in Burns," he said. "I'll have to get money for expenses. I may have to stay there all night."

"How much?"

"Twenty-five dollars."

I gave him a check and he left. While he was gone I bought and sold, disregarding his "strictly one price" policy.

When he came back the next day, I asked him, "Did you buy the pipe?"

He replied, "It was a hoax."

I doubted his story and investigated. I learned that he was in a poker game that night, and didn't go to Burns.

Max had another "deal," and drew money for expenses. I found out that he had been instrumental in securing pipe for a company in Oklahoma and had received a commission.

Once, after a long day of haggling with the customers, and irritated over my unethical competitors on the other side of the wire fence, I wanted to take a breathing spell. I walked through the unfinished building and stood on the sidewalk. My partner appeared. He stamped his foot and shouted, "Your place is in the back!"

His arrogance disgusted me. This obnoxious scene and the numerous disillusionments led not only to the dissolution of my partnership, but to the liquidation of the junkyard. It was a severe lesson to a conscientious beginner in business.

I told Max, "You haven't been straight with me, and you don't contribute anything to the business. I'm through with you."

I sold a carload of miscellaneous metals and rope to junk dealers in Kansas City. I paid off the loan to the bank and the balance of two hundred dollars due Dave on the yard.

Then I called all the customers who'd made us offers, and told them I'd sell at their price. Thus I disposed of all our junk, and locked up the shack.

I made a deal with a farmer to take me out to the oil field with his team, at a dollar an hour. We started out next

morning. Six miles north of town, I saw drilling derricks, and we stopped. I got out and went over to one of the drilling wells. There I met a contractor named Clift Skirvin. I asked him if he had any rope to sell. He said he was running eight strings of Manila cable tools, and he had a lot of junk rope. He took me around the wells in his car, and showed me the rope. "Would you buy a complete string of casing?" he asked.

"I'll let you know later. I'll have to find out from the bank whether they'll let me have that much money. How many pounds of rope do you think you have?"

He said, "About five tons. I hear rope is going up. You can have it all for five hundred dollars, where it lies."

I said, "Would you take three hundred?"

"You are a pretty good fellow. Give me a check."

"I'll come in the morning with a truck to pick it up, and complete the deal. Maybe I'll have enough money to buy your pipe at the same time."

When I returned to the yard, I told Max, "You can have your way. I have practically everything sold—turned into cash. I'll do with you as Abraham did with Lot, when the herdsmen quarreled over where to pasture their flocks. If you want to go right, which is the natural thing to do, I'll take the worst of the deal, and I'll go left. However, if you want to be contrary, which is natural for an odd person like you, and go left, then I'll be glad to go right. If you want this yard, you can have it for nothing; and everything will be divided equally after deducting your withdrawals. Let's not have any arguments."

He said, "Yes, I want the yard."

"You can have it," I told him.

We settled, and I said good-bye.

I had two thousand three hundred dollars—not bad for a few months in business. Max had spent most of his half on his pleasure trips.

The same evening, I rented a place a few blocks north on the Santa Fe track. I had no entrance from the street—I didn't need one. I didn't want to sit and wait for petty customers—I wanted to go out in the field.

I was happy. Though Max had got the better deal—he had the old established yard for nothing—I was relieved of my troublesome partner and rid of my unpleasant neighbors.

CHAPTER

17

THE lot I'd rented on the Santa Fe track didn't have a good approach, but was convenient because it had a spur track. I could load and unload cars right in the yard, and thus save hauling; and I had a yearly lease from the railroad for a nominal rent. I started out to build a small bunkhouse, just big enough for a desk and telephone, and a wooden bench on which to rest. But when I was through, it had become a twenty-five by thirty-five foot corrugated iron building—a lot bigger than I expected—with a gravel floor and a twelve by twelve wooden platform, where I had my desk, chair, and bench. It was put up for me by a rig builder. He had it built in a few days, and he didn't even use a level. There was enough space in the building to store a carload of rope and metal.

I had a truck bring over the big scale from the old yard which had come to me in the dissolution agreement. I secured the rest of the necessary tools, and was in business for myself.

I arranged to lodge with a retired doctor and his wife, and board with a family who kept kosher. That settled, I called a trucking contractor, about a small truck to haul in the rope I'd bought.

We left early next morning, and "Skinny," Skirvin's tool pusher, told us we could go ahead and load rope till Mr. Skirvin arrived. We loaded up the truck, but there was a lot left on the ground. Skinny told me to take it to town, unload, and come back for the balance.

We went to town, unloaded in the bunkhouse, and drove back to the lease. While we were loading the rest of the rope, Skirvin arrived. "I got some more junk for you," he said. I went with him and told the truckman to wait for me.

Skirvin took me over to another lease about a mile and a half away. We stopped at a pile of rope. He said, "You can have this pile too, in the same bargain. Do you buy wire line? I'll give you all I have, for hauling it off."

"I'll take it," I said. "But I want to find out first how I stand on the draft."

Skirvin took me to town, and we stopped in a restaurant for a cup of coffee. Then we went to my bunkhouse, and I wrote a check for three hundred dollars on my new account, and gave it to him.

"I want you to get acquainted with my brother, W. B. He's a big shot. He's the head man of the Gypsy American. He also owns the Skirvin Hotel in Oklahoma City."

"I'd like to meet him," I said.

While in the field, I came in contact with other drilling contractors and their tool pushers. I bought rope and metals from several of them, guessing at the value.

I didn't want to accumulate too much stock, as I expected to be drafted. Whenever I had about eighteen tons, a carload of rope and metals, I'd ship.

I was notified to appear before the El Dorado local draft board, and went the same day. The chairman, H. W. Shumacher, said to Charles W. Steiger, another member of the board, "Charlie, Isador is an ordained rabbi. He could claim exemption."

"What? A robber?"

Mr. Shumacher, an old lawyer, looked at me and smiled. Charlie didn't know what a rabbi was.

I said, "I waive exemption."

The local office for physical examinations was already closed, so I had to go to Wichita. I went with a group who were to be re-examined for venereal disease. The rest of the group was rejected. I was accepted and sent to Camp Funston, where they examined my eyes and reclassified me. They sent me home, telling me I would probably be recalled for limited duty.

A week later I received a letter from Major General Enoch H. Crowder confirming my waiver of all exemptions, but giving me a discharge.

Max Sokolsky was one of the first to come around to my bunkhouse when I returned. He was curious. "What did they do to you?" he asked, referring to the draft board.

"It looks as if I'm going to stay here," I told him.

"I thought I'd get the big scale from you."

"You have no use for big scales. You are out for 'big deals.'"

"Loan me a hundred dollars."

"No, but I'll give you a hundred dollars for your contract with a Kansas City dealer for a thousand tons of junk wire line. It will soon expire, and you haven't started to fill it." It was a six-month contract, and he'd already had it in his pocket for three months.

"Give me the hundred dollars. You can have it," he said.

I got busy. First, I went to the Gypsy-American leases, and moved all the wire line which Skirvin told me I could have for the hauling off. It was quite a job. I had to coil and tie it with bailing wire in separate coils. Each coil was to weigh not less than two hundred pounds, and not more than five hundred. Some of the wire was buried in the slush ponds, and covered with dirt. I had to hire teams to drag it out, and then coil it to specifications. When I had forty tons, I shipped it to Kansas City.

I bought a secondhand model T Ford, but I couldn't drive. I hired Dave Stein's brother Ben, a high school boy, to drive the car and help me with the wire line. I paid him a salary, and a commission on some of the deals. He worked after school and during vacation.

Ben was short and plump, and always smiling. He had schoolboy notions. We were coiling wire one day on the Selby lease, a couple of miles west of town. I had both feet on the wire to keep it from kinking and with my hands was helping Ben coil. We were about ready to cut it off and tie it together, when the refinery whistle blew. "Five o'clock,"

Ben called out. "I got a date!" He jumped in the Ford and left. The whole coil loosened and sprung up around me. I was trapped inside the wire for about fifteen minutes—it seemed an eternity. Fortunately, the lease pumper came by and freed me.

I could have laughed at Ben's antics, if I hadn't usually been the victim. Late one night I went over to the public garage to see if the car was there. The stall was empty, and I started back home. It began to rain. I saw a Ford pass with something red sticking up out of the front seat. I took a second look. It was a red hat. I didn't think about it being my car. The next day I said to Ben, jokingly, "What were you doing with my car in the rain so late? And wasn't there a red hat in it?"

"I went out for business," he said. "I was driving in the rain, and I saw a little dog. I was sorry for him and stopped to pick him up. And behind him was a woman, so I picked her up, too."

He often provoked me to anger. But when I looked at his smiling face, my anger vanished.

One Sunday we went out in the field near Potwin, about thirteen miles from El Dorado. On the way back, in the evening, we had a blowout. We drove into Potwin on the rim. Bennie discovered that there was a dance there that night and said nonchalantly, "I'm going to the dance. I'll see about the tire in the morning."

"I have to get back to El Dorado," I said. "You know I have an appointment with Mr. Rogers from the Perego lease, to buy his wire line."

"Well, walk!" he laughed.

I did walk. I started back at eight o'clock. I walked

and walked on the dark road and lost my way. I saw a dim light in a house and went to inquire. As I approached the gate, two angry dogs sprang forward, and I began to run. I ran all the way without looking back till I came to El Dorado. I imagined the dogs were following me. When I reached town, out of breath, I didn't even know I was there!

Bennie could work when a date didn't interfere; he was pleasant, and a good helper. I was getting along well, and had accumulated almost enough wire to complete my deal for a thousand tons. Then I received a telegram from Kansas City: "Without shipment." Regardless of this, I continued to coil and pile up wire at the track till I had an accumulation of about four hundred tons more on the ground to complete the contract. I loaded eight cars of wire on the track and sent them "shipper's order."

A few days later I traveled to Kansas City, and found out that the cars had arrived and been unloaded. I then called El Dorado and was told the drafts had not been paid.

I anticipated trouble, and looked up the consignee, a Mr. Gimbel.

"Why didn't you honor my drafts," I asked, "though you unloaded the cars, which were shipped with bill of lading attached?"

"I wired you to withhold shipment. Why did you rush?" he said.

"I shipped as per contract."

He looked for faults; he claimed that some of the coils were not up to specifications.

"Mr. Gimbel," I said, "You don't want to pay my bill

because there's been a break in the market. Will you pay me, or would you rather I turned the account over to my attorney for collection?"

He answered, "I'm going to lose a lot of money. It doesn't cost you much. You fellows buy from crooks."

"It's too bad we have to buy from crooks and sell to bandits," I commented angrily. "However, let's settle."

"How?" he asked.

"Any darn way. Name it."

"I'll give you half of what the contract calls for—fifteen dollars."

"Okay. Give me a check, and I'll give you a release."

I returned next day to El Dorado, disgusted. I was through with the wire line and junk business. Although a fairly large share of the business done in the country is in trade-ins and reclaimed material, I didn't like it. It looked to me like a swindle.

I'd worked hard to fill this contract. The laborious task of digging out the rusty wire line from the slush ponds, coiling and cutting and binding it in bundles, then hauling and loading it on the freight cars had taken time and toil. I'd had to contend with Ben's dates—with hostile dogs—with twists and kinks—with rusty wire which sprang in my face and enveloped my body. I'd had to sacrifice my regular business. But I was glad anyhow, that I'd settled, and avoided litigation.

I came to the conclusion that I was still, to some extent, the Yeshivah student, and thinking in terms of Slabodka. It wasn't junk. It was business in general—new associations, concrete matters, and living men, replacing

theories and dogmas. My world was not books anymore—it was man. I could enter the *pardes* (vineyard), and like Rabbi Akiba, come out clean—unscathed. I could stay in business, without looking for "Simon Pures." I attributed my disturbed mental attitude, in part, to the war.

One night I'd just fallen asleep, when I was awakened by loud knocking on my window. I opened my eyes, and heard shouts. "The war is over! The war is over!" The neighbors were standing in a group, laughing and yelling. They looked as though they'd just jumped out of bed. The men were hatless and in their shirt sleeves. The women had thrown coats over their nightclothes.

I dressed hurriedly and ran out. Sam Asbel grabbed my arm and pulled me along with him. He kept firing his revolver crazily as we walked toward Main Street.

There was a crowd on the corner of Main and Central; several men made speeches. The crowd kept getting bigger and noisier. Father Kennedy stepped forward, and pulled off his collar. He began to speak. "Today we are not Catholics or Protestants, Christians or Jews. Today we are all Americans!" Wild applause!

I thought I could now dispense with Ben, my wire line helper. Wire line was worthless. I sold the Ford. I walked to the fields closest to town, and if I had to go farther away, I hired a team.

One morning I was walking toward the Dillenbeck lease, a few miles west of town, to buy pipe. I saw my competitor, Louis Biddle, in a model T Ford. I didn't want him to see me, and find out where I was going, so I crawled in a ditch and hid. But he saw me and thought I'd fallen in,

so he stopped to get me out. My feet were stuck in the slush, and I needed help.

"Mr. Molk, where are you going?" he asked.

Since he'd been so kind, I told him. "I'm going to see Mr. Swangle, the farm boss on the Dillenbeck lease. He has junk line pipe to sell. Louie, I'll buy it and get a team, and haul it to your yard."

I delivered twenty tons to his yard. I told him what I'd paid for it and he gave me a dollar a ton profit. It wasn't much, but I appreciated his getting me out of the ditch.

I had better luck on the Perego lease. I asked Jim Rogers, the superintendent, whether he had anything to sell. He said, "Isador, I got some wire line."

"Wire line is worthless unless it's on the spool," I told him. It could then be used again for shallow wells.

"Well, I can sell you the spools. I got two at the first well."

I looked at them and asked how many tons he thought there were. He guessed about three tons. Wire on the spool was still worth twenty dollars a ton. I said, "I'll give you fifty dollars." Before I left, he told me to come again in a few days, when he'd have something else.

I hired a team and hauled the spools of wire line to Max's yard, as I didn't want to keep wire line in stock. He weighed each spool separately on the scale and deducted the weight of the wooden spools. There was only fifteen hundred pounds net, and he gave me fifteen dollars.

I walked back to the Perego lease—Mrs. Rogers was there. She said, "How did you make out on the wire spools?" I told her I didn't make much money. There were only one

or two strands of wire left on each spool. Instead of three tons, it weighed fifteen hundred pounds. "So you lost money," she said. "Wait, Jim will be in for lunch. You'll eat lunch with us?"

"Thanks," I said, "I don't eat lunch, but I'll wait for Mr. Rogers."

When he came in she said, "Jim, what did you do to Isador? You cheated him."

"I knew it, and I told him to come back. Isador, didn't I tell you to come back? I have something else for you. I have a half dozen sacks of different kinds of metal ready to go. Then I want to give you a chance to bid on the two-inch tubing I'm pulling out from ten wells, about twenty-five thousand feet. It's pretty good tubing, but we want to change it for three-inch. The lease is going into water."

"Have you already gotten some bids?" I asked.

"I have a few. When I get another, I'll sell."

"About how much were the bids?"

"The best offer I've had was eleven cents."

"I'll take a chance and give you twelve."

"Sold!"

I got a truck to bring in the brass, and put it in my bunkhouse; then I looked around for a customer for the tubing. I met a Tulsa pipe dealer who took me out in his car to see the pipe, and bought it for fifteen cents a foot. I made seven hundred and fifty dollars without any investment.

I hired a team and went north to see Clift Skirvin. He told me, "My brother, W. B., is in town. I'll take you over to see him."

W. B. was a short, stout, dignified man, well-known as a politician. He told me, "When you come to Oklahoma City, I'll take you to Cement, the new field. Clift, why don't you sell Isador our pile of thread protectors? And you've got a lot of Manila cable on our Cameron. Sell it to him."

I did pretty well that day. The teamster loaded up what he could, and the next day I hired a truck and brought in the balance.

I wasn't around my bunkhouse much—I was mostly in the field. If I ran across some junk pipe and other iron, I hauled it in and sold it to the junkmen in El Dorado. Metals and rope I put in my bunkhouse. When the Kansas City buyers came to El Dorado, I sold them the accumulation. I couldn't store very much—the bunkhouse wasn't big enough.

Louie Biddle called to ask whether I had anything to sell to his brother Jake, who had just come back from the Army. I said, "Send him over."

Jake was a heavy-set, friendly fellow, who smiled and talked calmly. He seemed to take a paternal interest in me. "I'll buy your rope and metals," he told me. When I was separating the oily rope from the clean and making bundles, he suggested, "Aw, you don't need to do that. That's just a buyer's trick. The mills clean all the rope anyhow. Don't let the oily rope stick out, but you can bundle it up with the clean." I liked his frankness—he seemed different from the other buyers. And he looked honest. I asked him whether he bought iron. "Yes, he said, "whenever you have a carload, I'll buy it."

"I don't know whether I'll stay in the junk business

much longer," I told him. "You need a pick-up truck, and I can't drive. And some of the buyers are unscrupulous and take advantage of all kinds of schemes.

"We treat everybody right," said Jake.

"I can see you're different."

"I hear you made a lot of money," Jake continued.

"I didn't make as much as the pipe dealers," I told him. "The other day I met half a dozen of them in the McConnell Hotel, and they were all comparing bank books. I don't care for the junk business—I've other plans. But first I'm going to take a rest."

"I heard you also bought a lot of pipe."

"I did buy a lot, but I had to turn it quickly at a small profit. I couldn't afford to hold it, and sell it to a customer direct. It takes big capital to run a pipe business right."

"One of these days you'll be the pipe king of the southwest," he smiled.

He waved as he drove off. "I hope to see you again, Rabbi."

I wanted to get out of the junk, and enter the supply business. Through pipe and supplies, I'd have a chance to get into oil. I could rent pipe for an interest in a well. Many independent oil companies began that way.

CHAPTER

18

IT was spring. In the country it was green and pleasant, a good time for a rest before the heat set in. Excelsior Springs, Missouri, not far from Kansas City, seemed a good place to go. I took the evening train and arrived the following morning.

The town is walled in by lush green mountains. A health resort with hotels and mineral bathhouses, people come there the year round. I stopped at the Royal Hotel, and had my meals in a restaurant.

In the evening, I walked over to the fashionable Elms Hotel and found several people I knew, among others Mr. Teller, an oil man from El Dorado. Asked where I was stopping, I told him at the Royal. "Did you see Mrs. Regal —your friend, who always fights your battles?" he asked. "She's stopping there too."

