

ORININ, MY SHTETL IN THE UKRAINE

ROOTS AND REMEMBRANCES

by BERYL SEGAL

THE SHTETL

My generation is perhaps the last to have been born, raised, and educated in the *Shtetl**. We were fortunate to have escaped annihilation at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators in the Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. It is therefore our duty, each in his own way, to tell about that special way of life.

The *Shtetl* was neither a city nor a village. It could have been a community where two or three thousand souls lived, or a little settlement such as my *Shtetl*, Orinin, of five or six hundred Jews, living completely apart and in isolation, an isolation decreed by law and fortified by tradition. But within this isolation there was a wealth of folkways and folk living that are gone forever. Yiddish was the tongue of the *Shtetl*. Yiddish song, Yiddish anecdotes, Yiddish wisdom, they nourish us to the present day and will continue to be a source of inspiration and wonder for generations to come.

We are the remnants of those who still remember the *Shtetl* with its beauty and also its ugliness, its spiritual greatness, and its grinding poverty. We also remember — it is engraved upon our hearts and minds — the tragic end of the *Shtetl* and all who lived in it at the unclean hands of the enemy.

Yet the *Shtetl* refuses to die. It is immortalized in hundreds of studies. It lives in the works of great writers who knew it well and told the world about it. It inspired poets and singers who were once touched by the afterglow of the *Shtetl* and who stand in awe of it, as one stands before a towering crag.

We never exhaust the stores of tales, and listeners never tire of hearing these reminiscences, just as people never tire of listening to the strains of a beautiful melody.

The reasons are many.

To the immigrant, such as myself, the *Shtetl* brings back memories of childhood and of youth, of days when we were dreaming dreams

Footnote: Much of this material has appeared in somewhat different form in the *Rhode Island Herald*.

*Small town or village, diminutive of the German *Stadt*, meaning "city" or "town".

and strove to attain peaks that stretched as far and as high as our fertile imagination could reach.

To the sons and daughters of immigrants tales of the *Shtetl* help them in understanding of their parents. It is the natural thirst for knowledge about ancestors that are gone, and a life that has passed away. Stories told to them when they were young come back to them, and as they read about the *Shtetl* they exclaim: "This is exactly what my mother told me about her *Shtetl*". Or, "My father told me about the poverty he had endured in the *Shtetl*, and I could not believe it." Or, "The pictures of my grandfather and grandmother on the mantle-piece of our house fit in exactly with the stories of the *Shtetl*."

And for the reader of the third and fourth generation, as well as for the non-Jews who have no romantic ties with it, the *Shtetl* presents at once a puzzle, a mystery, a wonder. To them the *Shtetl* is an absorbing object of inquiry and study.

I shall, therefore, add my own recollections and experiences and describe the *Shtetl* of my birth, where I lived until the age of twenty.

ORININ, MY SHTETL

Orinin was a small town of about five hundred inhabitants, almost surrounded by a riverbend in a fertile valley that was part of the breadbasket of the Ukraine. Located in the district of Podolia, hard by the Austrian border*, it was far away from a railroad, had no telephones, no electric lights or gas, and no newspapers. News was carried by word of mouth, greatly delayed and very often exaggerated, when someone came back from the big city. Plumbing and sanitary facilities were unheard of. In winter the houses were heated by burning wood and straw. A wood and straw fire was also used for cooking and baking, chores that were done by the housewife every day. The foods one could buy in the stores were few, and fewer still were the housewives who could afford to buy them.

Most of the houses were made of clay. On a spring or summer day one might come upon a house being newly built or having a room added. Such an event attracted spectators as it does universally. On a large area in front of the construction men and women could be seen treading with their bare feet a mass of clay mixed with the droppings

*Galicia, was the easternmost portion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. East Galicia is now within the U.S.S.R. Podolia is the west central region of the Ukraine. Kamenets-Podolsk on the River Dnieper, former capital of Podolia, before World War II had 40 per cent Jews.

of cattle, the whole reinforced with straw. When the three ingredients were well and uniformly homogenized, the mass was broken up into bricks and placed between the wooden framework of the new house. A house made of this material was cool in the summer and held the warmth in the winter. The roofs were usually made of straw. Such roofs were fire hazards to be sure, but they were also effective protection against rain, frost, and winds. The houses of the rich had shingle roofs or were covered with sheet metal of a red and green color, appearing very colorful at a distance.

The straw of wheat and barley had many uses. In addition to its use in the construction and heating of houses, it was used in the feeding of domestic animals. When used for food the straw was cut into small bits in a very primitive mill and fed to the horses and cows mixed with oats and other feeds. Most of the households kept a cow or a goat to supply the dairy needs of the family, and the merchants had horses to transport them about the villages. For the animals each house had an attached lean-to or a large barn, where the animals were cared for as if they were members of the family.

Every household had a barrel or two of water. The children had the task of bringing water from the wells that dotted the *Shtetl* within walking distance. Although there were water carriers who supplied water for a few kopecs a week, most households used these carriers only in the slippery winter season. Going to the well was a favorite pastime for youngsters.

New houses were seldom built. A house was handed down from one generation to another. As the families grew, so did the houses. Extra rooms were added onto this side or that of the old house as needed, and family dishes and furniture were shared by the new family.

The greater part of the kitchen was taken up by an oven, large enough for two or three children to sleep on, warm enough for them to do without covering at night. Near these ovens the mothers spent their time cooking meals and baking bread, and preparing delicacies for every festival and season.

The oven had two compartments. The *pripetchok*, the fore part of the oven where the cooking was done, and the oven proper used for baking bread and *halö*,* the Sabbath bread.