I was pleasantly surprised. Mrs. Regal lived across the street from the Golds in El Dorado. She was a tall stately woman, fair skinned, with dark hair and eyes. She was the first woman to awaken my interest since my parting from Deborah, the young girl on the ship for London. I was drawn to Mrs. Regal, and she liked me too.

Mrs. Regal always protected me from unjust critics. "You are not big enough to understand Mr. Molk," she told them. "If you really knew him, you would admire him for his ability and knowledge." She treated me with respect, and I liked being with her. She held herself aloof. When I asked her to dine with me at a certain restaurant, she refused. "I don't care for that class of people," she said. I noticed that men looked at her with longing eyes. Women were jealous, and gossipped about her. But I considered her a fine woman in every way. Her husband, short and flabby with a double chin, was a pawnbroker, hard-working, but not too successful.

I spent much of my leisure in Excelsior Springs in Mrs. Regal's company. She was intelligent and didn't talk platitudes. She was sympathetic about my problems. We discussed philosophy, and she proved understanding.

After two weeks, I decided I'd had enough rest, and returned via Tulsa. Here I wanted to renew acquaintance with some relatives of the Golds, whom I'd met at their house, and who had urged me to visit them if ever I came to Tulsa. I met them both, also Mr. Diamond's parents, who insisted on my living with them; and we grew very fond of each other. Old Mrs. Diamond, then in her eighties, prevailed on me to await the return of her youngest son,

Marion, who owned and operated a fifteen-million-dollar refinery in Tulsa.

While awaiting Marion Diamond's return, I met Rev. Himmelstein, the *shochet,* who invited me to come to his synagogue Sunday evening and join in studying the *blatt* with their most learned men. I attended and, as I'd done in the New York Yeshivah on the day I landed in 1907, "stole the show." I was a stranger, but I was able to reveal myself!

I had met Marion Diamond the previous afternoon at his mother's and we'd had a long talk on every conceivable subject. But nothing was said of business—it was the Sabbath! When I called on Marion at his office early Monday morning, I found that as President of the Synagogue he'd already heard all about my share in the previous night's *blatt* session.

Then we got down to business, and in a single sentence Marion Diamond changed my business career. All he said was: "Go back to El Dorado, and get in the pipe business right."

He gave me a note of $10,000, running for a year, with his endorsement, to be given as collateral to my bank. "Whenever you have a big pipe deal on hand," he added, "draw on me, and I'll advance you whatever you need." I thanked him heartily and left.

I paid farewell visits to all the Silvers and Diamonds. Reuben Silver asked about my interview with Marion and nodded with satisfaction at my reply. "But I'd have done the same thing for you myself, if you'd come to me!" he added.

Old Mrs. Diamond wanted to give me some money, but I refused with thanks, telling her, "I don't take money unless I've earned it."

Back in El Dorado, my bank told me that Marion's signature would be good up to three million dollars!

The news that I now had capital enough to handle deals of any size, spread quickly, and I was more or less deluged with offers.

The first deal I made involved $20,000 cash, and compelled me to draw on Marion, but when I resold, I doubled my money. This went through so quickly that I didn't have to use my $10,000 note, and returned it to Marion with my heartiest thanks. Now I was set!

I bought a Dodge roadster, and rented a much larger pipe yard on the Sante Fe with a house on it that I'd use for a field office. This place was ideal for pipe, but too far out for the junk business, a business you can't keep away from, once you get rust in your blood. So I rented a lot in town, with a barn on it, for my junk business.

The same man who owned the lot I'd rented, sold me his whole stock of pipe, tools, and spools of wire. I sold the pipe and tools at a handsome profit almost at once. The wire I sold to a friend of mine in Clarksburg, West Virginia, for $1600. On this sale, I didn't get a cent for months. Finally, in response to an urgent telegram, I received a thousand dollars. The balance I never collected, but the deal as a whole was sufficiently profitable.

Next I had an experience due to inexperience! I went out to a lease six miles west of town with a wagon and team owned by my landlord, Mr. Mann. I saw a big pile of pipe

thread protectors and bought it for fifteen dollars. We put boards against the standards and loaded the protectors. When the load was high, we added more boards on the sides to make the bed deeper. We kept loading and adding boards, until there were no more protectors left on the ground. The road was dry, the horses pulled hard, and we moved along slowly to town. It was evening when we arrived at the city scale.

The approach to the scale was soft, and the wagon sank. The horses strained and strained until they collapsed from exhaustion. Mr. Mann, who lived across the street, heard the commotion and ran out. He was furious when he saw the enormous load bogged down and the horses lying on the ground.

"Son of a——! Haven't you enough sense to know that horses can't pull a load like that!" he screamed at the young driver. He was angry at me, too, but had too much respect for me to say what he wanted to. I realized I was still a novice.

He insisted on having the load weighed. He said it was three times as heavy as the team should haul. I knew he was right, and that if he found out how much it really weighed, he would holler still louder. If I had had any idea this would happen, I wouldn't have gone to the scale. I usually weighed my loads just to find out whether I'd been "skunked," but I should have known that I couldn't be cheated with a load that big. (Protectors then sold for twenty-five dollars a ton.)

When the team was fresh and pulled the load onto the scale next morning, it weighed over six tons. My face was

surely red! Mr. Mann was quiet. I was his tenant and his friend, and I'd know better next time. Anyway, I certainly hadn't been "skunked"!

I was leaning against the mailbox on the corner in front of the El Dorado National Bank, and thinking of the team, of Mann, and my inexperience. A small man in a business suit approached me. "You must be Molk. My name is Young. I am from Cleveland. I am stopping at the McConnell Hotel. I represent the Young Development Oil Company of Cleveland. Young doesn't stand for my name—I'm just small fry. Mr. Young is also the president of the Cleveland National Bank. I've been sent by Mr. Young to drill two wells on the Young farm—another Young who is no relation to me or to the president of the company—twenty miles east of El Dorado. I need two complete strings of casing from fifteen and a half down to five and three-sixteenths. They tell me you are a wizard at getting pipe. New pipe is out of the question. Only major oil companies can get pipe from the mills."

I said, "Yes, I can sell you the pipe. How soon do you need it?"

"The sooner the better. What will it cost me?"

We sat down on the bed in his hotel room, and I figured out that it would cost about sixty-eight thousand dollars. I looked at my watch and said, "We have time enough to go to the Farmers and Merchants Bank. I'll have them wire your bank to honor payment for sixty-eight thousand dollars on your signature."

"All right," he said.

I didn't have one joint of pipe on hand to fill the order.

I asked George Muehlbach, manager of the Fidelity Refinery, to drive my car. "We'll go to the new Elbing Field and scare up some pipe," I told him.

George was a handsome red-headed Irish Catholic, and an amiable fellow, always glad to serve. I helped him out when in need—and he was often in need. He had a wife and two children, and he wasn't too frugal. His father was a successful grocer in Kansas City, with a small red beard of which, so he told me, he was proud because it made him look like a rabbi! His youngest daughter had just entered a convent. George, too, was very religious, but before he came to El Dorado to work for the Fidelity, he had been manager of a burlesque show in Kansas City!

At the field I met my old friend Skirvin. He had a lot of pipe, but had just sold most of it to the Federal Machine Company, who were also pipe brokers. "Come right along with me," he said. "They'll resell it to you at a short profit." After I'd bought the Federal pipe and what Skirvin had left, I had enough to fill the order. I was happy.

Pipe had become scarce, critical—almost unobtainable. People paid as much for used pipe as for new. I didn't have any time left for the junk business. I rented a four-room office suite in the El Dorado National Bank Building. I hired George, paid him a salary, and gave him an interest in the business. He also drove my car.

I went to Texas to sell a string of cable tools. On the train on my way home, I met Morris Appel, a Tulsa oil man. He was going to Louisiana. I told him I lived in El Dorado. "Do you know where I can buy settled production?" he asked.

"Yes. I know of a property with four hundred barrels production that could be bought."

He said, "I'll be back from Louisiana in a few days, and I'll stop at El Dorado."

"The hotels in El Dorado are full, but you're welcome to stay in my suite," I told him.

When he came, I took him out to see the Cosden Oil Company properties. After he told me about how much his people would pay, I went to Tulsa and made the deal with the company's superintendant. The Appel brothers and their associates got it for $652,000. They had promised me five per cent, a legitimate commission, but they never paid it. The Cosden gave me seven thousand dollars gratis, not as a commission. George urged me to sue the Appels. I filed suit, but didn't appear at the trial. I didn't care to sue for money. I was sorry I'd listened to George in the first place.

A few months later the Trapshooter properties of the William and Ralston leases were for sale. I had learned a lesson from the Cosden experience. This time I didn't want to buy it for others with the prospect of a commission. I wired my bid, and substantiated it with a fifty-thousand-dollar cashier's check. My offer was passed on to men close to my bank. They forced my bid up high. I took a chance, and paid $194,000. My original offer had been $125,000.

I was lucky. On my way from Enid to Tulsa, I met a banker on the train who was connected with the Producer's Supply of Tulsa. I sold it to them for $205,000, an $11,000 profit.

There was a little sentiment connected with this transaction. The Trapshooter was the first place I'd visited to

buy junk rope, and they had shut the gate against me. A few years later I came back to take it over. I stopped at the luxurious lease-house where the bookkeeper now lived. He said, "Mr. Molk, don't go in. My oldest girl is down with the flu. I heard you bought the lease. We won't be able to leave the house for several weeks."

"You don't need to worry about that," I told him. "Whether I keep it or resell it, won't affect you. I'll see to it that you aren't bothered. Do you remember me?"

"Of course I do. I was the man who refused to sell you a pile of rope, saying that we didn't sell to peddlers."

Most of our business was done by me outside the office. One Sunday I drove to Towanda, a farm community on the Missouri Pacific, ten miles from El Dorado, and stopped at a filling station. Robert McKurkle, an oil company executive, came up, "Isador, you want to buy a complete string of casing? I'll sell it to you. I'll pull it and put it on the ground, for ten per cent below list price."

I took him up, gave him a deposit of twenty-five hundred dollars, and wrote on the check, "Balance to be paid after pipe is pulled and measured."

I didn't see him for several weeks. At his office in Towanda I found other members of the company offering the same Kingman pipe for twice the price of new. I showed them the deposited check and told them the pipe was mine. When McKurkle returned, we settled. He gave me back my deposit plus a check for eight thousand dollars profit. I never even saw the pipe!

I made many friends in the oil business. They sold me

their secondhand pipe below the list of new, and I sold to independent producers at a good profit. Later, competition became very keen, and dealers had to pay for their used pipe more than double the price of new. And here is where the risks came in. Pipe was scarce. The mills sold their pipe to major oil companies only, and all the independent producers had to use secondhand pipe. A dealer couldn't sell before completing his purchase, as I'd been doing before; he might never get the pipe to fill his order. So he had to put it in stock, and wait for a customer. Should new pipe become available to the independent producers, the market for secondhand pipe would be flooded, and the price would drop to about fifty per cent of new, as it had been normally. The loss would be disastrous. Why shouldn't I tackle the steel mills in Pittsburgh for new pipe? First, I wouldn't have to pay a premium. And the price on new pipe is fixed—like a silver dollar. There would be no risk.

I'd handled all kinds of deals in different situations, and had never had a failure; so I felt I could do anything. I decided to go East in search of new pipe, and at the same time see old friends and relatives. I'd visited in New York several times since coming to El Dorado. I wanted to see my sister again, and talk with her about my mother and Simon. We hadn't heard from them since my brother wrote at the beginning of the war that he'd recently married, and that the whole Jewish community in the Ponievez vicinity were to be transported to Siberia. I thought I might be able to find out their whereabouts by personal inquiry at the Jewish welfare organizations in New York.

Before I left, I had the bank make out a cashier's check

for a large sum. I didn't expect George to do much business without me, but I told him to call me if a big deal turned up.

This was in 1921, at the end of a spring day with a typical flaming Kansas sunset. This time, when I boarded the train for New York, I carried neither my diploma nor *smicho,* but I had courage and fortitude, and a cashier's check in my pocket!

CHAPTER

19

I STOPPED off at Marietta to visit the Windels, who had heard of my activities through the oil field people. Mr. Windel said, "Didn't I make a business man out of you? Weren't the pictures I got for you to sell a good start?"

"Now, I suppose you are going to New York to get married," Mrs. Windel suggested.

After a while, Mr. Windel proposed, "Sam is graduating from the University of Pennsylvania—how about taking him along and putting him in your business?"

I promised him I'd think about it.

I told my old friend, Dr. Fein, that Mr. Windel wanted me to give his oldest son a job. He said jokingly, "Why not give a job to the president of the chemical company who refused to hire you when you were looking for work? They are on the rocks now."

In New York I went directly to Brooklyn to see my sister and her family—she now had three good-looking children. My mother and brother Simon were, it appeared, back in Ponievez. Simon wrote that Russian hooligans had killed his newly-wedded wife in her homestead while he was with my mother. She had refused to go along with them, because she didn't want to leave the family home in Wabolnik, twenty miles from Ponievez. He also wrote that my brother David and his family had left Dvinsk and were living in Berlin.

I visited, next, my half-brothers and sister in Paterson. Barnet, who was in the shoe business, introduced me to the president of his bank. To surprise him, I deposited one of my cashier's checks there. The president remarked, "If I didn't know your brother, I'd say you robbed a bank. How can you make so much money so fast? You look just a boy."

Barnet was thrilled.

Many new relatives came to see me. Some wanted to sell me silk factories. I did buy a silk mill from Barnet's cousin for investment. It was worth a quarter of a million dollars, and I bought it for fifty thousand.

I wanted to see Rabbi Yudelevitz who had ordained me, and who was now chief rabbi in Boston. On the train, I mentioned my silk purchase to a businessman sitting next to me. He remarked, "If the silk business doesn't get better soon, your venture can prove a total loss. Silk may go out of style."

I didn't go to Boston. I got off at the next junction and took the first train back to New York. I met Mr. Horwitz,

my half brother's cousin, at the McAlpin Hotel and told him I'd decided to stick to my own business—I didn't understand silk. We settled, and I took a loss of a few thousand dollars.

I told my sister to send her boy to El Dorado, and I'd try to make something out of him. He was about eight years old, and shy. When I came, he hid under the table.

I visited various old friends, then left as unannounced as I'd come.

In Pittsburgh, I called on the manager of U. S. Steel, and told him I wanted to buy five hundred tons of pipe. He asked me, "Whom do you represent?"

I answered, "Myself. I'm Isador Molk of El Dorado, Kansas."

"We only sell to major companies. And we don't do the selling here. These are the mill offices. You'll have to buy through the sales office in New York."

"What's the outlook?" I asked.

He said, "I think that you have a good chance to get pipe now. There is going to be a break in the market. They wouldn't know it yet in the Southwest. We feel it here."

"Could you give me a letter of introduction to your New York office?"

"Let's go out for lunch now," he said. "I'll write the letter after lunch."

When I got back to New York, I went directly to the office of U. S. Steel and presented my letter to the head of the sales department. "We'll sell you ten cars of pipe," the sales manager said. "Leave us your check for ten thousand

dollars to cover the freight, and we'll send the pipe, shipper's order. Wire the mills shipping instructions."

I telephoned George in El Dorado about my purchase, told him to get busy and sell it immediately and wire me shipping instructions, so that I could notify the mills. He said, "I'll see what I can do and call you back at the McAlpin at six."

He called, and told me to ship the pipe to Fort Worth. He'd sold it to Jim Gallagher, a pipe broker of El Dorado, for fifty per cent above list and Gallagher resold it to Tom Humphrey, a Texas broker. The next morning I wired the mills the instructions.

On the way home I stopped off at Kansas City and went to the Muehlebach Hotel. To my surprise, I met George in the lobby. I said, "George, what are you doing here? Did you get the pipe money from Gallagher?"

He said, "No, Humphrey went bankrupt."

"What are you doing here?"

"Personal business. A kin of mine, connected with a bank got into trouble. His relatives made good the loss. Now, we can't find him."

"That's too bad," I said. "But what am I to do about the pipe? When it arrives in Fort Worth, I'll have to pay the draft to U. S. Steel. Should I divert it to El Dorado, or go to Fort Worth? What's your idea?"

He answered, "Isador, you always come out from under. Go to Texas."

I went to Fort Worth, where all I could get was a cot in the hall at the Westbrook Hotel. I couldn't have fallen asleep anyhow with the ten cars of pipe on my mind, so I

went down to the lobby. There I found a man walking the floor and asked him what he was doing.

"I'm a trucking contractor, waiting to take out pipe to a flowing well. They're looking for pipe and can't get any."

"I've got pipe," I said.

"You have? I'll call up the superintendent."

"Call him up right now. If I can't make a deal here, I'll have to go on to Dallas."

He called the superintendent and told him he'd got hold of some pipe. The superintendent said he'd be at his office at seven o'clock. I didn't go to bed again; just breakfasted with the trucking contractor, and went with him to the company's office.

I sold all the pipe, not for fifty above, but at a good profit. I'd mastered a critical situation and was satisfied.

When I came home, I withdrew my account from the Paterson Bank. I said to myself, "I'd better stick to the pipe business. Pipe, unlike silk, never goes out of style."

There came a change of atmosphere. The demand for pipe was not as great as before, and you could buy it at a smaller premium. The price of oil dropped from four dollars to two. There was less drilling. Fewer new fields were opened. However, good secondhand pipe below list was still not a bad investment.

When two brokers told me that Marshall Petroleum had a complete string of casing, which could be bought for ten per cent below list, I grabbed it. If the pipe hadn't needed rethreading, etc., I could have sold it then and there at a profit. But since I had to wait till the pipe was repaired, I lost my customer, and had to put the pipe in stock.

The next day George drove me to Lincolnville, Marion County, and I bought a complete string of casing from Deering Marshall of Wichita. It was better pipe and cheaper, twenty below list. I made many more deals, buying pipe at fifty below and less, and the market dropped still lower.

Uncertainty was characteristic of that time, especially in the pipe business. When you pay twice the price of new for used pipe it's abnormal—in fact it's madness. When an oil man expected a gusher, he didn't care how much he paid for pipe. Now, when new pipe could be bought by the small producer, there was no way of telling how low the price of used pipe would go. Those dealers who owed money had to sell their secondhand pipe in a low market, and lost heavily. Such was not the case with me; I was still buying.

Since pipe had become plentiful, buyers were more particular. I had to enlarge my business. I installed threading machines to repair pipe. Independent producers hadn't enough money to buy all needed pipe outright and had to rent casing for the drilling of a well. Rental became popular. Trucks had to deliver to the drilling well and later haul pipe back. Rental was a risk—if the lessee got a dry hole and some of the pipe couldn't be pulled, the renter would be the loser. Sometimes I took a chance, and rented pipe for an interest in a well, or for an offset of the adjoining acreage. Usually the wells were not commercial producers, or came in dry.