A stranger traveling toward Orinin would stop at the top of the hill and gaze down at the sight revealed to him. In the valley below stood

*A braided loaf of white bread (Hebrew).

houses stacked upon houses, roofs topping roofs, patches of color vying with one another, and a river like a silver ribbon embracing all of this on three sides.

But as the stranger came down from the hill into the valley he would discover a little town divided into streets and alleys, squares and market places, each throbbing with a life of its own.

The stranger has arrived at Orinin.

There are two churches, one at either end of Orinin, the larger, the Russian church with its green cupola, and the smaller Polish church with its modest cross protruding above the tall stone walls around it. They stood guard over the *Shtetl*, as if to say:

"You are not to expand beyond the Russian church. There is the territory of the *Krestianin*, the Christians, the *Pravoslavny*. And you cannot go beyond the Polish church, because the river laps the grounds of the stone wall, and you have no business to live across the river."

Was it by accident or by design that the two churches stood at either end of the Main Street, or Post Road, of the *Shtetl*? The fact was that no one dared to step out of the boundaries set up by the Polish and Russian churches. When a new house was built in the *Shtetl*, it was built in the empty spaces within the town, and not in the wide open spaces of the village.

The stranger strolling at a modest pace down the Post Road between the Russian and the Polish churches could walk the distance in about fifteen or twenty minutes. He would have walked the entire length of the *Shtetl*. But there was also a width to the town. The bulk of the population lived in the streets and alleys that began suddenly and ended just as suddenly within the limits of Orinin. The Post Road was straight and was paved with cobblestones, but the others were not as favored. There was the *Yatke Gass*,* the butcher's alley, where all of the slaughter houses were located, characterized by the stench of slaughtered animals and dogs underfoot. The street began at the large animal slaughter house and came to an end by the fence of the policeman's garden. There was the *Variatsky Gass*, where the merchants of dry goods lived. Bolts of cotton, alpaca, cretonne, and linen were stacked on the shelves of their establishments, which were simply the front rooms of their houses.

Leather goods were also sold on the *Variatsky Gass*. The aroma of freshly tanned soft calf skins, karakul, and beaver always hung in the air as one approached the stores.

*From the German *Gasse*, meaning "alley".

A narrow street called "between stores", hardly a street at all, was busiest on market days. Two customers going in opposite directions rubbed elbows while stopping to buy ribbons and trinkets there. It was a short street, which ran the length of the *Variatsky Gass*. It was crowded, stores almost touched one another. Beyond these named streets began a jumble of alleys and crooked passageways known under the general designation of Lower Streets. The *arizans*, the horse dealers, and the poor inhabited that part of Orinin.

But the Lower Street had the distinction of having the Old or Big *Shul*,* and four Houses of Worship along its way. The Old *Shul* was at the very shore of the river as it curved to embrace the *Shtetl*. The *shul* and the *mikveh*, the public ritual bath house, stood side by side. Farther removed from the shore were the Old and the New *Beth Midrash*,** the *Zinkover* and the *Tchortkover Klois*.† The latter were known by the names of the towns where the Hasidic *rebbe*‡ resided, and in them their followers worshipped.

One could draw a triangle with a line running from the Russian church to the Polish church for the base and the Old *Shul* at the apex of the triangle at the mid-point of town. The Old *Shul* was not very impressive to look at from the outside. The structure was low in profile, and appeared even lower because it was built in the lowest part of town, so as not to distract from the two churches. Old-timers explained that this was done at the insistence of the two Christian churches, so that the Jewish synagogue could not be seen as a landmark of Orinin. Others said that the synagogue was intentionally built in a low-lying area so as to conform to the words of the Psalmist: "Out of the Depths I call Unto You, O Lord."

But the interior of the Old *Shul* was awe-inspiring. The small windows high up near the ceiling allowed little light to penetrate the interior. There was a hushed quiet as one entered the sanctuary, sheltered from the hustle and bustle of the street. Illuminated by the flame

**Shul* is Yiddish for "synagogue", from the German *schule*, "school".

***Beth Midrash* is Hebrew for "House of Study".

†*Klois*, from the German *Klaus* (enclosure), was term often used by the Hasidic Jews for their synagogue, where the adults studied *Talmud*.

‡*Rebbe* (rabbi) was the term used by the Hasidic Jews for their spiritual leader. *Rav* or *Rov* was used by the non-Hasidic community. Rabbi is Hebrew for "my master", *rav* means "great". *Rebbe* is a corruption of the Hebrew *rabi* (pronounced rah-bee), anglicized to rabbi. The Hasidic *rebbe*, though well-grounded in Jewish learning, did not necessarily have formal ordination from an academy or *yeshivah*. The *rebbe* was the rabbi's wife. *Reb* was also used as a title — a shortened form of *rebbe*. The subtle differences and apparent interchangeability of these terms is confusing, but probably not too important.

of the Eternal Light the large chandeliers could be seen hanging from the ceiling. The intricate carvings of the *Aron Kodesh*, the Holy Ark, the work of an unknown artist, reaching the full height from floor to ceiling, held the eye of the visitor. And the *bailemer*, the readers desk, standing in the center, lured one to ascend the three steps to the platform and to look around in silence.

Yet the *Shtetl* was inhabited by people who needed sustenance and the essentials for survival. How did they manage to eke out a living?

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

My father was a *klei kodesh*, literally a Holy Vessel, one whose function is essential to the Jewish community. A *Shtetl* could get along without a rabbi if necessary, but no Jewish community could function without a *shohet*, a slaughterer of fowl and cattle according to Jewish law. My father was not only a *shohet*, but was also a *mohel*, one who performs the rites of circumcision. He was also the *sofer*, the scribe of the Holy Scripture. He wrote *mezuzas** and *tefillin*** as well. In addition he was the *hazan* and *Torah* chanter† in one of the houses of worship. There were other functions in the community where his learning or skill was required, such as the printing of marriage contracts, or *troyim*, and performing marriage ceremonies, as well as writing divorce procedures.

I mention all these skills or trades or duties of my father so as to understand the spiritual needs of a *Shtetl*. There were such *klei kodesh* in every little community. Despite all of these occupations my father was far from being a rich man. We lived austere, and when an emergency arose we had to borrow from one of the money lenders. We were always making weekly payments to one lender or another. As the boys grew up they were put to work to help with the expenses of raising a family of nine. My older brother and I were sent away to teach the sons and daughters of Jews living in isolation in the villages. There were such Jews who were owners of flour mills, or supervisors of wood cutting in the forests, or proprietors of roadside hostleries, and therefore privileged to live outside of the *Shtetl*. They rented these facilities

*Hebrew for "doorpost". Small parchments on which are inscribed the first two paragraphs of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21). Rolled tightly, it is placed in a small case or capsule and attached to the doorpost. *Shema* means "Hear", from "Hear, O Israel".

**The prescribed prayers.

†The *hazan* was the cantor. He sings long passages of the liturgy. *Torah* is the Pentateuch.

in perpetuity, and were usually rich Jews. But they were at the mercy of the *Poritz*, the owner of the land and all that was on it.

But even before we became teachers to village Jews, we helped in the many enterprises of my father. On days before the Sabbath and in preparation for the holidays we stood at the entrance of the slaughter house and collected tickets or money from those who brought chickens or geese or pigeons to be slaughtered. The tickets were of different colors for each category of fowl. We sorted them by color and counted them so that father could collect the money due him from the man in charge of taxation. Each family was taxed to raise funds to pay the *shohet*.

Our largest chore was preparation of the *Sefer Torah*.^{*} The *Torah* is written by hand on separate *yerios*, or sheets of parchment. These *yerios* had to be sewn together to form a scroll. When father finished a *yerio*, we would proof-read it. One of us had a printed book of the *Torah*, while the other read from the hand-printed *yerio*, word for word and letter for letter, making sure that the dots and ornaments on the letters were in place. We would then prepare the *gidдин*, the sinews of young calves by which the various *yerios* were held together. The sinews were dried and beaten until individual strands were separated. The strands were joined together, end to end, and wound on spools. This was the only means of sewing together a *Sefer Torah*, *yerio* to *yerio*.

In fact, we made such an abundance of *gidдин* that the dealer in parchment would come once or twice a year to sell parchment to our father and buy *gidдин* from us.

My father also taught young men *Hilchos Shehita*,^{**} the laws of ritual slaughter. There was always a young man in our house, a student from another town.

In the midst of all of these activities my father always studied. I cannot remember a single meal without a *sefer*, a book of instructions, morals, or words of wisdom at father's side. He would look into the book between dishes and mother would have to remind him that the meal was getting cold.

There were other *klei kodesh* in the *Shtetl*, servants of the community, essential to the spiritual life of a town such as Orinin.

The *rov*, the rabbi, was of course the most respected of the *klei kodesh*. The *melamdim*, the teachers of little children, were most essential,

^{*}The scroll containing the five books of Moses that is kept in the Ark in front of the synagogue.

^{**}*Shehita* is "ritual slaughter". *Shohet* the "ritual slaughterer". (Hebrew)

though their lot was not always an enviable one. The cantor of the Old *Shul* as well as the *shammos*, the attendant of the *Shul*,* were invited to every wedding and *brith* (circumcision). To a lesser degree the *kabron*, or the funeral man who was in charge of the *Beth Olom*, the cemetery, and the manager of the *mikveh*, the ritual bath house, were also counted among the *klei kodesh*.

All of these men were at the mercy of the rise and fall of the fortunes of the *Shtetl*. In times of prosperity the *klei kodesh* had enough to eat. When times were bad they could barely keep body and soul together.

In such cases my father would see the money lender, and we boys would carry *vochen gelt*,** weekly payments, to their houses.

But good or bad times, the boys always attended *heder*, the Jewish school for children, and when we grew older we were sent to the *yeshivah* in the big city, Kamenetz Podolsk.

WHAT COULD I DO IN THE SHTETL?

The universal dream of every child is to become either a policeman or a fireman. These were out of the question for a Jewish boy growing up in the *Shtetl*.

He could not aspire to be a policeman because that exalted office was out of reach of a Jewish boy by decree of the Czar. Oh, to be a policeman with a uniform, and brass buttons, and a sword at his side! He could not be a fireman because there were no firemen in the *Shtetl*. When a fire broke out the entire population would come out with pails of water to form a chain of fire fighters. They would keep it up until the conflagration was out. By the time the "fire brigade" arrived from the nearest town there was nothing for them to do except to disperse the crowd.

There was one man in the *Shtetl* who was dressed in a uniform and treated everybody as if he was doing a great favor in acknowledging their existence. He was the postal clerk who stood behind a grilled window and received and distributed mail. But that office was forbidden to a Jewish boy. Jews were excluded from all government offices, including the Post Office. Jews were forbidden to be in federal, state, or local civil service. The Jew could never become a judge or district attorney or hold a notary public seal. He certainly could not be a teacher in the public schools or an instructor in a university.

*i.e. the sexton.

**From the German *Wochengelt*, "weekly money".

The army and navy were distasteful to Jews. When a boy was drafted, the unhappiness at home was very great. He would not be able to observe the sabbaths and holidays, and would not have kosher food. The government would never think of providing these for Jews. A Jewish officer in the army and navy was rare, and he was usually in the medical corps. When a Jewish boy rose to officer rank you could be sure that he had tampered with his faith. Renouncing the faith and becoming a member in the *Pravoslavny* church, "a True Believer," was the key to a good position and to proper marriage in Russia. Some Jews did this, and received the keys to the kingdom. They never returned to the *Shtetl*.