I didn't stay in the office. I was out looking for business —from the Philadelphia Navy Yard to Breckenridge, Texas from Cement, Oklahoma, to Lima, Ohio. George was good in the office, but he was a plunger in business. The sale of

the ten cars of new pipe to Jim Gallagher without getting at least a deposit illustrated his recklessness. I took in Ike Klein as a check on George. Ike had just sold his Tulsa grocery to a friend from Marietta. I bought him a car and gave him a salary and an interest, as I had George. Now I had three cars.

Leaving George and Ike in the office, I went to Halstead to purchase the pipe in a dry hole. The well had been drilled by a combine of the town's citizens. Whenever they ran out of money, they shut down the drilling. It had taken two years to drill the well. I hired a pulling contractor to dismantle it without delay and move the pipe off location. I suspected that the "hardly able" company owed a lot of money and that the creditors might put liens on the pipe if still on location.

One midnight the pipe puller phoned that he needed a hollow spear to start the eight-inch. I called George, told him to rent a tool from the Bridgeport Machine Company, and take it out to the well. "Isador, let's do it tomorrow," he said drowsily.

I called Ike, who said, "Molk, you're crazy. Take out a spear in the middle of the night? Aw, go to bed."

I knew the pulling couldn't wait; and I didn't want litigation. So I telephoned Harry Brown to go over to his garage and back my car out for me. I'd had the car over a year, and had never driven it myself. I got in behind the wheel and drove. I picked up the spear at the Bridgeport and started out for Halstead. Fortunately, I met no cars. I drove fifty-one miles to Halstead to the well.

We started the pipe, and I stayed in Halstead until all

the pipe was pulled. We couldn't get enough men to make up a casing crew to pull the five-inch, the last string. I needed three more, but saw no workmen on the street. It was now three o'clock and I knew the bank clerks should be through work. I asked the cashier where I could get three men to help me pull a string of five-inch. He said to the two clerks, "How about it, boys?"

They agreed.

"I'll be the third," he said. "I need exercise."

They piled into my car, and we drove to the well. I got the pipe pulled.

Next day I took out Brennan and Wixson, drilling contractors, and sold them the pipe. They bought it for I. J. Buck, a Tulsa attorney, who was to drill a well ten miles north of El Dorado. The pipe was saved from liens, and I had learned to drive a car and no longer needed partners to drive me.

By the time the pipe was delivered, the price of used pipe had dropped still lower. Buck, being a lawyer, looked for a loophole to get it cheaper. He claimed I hadn't delivered the right pipe. Wixson told him in my presence that this was the very pipe he'd inspected. I told Buck in oil field vernacular that he was trying to "do me." He had to accept the pipe.

We drove back to El Dorado in Buck's car. I was laughing—I'd had my way. Buck asked, "Isador, how come you are so hilarious? A while ago you were raving mad."

"You've reminded me of a story," I said. "You know little Annie, the harlot of the Metropolitan Hotel? She once came down into the lobby, dressed like Eve. She called out, "You

know Jim, the beast? He stripped me and raped me. I'm happy.' "

Mr. Wixson enjoyed a hearty chuckle.

As I was about to enter the office after my ten-day absence, I overheard Ike saying, "Molk hasn't reported, and his car's gone too. Wonder what happened to him; and who's gonna get his money?"

George answered, "Isador will show up."

I walked in. "You two must need money. George, make out checks for yourself and Ike. I'll sign them."

I had more time now to observe the machinations of the Klu Klux Klan, which was at its height in El Dorado in the fall of 1922. When the Klan put up a blazing cross on the Siegel building, and announced a meeting to be held at midnight, I was there. The speaker asked the audience, "What race came to this country merely to make money?" One man answered, "The Germans." Another said, "The English." The speaker said, "I don't mean a nation. I mean, what race?" Nobody answered. He had to answer himself: "The Jews."

El Dorado was a peaceful town. There were no riots, no disturbances. Now in the crowded hall there was an uneasy stillness. My blood stirred. I arose, stepped on the platform, unbuttoned by shirt, faced the speaker, and said, "You may tar and feather me, but let me ask you, did you say the Jew should be hated because he is a capitalist? Didn't I hear you say when you talked in Blackwell a few weeks ago that he should be condemned because he is a socialist? How can you accuse him in the same breath of being a capitalist and a socialist? You don't hate him because of

what he does. You hate him because of what he is. You jus
hate the Jew. You pretend to be a preacher. How can yo
preach the gospel of Christ, your Savior—my racial brothe
—so deceitfully!"

A ring was formed around me by my El Dorado friend
The speaker changed the subject. I left, and my friends le
with me.

The next day I had a similar experience. A man and hi
Canadian wife came to buy a string of seven-inch and eigh
inch pipe to finish a well in Rock. His wife gave him eigh
thousands dollars cash to pay me. He counted out th
money in bills and coins. I was anxious to make a sale, an
I sold him the pipe cheap, but he didn't appreciate it. Be
fore he left, he said, "You Jews have to get your way.
belong to the Klu Klux Klan."

I was still upset over my experience of the night before
I gathered up the pile of money and when he opened th
door I threw it out. He picked it up, and went over to Jak
Ferber's pipe yard to buy the pipe. Ferber didn't have th
pipe he wanted, so the man asked Ferber to buy the pip
from me and promised him a commission. I had compassio
on him, and told Ferber I'd pay the commission, if h
wouldn't raise the price on the pipe.

The pipe business was dormant; big dealers were banl
rupt. I had no need of the downtown office. George wen
back to Kansas City, and I helped Ike get a grocery stor
in El Dorado. My living quarters became the office. I re
duced my help both in the yard and in the machine shop.

This was the chronology of my adventures in the pip
business, until I began to dabble in oil.

In the early twenties, after the big slump in the oil industry, small producers went into receivership. In Federal court I bought a bankrupt outfit, the Dillenbeck lease, a producing property consisting of six wells. It had formerly been known as the Oil and Gas Company of El Dorado. I organized a company with Arch Williams, the county attorney, and H. P. Taubman of Tulsa. I looked after it, and thus I became an oil operator.

CHAPTER

20

I HAVE learned, from experience, that although people are generally honest, some are honest only under favorable circumstances and become unreliable in adverse situations. A case in point occurred when I rented a string of pipe to a company, for a test east of Rosalia. They were to pay me twenty-five per cent of the value of the pipe in cash for rental, and the balance of seventy-five per cent was to be put in escrow. In case of a dry hole, they were to pull and return the pipe within a reasonable time, and get their escrow money. I trusted them, and delivered the pipe to location. When I came to their Wichita office to complete the deal, and get the check for the rental, the office man said, sternly, "We have time."

"It's a cash deal," I told him.

"Cash is thirty days," he said.

I went back to El Dorado. I asked advice of my partner in the oil business, the county attorney, as to what to do. "Isador," he said, "You have to replevin your pipe and put up a bond of double the amount. You'll have to wait till Monday. This is Saturday night."

I pointed out, "They'll be ready to run some of the pipe in the hole Sunday and I'll be stuck."

I decided not to wait. Saturday night I sent the trucks out to the location and hauled the pipe away.

Monday morning, Ben James, president of the company, came to El Dorado, and called me over to the hotel. I met him in the lobby. He was a heavy, stumpy man, who'd always been friendly. "Isador, so you moved the pipe away," he said with a grin.

"Confucius say, 'No ticky, no washy.' This was a cash deal," I told him.

His face became ferocious. He grabbed me. I wrenched myself loose and ran, with him after me. But I was lighter and faster.

In the evening he offered by phone to pay me. I refused. "You didn't complete the deal as you promised, and I don't want to have any further business with you," I told him.

My friend, the county attorney, remarked, "Hauling off the pipe wasn't lawful, but you did the logical thing, and you got away with it."

The Drumright affair was plain thievery. A Wichita broker, with whom I had dealt before, asked me to go with him to Drumright, Oklahoma, to buy several cars of pipe loaded on the track. When we got there, I looked over the

pipe, and made the deal in the bank. I asked the cashier whether he knew the party who was selling it. He said, "I've heard of the company, but I don't know any of the individuals.'" His answer didn't satisfy me.

We went back to the cars. I heard the teamsters quarreling about money. When they saw me, they stopped talking. I became suspicious. I said to the broker, "Let's hurry back to El Dorado. This pipe is 'hot.'"

It was already dark, and we drove fast. We came to a narrow bridge. We didn't slow down. A car was following us, and we heard shots. I was sure it was the men who had tried to sell me the stolen pipe. When we came to El Dorado, we found bullet holes in our fenders.

I have always honored our courts. If one is dissatisfied with the decision of a lower court, he is free to appeal to a higher court. He can go as far as the U. S. Supreme Court. In one particular case, I wanted to go against my own volition—I do not like litigation—and demonstrate the sense of justice in American courts. I had bought pipe from a bank through an agent. The bank foreclosed the mortgage on a bankrupt oil company. The agent took me out to the field. I inspected the piles of pipe and counted the joints of various sizes in each pile, as specified in the mortgage. I made out a check to the bank as a deposit, and wrote on the check the description of the piles of pipe as I had it on paper. I also marked on the check, "Balance to be paid by draft." I hauled the pipe in and told my bank to pay the draft.

A few weeks later a man came to my yard with trucks and said, "We are going to move our pipe from your yard.

Part of the pipe that you hauled away wasn't yours." I told him to get out!

The bankrupted company filed suit. It was evident that they had secured a partial release from the bank, which didn't have to appear on the mortgage. A partial release does not have to be recorded. Now the company claimed that the pipe on the partial release was not sold to me. I bought the pipe on the strength of the deposit I gave the agent, as specified on the check and the original mortgage. No partial release was mentioned.

There were hung juries and appeals. The case continued. Twice it was in the Kansas Supreme Court. I fought for the truth. After six years of wrangling, the truth emerged. *Emeth m'eretz tizmoch*—"The truth emerges from the earth."

My unpleasant experiences were not confined to oil men and bankers. While I was dismantling a property adjoining the Dillenbeck, I had a good chance to see what transpired on my producing lease. I discovered that my pumper and roustabouts were neither honest nor experienced. The walking beams bobbed up and down, but the wells weren't pumping. When I opened the throttle, no fluid came out. Either the rods were parted, or the cups, balls, and seats were bad. When a lawbreaker couldn't pay his fine, my partner, the county attorney, called to me to give him a job. I began to watch the work more closely.

Whenever I passed the El Dorado Hotel I saw the lease truck parked in front. My head man was in the lobby, smoking a big cigar, and joshing the cigar girl, when he should have been on the lease. I realized that you can't become an

oil man merely by buying an oil property and leaving it to hired men to operate.

When I was through dismantling the junk lease, I had the men move their pulling machine to the Dillenbeck. I pulled out the pipe, dismantled the wells, and sold the equipment. So ended my first venture in the oil business.

I'd had a bad start. I hadn't known the business, or the men.

Charlie, my handyman, was faithful. Since there was no business, I decided to take a trip and leave him to watch my yard.

Charlie was honest and was my standby. He always reported it to me if a man tried to steal, or grumbled against me. He came to tell me, when he thought a competitor had tried to take a customer away. If a man or woman who didn't look "right" came to my field office, he walked in on some pretext to be in the office to watch over me. Whenever I had enough help and could get along without him, he asked for a vacation and took off. On these junkets he drank, or "rode the rods." When he "rode the rods," he wasn't particular which way he went. He said, "If they chase me off a train going one way, I hop a train going the other."

Once the sheriff called from Ottawa, Charlie's home town, to tell me that they were holding Charlie on several counts—drinking, making, and selling moonshine. I was afraid they might send him to the penitentiary and went to see him. While I waited for the judge, the sheriff put him in a cell. He kicked off his shoes and asked, "Chief, what'll I have for lunch?"

Speaking of faithfuls, I must introduce my good friend

Hyman Cook. Whenever I went out of town, I entrusted my personal affairs to Mr. Cook. He was a good, quiet and honest man, agreeable and intelligent. His wife was a friendly home woman. Their son, a high school boy, respected me, and considered me one of the household. Frequently I spent my evenings with this congenial family. I drank tea and chatted with them. I took them into my confidence. This, in part, was my recreation in El Dorado. My social functions were few. I was as engrossed in my business as I had been in my studies when a student.

It was Charlie, however, who was genuinely anxious about me. He said, "You need someone to take care of you, Isador. You ought to get married."

CHAPTER

21

AT about five o'clock on a fair June day in 1924, I heard from my yard the distant whistle of the train. "Charlie, drive me to the station," I said. "I'm going to New York."

"You got no tie, Isador," Charlie reminded me.

"Take my car, run over to Wheeler's, and pick up a tie in my room," I said.

The train was about to leave. W. E. Pope, the ticket agent, had overheard our conversation. He said, "Isador, I'll hold the train five minutes."

In five minutes I was on my way to New York. Charlie hollered as the train pulled out, "Bring back a wife."

Arrived at New York, I called my friend Dr. Chestman to lunch with me at the McAlpin. I told him what my handyman had said. Chestman replied, "Ike, I've got a fine

girl for you. My wife and I know her well. Her name is Louise Stern. She is private secretary to the president of Universal Films. I'll arrange for us all to have dinner together." A little later, he called up to tell me that we'd have dinner at the McAlpin at six.

Louise was a slim, attractive brunette, with intelligent eyes. She talked mostly about the film industry. Dr. Chestman spoke to her in Spanish, also in French. He told me later that she spoke French well. I was mum. I made a special effort just to listen.

She told me that she lived with her sister in Brooklyn. I told her that I had a sister living in Brooklyn, and that when I went to see my sister, I might come to see her also. Before we parted, she said, "Come over Friday evening for dinner." I was pleased, and accepted.

The next morning Chestman called to ask my impression of Louise. I told him she seemed to me to be an intelligent girl, and good looking; but I hadn't had enough experience with women to decide immediately, and I had to go right back to El Dorado.

He said, "After you have dinner at her sister's, call me up."

I told Chestman that if I made up my mind, I'd get married right away.

"It wouldn't surprise me to find that you'll like her enough to get married. She's a fine girl," he said.

In the meantime I saw my sister and told her all about it. She said, "Don't hurry. Hymie knows of a nice girl who'd be just right for you. He knows her brother."

Louise called me before our dinner appointment, and

asked me to call for her at her office, and take her to lunch. I agreed. She was attractive, and I was glad of the opportunity to be with her.

This second time I saw her, I found her very interesting. I even mentioned marriage indirectly. I told her casually that I was old enough to get married. She seemed acquiescent, and told me that she'd been born in a small town in Michigan and liked living in a small town. When I left her, I thought a lot of her, and waited anxiously for our dinner engagement at her sister's.

The following night on my way to the hotel from Brooklyn, I missed my subway stop, and got off at Forty-second Street instead of Thirty-fourth. I emerged on Forty-first Street facing the Western Union office—which reminded me that I had to send a message home. I went in, and ran into Abe Schwartz of Tulsa, a brother-in-law of the Livingstons and Diamonds, who was Mr. Taub's representative in El Dorado. He told me he'd come from Baltimore with his brother-in-law and was stopping at the McAlpin. I said, I'm stopping there, too. If you stay here a few days longer, I want you to come to my wedding."

"Yes, if I stay over, I'll be there," he replied.

Friday evening, I came to Louise's to dinner. She introduced me to her sister and brother-in-law as the man from out West. They looked at me with interest and their two small children eyed me curiously. The family seemed to me the common run of humanity. The wife was short and flabby and her husband was slim and apparently somewhat henpecked.

"How long have you been married?" I asked my hostess.

"Twelve years."

I looked from the woman to her younger sister, and from the girl to the woman again, and wondered, "Will Louise look like that in twelve years?" It chilled my ardor.

I told Chestman, "I'm not crazy about the family. Louise seems to be nice, but when she gets older she'll look like her sister. I promised to take her to a show, and you'd better come along and bring your wife." I thought, "There's safety in numbers."

After the show, I told Louise that I had to go back to El Dorado. I didn't see her anymore.

I visited some more with friends and relatives, and was ready to go home. I wired that I was starting back. Mr. Cook wired back, "There's nothing doing in El Dorado. Stay till you get married."

A passage from the Bible came to my mind, "Abraham said to his servant, the eldest of his house who ruled over all that he had, 'Go to my country, and to my birthplace shalt thou go, and take a wife to my son Isaac!' " I went to my sister's. I told her about my disappointment in the Universal girl. She said, "Hymie saw Charlie at the Horowitz's, his cousins, and we arranged to have you meet his sister, Sophie, at their home Thursday night."

I went there with my sister and Hymie. Charlie and his wife and sister came later. I talked most to Charlie's wife. She looked like a Grand Street girl of good parentage, and she was intelligent and talkative. She told me that her father had a farm with one of her brothers, that another brother was an engineer, and the youngest a doctor. A married sister lived in Boston. She said Charlie, her husband,

had been in the navy during the war, and was now in the insurance business.

The girl, whose name was Sophie, was small and pretty, light complexioned, with fluffy brown hair. She'd come without a hat, it was windy, and her bobbed hair was in disorder. She talked casually, with her cousins, while my sister and brother-in-law just listened.

My sister had already told me about the family—that Sophie had lost her mother and had worked to help two of the brothers through college. This impressed me considerably.

When we left Horowitz's, my sister and brother-in-law walked home, while I took the subway with Charlie, his wife and sister. I sat down beside Sophie, and told her I was probably leaving for Kansas the next day. When they were about to get off at their station, she said good-bye to me. Just then, I changed my mind about leaving. "Can I see you tomorrow evening?" I asked her.

"Yes," she said. I asked her to meet me at the McAlpin after work.

We had dinner together next day, and talked a lot. She'd graduated from high school in the country, she told me, and was working as a bookkeeper for a candy machinery company on West Houston Street. Remarks she made convinced me she was intelligent and a girl of character. After that I saw her every day until we were married.

Saturday afternoon she went to buy a hat, and I went with her. She picked out a tan hat with lace, to match the dress she was wearing. I wanted to pay for it, but she wouldn't let me. She said, "We're not married." I persisted, and paid for it in the end.

I wanted to follow the example of Isaac, and I knew that her family and mine were of similar stock. I wasn't looking for a showy girl. I was looking for a girl with a heart and a soul, and I had found her!