Attendance at government schools, equivalent to public school here, was fraught with difficulties. The ten per cent norm for Jewish children was strictly observed. Within my memory only two boys ever went up "to the hill", as the government school was called in Orinin. Parents were not very anxious to subject their children to all kinds of humiliation on the part of teachers and pupils. The schools were under the supervision of the Russian (*Pravoslavny*) church, and religious instruction and prayers were a dominant part of the curriculum. The same was true of the middle school, the *gymnasium*, a school which was not available in Orinin. One had to go to the city to attend that type of school. But not having an elementary education, how could one aspire to the *gymnasia*?

A Jew could not own a farm, or cultivate his own field, or gather the fruit of his own orchard. Ownership of land was forbidden to Jews. In a country where agriculture was the main occupation of the people, the Jew was excluded from participation in it except for buying and selling the fruits of other people's labor.

Buying and selling were the only occupations open to Jews, provided they had the inclination or aptitude for such pursuits or the means to establish themselves.

What could I grow up to be or what could boys of my generation do in the *Shtetl*? We could become merchants in grain and cattle, provided our fathers set us up in such business. Children always followed in the footsteps of their fathers in Orinin. Children of merchants became merchants. You were born into it. You were trained in the business, and you found it easier to slip into it as you grew up.

We could become *arendars*, that is people who rented a water mill and ground wheat and corn for the peasants. We could rent a section

of forest and work its wood for its fuel, its lumber for furniture, building, or export. We could rent an orchard and gather the fruit when it ripened, or lose everything we invested if the crop failed. Again, we could gamble on the abundance of the *Graf's** or *Poritz's* fields. When the wheat or corn or barley crops were plentiful, we became rich. When the rains did not come in time, or the sun was scorching, or the grains for some reason were shriveled on the sheaves, we became impoverished overnight. The *Poritz* had no responsibilities for the crop. We would buy it up as soon as the grain was planted.

Or we could, and many of us did, open a store, one more store, to sell dry goods, food stuffs, or agricultural supplies to the peasants. Such stores enslaved the owners to the business day and night, all through their lives. And it required money, which was in short supply in Orinin.

The profession open to everybody because it required little money and no skill and no specific qualifications was to be a *luftmensch*,** a *shtেকে dreier*, a twirler of the cane, an agent for one thing or another. These *luftmenschen*, or agents, would attach themselves to a money bag and do all kinds of services for him. They would make deals for him, collect his debts from impoverished debtors, go to far-away places in all kinds of weather to do his bidding, take all kinds of insults from him, and for him from people whom he displeased. Such persons were known as *meklars*, and their livelihood was precarious. They lived out of thin air — they were truly *luftmenschen*.

Orinin had more than its share of *meklars*.

We could become artisans. Most of the population of Orinin were artisans of one kind or another. There were tailors, carpenters, shoe-makers, sheet metal workers, rope twisters, barrel joiners or coopers, wagon makers, or silversmiths. But these were trades that were handed down from father to son, and unless one had some family connection, there was no way he could learn the trade. There was no trade school in Orinin.

Then again because of *yihus*,† the complicated relations between

**Graf* is German for "Count".

***Luftmensch*, Yiddish, from the German *Luft* ("air") and *Mensch* ("man"), described by Leo Rosten as "1. Someone with his head in the clouds, 2. An impractical fellow, but optimistic, 3. A dreamy, sensitive, poetic type, (or) 4. One without an occupation who lives or works *ad libitum*". *Shtেকে dreier* is Yiddish.

†Hebrew, meaning "distinguished connections or genealogy". Originally the distinction of belonging to the family of a priest or scholar.

the various sects and groups in the *Shtetl*, no son of a *balebos** who resided in the Upper *Gass* would ever think of learning a trade. "*Es shtet nit on*" — it is not becoming to a nice *balebatish* boy. Whenever one of such *balebatishe* children went down to an alley in the Lower *Gass* and apprenticed himself to a master tailor or carpenter, respectable dwellers of the Upper *Gass* would turn up their noses.

Children were expected to walk in the footpaths of their fathers, and any deviation from the established rule provoked the disapproval of clannish *Orinin*.

But we, the sons of *klei kodesh*, those who worked in holiness, were in a class by ourselves. The son of the *rov* was expected to become a *rov*, and the son of a *shohet* had to be a *shohet* when he grew up. We were covered, and limited, by the law of *Hazokah*. By this law a *klei kodesh* had the right to bequeath his position to his sons. If he had no sons he could bequeath it to his son-in-law. Accordingly, my elder brother studied *Hilhos Shehitah* and was awarded the *semihah*, the authorization to become a *shohet*. I was the next in line, and I, too, was sent to a *yeshivah* to study and be a slaughterer of fowl and cattle.

But then came the revolution, and everything was uprooted. All of the laws, ukases, and edicts of the Czar were abolished. All limits, all restrictions, all do's and don'ts were as if they had never existed. The *Krome Yevreyev*, "Except Jews", of the Czarist laws were declared null and void at one stroke and forgotten. All restrictions on living quarters or professions and divisions into sects and classes were removed. The *Shtetl* dwellers broke out of the yoke they had lived under all these years. They traveled over the length and breadth of Russia unrestrained. All professions were opened to them, and the sons and daughters of the *Shtetl* filled the trade schools and the universities of the land.

Is there any wonder that so many of us were infected with the fever of the Revolution and in those days became the most ardent followers of the new order?

The *Shtetl* as my generation remembers it was swept away in the storm of the Revolution. But as so often happens, everything was swept away, the good and the evil, the beautiful and the ugly, the spiritual together with the vulgar.