My future wife, her mother, sister, and brothers had come to America from Novo Alexandrovsky, Lithuania, two years before I did. They came to join her father in Boston. He had been there five years before bringing over his family. In Lithuania he had had no vocation; he'd spent his time in the synagogue. Her mother had been given a grocery store, and with it had made a living for the family. In America, her father had gone into the furniture business. Later he'd sold his furniture store in South Boston and moved his family to rural Westchester County, New York, and eventually became a gentleman farmer.

I definitely made up my mind to get married. I asked Sophie one evening, "Would you like to come to El Dorado?" It was my way of proposing.

She looked at me quizzically and replied, "Why should I want to go to El Dorado?"

I wanted her to leave her job at once, so that we could be together. I felt lonely without her. She said she couldn't leave her job without giving her employer notice.

I was anxious to get married, and go back home. The following Saturday evening we were married in her brother's (the doctor's) apartment on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. He had just opened an office, and his oldest brother and wife moved in with him. Chestman had gone with me and my prospective wife to get the marriage license a few days beforehand.

Saturday about seven o'clock, I arrived with Chestman

and his wife. Everyone looked relieved when they saw me—I was late, and they were afraid I wasn't coming. I wore a business suit. Chestman had rented a dinner coat for me, but when I put it on, and looked at myself in the mirror, I took it right off again—it made me look like a waiter at the McAlpin! My bride had on her sister-in-law's wedding gown. She wore no flowers. She had worked in her office till noon, and must have had to hurry, preparing for the occasion. There were bottles of soda, cake, wine, and a jug of whiskey, which her sister-in-law got from her father. The refreshments were not put on the table till after the ceremony.

The bride's father and brother came from the farm in their holiday clothes. My future father-in-law was a tall, blond, dignified man with a red mustache. He wore an old blue business suit and a celluloid collar. My future brother-in-law Jack and his short, blond wife came from the Bronx, and Mr. and Mrs. Muffs, friends of the family, came from upper Manhattan. The doctor took the evening off from his calls. Her Boston sister must have been shocked by the sudden news—Sophie's going out West, so far away—and had gotten sick, too sick to come to the wedding.

On my side, there were my sister and brother-in-law, and their daughter Mary, my friends Rabbi Israel Rome and Dr. Samuel Shulman, and of course the Chestmans.

Rabbi Rome performed the ceremony. After the kissing and felicitations, everybody sat around the long table, made speeches, and partook of refreshments. My new brothers-in-law each got up and said a few words in praise of their sister. My sister sang a song without accompaniment in her

rich contralto. My friends each made speeches on my behalf.

Dr. Shulman delivered a talk in Hebrew. He said, "You see Mr. Molk as he appears to you now. Not big, not fat, but alive in every inch of his body. His eyes are not dreamy —they are alert. In Slabodka, they called him *illu.* I'm critical of many so-called *illuim.* But he is an *illu* in the full sense of the word.

"I saw him grow up. I saw him develop. When he first came to the Yeshivah at 156 Henry Street, just a *Bar Mitzvah* boy, I asked him, 'What are you going to do here?' He said, 'I'll stay here until I get *smicho,* and my high school certificate.' I met him three years later, and asked him 'How are you getting along?' He answered, 'I just got my high school certificate and diploma for the rabbinate.' 'What are you going to do now?' 'If I can't find a way to go to Medical school,' he replied, 'I'll try to obtain a degree in education, somehow.' I met him again a few years later, and he told me he'd graduated from Valparaiso University, and was going into business. 'Have you any money to start with?' 'No,' he said, 'all I have to lead me on is fortitude and faith in myself.'

"Several years later, I heard he'd made a tremendous success in the oil well supply business. About a week ago, I met him again at Dr. Chestman's. I asked him, 'What are you doing now?' He said, 'I've started in the oil business. I'd like to get married.' 'Have you a girl?' I asked him. He said, 'No. I'd like to find a girl with the virtues that would please my mother, too.' That was just a week ago. Now I'm at his wedding." And he finished with "*Motzo isho motzo tov*—He found a good woman."

CHAPTER

22

I SPENT a few days more getting acquainted with my newly-acquired relatives and then left for home. I wired Mr. Cook that I was coming back with my wife and wanted Charlie to meet us at the train. My wife and I were still a bit formal—we hadn't yet learned to call each other by our first names. At St. Louis we changed trains for El Dorado. We were getting close to home and I was afraid there might be somebody I knew on the train, who would see me "with a woman," so I told my wife to sit by herself. She gave me a surprised look, and I said no more about it.

Six o'clock Sunday morning we arrived in El Dorado. Sam Berger was at the train to see "whom Molk married." He was curious about my taste in women. I introduced my wife, and he congratulated us both. Charlie, beaming with

satisfaction, was on hand with my Dodge roadster. With a broad grin on his weatherbeaten face, he scurried around, grabbing the valises, and putting them in the car. He was too shy in the presence of my wife to express himself in his habitual way.

We drove to the Cooks. The family were up and dressed, awaiting our arrival. They greeted us as if I were their newly-wedded son come home with his bride. The table was set for breakfast. It *was* like coming home.

Mr. Cook said, "I'm glad I sent you the telegram not to come back without a wife."

"I've already found an apartment for you, too. But this day is our day. You will sleep here tonight," Mrs. Cook said.

After breakfast, I drove with Mr. Cook to his office to pick up my mail. My wife remained with Mrs. Cook, who had a lot of questions to ask.

The next day we rented the place she'd found for us. It was an upstairs furnished apartment, in a two-story frame house on the next street. We shopped for dishes, kitchen utensils, and other household necessities, and set up housekeeping in our temporary quarters. Having been alone since I was nine years old, I wanted to adjust myself gradually to married life, and I didn't want a big home. My wife, too, liked simple living.

As soon as we were settled in our apartment, we both wrote to my mother. I told her:

> "Mama, I am married. I wish you had been at my wedding. It was homelike and genial. Sister Tobie, Hymie, and their daughter Mary, were the only members of our family to share my happiness. Tobie must

have written you that she'd been instrumental in finding my *zivug* (spouse).

"I followed the example of the Torah—where Abraham tells his slave to go to his own people to get a wife for his son Isaac. I not only got a wife, I got a friend and companion. I wish you could see her.

"I wrote a letter to Simon and sent him a check, too. I mentioned his coming to America. But as he has said before, he doesn't want to leave you alone, and you don't want to part with Ponievez. Mama, you left your native town when you started for Siberia. You were forced to leave, and you were forced to come back. Why don't you come out here? I'm certain that when you come here and get a taste of free America, you won't want to go back.

"I can assure you that Simon could get a position as rabbi in one of the finest synagogues in the country.

"I am enclosing a check for a hundred dollars. Use it in good health."

My wife added, "It is unfortunate that I cannot introduce myself in person."

The furnishings in our three-room apartment were meager. After a few months we moved downstairs and bought our own furniture. My wife was a good cook and I gained a little weight.

Charlie told me that Don Stevens, who worked at odd jobs in my yard, and his friend Jim Ross, had leased a hundred and sixty acres on the Deming farm close to shallow production. They wanted to turn over the lease to me for

the rental of a dollar an acre, and have me drill a well within sixty days. They also wanted me to carry them for an eighth working interest to the pay, free. If we should get a well, they would pay their share for completion. The contract called for drilling down to nine hundred feet, unless oil was found in shallower sand. I talked to Stevens, and made an appointment for him to see my lawyer, the county attorney.

We organized the Deming Oil Corporation, consisting of the court clerk, the county attorney, Stevens and Ross and Robert Schwartz, who owned an old Star machine, and myself.

I wasn't familiar with shallow production, and I didn't want to be a "lone partner" with those "drifters" who approached me with the deal, so I took in Arch Williams, my former partner in the Dillenbeck.

A few days later, he told me, "Isador, I got it organized. I'll take an eighth, the court clerk will take an eighth, and we'll give Schwartz a quarter for the machine, and an eighth to Stevens and Ross. You'll get three eighths and you'll furnish the ten-, eight- and six-inch casing to drill to nine hundred feet. If we get a well, we'll run a string of five-inch, the oil string, and we'll pay for it. The ten, eight and six will be pulled and returned to you."

I was not enthusiastic about the whole set-up, but I said, "All right."

When the contract was drawn up, I had only one eighth. I was indignant, but didn't say a word. I felt I still didn't have a friend in the organization, so I telephoned Louie Biddle and told him about the deal and my disappointment

in it. I asked him to come in with me and I would give him a sixteenth interest, a half of my eighth, and he should furnish the six-inch. He was pleased.

We drilled to nine hundred feet and got a well. I sold the company the five-inch for an oil string. I was to operate, and Charlie was to be the pumper. We formed a Corporation, of which I was vice-president and a director. The well was making eight or nine barrels. We drilled two more wells. The lease made about twenty-five barrels a day. The oil was thirty-seven gravity, worth about a dollar and eighty cents a barrel.

We'd planned to drill some more wells, but the corporation ran out of money. The directors held a meeting, and voted to borrow ten thousand dollars from the bank. I'd have to be a signer of the note, reluctantly, as most of my associates weren't financially sound. I had another objection—I was to have had a controlling interest, but had been finagled out of it. The night following the directors' meeting I couldn't sleep. In the morning I sold my interest to the court clerk, and got out. This was my second object lesson in the oil business.

The Deming proved to be one of the best shallow leases in the El Dorado field, worth about half a million dollars. But I was glad to be out of it, and not have to worry about what my partners might do.

Lloyd Ressler, a Wichita broker, brought me a clipping from a Lincoln County paper, advertising for sale a string of casing, complete except for the ten-inch, which belonged to the Pawhuska Oil Company. The casing was in a dry hole, drilled in a wildcat test in Sylvan Grove, about two

hundred miles northwest of El Dorado. We drove to the sheriff's sale in Lincoln. I bought it and told Ressler I'd get pipe pullers and that he should stay there and look after the work. As a consideration, he was to get part of the profit after the pipe was sold and not share any loss.

I engaged the Abraham brothers, pipe pullers, sent out a steam engine and boiler, and told the truck drivers to contact Ressler in Lincoln and he would show them the well. One of the Abrahams phoned me that they couldn't start working, because the boiler and engine were not on location. I learned that Ressler had taken the machinery to Kanopolis, twenty miles from Sylvan Grove, to one of his other deals.

I went to Kanopolis, and found that Ressler had hired pipe pullers to pull a string of twenty-inch casing. They couldn't pull it, because the pipe was driven into quicksand. He didn't pay for the work, and the contractor put a labor lien on the rig and my tools. I had to get an attorney to clear up the mess. I paid Ressler's bills and moved my tools to Sylvan Grove.

I needed a Wilson elevator to pull the eight-inch. Ressler said, "I'll get it." He went to Russell, and borrowed an elevator from a truck driver, who was hauling for a local oil company.

While I was breakfasting in a restaurant, an excited man ran in. He said, "Have you seen the mob? They're having a necktie party. They're going to string up a Wichita oil man!"

I rushed to the hotel, where the mob had pulled Ressler out of bed and were dragging him along in his underwear.

I cried out, "Don't kill him! The man has a wife and three children."

The enraged truck driver told me that Ressler had borrowed his elevator, then invited him to dinner at a restaurant. Ressler had paid with a ten-dollar check, which the truck driver had to endorse, as the proprietor didn't know Ressler.

"The check bounced back. I'm gonna take it out of his hide!" he yelled.

"Here's ten dollars," I said. "Don't kill him."

The aroused mob dispersed.

I pulled out all my pipe, and also the ten-inch for the Pawhuska Oil Company which I hadn't bought. I plugged the hole and moved away my pipe.

I took Ressler to an attorney in Lincoln, the county seat, to settle with him right there. As we drove into town, the sheriff stopped me. "You trying to get out of the county? Are you Ressler?"

"This is he." I pointed to Ressler. "What's the trouble?"

"Ressler didn't pay his room rent," the sheriff said.

Ressler sat beside me, nonchalantly, while I paid his room rent. We drove on towards El Dorado. I delivered Ressler in Wichita to his wife and three children.

I was glad to come home, to peace and quiet. My wife told me she'd located a brand new six-room bungalow. We bought new furniture and moved in.

That summer my sister's boy came to us. This was a new world to him. He'd never been out of New York City and was still the shy boy who'd hid under the table. I took him with me to the yard, where I tried to teach him about pipe, and also along with me in the field. I wanted to put him in

school, but he quietly connived with my sister, and she wrote him a letter to come home. When it was time for school to start, he left.

I was busy in the field, and my wife kept busy in our home. She worked in clay, and in oils. She trimmed lamp stands, made lamp shades, and painted on silk and velvet cushions. She told me she'd been sketching since childhood, but had never taken up art as a study.

Pipe began to move, though it sold cheap. The price of oil was low, about a dollar and a half, but steady. It was 1927. I decided to sell my accumulated high-priced pipe. I put a man to work buying and selling on commission. Let's call him "Handsome Jack." I gave him the go-ahead to sell as low as fifty per cent. He sold the pipe I'd bought from the Marshall Petroleum Company at a big loss. He sold my Dillworth pipe, and I took a big loss on that. The pipe I bought on the fallen market he sold at a profit. In a couple of years, the high stacks of pipe in my yard were gone. I believed in Jack and his salesmanship, and was glad to give him a chance to work with me.

I bought twelve complete strings of casing from 5$\frac{3}{16}$" to 15½" on the ground at thirty-five per cent of new, from a Topeko company in the Peabody field. I told Jack, "You sell it at fifty."

On my regular day for paying my bills, I mailed a check for the pipe to the Topeka company. The check was returned, with a letter stating, "We already received payment by cashier's check." I was dumbfounded. I was sure it had been done by "Handsome Jack", and called him back to the office. "What have you done to me?" I asked.

He laughed lightheartedly. "I needed extra money. I'm

about to get a big deal for you. We'll straighten it out, Isador."

He'd sold the pipe at a profit, collected the money, then paid my bill to the Topeka company before it was due, with a cashier's check, and kept the profit for himself. I was through with him as an agent.

The "big deal"? He wanted me to drill a test on eighty acres, a mile from a flowing wildcat in Rooks County. I refused flatly. I suspected that he had something up his sleeve. He must have had some acreage in a different direction from the flowing well, with good geology, and he wanted me to drill so that he could find out whether the oil trend continued east where the acreage was, or turned west. There was already a well a few miles straight west.

My guess was correct. He got somebody else to drill on the eighty. The test was dry, and the parties lost heavily. Their dry hole proved that his own acreage was on the trend. He could get money now to drill for himself. He drilled a test on his own acreage, and opened up the new Rooks County field.

"Handsome Jack" was not a Ressler type. He was friendly and likeable. He was a promotor, doing high financing, and he was ambitious. I didn't approve of his methods, but he had nerve. He took chances and at times was reckless. He was out for money and he wasn't interested in sharing. I learned from him that if you want to make big money, you can't be too cautious.

Of course, I didn't consider the gold reward of enterprise as success. To me, success was accomplishment, attainment of one's goal. However, if you overemphasize at-

tainment, and minimize the cash incentive, you may even miss the chance of attainment. Such a case was the Deming deal. Had I given more thought to the financial end, I would not have shared with inexperienced and irresponsible associates, and I'd have had that valuable property. I was learning my business from the "drifters," men like Sokolsky, Ressler, and "Handsome Jack."

CHAPTER

23

I WAS buying pipe from major companies, The Carter Oil Company, a subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey, being one of them. I got acquainted with Ira Gibson, assistant to the district superintendent, when he asked me to buy pipe left over from a deal a Tulsa dealer had failed to complete. I bought and moved off the pipe as agreed. He liked my way of doing business, and one day he took me into the office to introduce me to Frank Graham, the district superintendent. J. J. Conry, the general manager from Tulsa, also happened to be there.

Mr. Conry was a sedate, middle-aged, temperate, thoughtful man of few words. He had worked his way up to his high post, beginning as a laborer in the oil fields.

Frank Graham was of Pennsylvania Dutch stock, short, heavy-set, with small, friendly brown eyes, and immaculate

in his dress. He was a widower and often talked about his former wife. We invited him to dinner frequently. He was fond of my wife and of me, and liked our orderly home. Before coming to Kansas, Frank had headed a South American division to drill for oil in Venezuela. He had eight million dollars at his disposal. When he returned from his successful South American oil venture, Standard Oil of New Jersey gave a dinner in his honor at a New York hotel.

Since that first transaction and my introduction to Frank and Mr. Conry, whenever The Carter had something to sell, they'd call me. I'd put in my bid in the El Dorado office, and they'd forward it to the material department in Tulsa. If it meant the abandoning of a lease, it had to go through Mr. Conry's office. I almost always had the refusal. Only if I couldn't raise my bid did they sell to anyone else.

The company had dismantled four wells on the Ferrier lease in Marion County. Mr. Gibson called me. I went out with him to inspect the pipe, and bought it. They knew I'd do whatever I promised. Sometimes the sale originated in Tulsa. If a lease didn't pay to operate, Mr. Conry called, "Sell it to our friend," which meant Isador.

The Standard companies are worlds in and by themselves. They have a system all their own. The Standard of New Jersey is made up of many subsidiaries in different branches of the industry—production, pipe line, refining and marketing. The Carter is one of its production units—it produces crude. The Oklahoma Pipe Line is the underground artery which gathers the oil, and carries it to the refineries. One of the company's biggest refineries is in Bayonne, New Jersey.

The organization is conducted, like government, by divi-

sion and subdivision. There are division superintendents, district superintendents and farm bosses. Each district has its land, material, and production departments. The production department is subdivided into drilling, cleaning, and maintenance. Every morning the farm bosses report the daily production to the local office. The bookkeeper calls in his report to the main office in Tulsa, the headquarters for the Carter Oil Company. In this way, the daily work of the drilling well is reported. Each farm has its own repair crew. The most important farm becomes the district headquarters.

The Porter Lease, five miles west of El Dorado, was the headquarters for this district. The Carter camp was a veritable community. There were about fifty buildings, including a large two-story office structure, repair shop, warehouse, machine shop, garage, and residences for forty families. The Carter men were contented. The company provided good living quarters and adequate insurance. They were secure in their jobs and well paid. Ben McGraw, a big, smiling Irishman, was the farm boss. The bookkeeper was George Yandel, a slight quiet, young man. J. J. Conry was General Manager, and later president. His office was in the Carter Building in Tulsa.

I always liked to buy from the Carter Oil Company. Their secondhand pipe was good; it was once-run. Seldom did they use the same pipe in another well.

Our friendship was not built on the so-called "good-fellowship" customary in business. It was based on trust and decency. My association with the rest of the companies I dealt with, was similar in nature.

A dinner was once given in Wichita for the Carter officials from New York and Tulsa, there on survey. Men prominent in the oil business were invited, I among them. They had some women there to add zest to the affair. When I entered the dining room, I looked surprised at seeing the women. Frank Graham spied me, and shouted, "Hey girls, get the hell out! The rabbi is here." The girls left!

At times a property was sold because it had too many partners, which hampered the operation. The Dempsey lease belonged to Gypsy, Sinclair and Marcum. I bought four wells to pull. They kept the fifth well to hold the lease. They had to have a pumping well to maintain the mineral rights. The pumper didn't have much work, so he busied himself in the storm cellar making home brew. While I was pulling the wells, he asked me, with tears in his eyes, "Will you pull number five, too? My cow went dry. No wells to pump. And my wife is kicking, too."

I was glad they didn't sell me the fifth well then. Later they sold me the lease, including the pumping well. I drilled some new wells and made a commercial lease out of it.

The major companies gave me an opportunity to buy material from all their districts in Kansas and Oklahoma. I bought tools from the Carter at their abandoned station at Logan, Oklahoma, six miles south of Pawhuska. They had to be loaded on cars, and shipped to El Dorado. My wife and I drove to Pawhuska, taking Charlie along to look after the loading. It was in the fall, the trees were turning color. It was a long drive there and back, but Charlie made the way seem short with his yarns. He told a story about

"Charlie Stink," an Indian boy, in Pawhuska. Charlie Stink had been buried alive by his tribesmen, who took him for dead when he fell into a coma. They covered him with twigs, and when he came to, he walked out of his shallow grave. His friends were frightened when they saw the "dead man" coming toward them, and ran away from him. "Charlie Stink is a lost boy," Charlie said mournfully.

When we passed a forest, he became very serious. He pointed and said, "That's the badlands. That's where the robbers hide. Them holdup men, they're all right. If you don' have nothin', they just tell you to be sure and have somethin' next time. But them hijackers, they don' give a feller a chance."

We stayed at the Pawhuska Hotel, while the tools were being loaded. We saw Indian women wrapped in blankets, and their men wearing feather headdresses. We were amused and entertained—it was a pleasant interlude.

Sadness awaited us on our return. I received word from brother Simon that my mother had passed away. I cried all the way home from the post office. My wife heard my groans as I drove into the garage, and ran out. "What's happened?" she asked.

"I couldn't speak. I suddenly felt old, because I had no mother. I had always hoped to bring her here. I could never realize that some day I might lose her.

My salvation was in work and in proving myself the son she had hoped for. With my mother dead, there was nothing to keep my brother Simon and his wife from coming here, if I could find a way to make it possible.

CHAPTER

24

KNOW thyself" is the first maxim of the Greek philosophers. My story would be incomplete if I didn't tell the reader about myself from my own angle.

Life is a continuous battle with the elements, for adjustment. My own struggle was the more severe because of the forces I myself created, the social complex—partners. If life's struggle for adjustment is a tragedy, mine was a comedy—it was my own *golem* (creature). But my aspirations inclined toward the ideal. My main object was never money but achievement, and I looked about me always for encouragement. I was willing to make sacrifices, to share my profits with others in return for appreciation. I didn't need either the counsel of my partners, or their money. And I was wholly willing to do all the work. There were few risks involved in the transactions.

Nor was I afraid of competition. As a matter of fact, I took in competitors in deals where they'd bid against me. It was a craving within me for approval of the alter—the other. It was in the same spirit as, when a youngster, I had run with my new interpretation of the Talmud to Reb Itzale Ponievezer, and later, in the university, when I'd gone to the professor with a new method of solving a problem in trigonometry. Approbation was to me the reward for work well done. This was my social pleasure; this encouraged me to go on.

I didn't expect my partners to be idealists, but I wanted them to display appreciation for the wealth I created. With a few exceptions, they were short-sighted and mercenary. That disturbed my ego and intensified the struggle.

One day, in the fall of 1929, Frank Graham told me the company had decided to sell its Kansas holdings. Most of the wells had turned into water, and it was no longer feasible for a big company to operate the leases commercially. He had been instructed to ask me to figure out what I could pay for their six properties in Butler County, and make him an offer. I knew I could buy the properties if I could keep out professional brokers. Their policy was always to intrude, by fair means or foul. Even when they know they can't buy, they will try to ruin the deal unless "paid off." One broker, I knew, had connections with the Carter office in Tulsa, and I was afraid he'd try to secure a buyer who'd bid against me. I approached him before he'd had a chance to find out anything, told him the leases were for sale, and offered him a special sum to act as my agent. "I won't pay you a regular commission," I said, "because I can buy it without any help.'" I was after expedience. I couldn't afford delay. I

gave my bid to the broker, instead of to Mr. Graham, to take to Tulsa. At the same time, I told Frank what I'd done, asked him to phone Tulsa to find out whether they thought my bid adequate, and if so, mail me an acceptance. He informed me later that they'd told him a letter of acceptance was in the mail.

When the broker came back from Tulsa, I gave him his check. I made the purchase, after overcoming the usual problems which occur in a highly competitive business.

Next morning I found Louie Lind in my office. "You are gonna take me in?" he inquired.

"How do you know it's a good deal?" I asked.

"Take me in on the ground floor, and I don't care what you paid for it," said Louie.

He knew how I did business. He'd butted in on several of my deals before.

I told him, "If I take you in, I ought to take in my other competitors, and also Mr. Levinson."

"You ain't gonna take in Levinson! He's in the dresses business."

I paid no attention. I thought if I took in those who competed against me, I should also have Herman Levinson, who would, I knew, be with me in case of disagreements.

I called up my wife and told her about Louie Lind's casual request. She said, "You don't need any financial help. You'll do all the work. Why do you want partners? I know you don't care for money, but you won't even get gratitude for your efforts."

At the time I bought the properties, oil was still a dollar and a half a barrel, and used pipe was normal, about fifty cents on the dollar. From either standpoint, the leases were

an excellent buy. I talked to my attorney, J. B. McKay, about having Joe Porter reduce the overriding royalty on his three hundred and twenty acre tract, from a sixth to the regular eighth. He got in touch with Mr. Porter's attorney, C. L. Harris, and the report was discouraging. I wrote a clause to be incorporated in the new lease I was to get. When Mr. Porter, Mr. McKay, and I met in Mr. Harris' office one morning, Mr. Harris read and re-read several times to Mr. Porter the new clause which I had instructed my attorney to insert in the proposed new lease. He wanted, as an old time upright counselor, to make sure that his client understood that it implied a reduction of his royalty. Mr. Porter raised his head and said, "Give me a pen."

"Joe, do you understand what I've read to you?"

"I heard you the first time," Porter rejoined gruffly.

Joe Porter was already in his late eighties, but his physique belied his years. He was a pioneer cattleman, and spent a great deal of his time in the Flint Hills, the famous Kansas grazing land. Mr. Porter was nationally known among cattlemen. He was also a wheat grower, oilman, and banker, but in appearance remained the rough and ready cattleman. He was involved in many litigations. I once said to him, "Mr. Porter, you are suing half the world."

He answered, characteristically, "The other half is suing me."

"In whate state were you born?" I inquired another time.

"In the state of ignorance."

He had been born on the border between Missouri and Kansas, and didn't really know which was the state of his birth. I liked his earthiness and he seemed to have a liking for me. Though an active man, he took time out to stop

frequently at my office and chat with me. He had the reputation of a hard trader, but I found him easy to deal with. I had no difficulty in getting him to reduce the royalty.

The Porter lease originally had fifty-one wells. One of the wells was swabbed three thousand barrels the first day it came in. When the lease was sold, the wells were making a lot of water and not much oil. They were pumped with oil and gas engines, which required a lot of help to operate.

The other leases, the Wilson, the Loomis, and the rest, were smaller. They, too, were pumped with the old-fashioned oil and gas engines.

After I'd completed the deal, and had gotten the Porter royalty reduced, I met with my prospective associates, and assigned each one his share. I reminded them that I hadn't a share for Hyman Cook, who was in the same line of business. But nobody wanted to give up any part of what he'd already been given. I gave Mr. Cook a part of my own.

My wife set up the entry in the books, and I gave the new company its name, "Cosmic." When George Berry, geologist for the Empire Company, asked me, "Isador, why did you name it Cosmic?" I said, "If Henry Doherty could create empires, Isador Molk can create cosmos!"

It was a co-partnership. The runs of the refineries were sent direct to me, and I was responsible for the operation of the leases.

My partners didn't have enough money to pay for their shares, and I consented to a loan, secured by a mortgage on the property. Though I had never mortgaged anything, I thought it good business policy to have a mortgage where there were a number of partners.

The Dempsey lease, which I had acquired from the part-

nership, Gyspy, Sinclair and Marcum, was also incorporated in the Cosmic.

The broker who tried to interfere in the Carter deal, did so with the Gypsy on the Dempsey deal, though I had an option on it. I had to give him some money, and I bought it for the company.

I bought the Naden-Bush from Oil Well Supply. It went to Cosmic. Then I bought the Atkins lease, joining our Wilson from the north, from O. W. Compton, for the Cosmic. I sold off enough material on the ground to pay for this lease. And I turned over to the company, a property with three wells, making thirty barrels of oil, for nothing. My ambition was to make Cosmic worthy of its name.

As soon as we took possession, I got busy. Those wells where I could shut the water off I cleaned out and put on the pump. The ones that were beyond repair I pulled out and sold pipe and equipment, using the money to reduce mortgages and drill new wells.

The slump hit the oil industry as well as the oil country. Everywhere there was a morbid quiet. When I went into the post office, I saw only a few restless spirits. At the bank the clerks worked jig-saw puzzles. And when I went to my office, I found a line of men waiting to ask for work, or for help.

The price of oil dropped from a dollar and a half to a dollar. I didn't pay any dividends. I drilled more wells to produce more oil, in order to pay off the mortgage. I wanted to have the property free and clear. I kept on till the price dropped so low, that drilling cost became prohibitive in comparison. In a little over two years, the mortgage had

been paid off—before it was due. Our properties were saved. We owed nothing. We still had most of the wells we'd bought, and the new ones I'd drilled.

The old engines were worn out, and it required more help to operate the leases. Oil went to thirty-three cents a barrel and even, for a short time, to fourteen cents. One Sunday, I called all the workmen to my office. I opened the books and explained the conditions. I said, "Boys, I have some bad news for you, but we're all in the same boat. I can't continue operating the way I've been doing, and we'll have to make some changes. In some ways you'll suffer, but your families won't starve. Cosmic will pay all expenses, including replacement, and turn over the money from the oil runs to be divided among you as wages. You'll receive the same wages you've been getting, as soon as the company is in a financal position to pay."

"It's O. K. with us," they said, "We'll stay with you."

When I came home, I said to my wife, "I surely have fine men. Before I had a chance to explain the whole situation, they said 'We'll do it'."

I learned to respect the working men. The next day, on Monday, my heart was filled with both gladness and grief. I was glad the men had accepted the compromise. But that didn't change the state of affairs. I had a big investment in capital, time, and effort. My bonanza had turned into a white elephant. I had too many gas and oil engines, and that required a lot of labor, while crude oil was almost worthless.

July 25, 1933, I sent the following message to Franklin

D. Roosevelt, President of the United States, Washington, D.C.:

"We, a representative group of the independent oil producers of Kansas, while heartily in accord with and anxious to support your lucid and coordinated plan of recovery, are helplessly embedded in the quicksand of ruinous prices for crude. Though our employees have magnanimously taken cut after cut in their wages, and not even considering the depletion of our capital assets, we are still producing at a loss. How can we pay a reasonable wage under unreasonable prices for crude?

ISADOR MOLK

A group of independent oil men signed with me.

I received in reply a letter dated July 28, 1933:

"Mr. Isador Molk

El Dorado, Kansas

My dear Mr. Molk: It is the hope of the administration that when the oil code is completed and put into effect, the price of crude oil will rise.

(Signed) J. H. WARD"

I came home and told my wife, "We are living in a wonderful country. Would I have had the nerve to write or to send a telegram even to a minor official in Russia? And here I wrote to the President of the United States, the highest authority in the land, and he answered me through one of his direct subordinates."

I was thankful, too, for my Talmudic learning. First, the Talmud gave me the mental training to reason. Second, it gave me a heart to feel, and it taught me to appreciate a situation at its true worth.

CHAPTER

25

I EXPLORED new realms and discovered new fields of endeavor. I penetrated the earth. I built Cosmic. But my ambition was to create, to help complete the world God had entrusted to man.

I found solace in the Torah, in the Book of Jonah. Creation of good-fellowship is beyond creed. The love of Jehovah expressed in the story of Jonah extends beyond the barriers of ancient Israel. God urges compassion on the people of Nineveh, though they were enemies of the Hebrews. Jonah was irritated because the wicked city was not destroyed, and God said to him, "If you had pity on the gourd, which grew up overnight and vanished overnight, shouldn't I have mercy on the people of Nineveh, who do not know the right from the left?"

What makes it more interesting is the fact that the Book of Jonah is recited at the climactic hour on the day of days, the Day of Atonement. On this day of fasting and prayer, Jews everywhere come to the synagogue to pour out their hearts to God and to listen to the story of Jonah. I made a practice of reading before the congregation in the Wichita synagogue the narrative of Jonah, the noble prophet. The recitation of this portion is sold to the highest bidder, and I set a price high enough so that no one has outbid me in the past quarter of a century. It is to me ever new, and I recite it each year with greater fervor and emotion. The whole congregation is keyed to attention.

I looked for kindred sentiments in Masonry. When I took Consistory in Wichita in 1934, my friend, Henry Wallenstein, the secretary, arranged to have me speak impromptu. The rituals were conducted in a dark chamber steeped in mysticism, and my inner voice spoke:

"Since the creation, man has been searching for the truth; Abraham in his Maker, Moses in the Redeemer, the prophet of Israel in the glorification of the Creator, the Egyptian sages in the sophistry of unworldliness, the Greek savants in the philosophy of man. And so the pageant goes on. On the streets of ancient Athens, Diogenes, with lantern in hand, sought for a truthful man. And in our modern observatories, Einstein searches for the true universe. All our educational institutions are laboratories of research for the truth.

"Search for truth is sublime. It is the divine impulse with which God vested man. Only through self-surrender and

altruistic work can truth be reached. This is what Masonry teaches."

I was interested in people. I wanted to help my sister. I wanted to instil a love of learning in her children. When Reuben, her son, came to us again, I welcomed the opportunity. His mother sent him to me to put him in business, though he was merely a second-year high school boy. I put him back in school. With my tutoring, evenings, he graduated from high school in a year and two summer sessions. Despite his lack of ambition, and without encouragement from his parents, I sent him to Kansas University. He graduated.

I built Cosmic in the dark days of the depression. I discovered new methods of operation and of increasing production. I was proud of my accomplishment. My partners were glad to let me pull the load. Then the flush production and the Roosevelt recovery awoke their self-importance, suppressed in hard times.

The country was convalescing. Steel and oil were picking up. Revival was noticeable. Cars were parked in front of the post office, people were going in and out. In the bank were numerous depositors, and the clerks were busy. J. H. Ward's prediction had been correct. The price of crude went up—from twenty-two cents to eighty cents a barrel. I raised wages.

Also I made improvements. One of the first and most important things I did was get rid of the obsolete gas and oil engines and install electric motors on all the wells. The new equipment, with electric clocks, enabled me to use the men for other work. Formerly they had had to start and

stop the troublesome engines by hand. Now they had time to recup the wells oftener and so increase production. My second step was to spark the drilling. I started a few new wells, and drilled others deeper.

We got our investment back and had better wells and better equipment. Production increased enormously. The Wilson lease made about three hundred barrels a day. I drilled number 9 two hundred and fifty feet deeper to the Viola lime and acidized, and it started out with a hundred and fifty barrels a day. This was the first time I had acidized a well, and I was the first to use acid in this field. This process had previously been introduced in Western Kansas. It is used in a lime formation. The acid dissolves the lime and increases the porosity.

In spite of my success in increasing production, and in raising the value of the properties, some of my partners were critical. They were interested merely in immediate profit. They wanted to keep on drawing more and more dividends. I wanted to use the surplus to improve and modernize the properties and make operations more efficient. My neighbors, the major companies, copied my new methods. Cosmic grew, and vied with the big companies. Its credit rating was high.

I couldn't reason with some of my associates. I had to argue with them. Hence I resorted to writing letters, instead of having meetings. When I'd decided to electrify the leases, I wrote a letter of requisition. My logic appealed to the Kansas Gas and Electric Company and they used it as sales talk. As a result, several independent producers, and some major companies, followed my example and electrified their leases. My partners were against it. I wrote them that

I would go ahead with my plans. The property couldn't survive otherwise. There must be leadership. This is the reason the Cosmic Oil and Gas Company has been a success since its beginning. Whether the price of oil was a dime or a dollar, and regardless of the amount of production, Cosmic was never in the red, and bills were always discounted. In the five years of its existence, not a day passed without planned work toward improvement.

I organized subsidiaries of Cosmic—the Fairview Oil Company and other companies. Whenever I came across a deal where there was no chance of loss, I turned it over to Cosmic. If it was doubtful, like the Henry Penner lease in Potwin that turned into water after I bought it, I kept it for myself. I always considered that partnership was a public trust, and I was more careful than if I had been sole owner.

The price of oil rose to a dollar and over. Production on the Cosmic properties continued to increase. My partners forgot the bad times. They hadn't experienced the difficulties I'd had during the depression. I'd saved the Cosmic properties from becoming a sacred cow. Income without effort or worry had blinded some of my associates. They ignored the fact that I had secured and maintained the property for them, when I might have had it all to myself. I realized that I'd have to break away. My first step was to send division orders to the refineries to distribute the Cosmic runs among the partners. Now I had to assess them for improvements, which they paid with great reluctance. I tired of administration by letter and lost interest in the Cosmic venture as an ideal.

I wrote my friend Mr. Levinson that the meeting of the

previous night had irritated me. I asked him to tell the rest of the partners that I'd decided to dissolve Cosmic, and that I wanted to do it within twenty-four hours. Nor did I want the name Cosmic to be used by any of them. I wrote the letter on a Friday, proposing a flexible basis of settlement; and I told Levinson if that wasn't satisfactory, I'd take anything I was offered, and get out. "There is more than money involved," I wrote him.