**Balebos*, from the Hebrew, refers to the owner of a store, shop, or establishment; a manager or superintendent; one who assumes authority; and ultimately the head of a household. *Balebatish*, the adjective, means "of some consequence," "respectable," and ultimately "quiet," "respectable," or "well-mannered."

THE HEDER

The *heder* was the Jewish answer to government schools. There was no compulsory attendance in school; hence the *Shtetl* took care of its own education system.

The *heder* was the most remarkable phenomenon in the life of the *Shtetl*. It was private and yet under the supervision of the parents. Since the parents were themselves products of the *heder*, they could follow the progress of their children in all stages. It was voluntary, yet with a degree of compulsion imposed by public opinion. Every Jewish child in the *Shtetl* had to attend a *heder*, any *heder*, and those who could not afford to pay tuition were assisted by community funds collected for such purposes. In larger towns the community supported a *Talmud Torah*, a place of study for the poor children. The rich and the poor children sat side by side, the *rebbe*, the teacher, usually favoring the poor child, because it is said in the *Talmud*:

“Be careful of the children of the poor,
because from them will come forth Torah”.

Heder means a room, a schoolroom, a form, but typically the *heder* was a room in the house of the *rebbe*. Children came to *heder* early in the morning and left for home late in the evening. We sat around a long rectangular table, on long hard benches, and learned from books placed in front of every student. We studied in a sing-song manner, the *rebbe* setting the tune and we repeating after him. Every once in a while the *rebbe* would stop in his recital and point to one or another of the pupils, asking him to read alone.

Woe to the pupil who did not know the place and just pretended to sing along with the class, moving his lips. No one could fool the *rebbe*. Not for long, at any rate.

A child came to *heder* at the age of three. By that time he knew quite a few things required of a Jewish boy. Some knew more, some less, depending on the home they came from. Before a child came to *heder* he knew the blessings over bread and water, and milk and wine, and fruits and vegetables. He knew the *modeh ani*, the morning prayer in which we give thanks to the Creator for giving us back our souls, in his great mercy. He also knew the *Shema Yisroel*, the admonition to every Jew to remember that God our Lord is One. And much more. Some children learned the entire *Aleph Beth*,* before coming to *heder*.

The first *heder* was at the house of the *dardeki melamed*, the teacher

*The Hebrew cognates of *alpha beta*, i.e. the “alphabet”.

of little children. *Dardak* means a "child", a youngster. Passing by the *dardeki heder* one could hear the sing-song of *Kometz Aleph — O, Kometz Beth — Bo*, and so on through the entire *Aleph Beth*, until all the letters were paired together, each consonant with each vowel, and each vowel with each consonant.

What was the method of teaching in the *heder*? Before explaining such things as methods, I must point out that the *dardeki melamed*, the teacher of beginners, was not at all versed in the psychology of children, or in methodology of teaching. The subject matter as well as the method were both handed down from generation to generation. The *rebbe* was not at all innovative or original in his method, which consisted of endless repetition. Day in, day out, we repeated the reading of the *rebbe* in the *siddur*,* the prayer book, which was the textbook par excellence, until we knew the entire text mostly by heart. The sing-song of teaching was a great aid to memory. The *rebbe* sang, and we emulated him. The text was remembered together with the melody.

Repetition, emulation, and singing were the old and proven methods of teaching in *heder*, especially so in the *heder* of the *dardeki melamed*.

The *kantchik*, the leather tongued whip, was the chief aid in teaching. The *dardeki melamed* and the *kantchik* were inseparable. The *melamed* would make the rounds of the table and listen to the sing-song of the children. With the *kantchik* poised in mid-air, he would bend an ear to the reading of each child. If something displeased him, it would come down on the shoulders of the pupil. The child would whimper a little and go on with the sing-song.

The *dardeki heder* had another institution, the *behelfer*.** He was the assistant to the *rebbe*, an apprentice who was in training to become a *dardeki melamed* in his own right. His job was to bring the children in in the morning and take them back at sunset. He would walk with his flock ahead of him, carrying the weaker ones on his shoulders, holding on to the hands of the frightened ones, and singing with them the *Aleph Beth* or other songs of the *heder*. He would dress and undress the children in cold weather, and he was in charge of the lunches they brought with them. The *behelfer* would have his meals at the house of a different child every week.

*Hebrew for the daily and Sabbath prayer book. Contains three daily services, the Sabbath prayers, in some editions the festival prayers, ethics of the Fathers, and special readings.

**Yiddish for "assistant" or "helper". From German *helfen*, "to help".

The *dardeki melamed* was the first step in the education of a child. After that came other *melamedim*, teachers of other *hederim*. There was the teacher of *Humosh* and *Rashi*.^{*} There was the teacher of the Prophets, and the *gemoro*^{**} *melamed*. Each one would take the pupil one step further toward the completion of the standard course of study. After that, some went on to a *yeshivah*, a rabbinical school, but most helped their fathers in making a livelihood. Their education was over.

In presenting the *heder* and its system of instruction we should mention one more step in the learning process. It was called "*farheren*",[†] listening. Every Sabbath afternoon the *rebbe* came to the house of the pupil and had the parents or some other person "listen" to the progress of the child. Some children would bring their books to the *rov* in *Beth Midrash* to show him what they had learned during that week. In this way the parents checked on the *rebbe* and his teachings. In this way also the uniformity of teaching was assured, so that the children of Orinin and the children of hundreds of other places, hundreds of miles away, knew the same prayers, the same *sidras* and *midrashim*, and were imbued with the same Jewish ideas. In a world without newspapers, journals, conventions, or schools for teachers, such uniformity was miraculous.