Saturday the papers announced a hike in the price of crude. My partners thought, since the price had risen, the twenty-four hours would soon be up, and no legal work could be done on Sunday, that I would change my mind. They didn't want to press the issue. But I called Mr. McKay, and asked him whether it would be possible to set up the dissolution agreement on Sunday. He said, "I'll do it if you insist."

I called Levinson and told him, "Regardless of the rise in oil, we are going to have a meeting on Sunday and dissolve partnership."

We met Sunday in McKay's office. I said, "Whatever you decide, I'll accept it." Levinson wanted to remain with me. "You'd better go along with them," I told him. "You'll be twenty-five thousand dollars ahead."

For my portion, I got the drilling casing, the H. B. Loomis lease in Augusta—the black sheep of the company—and some cash. They took all the production with modern equipment. These properties were in good shape and could be operated without repairs for the next few years. The documents were drawn up, and we were through before noon.

When I got home, I sat down on a footstool in front of a mirror. I saw myself smaller than I'd ever been. Tears rolled down my cheeks. I thought, "This is my reward for seven years of incessant work." It was not the loss of a fortune that I deplored—it was the death of Cosmic, which I'd created and developed.

I looked at my wife and recalled her words, at the time I made the Carter purchase seven years before: "Why do you need partners? You don't need the money, and you'll do all the work anyhow."

On Monday, December 6, 1936, I signed. Irving Cook, the son of Hyman Cook, and my nephew Reuben witnessed the signature. Mr. Cook, whom I'd carried on my own share in Cosmic, was still with me.

CHAPTER

26

AN oilman is an oscillator, the perpetual motion in his field. Like his field, he has to be wide in scope and deep in intensity. He deals in mammoth objects which involve great risks. He swings from a bizarre bonanza to a white elephant. It is a challenge. Not only the search for the pay—even the elements challenge him.

While I was operating the Cosmic Oil and Gas Company I made a location for Penner 2 on an 80-acre tract. Here I was alone—no associates. We moved my 3-A National machine in, and in three days we were rigged up. We spudded in, and at 500 feet put her on the beam. The drilling ran smoothly till 900 feet, with the exception of a few stormy nights when the rain kept throwing the belt off and all we could do was to try to bail the water, to have the hole dry and keep it from caving. Then the trouble began.

The 15-inch bit sprung a pin. The pin broke off in the stem, and the bit was left in the hole. The tool pusher hopped into the pickup and ran to the Eureka Tool Company in Augusta, twenty-five miles away, to rent a fishing socket. It was ten o'clock in the evening. When he returned with the socket, the men cleaned it and fastened it to the tools. It was already midnight. When the morning crew came, they ran the socket. They couldn't get it over the bit, as it lay to the side of the hole. We ran a spudder to move the bit back to center, without success. We did no good in the morning tower, and we decided to shut down the drilling and look for the right tool. I left the daylight crew at the well, sent the tool pusher to look for a tool and drove home.

I found my wife still awake and listening for my coming. She was used to my unearthly hours when I was drilling a well. I had a cat nap, took a bite of breakfast and drove back to Potwin to the well.

I found the daylight crew bailing water. The tool pusher hadn't come back yet. I drove out to the lease where he lived to find out what had happened. It was already noon.

I saw the pickup coming. At last, I thought, he got the tool. I stood watching. The pickup stopped at the house of one of the pumpers. I saw the pumper's spry young wife step down with a bundle and go into her house. When the pickup moved on, and the toolpusher approached me, I asked him anxiously, "Did you get the tool?"

"No," he said calmly, "I had to take Sally to the store to get her groceries."

I was mad. "The crew is waiting! All they do is bail water! I may lose the hole!" I left my car and got into the

pickup with him and went to scour the countryside for a wall hook. I found one, finally, in my own yard. I thought of Sally and the groceries and smiled to myself.

We took the wall hook out to the well. They ran it, and never came out with it. They broke it off—and that was left in the hole, too. I decided to give it a nitroglycerine shot to push the bit away and drill by with smaller tools. This was the last resort. It is a slow process. Until it is cased off the bit will try to come back in the hole and interfere with the drilling. This tries a man's patience. I called for the shooter and we got ready to shoot at midnight. After we shot it, we started to drill by.

As I expected, we made only a hundred feet in four days. We found a casing spot, and instead of running 12½-inch we ran 10-inch casing in a reduced hole. After we cased off the bit and shut off the water, the drilling ran smoothly again.

We reached the Mississippi lime, about 2700 feet, in twelve days. We ran the oil string, 2700 feet of 5½-inch. I called Haliburton and had the pipe cemented, and shut it down for three days for the cement to set.

At midnight the crew went out to the well to bail water and clean out the cement. They waited for me before drilling in. I came out at sunrise. We drilled six feet in the lime. I took samples at each run—a foot at a time. I was afraid we might drill into water. There was a strong smell of gas. We ran the bailer, and brought up a half bailer of oil—no water. I said, "Let's drill another foot as long as there is no water." We brought out the tools; they were covered with oil. We ran the bailer again, and struck fluid about 500 feet

from the bottom. We didn't go to the bottom, and brought the bailer out from the fluid level. There was a full bailer of high gravity oil. We swabbed the well for twelve hours; it made a hundred barrels. I was convinced it was a good producer. We tore down the machine and tools and installed an electric pumping unit. The well made about sixty barrels a day for two months.

It began to fail. I decided to give it a nitroglycerine shot and open the pay. The shooter put in the shot and covered it with a half ton of sand, so as not to bust the casing. Later, when my man ran the sand pump to clean out the sand, the pump was sand-ditched—stuck in the hole. We put up the National machine and tried to clean out the hole, but we couldn't do it. I had to abandon the well.

The cost of drilling a well approximately 2700 feet is $9,000. Completing it amounts to another $9,000. A property that produced sixty barrels of oil of forty gravity and above, and made no water, at that time when oil was $1.50 a barrel, was worth $150,000 or more. This will explain what I meant by a "bizarre bonanza." In the case of the Penner lease I lost everything because of the carelessness of my men.

I have had sleepless nights and restless days—often, have eaten only when food was brought out to the rig. . . . I may be comfortably seated in my living room, reading the news. I hear a storm brewing. I think about the transformers on the leases, the fuses out, and all the wells down, the lights on the drilling well out, the drilling stopped. I expect a call. I may have to run out in the storm.

Still, I want to be an oilman. It fascinates me.

CHAPTER

27

ON the same Monday that I signed the dissolution agreement, I staked a location for number 11 on the Loomis property, which I'd received as part of the settlement. The lease had two wells, one shallow and one deep, both making seven barrels.

I could more readily have forgotten Cosmic, if it hadn't been for Levinson. He came to my office every morning to see how I was getting along without the company. When I told him that the well I'd just drilled in on the Loomis made thirty-five barrels, he said, "Mr. Molk, I'm surely glad. My partners do no drilling. They're busy pulling and selling pipe."

My old friend T. A. Young later visited me at my office and said, "Mr. Molk, I know you got a raw deal. But you're doing all right by yourself. Now you'll be able to make a

place for my fishing partner." He referred to Reuben, who had graduated from Kansas University the past summer.

I took Reuben into my business, and told him to familiarize himself with both office and field work. He was a tall, good looking boy of robust build with a cheerful disposition—whistling when he wasn't smiling. When no one was around, he sang. He could whistle very well and he had a good voice.

He had an aptitude for music, so I had had him take violin lessons when he was in high school. He'd protested, "I'm not going to play the violin till I'm a grown man." He thought only children were supposed to take music lessons, and play an instrument. He didn't make much progress with the violin, so I gave him piano lessons. He could play well, but preferred to amuse himself. When he was alone in the house, he would tap out little tunes of his own composition on the piano. He liked best to play the harmonica, which he could do masterfully.

Reuben manifested no interest in business, nor was he reconciled to making his home in the Midwest. I suspected there was a pulling force back home. Most of his correspondence was done in secret, with a girl he'd known as a child. I continued to try vainly to explain, to teach. He was quiet, but uninterested.

During the eight days of Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, I placed the Menorah lamp on the mantel in the evening, lit the candles, and recited the prayer. I told the story of the Maccabees, their victories, and the rededication of the Temple. I explained the significance of the lighting

of the candles. My wife and I went out to visit friends leaving him in the house.

When we returned, the candles were still flickering, but Reuben wasn't there. I found a note in his florid hand on the mantel by the Menorah light. I read it with unbelieving eyes. "I've left for New York," it said. "You made your own way, and I want to make *my* own way."

The boy who had left me so suddenly was not the little Ruby who had hidden under the table when I came to Brooklyn in 1920. This boy was the one whom I had raised to manhood after he came out to El Dorado in his second year of high school. His departure was a great disappointment for me, as great as the dissolution of the Cosmic Company, which I had also nurtured. But I did not despair—I had work to do.

I deepened number 10 Loomis, a two-thousand-foot Kansas City lime well, to the Wilcox sand, twenty-five hundred feet down. I had drilled this well originally for Cosmic. I shot the sand with twenty quarts of nitroglycerin and made a paying well of it. I bought Biddle's Lease, which they couldn't operate profitably, from the Skelly Oil Company. I repaired it and made it pay. The Pure Oil Company sold me the last pumping well they had on the Brown farm. I saw a good chance to drill several more wells on that lease, but it had an overriding royalty. While I was pulling the well, I negotiated with Warren Brown for a straight eighth royalty. I drilled number 1 Brown with a standard rig, finished it in the Viola lime, and acidized it—and it swabbed forty barrels the first day.

Before I drilled that well in, A. L. Taube of Oklahoma

City came and asked me to sell him an interest in the Brown. I refused. No more partners! But the next day, when Henry Biddle of Augusta came over to the location and asked whether I would take him in, I weakened. I had known him for a long time and I liked his approach. I took him in on the ground floor, after I already had a well, and the property was worth considerably more. I told him that I figured him in for a quarter. I gave my friend Cook an eighth, and when Louie Price came around, I gave him an eighth—without profit.

I drilled number 2 Brown, a good well, too. I obtained another eighty acres from Mr. Brown, and got ready to drill a third well. Meanwhile, I negotiated on two leases, Yingling and Wagner, and I bought a National drilling machine. Henry Biddle suggested that he buy a half interest in my tools and we would develop these properties in partnership. I consented. I ran the tools. I secured the leases, and I drilled two wells on the Yingling, and two on the Wagner. The four wells were drilled to the Mississippi lime, twenty-eight hundred feet down. They all came in commercial wells.

I raised the production on the Loomis from seven barrels to seventy. In a brief period, I succeeded in building up a substantial production on the Penner, Joseph, Loomis, Biddle, Brown, Yingling, and Wagner leases.

CHAPTER

28

THE major companies core-drilled and opened new pools in Western Kansas, and farmed out some of their unproven territory to independent producers. There was a general trek westward. I didn't want to follow the stream. I preferred to stay in El Dorado, and enjoy my home life. I felt that with perseverance I could find new producing zones in the old El Dorado field.

Verne Myers, who had worked for me when I had Cosmic, told me that the National Refining Company was disposing of its El Dorado holdings. I kept an eye on the hundred-and-sixty-acre Mills property, which joined the Cosmic Wilson on the West. I learned that Tulsa interests were bidding on it. I called the Wichita office and told the company's land man I was coming out to see him.

When I got to the National Refining office, I asked the land man whether there was still a chance for me to buy the J. H. Mills lease. He said there was. He gave me a price and I bought it. He told me, "Leave me your check for the full amount and I'll telephone our Cleveland office to wire acceptance."

The next day the National Refining Company called and informed me that the Cleveland office instructed their attorney to draw up the papers.

The property had a lot of wells, of which only a few were producing. Number 31 was the best well; it made twenty barrels. The entire lease made about thirty. The workmen were irate over losing their jobs, and, without the knowledge of the company, pulled out the new string of tubing from 31, hauled it away, and replaced it with junk. They dropped some of the junk tubing while running it and plugged the well. My first task was to try to fish the junk out and run another string of tubing. I could not get all of the junk out. I had to skim the well a few hundred feet above the pay.

Louie Price called me from Tulsa, saying he had heard that I had bought the property he was bidding on and asking for an interest. Since I wanted to have control, I split up one half of the seven eighths working interest and gave one sixteenth to Mr. Cook and seven sixteenths to Mr. Price, leaving me eight sixteenths of the seven eights working interest. I took them both in on the ground floor, though I could have sold it at a good profit. We drew up a contract stipulating that I was to have full control and operation of the property, without interference. This was my policy.

I drilled 1-A with my machine and tools. It came in a good well, but before acidizing one of the drillers made a mistake on the sandline string while cleaning out. Instead of cleaning out, he drilled deeper. When we acidized, it brought in water, though it made a lot of oil. We couldn't pump off the water to get the oil at the bottom. We had to raise the tubing and skim the well.

On the day of the monthly assessment, I sent Louie a bill. I received his check with a letter stating, "If you drill another well, I wouldn't accept, unless it made a hundred barrels." I knew he was within the law, and could give me a lot of trouble. I decided to buy him out. I wrote him that he would have to leave the operation to me, as agreed, or sell his interest back to me. He replied, stating his price, which was fantastic. I promptly called him and told him that I was coming to make a settlement.

I drove to Tulsa with Irving Cook, my bookkeeper, and went to Price's office. He called his lawyer and had him draw up a contract of dissolution. We both signed. The figures were steep. I allowed him a profit of twenty thousand dollars. But I was satisfied; I could go on with my work. He made out the assignment, which was to be attached to the draft, and sent to my bank.

It was the spring of 1942. There was a resurgence in the oil fields. Oil had gone up twenty cents, from $1.30 to $1.50. I had not received the assignment from Price, and telephoned him. He told me he was sorry he made the deal. He was in no hurry to turn over the assignment. I filed suit in the District Court to enforce fulfillment of the contract. He procrastinated, and found excuses not to appear in court. I was compelled to take the case to the Federal Court.

In the latter part of July, 1942, J. B. McKay, Irving, and I drove to Kansas City. Price had two attorneys. My attorney delivered a strong convincing plea, proving that the defendant had no case at all. The attorneys for Price replied with arguments.

Judge Richard J. Hopkins must have realized that they had no claim. "You talk it over with Isador," he told them. "It will take him five minutes to settle it, while it will take the court two or three days."

The judge knew me through John W. Madden's law office in Wichita, when I'd bought the bankrupt school lease in Midian. Judge Hopkins frequented the office, when practicing law in Garden City.

I consulted Mr. McKay. He said, "Isador, they have no case. Millions for defense, but not a cent for tribute."

"I don't want to settle from a legal view," I said. "I want to settle from the standpoint of friendship. Mr. Price used to be a friend of mine."

"Well, as a friend, you can give him anything. You don't need to ask me."

During the court recess, I talked to Price. "Turn over the assignment, and I'll call off the case," I told him.

"Give me an additional check for my court expenses. "I've already spent five thousand dollars."

"No, I wouldn't give you that much. When I get to El Dorado, I'll send you a small check."

He agreed, and surrendered the assignment to my attorney. When I went home, I mailed him a check for a thousand dollars.

I favored Price because of his piety—though piety is no badge of honor. According to the Talmud, one should re-

spect age and erudition—even a youth, if he is learned. My father respected even wealth—it is a gift of God. When Tzemech Brody, the banker, passed by his seat in the synagogue, my father arose. He said, *"Rebbi m'chabid ashirim."* (Rebbi, one of the pillars of the Talmud, honored the rich.) But there is no mention anywhere of paying respect to a pious man. There is a reason for it. Nobody can tell by a man's actions whether he is sincere; he may be a hyprocite.

I wouldn't say that Price was dishonest. I would prefer to think that he was honest, but that he lacked confidence in people. He thought everyone was trying to cheat him. Louie Price was a thin, long-legged man who talked fast in a high-pitched voice, and complained about everybody tricking him. His pockets were stuffed with papers, dividends from his scattered investments, runs from refineries, and notes, cancelled and due. He was always buying—anything, anywhere, and he traveled by plane to and from his holdings. He loved God and his family, and he was friendly.

Henry Biddle, who didn't profess piety, was agreeable. We did a lot of business together. He was my partner in several leases. After we had about a hundred thousand dollars invested, I sent him an assignment for his half. He said, "What's the rush?" When negotiating a deal in the hundred thousands, he was calm—cool as a cucumber. Henry respected knowledge and experience. When we were through drilling, I said, "Henry, what are we going to do with the machine and tools?"

"I've got plenty drilling machines. I've got a bunch of rotaries with the B & R. Why don't you take it over?"

We invoiced, and I made him a price. It took hardly thirty minutes, and we were through.

The court settlement with Mr. Price was a great satisfaction. I felt as though we had come out from a Hebrew court—we entered guilty and came out innocent. (According to the Hebrews, when two come with a dispute both are considered guilty. After the court session both are innocent—one, by virtue of being "not guilty," the other by accepting judgment.) I had no interference. I drove a stake for No. 2A Mills, three hundred feet west of the Wilson, the old Cosmic line, and two hundred feet north of a dry hole drilled on this property previously by National Refining.

CHAPTER

29

SINCE my mother was no more, I tried to bring my brother Simon and his wife to America. He had remarried in Wabolnik, fifteen miles from Ponievez, after they had moved my mother and him back from deep Russia. His wife, Rifke, kept a general store, but the income was not enough to provide for them adequately. I frequently sent them checks to supplement their income. They had no children. His wife had had a miscarriage during her first pregnancy, and she never bore a child again.

Until the late thirties, Simon and I had corresponded regularly. He sent me in his letters the gems he discovered in the "ocean of the Talmud," and I sent checks in return. I begged him many a time to get *smicho* from an authorized rabbi. (Diplomas are issued by an acknowledged

rabbi.) Learned as he was known to be, a diploma was not necessary for him in Lithuania. When he was young, he'd been told by renowned rabbis that he didn't need *smicho.* They said Reb Isaac Elchonon, the rav of Kovno, didn't have *smicho,* and Reb Itzale Ponievezer didn't have *smicho,* and they were recognized as the greatest. Consequently, he'd never bothered about *smicho.* I wrote him that if he wanted to come to the United States as a rabbi, he would have to have it. No congregation would accept him without *smicho.*

In the latter part of September, 1939, I received an ominous letter from brother Simon, dated August 16 of that year, He wrote:

"Dear Brother Isador, shall live, with your wife Sophia, shall live:

"Your letter with the check I received, for which I thank you very heartily. For this meritorious deed, God shall favor you with all you wish. You should be well with your wife. This time I waited too long to get this letter. I used to get it every month. Now it takes longer. Thank God I received it. I know that you are very busy. I am restless and anxious to see your letter.

"You want to know how to make out the visa, the years, as stated in the passport when we came home from deep Russia—after the war in 1921, were 31 years. It is today 49 years. The passport is written with the testimony of witnesses, not as the birth certificates, because there were no birth certificates then. Now they've found the books of the registered births. They will give out new passports. Each one will have to put on his cer-

tificate where he was born, and they will include it in the passport, and it will come out younger, so I don't know what to write. But the pass given out in the name of Simon in 1921 is 49 years now. The wife is listed in the pass as 25 years, so she is now 45. Her family name was Annus. The wedding is already 15 years past, and she is now 45 years. So you can write this way. But God knows how long such a situation can last. When you apply for a visa it takes so long till the American consul issues a visa. You have to register some time in advance. Then getting a reservation on the ship takes time. In America you may find a way to make it quicker. If you wait, you can't tell what may happen. A war may break out. We are already late. God forbid, the terror alone is impossible to bear. I still remember the first war. I didn't imagine that it would take so much time to obtain a visa. You know my weakened condition. I will not be able to endure another war.

"God shall help you in your work. I wish you a year of peace and long life. My wife Rifka and her mother, too, wish you long life and peace."

I felt for him as though I were in his place. But I was helpless. The only way I could secure a visa for him was through a synagogue in this country, but no congregation would hire a rabbi without *smicho,* regardless of his erudition.

I went to New York to find out from the Hebrew Immigration Society if there were a way that I might bring him over here. They promised to work on it. They warned me against becoming involved with fakers.

I wrote him what I was doing in regard to the visa, and enclosed a check, as usual. I didn't want to grieve him by reminding him again about his error in not getting *smicho.*

I learned from my sister Tobie that my brother David and his family had fled from Berlin and gone to Palestine. He had been established in Berlin—had had a store there. His two sons were dental mechanics, and his younger daughter sang in the Koenigsberg Opera House. The older daughter attended Prague University. His grief over the disruption and hopelessness of the future was too much for him. He died soon after reaching the Holy Land.

My sister also told me that Reuben was employed in his brother-in-law's fruit store, was working hard, but was dissatisfied.

Reuben came back to El Dorado in the fall of 1940. The shy little boy under the table, the whistler, the crooner, the composer, who ran off to "make his own way" was back. He had written me that he'd gotten married while his parents were away in the country. And then he arrived with his wife. I looked at him now not as a little boy, but as the broad-shouldered pioneer, the statue in the picture with him which his sister had taken on the K. U. campus, when we went to his graduation.

Reuben's wife was a quiet young woman, who, I thought, must have had a plain home-loving mother. She told me that she was going to have a baby. I felt that Reuben might now achieve a serious outlook on life.

He went out with me in the field, and when Irving joined his father in business, he took his place in the office. When I acquired new leases, I gave him a share, and told

him to learn to take an active interest in the work. I wanted him to bring out his potentialities, and have the feeling that he was doing it by his own efforts. I believed that after he had learned the business his future and his children's future would be assured.

CHAPTER

30

I TOOK Reuben over to the location I'd made for 2A Mills. When we were measuring off the distances for the deadmen (anchors) and the slush pond, he remarked, "Aren't you close to a dry hole?" He was right—we *were* near a plugged hole. And because of this dry hole and a few more on adjoining leases, the whole southwest field including the south eighty of the Mills was declared dry by the geologists of the National Refining and Empire companies. They claimed it was located in the dry belt that ran east and west. But I wanted to test it anyhow, and now I had no one to interfere in my work. I had always doubted the conclusiveness of geologists.

At times I was amused, and thought of myself as Fiveh the *felser* (medicine man). When I was a child, my grandmother had taken her *illu* to Fiveh for a haircut. She said, "Reb Fiveh, cut my Itzale's hair." He was an old man,

seemingly in his nineties. I also remember when I was just an infant, my half-sister Dora holding me on her arm while cleaning windows. I broke a window, and cut my hand on the glass. She, too, ran with me to Fiveh the *felser,* to have the cut treated. The scar is still there. I recall, too, a little incident when Fiveh the *felser* was sick himself, and Dr. Mehr was called. When the doctor took out his stethoscope to listen to his breathing, Fiveh the *felser* scoffed, "Foolish man. I've been trying to listen through that thing for fifty years and could never hear anything."

Geology is not as accurate a science as medicine. I still laugh when I think how Fiveh the *felser* ridiculed the stethoscope. But astronomy can tell more about heavenly bodies millions of light years away than geology can about the earth we tread. In my short span in this business, I have seen geologists err in many instances, especially in the case of an irregular eruption. I was often criticized for going against geology, and not only by Reuben and Chick Willis, my foreman. But I learned from experience that when you drill a well you only test a space the size of the hole. When it is dry, only the hole is condemned. If I could find a well here, I'd put the abandoned south eighty on the map again.

We drilled 2490 feet, and the formation ran similar to the log of the dry hole. There was a showing in the lime at 2492. I stopped the drilling, and waited to see whether we'd get oil at this depth. In about an hour, we ran the bailer and had free oil. I told Chick to run tubing and have it acidized. The Chemical Process Company acidized the well with five hundred gallons of acid under five hundred pounds pressure. We pumped the well, and it made only six barrels a

day. I then called the Dowell Company, who reacidized it with a thousand gallons, under a thousand pounds pressure. It took about eight hours to force the acid into the formation. The well was then put on the pump, and it still made only six barrels. I told Chick to pull out the tubing, and drill deeper.

When I came to the lease in the morning, I met the pumper. "Have you seen Chick?" I asked.

"Chick's at the well, waiting for you. He says you told him to drill deeper. It'll surely be in water, he believes."

When I got to the well, Willis showed me the cuttings. There was no sign of oil. He'd already drilled fifteen feet deeper. It had a smell of gas, which the oil on the top didn't have. "You must be close to a new pay," I said. "Go ahead and drill."

He'd hardly drilled a foot when we heard a swishing sound. The fluid was rushing up in the pipe. "Here's your Arbuckle water," he said in a satisfied I-told-you-so-manner. But when he brought the tools out, they were covered with oil. And when we ran the bailer there was fluid up to two thousand feet. We found, after testing it, that of the two thousand feet of fluid, only a hundred feet at the bottom was water, and the rest oil. We put the well on the pump and it made, natural, forty barrels of oil and ten barrels of water a day. It is still a good producer.

Chick couldn't understand my technique, but he knew the mechanics of the oil field. He was a driller by trade, and had followed the oil stream from West Virginia to Kansas.

Here is another instance which neither Chick nor the

geologists could predict. We staked a location for 3A Mills, fifteen hundred feet straight west. I intended to go straight west, but I made a mistake—I didn't use a transit. I had as much use for it as Fiveh the *felser* had for a stethoscope. I didn't think the Architect of the universe needed a transit or a level when he made the earth. I went about three hundred feet southwest—again in the condemned eighty. We had hardly drilled five hundred feet when we reached free oil. We had a half dozen more showings in gas and oil at different depths. I was too busy just then to test them out. I wanted to go to the same formation as 2A. I drilled to 2492, acidized, and increased the oil, but increased the water, too. I pumped the well for a few years, then decided to plug it back to a shallower pay. I plugged off the bottom water to 2400 and ripped the seven-inch casing to pull, but it was tight. I ripped it again a few hundred feet higher; the pipe was loose. The next morning when we ran tools, Chum Efaw, my driller, said, "We got an oil well." I told him to run tubing and put it on the pump. For six months, it pumped fifty barrels a day, and no water. Then it went down, but is still a good commercial well.

No one knew from what level the oil came, since all the formations were open, because there was no casing except the seven-inch in the hole. I drilled six new wells pretty close to it, each producing from a different pay. All are commercial wells and make no water. So, number 3A, drilled in a condemned location, disregarded as a producer when drilled, became a phenomenal well and the guide to six new wells in different formations.

The discovery of oil is fascinating and it attracts a di-

verse multitude. The major companies, with mammoth sums at their disposal, employ armies of geologists and petroleum engineers, and equip them with the most modern instruments and devices for core drilling. They find and develop the largest and most fertile fields. They also abandon these fields as quickly as they think the yield is dropping off too much.

There are promoters who interest merchants, doctors, and lawyers in drilling a test. Sometimes they strike a good well, and open a new field. I know of several cases in which Hollywood actors made money in oil. I also knew a cobbler who became rich out of oil. These men are in the oil business, but they are not really oilmen, any more than speculators in corn and wheat on the Exchange are farmers.

The real oilmen are those occupied in drilling for oil. They are fascinated by the search. They may not always develop fields of large proportion, as they generally deal with leftovers of the major companies—nonconformities in condemned territory where every hole is a new test. They learn by actual operation and development, and do the work themselves. A more successful independent oil man may drill a wildcat test, and open a new pool. Such have been the forerunners in the oil industry.

I myself pioneered in a developed territory. A geologist could not have figured it out, if he lacked the experience I'd had with Cosmic on the Wilson. I drilled a well on the Mills about a thousand feet west of the Wilson, and got it in the Peru sand, at twenty-two hundred fifty-five feet. I recalled, when I took over the Wilson from the Carter, that the company had had two wells in the Peru pay. They had

deepened one after it had been pumping for about fifteen years, and when I took over the lease I had deepened the other. I drew a straight line between the two Cosmic wells, and extended it six hundred feet northwest of the so-called dry hole that National Refining had on the Mills. They had a showing at the same shallow depth, and passed it off, drilled deeper, and got a dry hole. I extended the line to the fabulous number 3, which also had a showing on the same level, and backed up to center and drilled in number 5 in the Peru pay. I set the casing, and swabbed forty barrels a day. After pumping for five years, I shot it with nitroglycerine. It is still a good well.

No geologist ever found in this territory what I discovered by trial and error. I drilled a well on the Mills and lost the tools at eleven hundred feet. I fished for them and lost the fishing socket, too. It was impossible to drill by the socket, so I told my men to plug the hole back to seven hundred feet from the top, and try to make a well of the six-hundred-fifty showing. But there was a cave around six hundred feet, and we couldn't get to it. I said, "Let's plug it above six hundred and try to make a well of the top showing, the shallower pay at five-twenty." That showing was very light. We shot the formation and ran five-inch on a fifteen-inch swage with a perforated fifteen-inch nipple. We mudded off the five-inch casing, ran tubing, and put it to pump. The well is making ten barrels, the first five-hundred-foot well in this area.

In an editorial, August 30, 1951, entitled "Oil's New Phase in Butler County," R. A. Clymer wrote in part:

"What has happened is that many new pools have

been discovered in this area in recent years, and, moreover, that operators are going out and finding profitable extensions to older areas. Along with this, they are taking greater pains in the drilling of wells on some of these older leases. For example, there is the report of this week that Isador Molk, progressive El Dorado operator, will test half a dozen oil-bearing formations in the new well he is drilling on the J. H. Mills 160-acre tract in the El Dorado pool. Time was when operators simply went after the deep, or main sand—casing off all others through which the tools passed.

"But no more. Mr. Molk's excellent example doubtless will be followed. All oil pays from now on will receive their due and proper share of attention. Mr. Molk will drill his Mills No. 14-A with cable tools, thoroughly and painstakingly testing out every level of production. There will be none of the smashing impact of a rotary outfit, which can put down a hole two thousand five hundred feet deep in a week. The cable tools will search out the productive capacity of every horizon for present and future beneficial possibilities."

The inherent faith of my father's *chassid*—Man of Faith—the story he recited at the close of the Sabbath, was reincarnated, in the classroom in Valparaiso, into my faith in Mother Earth. And it spurred me on to fathom the depths of the earth's treasures in the Southwest. This concludes a story of discovery of subterranean wealth by a Yeshivah geologist in free America. I searched for the treasures not for money, but for the love of exploration, and I shared the riches for the sheer joy of appreciation.

CHAPTER

31

I CAN'T recall any period when money was my main object. I always wanted to create, to function, not only for practical purposes but also for appearance. Neatness and cleanliness were habits I'd acquired in the Yeshivah in muddy Slabodka. Reb Moishe, the overseer, used to say, "You don't deserve your stipend if your collar is black, and your shoes are white." The celluloid collar had to be clean, and the shoes blackened. One of my partners accused me heatedly of spending too much money in keeping up the leases. He said, "I am only interested in what runs in the tank." I paid no heed. I instructed my men to keep the roads on the leases leveled and oiled; the ground around the tank batteries clean; the weeds around the wells goosed; the derricks painted; the pumping units and equipment washed,

regardless of cost. I kept my pipe yards and my machine shop in the same way. I tried to improve the appearance of my house, but I was not satisfied with the results, since it was not built, originally, according to my taste.

One Sunday I picked up the foreman of the Kansas Gas and Electric Company in his garden—I wanted to have him fuse the high line transformers on one of my leases.

"I'll give you some fresh tomatoes," he said.

"Do you own this ground?" I asked.

"Yes, I bought this lot to build a house close to my job. I expected the company to put up a substation across the street, but they changed their plans. Now I'm stuck with the lot."

I looked around at the tangled mass of weeds while I stood ankle-deep in mud. I said, "Harry, I don't know how much money you sunk in it, but I'll take it off your hands for what you paid. I like to clean up a mess."

"It's yours," he said.

I was reminded of my agreement with Harry several months later when a man offered me a good price for the lot. I told him Harry had never sent me a bill, so it was still his. I called Harry. He laughed. "Isador, it's yours. I sent the man over to you."

"The man offered four times as much as I'm to pay you," I told him. "You can have it. You need the money more than I do."

"No, it's yours," he said, "You can sell it."

"In that case, I won't sell it," I told him. "I'll build a house." I wanted to build a home according to my taste.

I began to prepare the ground which extended to three

quarters of the block. The city had paved other streets in the neighborhood, but not where this patch of jungle was located. I filled the lot with tons of black river dirt. I built retaining walls. I demanded that the city administration hasten the building of a storm sewer and pave the streets around the block and its vicinity. I met with opposition from neighbors living in small houses across the street. They didn't want to be taxed for the new pavement. They didn't realize that the levy would be insignificant in proportion to the increase in the value of their porperties and refused to sign the petition. I could have bought their houses cheaply before starting work, but I didn't want to deprive people of their homes. With the cooperation of the city manager and a few farsighted commissioners, my block and the neighboring blocks were paved.

Before the grading for the pavement was made, I already had all the excavations for the utilities of three houses. I built the first house, a frame house on the middle lot, as an experiment. This was to be the background for our own house on the corner lot. I built sidewalks, seeded grass, and planted trees and rosebushes over the whole grounds. When the roses were in bloom, people stopped their cars to look. I had turned the wilderness into a garden.

When the city built the storm sewers and pavements, we moved into the new house and began to plan for our home on the corner. I wanted to build a real house, a perfect home. I took Bezalel, designer of the *Mishkun* or Tabernacle, built in the wilderness at the instance of Moses in the 13th century B.C. as my inspiration, my architect. He designed not only the structure, but the sacred vessels in it.

When asked why he had omitted the place for the cherubim in his plans for the construction of the *Mishkun,* he replied, "Angels don't need space."

I hired my carpenters, plumbers, and electricians. I employed a good foreman and worked with him. We built the house of buff Roman Beauty bricks, with a hip roof to give it a finished appearance from all sides, since it was on corner site. The house was built in the center of the lot. The front porch had a copper roof and antique metal railing. The large picture window in the living room and the porthole window in the vestibule looked out on the porch. The northeast corner of double glass blocks was an added attraction. The house had the most modern improvements for beauty, ease, and comfort. When it was finished, the cherubim found a home!

The frame house was a suitable background for our home. I sold it for less than I had been offered in order to secure good neighbors.

I felt satisfied with my latest achievement. I had turned a weed patch into a beauty spot, and had a home according to my taste.

I was even happier over the farm I bought, quite unexpectedly, on a hilltop on the outskirts of town. One day I had seen a group on the courthouse steps, including some friends of mine. They were bidding: A thousand dollars, a thousand and fifty. I asked a friend, "Do you want to buy it in partnership?"

He answered, "I already have a partner."

"Sorry. I'll have to bid against you."

I asked the sheriff to read off what was being sold. It

was an eighty-acre farm, on a part of which a big company had some wells. I didn't care as much for the oil royalty as for the land in fee. I wanted to own a farm.

I heard a bid of eleven hundred. Then I heard "Eleven fifty." Another bid eleven seventy-five. My friend bid twelve hundred. There was a pause. I ignored the low bids, and raised to six thousand. Heads turned to look. I kept on bidding, till the auctioneer called out, "Sold!"

I had bought sixteen twenty-firsts of eighty acres of land, and the royalty. I hunted up the five or more heirs of the five twenty-firsts. They were in the service. Some were stationed in Japan. I bought their shares, and was glad to pay them more, porportionally, than I'd paid for the sixteen twenty-firsts at the sale. It turned out to be a good buy. The residential district extended out close to the property, and the oil company increased its production by the second recovery—water-flooding. The value of the land multiplied, and the royalty was raised manifold.

Next came a deal prompted by Reuben's return. I thought about the lease which National Refining Company had purchased from Ramsey Petroleum Company and about fifteen years before resold to me to dismantle, because it was making too much water. I remembered that when I pulled out the casing, I had found that all the strings of pipe in the hole, from fifteen-inch to five-inch, were eaten through a hundred feet from the top. I was convinced then, that the water came from the surface and not from the pay below. I said to myself, "If I could get a lease on the one hundred and sixty acres from Roy Ramsey, I'd drill a well there. It would be a sure shot, and I'd start Reuben on this new lease."

I negotiated a lease with Ramsey. When I came out of his office, I met Ted Helling, President of El Dorado Refining Company, whose offices were in the same building. I told him I'd gotten a lease on the old Dunkle farm, the Ramsey, a hundred and sixty acres, and that I meant to drill a well there. He said, "Isador, El Dorado Refinery will go in with you on that." We went into his office, and wrote out a memorandum. They were to pay half the cost of the drilling, and I was to operate it on a fifty-fifty basis.

When I got back to my office, I told Reuben I was starting him in the business and assigning him an eighth interest in the Ramsey lease. It was my intention to turn over my entire half to him eventually.

The first well, after we acidized, made a hundred barrels of oil and some water. The second well, after acidizing, made a hundred fifty barrels of oil and a lot of water. The third one was a fair well, and didn't make any water. We didn't acidize it. Later the lease began to make a lot of water, and less oil. We installed Reda pumps at the bottom of the tubing connected with electric cables to take care of all the fluid. The lease would have paid off and made money, but it required a lot of work. Just at this time, Reuben and his family left for New York, and I was too busy, and couldn't attend to it without his help.