The year of the *heder* ended during the High Holidays. On these days, called *Bein Hazmanim*, in-between seasons, the *melamedim* of the various schools were seen around the *Shtetl*, visiting parents of children who would be prospective pupils in their *heders*.

Usually when one child of the family went to one *heder*, all of the others in their turn would attend the same *heder*. Calling on such a family was a mere formality. In the meantime the *rebbe* talked of various subjects to the man of the family, while the woman brought tea and cookies for the guest.

The relations between parents and teachers were very personal, very close, a relationship we miss in our schools today. We also miss the ceremony of the first day of a child in *heder*, when he was initiated into the study of *Torah*. There is hardly a person of my generation who does not remember that first day, with the father carrying the child to the *heder*, the mother bringing cooked chick-peas and raisins

^{*}*Humosh*, the five books of Moses, or the Pentateuch, synonymous with *Torah*. *Rashi*, abbreviation of Rabbi Shelomoh Yitzhak (Hebrew for Solomon ben Isaac) of Troyes, French Bible and Talmud scholar of the eleventh century.

^{**}*Gemoro* is one of the two basic parts of the *Talmud*.

[†]Yiddish, from the German *hören*, "to hear" or "listen".

and candy to distribute among the children, and sweet cakes baked for the occasion and dropped from above the head of the pupil onto the pages of the *siddur* as he read each letter. That too was a means of bringing *rebbe* and pupil and parents together.

THE SHREIBER, A HEDER FOR GIRLS

Girls never attended the same *heder* as the boys in Orinin. The *Shtetl* rigidly observed the separation of sexes in education. The girls went to a different *heder*, they were taught different subjects, and their teacher was not dignified with the name of *rebbe*. He was called a *shreiber*,* a writer. While there were many *rebbe*s in the *Shtetl*, there were only two *shreibers*, which means that parents did not feel obligated to send their daughters to school. To send a girl to a *shreiber* was considered a luxury.

The *shreiber* used a method which is, alas, used even today—copying. The first thing a *shreiber* did in his school was to write down the letters of the *Aleph Beth* on a sheet of paper with a pencil. The pupils were required to go over the letters with pen and ink. They would write the letters and repeat the names of the letters aloud.

Having learned the entire *Aleph Beth*, the girls were ready for a *Shurah Grisl*,** that is a Greeting Line. The girls would use their pencils and ruler and mark lines on the paper. The *shreiber* would write on the first line, and the girls would copy the same line on the rest of the paper. They would go from the simple to the complex, from the familiar to the novel, from the easy to the difficult. They would learn to write their names, their father's and mother's names, the name of Orinin. Later they would learn to copy sayings, moral and ethical concepts, and proverbs. Why it was called *Shurah Grisl* no one really knew. But from copying these single lines, the girls gained fundamental knowledge and folk wisdom.

After copying a *Shurah Grisl*, the girls were given textbooks which were called *brivenshteler*,† letter writing handbooks. They were soft covered booklets, sold by the traveling booksellers when they came to Orinin. The *brivenshteler*s did not have the same standing as the *siddur*, the prayer books. From the *brivenshteler* the girls learned how to write a letter, an art that is still taught in the secretarial schools.

*Yiddish, from the German, *Schreiber*, "writer".

**Yiddish. From the German, *Gruss*, "greeting". *Grisl* is a diminutive.

†Yiddish. From the German: *Brief* means "letter" (*briefen* is plural). In German, *Briefsteller* is a "letter-writer".

There were business letters, of course. But mainly these letters related to episodes in the life of a Jewish girl. A letter of invitation to a wedding, and a letter accepting such an invitation. A letter of introduction to the future mother-in-law and a letter telling of accomplishments to the future father-in-law. A letter to a friend telling of yearnings for the bride-groom and a letter from a friend who was married and moved away to a strange town and, alas, not so happy in marriage. Romantic letters and letters expressing sorrow at the loss of someone dear or close.

The letters in the *brivenshteler* were printed in Yiddish, and the girls had to copy them in Yiddish script. The letter handbooks were kept at home and copied many times even when one was not a pupil at the *shreiber*. They were used as models for writing letters. The books are a rarity now, and are kept in libraries and museums. The Yiddish of these handbooks is mixed with Germanic expressions, for this was the style of the day. The spelling of Yiddish words was also in the style of those days and followed the Germanic orthography.

But with all its shortcomings the girls had a secular education, something the boys never received.

Strange as it may seem the *shreiber* also taught the girls arithmetic and elements of geography. One *shreiber* also taught the girls Russian, a tongue the boys were expected to pick up from the streets of the *Shtetl*.

A few parents taught their daughters *Humosh* and *Rashi*. A *rebbe* would come to the house to teach the daughters what the boys learned in *heder*, and he also taught them to write in Yiddish. But boys and girls never learned together in the same *heder*. Sex education was considered anathema.

A new refreshing wind began to blow in Orinin. During the first decade of the new century modern Hebrew Schools were opened in many towns in the vicinity, Orinin among them. The modern features of the Hebrew Schools consisted of the following:

1. A house, a special house, for this purpose was hired. The house was furnished with desks and blackboards, and the pupils were seated in alphabetical order. They even wore a uniform and were called by their given names.

2. Teachers, actual teachers, were hired. They were mostly young and graduates of teachers courses offered somewhere in Odessa or Kiev. These teachers wore modern clothing, shaved their beards, and spoke Hebrew.

3. Hebrew speaking was a novelty in Orinin. While everyone knew Hebrew, nobody spoke it in everyday affairs. It was considered a Holy Tongue and not to be profaned by mundane usage. The teachers in the modern Hebrew School spoke Hebrew and taught history and even geography and arithmetic in Hebrew. And singing. Nobody ever heard of a school in which time, precious time, was given to singing. They sang songs of Zion and of nature and even of love.