The work on the lease became more difficult. Now that Reuben was gone, I lost my enthusiasm about going on with it. I asked the El Dorado Refinery to take over the operation, or buy it. They advised me to pull it out, which I did, and sold the material. I sent Reuben his share of the division.

This was not the first time Reuben had left for New York,

since his marriage. When he had returned the last time with his wife and two children, I thought he'd come back to stay. He was my incentive in buying the Ramsey lease, and the extensive drilling on my other properties. I thought that, with no children of our own, he would, in time, carry on for posterity, if he learned the business, the enterprise I'd founded. I didn't want to reveal my plans for fear he'd slacken his efforts. But Reuben couldn't see through the maze of the present; he thought he was just working for a salary. He never realized that I wanted to see him bring himself out and prepare himself for the business. That had been my object in keeping him in school, instead of listening to his mother, and putting him to work.

I penetrated the earth and brought up black gold. I swam in the "ocean of the Talmud," and gathered gems. I built homes. But I tried to mold a character and I failed. The prophet laments, "Children have I reared and brought up, and they have rebelled against me."

CHAPTER

32

I OFTEN wonder how the world would have looked if all the sages of the Talmud and its commentaries had devoted their time to the study of science and mathematics, instead of to abstract reasoning. And what would brother Simon have been if he had lived in this country and used his talents in modern science, instead of building structures in *higoyon.* Would he have become the discoverer of a fifth dimension?

In czarist Russia even genius was stifled among the poor. Here in America everyone is free to develop his abilities. Any one may become an inventor or a discoverer, and add distinction to his work. The roustabout on the lease, the roughneck at the rotary, the driller, the tool-dresser in the derrick house, unwittingly leaves his imprint. The scientist

formulates and defines what the layman discovered at work. I'll sketch, in evidence, a few of my own skilled employees.

Chum Efaw, my driller, blackened with the oil and grime of his trade, is the reincarnation of the vanished blacksmith. He stands alert and listens to the rhythmic *thump, thump, thump,* of the tools and now and then slips a notch or two on the drilling line. When he puts his hand on the wire line clamp, he can tell what is going on a mile down in the hole. He takes the two-ton bit off the stem and hoists it into the forge with a heave-ho of his sinewy arms. His muscles, which are like the twisted rope of the steel cable, flex as he sledges the glowing steel. He learned much from his father. When he was a little boy, and his father used a steam engine in drilling, he fetched the coal and water for the boiler. He tells me, "My father always said, 'You have no right to take the check if you didn't earn it.'" Chum always has a smile on his big face, and he likes a good joke.

The slim, wiry form of Enos Elmore, his tool-dresser, swings back and forth with the ram, when he and Chum pound the red-hot bit. He is past two score and ten, yet he climbs the eighty-foot derrick with the agility of a tomcat. Enos is an even-tempered man, talks respectfully in a low voice.

Chum and Enos are ingenious at inventing labor saving devices at the drilling well—making cold fills for rope sockets and ties for balers. I know of no one who could make a knot in a wire rope so fast and so skillfully as "Muscles" Enos.

My foreman, Verne Myers, is a self-taught, versatile man.

He can tell, by putting his hand on the polish rod, precisely what is wrong with the pump in the working barrel four or five thousand feet below, whether the balls and seats of the lower or upper valve, or both, are chewed up. He can tell whether the cups of the lower or upper valve are off; whether there is a hole in the tubing; or whether there is something between both the valves. He walks up the rig to grease the crown pulleys as one would walk on level ground. He can fix the time clock and fuse a high voltage transformer. He is a master, a super-mechanic, at the wheel of a vehicle. Verne is tall and slim with cowboy legs, which he gives a workout riding the horses on his father's farm. He is a mild-mannered young man, and he releases his words slowly, leisurely.

I once bought a small unit, which only had a bull wheel for the drilling line. We were going to use it as a cleaning-out machine, but it was inconvenient, since it had only one reel, and they could only spool one line at a time. Chick and Verne mounted it on a big Dodge truck. One day Chick came to me and said, "Mr. Molk, if you could let me have the sand reel and the calf wheel in your yard, I could make a regular cleaning-out machine, and we wouldn't have to waste time spooling lines."

I said, "Hop to it."

He and Verne set to work. Not only did they build on the bull wheel and calf wheel, but they added a cat wheel to screw and unscrew joints of pipe while running or pulling. They named the outfit "Granny," because it was mounted on an old Dodge truck and was slow.

When the representative of the company from which I

had bought the original machine came around, he inspected "Granny" thoroughly. He returned in a few days, bringing with him the company engineer. Before long the firm put out an exact copy of this improved machine.

Harry Brown, one of my pumpers, was a garage mechanic when I hired him. I call on him wherever precision is needed. He is methodical and meticulous in his work. Harry is a slight Irishman—Irish as the Blarney stone. He is sober, and has a deep sense of humor. He tells a dry joke in a quiet voice, and it penetrates.

My shooter, V. H. Corbin (Vic), has been in this business about forty years. He goes about preparing a shot, much like a housewife preparing a meal in her kitchen. He lays out the ingredients—nitroglycerine, and other explosives, the "Bolshevik" (time clock), and the umbrella (metal cover for the time clock). Then he measures the depth of the hole with a weight attached to a hook on the end of a steel wire. That done, he takes out the line, removes the weights, hangs a metal shell in their place, loads it with the prepared explosives, and lowers it to the measured depth. Sometimes the explosive is caught in a cave. He fishes it out calmly, masterfully, maneuvering with his hands, and puts it back in. Then he snaps the line, unhooking the shell, and leaves for home.

When it's time for the shot to go off, he comes back with a seismograph. He is on the dot with the time clock. He arrives at the well with an enthusiastic smile, as if he'd come to play golf. Vic is short, plump, and always jolly.

Charlie Smith, my yardman, has original ideas. I need

only suggest that some gadget is needed, for him to respond, "I'll invent it."

I had a lot of two-inch line pipe to thread one time. I told him, "It's too hot to work with the Landis machine. "We'll wait till it gets cooler."

"Aw," said Charles, "I don't need to work in the shop. I can work outside, and I can do the work at night when it's cool."

He took a Toledo two-inch hand threader, hooked it up to an old Ford engine, and made a threading machine out of it. He turned out more pipe on his crude invention than on the Landis.

Man was given the task, and a free will, of completing the world. The phantasies of Jules Verne were realized in the airplane and submarine. Science gathered momentum, and converged on the splitting of the atom. The smashing of the atom revolutionized the physical and social world. Theories became truths. The Einsteins took the place of the Newtons.

This brings me again to my brother, and other mental giants in the land of oppression, who sought to complete the world through a spiritual solution. I see before me the martyr, Solomon Molkho, a legend in our home, the marrano of the Portuguese court who turned back to Judaism, became a Talmudic scholar, a cabalist, the forerunner of the messiahs of the 16th century, till he was burned at the stake. He had given his life to bring the Redeemer by force.

Brother Simon was passive. He had faith that God would send the Messiah. He waited for him every day, and ended by digging his own grave. Blessed be his memory.

CHAPTER

33

IN June, 1940, I received a letter from my brother Simon.

"Dear Brother Isador, live long with your wife, Sophie!

"Your letter and check I received, for which I thank you. Be well with your wife. We wish to hear good news from one another. We should all be well. I thank Sophie for her letter.

"I thank you for asking me to write oftener how we are in health. I, too, would ask you to write me more and more how you feel.

"Let us hope that there will be better times. That is the wish of your brother Simon. Be well."

In this letter I read the fear of the censor. How could I report to him what I had been doing to get him out of there? I tried to secure a visa for him through legal channels. I got only promises. And I had been warned against

becoming involved with fakers, who were smuggling immigrants into this country.

In a few months, I received another letter from brother Simon, fraught with menace.

"Dearest Brother Isador, shall live, and your wife shall live:

"I received your letter. I wonder why you ask me again how to make out the visa. Ask an advocate. He will tell you all. You have to write that you will guarantee to take care of me and my wife. But if it doesn't help, you can make it a visitor's visa. You have to act. Don't ask questions. I don't know how else to make it. I heard that they go by way of Vladivostok through Siberia to America. I don't know any other way. I am lonely. I cannot express myself, and I must not express myself. And you still keep asking me questions. Don't ask, act. God will help. You have a good head. All you have to do is act. You understand. I never forced you to do things. You know the time. It is urgent. Take me away from here. I can't wait any longer. You overslept and you are still sleeping. When you send me a check, send me a check from the bank. Don't send me a personal check, because you can't cash it now. Don't send me any money unless I ask you. Act and don't ask any questions. Think seriously what I'm saying. Do as I write. Let your letters be plain. Just answer what you do for me. Be well with your wife. Have a happy New Year, as the wish of your brother. Regards from my wife Rifke."

I could see his dark, deep-set eyes filled with terror. I cried out, *"Zu torah v'zu schoro?"* Is this his reward for his devotion to God and His Torah?

The prodigy, who was known at the age of confirmation, thirteen, as master of the greatest portion of the entire Talmud and its commentaries; the genius who was renowned as having a grip on the *Yad Hachazoko,* the "strong hand" of the RaMBaM, the young man who was proclaimed in the Yeshivah one of the most profound thinkers of that time, did not know how to save himself from the beast.

I don't remember ever seeing Simon at leisure. He was either involved in a discussion, or was studying aloud in his sweet melodic chant. He was loved, respected, honored, yet he was meek. Students flocked to him when he was engrossed in his studies, for his interpretation of passages in the Talmud, and he remained calm and patient. Sometimes I was arrogant towards him, but he was rarely angry with me.

Another letter came early in 1941. This was from the valley of the shadow of death. He was in the clutches of the beast.

"Dear Brother Isador, shall live and your wife Sophie shall live:

"Your letter I received for which I thank you very much. You want to know how I feel, how my health is? I can write you that I thank God for all He does with me. See, brother, how one can get a visa. I should be able to come to you. We should be together. You should do more about it than you did till now. I shouldn't be so lonely. Can't you find a way, with your great mind, how to bring me over to you and save me from my loneliness and. . . . Be well. I can't write too much . . .

"As your devoted brother Simon wishes you. My wife

sends regards to you and your wife, also Tobie's son, Reuben, he shall be well."

I never heard from him again.

I read in the daily papers the horror stories of the ghettos and then the concentration camps: Dachau, Buchenwald, Auschwitz. I shuddered.

After the war, during the Nuremberg trials, I learned more about the sadists, Hitler's legions, the diabolic minions . . . the death marches . . . the lethal chambers. I had no word as to my brother's fate.

Later I read in a New York paper that some people from Ponievez had arrived in this country. I wrote to the editor of the paper, and asked for the addresses of these people. He sent me the name and address of Rabbi Oshrey in Montreal. I communicated with him. He wrote me that Simon was one of those who were marched to the outskirts of the town and were told to dig their own graves.

Another martyr! Not a legend. He was a mental giant. He was patient; he did not challenge an established system and hail a messiah. He believed in the principles of the faith laid down by Maimonides, that the Messiah will come, and awaited his coming patiently. He was gentle and serene —just one of his people—and was led like a lamb to the slaughter. A true sacrifice. The man who carried in his head the whole Torah from Moses to the later Gaonim, who could unravel and interpret, readily and unpretentiously, the most intricate passage of the Torah, might have been the savior of a struggling humanity, had he lived in the land of Jefferson and Lincoln.

CHAPTER

34

FREEDOM was my destiny. I longed for personal freedom—freedom of body and soul. It wasn't the personal freedom of Rousseau and Voltaire, who contended that man is born free, but kept in chains. It was not the fallacious assertion of the encyclopedic philosophers, who envied the beast. Walking on four feet is freedom, the freedom of the jungle, but not security. You are not free unless you live in a free society that safeguards your freedom. I searched for freedom and security—true democracy, wherein man could unfold his latent capacities. A democracy releases the potentialities of the common man. It was not the Newtons and the Einsteins alone who ushered in the new epochs of the past and future. It was you and you and you—the compounded genius of the laymen—who brought about the

development of the greatest democracy. This could only happen in a land where freedom is secured by a Bill of Rights.

Freedom was my goal. I felt I could be what I was destined to be, if only I had a free environment. What chance had the child of a second class citizen to unfold himself in the land of the club and the gendarme? How many prodigies have been trampled by the wayside!

Regardless of superior ability, if the body is in the throes of serfdom, the spirit is stifled. I remembered the tortures my family endured. Many years after my half-brother left for America, the Czar's men came, took away the straw pillows from under our heads and sold them, because he didn't report for military service, though he was a youngster when he left Russia. Under such conditions I came into the world; under such conditions I spent my infancy and childhood. My soul revolted, but my spirit found consolation in the Talmud, in *higoyon* discussions, in ascetic behavior. When my father died, this pleasant lethargy came to an end. I had reached adolescence, become thirteen. Suppressing my feeling for mother and home, and forsaking my brother, my ideal, I wrenched myself loose from the iron grip of the Cossack, and left for faraway lands where I could see a gleam of light.

Almost instantaneously I grew to manhood. Again I found comfort in the Torah. But now I had a purpose, a larger vision—I wanted to universalize myself. In order to eke out an existence and go to school, I had to roam abroad. I wandered from place to place, gathering knowledge and seeking understanding. After I had attained a

broader education, I began to search for the unknown. The circle around me became insipid—I found in it no stimulus. I looked for new fields of endeavor. The recesses of the earth appealed to me. Its challenge urged me on. I surmounted barriers. I picked up condemned territories, nonconformities, abandoned leases, and, without formal training or experience, extracted millions of barrels of oil in the primary recovery, with my own tools, under personal supervision. In the same discarded field, I opened new veins of liquid treasure, and set an example for others to follow. Search was my motive.

Money never fired my imagination. My desire was to find comfort and satisfaction in my work, and use my acquisitions for research. To this I dedicated my life. I wanted to contribute to the enlightenment of humanity, to universal peace. It has been my ambition since I gained freedom.

When a child, I learned in Reb Zoruch's *cheder* that God created man in His image, and gave him freedom of choice to complete His world. For this privilege, man has been contending since the creation.

My legendary forebear, in the dark ages, challenged the law of conformity, and aroused his people to the coming of the Messiah. It was in the time of the Inquisition in Spain, in the 16th century, when autos-da-fé were conducted with all the fanfare of a medieval Spanish fiesta. Solomon Molkho, the marrano, was inspired by one David Reubeni, a cabalist, and self-styled ambassador to a nonexistent Jewish king, who made his appearance in Portugal at the time. The mysterious stranger inflamed Molkho's Messianic hopes, and he openly returned to Judaism, despite the consequent perils

of his position as royal secretary in the high court of justice. He circumcized himself by his own hand, became a devotee of the Torah, and joined the Cabalists.

Molkho fled to Salonika, Turkey, and preached the coming of the Messiah. He published a volume of sermons, "The Sefer Hamesfar," announcing the Messiah's early arrival. He was brought back in chains. The heads of the church offered him a pardon, provided he accepted the new religion. But the Stoic refused. He was burned at the stake in the public square at Mantua, Italy.

Again, in the later era, oppression kept alive the hope of a Messiah. My brother waited patiently for the Redeemer. Poverty was widespread among the dwellers of the ghetto, largely the result of anti-semitic laws in the czarist regime. It was in the time of the pogroms, which culminated in the infamous massacre of Kishinev at the beginning of this century. The chief rabbi of the ghetto, Reb Isaac Elchonon, accompanied by the industrialist Baron Ginsberg, went to see the Russian Minister of the Interior, to plead with him to stop the pogroms. They had been kept waiting in humiliation for endless hours, when Minister Plehve finally showed himself. Baron Ginsberg spoke with restraint and dignity about the plight of his brethren. Reb Isaac Elchonon wept.

"What do you Jews want?" Plehve demanded. "You can even talk to a minister!"

They could have told him, but dared not, "We not only talked to ministers, we had our own in all ages. In modern times, we had our Disraelis and Cremeiux in England and France.

The two world wars climaxed in a blood bath. Brother

Simon who surrendered himself in the Torah, and waited daily for the Messiah to save the world from tyranny, met his end in the tyrant's holocaust. He dug his own grave.

In all ages war and persecution bring their martyrs, their hopes, and their Messiahs. My Messiah I await in the classroom. I believe that the atomic scientists have come nearer to the ultimate goal of abolishing war than all the doves of peace from Isaiah to William Jennings Bryan. Man could not tolerate another Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Fear that the guided missiles of nuclear weapons will return the world to chaos—the beginning of the creation—will make war impossible. Nations will not dare to rise against one another in a hydrogen age.

Further research will be the open sesame for humanity. When atomic power is converted into creative peaceful use, there will be enough energy fully to supply the world's needs. Peoples will have nothing left to fight for. Greed and rivalry will be eliminated.

This will crown the work of man, whom God endowed with freedom of choice to complete His creation. Man will be free. "He will live under his grapevine and fig tree. And war will be no more."

(Continued from front flap)

Restless years followed . . . more Talmudic studies, tutoring, a wild diversity of studies at various colleges—from medicine to forestry to geology, from Long Island Medical School to Ohio State to Valparaiso University. Geology naturally suggested the quest for oil, and the quest for oil satisfied the dictum he had learned in *cheder*: that God had set man the task of completing His creation.

Isador Molk entered the oil business indirectly. He began by building up a successful pipe business in the oil fields of Kansas. Gradually he acquired leases in various oil fields and eventually he became head of his own company, often rejuvenating condemned territories and infusing new life into fields abandoned by the mammoth oil concerns.

The tang of the oil business is all here—its frustrations, its triumphs, its pungent vocabulary, its heels and its heroes. Listen to Mr. Molk as he describes one of his workmen:

> *Chum Efaw, my driller, blackened with the oil and grime of his trade is the reincarnation of the vanished blacksmith. He stands alert and listens to the rhythmic thump thump thump of the tools, and now and then slips a notch or two on the drilling line. When he puts his hand on the wire line clamp, he can tell what's going on a mile down in the hole. He takes the two-ton bit off the stem and hoists it into the forge with a heave-ho of his sinewy arms. His muscles, which are like the twisted rope of the steel cable, flex as he sledges the glowing steel.*

THE MAKING OF AN OILMAN dramatically documents a unique fulfillment of the American dream. Isador Molk, scholar, rabbi, and business man, proves that a deeply-felt religious faith can be sustained in the modern world and it is not incompatible with material success.

JACKET DESIGN BY YUKIO TASHIRO



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The Citadel Press 222 Fourth Ave. New York 3, N. Y.