No boys were going to waste time singing and reading stories and poems written by the new writers. And so the modern Hebrew Schools were for all practical purposes during the first years of their existence mostly schools for girls. Here again the girls had the advantage over boys.

In time the Hebrew Schools became co-educational. The *heder*, the *rebbe*, and with them the *kantchik*, were on their way out in Orinin, as indeed in all other towns.

And yet, the *heder*, as an institution, with its emphasis on traditions, with its home-like atmosphere and its close *rebbe*-pupil-parent relationship, and above all in its voluntary yet obligatory nature, has never been duplicated in modern education.

WHAT DID THE CHILDREN DO IN THE SHTETL?

Orinin had little to offer in the way of entertainment, so we entertained ourselves. We were the actors. We were the audience. We had no movies, no radio, no TV, no playground, no band, nor orchestra or concert singers, not even funny books, all of the things that take up so much of the time of children in America. We had no organized games or sports. But do not make the mistake of thinking that Orinin lacked excitement, that life was always bleak and that children were forever depressed. Nothing is further from the truth.

The *heder* took up most of the day, but the *heder* was a warm place, both literally and figuratively. When the wind and snow raged outside in winter, we were kept warm and secure. At such times the *rebbe* told us tales of long ago. Tales of heroes and epics of great men and women. In *heder* we heard about the exploits of Deborah and Barak, about Samson and Delilah, about the Maccabees and Bar Kochba, about the Rambam* and Abarbanel, about lost tribes and the restless River Sambatian. Stories of kings and queens, of judges and prophets, of great joy and deep tragedy. And all of these things happened in distant lands, across the Great Ocean, under different skies. And these skies

*Hebrew, abbreviation for Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, Maimonides.

became as familiar to us in our imagination as the crooked streets and narrow alleys of Orinin.

But also games and diversions occupied our time, games suited to various seasons and climates.

The snowdrifts in Orinin were as high as the houses themselves. The snow lay undisturbed except on the Main Street, where people and animals had trodden a path for themselves. It lay unsoiled in the back of the houses and in between the houses until the spring thaw. We dug tunnels underneath the snowdrifts, and built castles and ramparts around them. None had ever seen a castle or been in a tunnel, but we built them from stories we had heard and above all from our own imagination.

The river around Orinin was frozen most of the winter months. We made "skates" for ourselves, which were no more than pieces of wood tied to the shoes with strings or wire—plus a little imagination.

We made sleds to slide down the hill. The sleds, like everything else, were homemade. All one needed were two side boards, some narrow pieces of wood, and plenty of nails. The two boards were made smooth by rubbing them with a stone until they would slide over snow or ice, and the shorter pieces of wood served to hold the two boards together and also to hold the rider. The sleds were carried up to the top of the highest hill in Orinin, called "Mount Sinai", and we would come down triumphantly into the valley below. There were many mishaps—the sled would collapse, the rider would spill, sleds would collide—but these were the hazards of sledding. We expected them. We welcomed them.

But most of the games were invented during spring and summer evenings. There were swimming places on either side of Orinin, two for boys and two for girls. As soon as supper was over we would rush to the river, unbuttoning our shirts and trousers as we ran, and jump into the water in the nude. Nudity was not a crime in the *Shtetl*. We didn't know one could swim otherwise.

On summer evenings we would go fishing. We fished for anything the fishing pole brought up. The poles of course were homemade. They were simply long rods, soft and elastic, freshly cut from the willows that grew in abundance at the river bank, with a long string tied at the end, and a crooked pin attached to the string. There were plenty of earthworms near the river, or we would attach a piece of dry bread for bait. The worms wiggled out of our pins, and the

bread was eaten up by the fish, but we stood in the stillness of the summer evening and watched little fish splash in the water, make a pass at our hooks, and disappear.

A very popular game was called "Sticks and Stones". It was our football and golf and hockey combined, with some elements of each of these games. We chose sides on the big square of the horse market, and stood facing each other in two rows. Each player had a heavy stick, preferably with a knob at its head. At a signal from the head player each side hit its stone, a round, smooth rock that was kept hidden in a corner of the square. Both sides tried to keep the opponent's rock out of its territory. It was our task to hit the stone as it approached our side. There were rules and regulations, usually made up on the spur of the moment. But the one rule that everyone had to observe was never to use hands, either to throw a stone or to chase away a player from the opposite side. We could use our bodies to push away the players, but could never touch them with our hands.

Needless to say girls were excluded from these games. The girls had games of their own, chief among which was *cheichen*. They picked up seven smooth little stones, hardly more than pebbles found on the shore of the water and would sit down in a circle on one of the lawns. Each had a larger pebble of her own in addition to the seven smaller ones required in the game. This was considered the lucky stone. The trick was to hold the lucky stone in the palm of the hand and to pick up as many of the smaller pebbles as one could with that hand. The adept girls, and there were famous champions in Orinin, could pick up as many as five or six at a time. But before anyone won the game, there would be arguments, and sometimes they came to blows. One could hear the noise and commotion blocks away.

On rainy days we played at being musicians. The fiddles were made of thin pliable boards shaped into violins. Strings for the violins and bows were obtained from the tails of horses. We made wind instruments from hollow reeds that grew along the shore of the river, cutting little vents in the reeds, and fashioning a slanting mouthpiece at one end. Some of the boys were lucky enough to have clay birds and trumpets that were sold during the fair held in Orinin by an itinerant artisan. For cymbals and drums we borrowed kettles, sieves, pots, and pans from the kitchen, and hoped that no one would find out about it. We gathered in the attic of the house of one of the boys and played to our hearts' content.

The girls played ball against a wall. They would bounce a ball to

and from the wall, and all the others would count: Not one. Not two. Not three. When the player failed to catch the ball on the rebound, another girl would take her place. It wasn't simple, and no game was over without quarrels. But the girls played and chanted for hours — nonsensical songs that no one understood.

The girls also played with hoops around the square, and "covering the bride", each one dressed in her mother's old clothes and talking mother talk.

All in all boys and girls were inventive and filled their free time without interference from their elders. What is more, these games, there were dozens of them, were accompanied by songs and ditties that were a mixture of Yiddish and Ukrainian, some with nonsense words that were incomprehensible to us. They were probably handed down from time immemorial, from parents to children, and were a part of the games.

HOUSES OF WORSHIP IN ORININ

There were five houses of worship in Orinin. Three of them stood side by side, so that the singing and the chanting in one could be heard in the others. The other two were a little farther removed down by the river bank. The five houses of worship were designated as the Old *Beth Midrash*, the New *Beth Midrash*, the *Zinkover Klois*, the *Tchortkover Klois*, and the Old *Shul*.

The worshippers in these houses of worship represented the various shades of difference in the population of the *Shtetl*. The Old and the New *Beth Midrash* attracted the solid *balebatim* of Orinin. They were the well-to-do, the merchants, and all dwelled on the Main Street and on the *Variatsky Gass*. The *Zinkover Klois* was so-called because its worshippers followed an Hasidic *rebbe* of the town of Zinkov, who was a descendant of the *Apter Rov*. The *Tchortkover Klois*, sometimes also called the *Sadigurer Klois*, were followers of the Hasidic *rebbe*s who held court in those Galician towns. But the largest and the most impressive house of worship was the Old *Shul*. It was so-called because no one among the living knew when and by whom the *shul* was built. While the other four houses of worship were nothing more than simple two-room houses, one room for men and the other for women, the Old *Shul* was architecturally distinct. The *Shul* was a conglomerate of several buildings added to the main structure. Its windows were small and were tucked away at the top of the high walls, near the roof. It had no heat, and in the fall and winter worshippers did not take off their overcoats. It was therefore also known as the Cold *Shul*.

The *mizrah*, or the eastern wall, was taken up almost entirely by the intricately carved Holy Ark and the *hazan's* stand. A few steps led up to the Holy Ark, which contained several *Sefer Torahs* of ancient origin. Copper candelabras hung from the beams of the roof. They were lit only on holidays and Sabbath Eves. Attached to the main *Shul* was the women's gallery, way up near the roof. One of the buildings, really a lean-to attached to the *Shul*, was the repository of *shemos*, a general name for all torn prayer books, *Humoshim*, and dog-eared Psalms and *Tehinos*, prayers for women. They were not to be thrown away, but kept forever because they contained the name of God.

Another lean-to was used as the chapel during weekdays, and for "dissenters", those who preferred for some reason to worship by themselves on Sabbaths and festivals.

The Old *Shul* was built as already described in the lowest part of Orinin. Besides, the worshippers had to go down a few steps before entering the *Shul* proper.

Now, we are told, the Old *Shul* has been torn down, after it was used as a stable for the Cossack horses. The *shemos* were probably unceremoniously disposed of either by fire or by scattering to the winds. Nobody will ever know how many generations brought their old torn books for safe-keeping in the *Shul*. Lost with the *shemos* is also the secret of the first builders of the first house of worship in Orinin. The only witness to the *shul* are the waters of the river that lapped the foundation of the structure, and probably still laps the same foundation, but without the *shul* or worshippers of over three hundred years.

Every wedding in the *Shtetl* took place on the little square before the Old *Shul*. Under the starry skies the *huppa*, the wedding canopy, was put up, and the entire population crowded to see the ceremony.

Traditionally every house of worship had a distinct function. The Old *Beth Midrash* provided the platform for every *magid*, itinerant speaker, who came to Orinin. On a Saturday afternoon the house would be crowded with listeners who came to hear him. Some *magidim* were amusing, some were eloquent, some would exhort. Others could tell tales of woe and awaken sympathy for their predicament. On the next day the *magid* and the *shamos* would go from house to house to collect fees for his talk.

The *Zinkover Klois* congregation sang and danced much more than others in the *Shtetl*. Once a year the Rebbe from Zinkov would come to Orinin for a Sabbath. The *Shtetl Hasidim* would go out on the high-

way to meet the *rebbe*. About a mile from Orinin, near the forest, the *rebbe* and his entourage would stop, and the young *Hasidim* would unhitch the horses and pull the phaeton into town by themselves. On the Post Road the older *Hasidim* would crowd around the *rebbe* and shake his hands, while the younger ones would dance and sing around him. A weekend of singing in the *Zinkover Klois* would follow, and dinners and suppers and dancing till all hours of the night. The *rebbe* has come to Orinin!

The *Tchortkover Hasidim* had not had such a Sabbath. The *rebbe* had never come to town from his residence in Galicia, a district of Austria only a few miles from Orinin. Instead they made a pilgrimage to the court of Tchortkov, or Sadigura, once a year. In their house of worship one could always find a group of people who were bent over volumes of *Talmud* absorbed in study. The *Tchortkover* were the scholars of Orinin. The western wall of the *klois* was covered with shelves filled with volumes of the *Talmud*, the *Midrash*, and commentaries on the Scriptures.

But it had fallen to the New *Beth Midrash*, the least pretentious of the houses of worship in Orinin, to provide living quarters for the *rov*. The house was divided into two halves with a corridor between them. On rainy Sabbaths, and more lately when the *rov* had been sickly, the doors of the *Beth Midrash* were left open and also the door to the room of the *rov* so that the old man could sit draped in his *tallis** and listen to the worship. When the weather was pleasant and the *rov* was in good health, he would leave his house early in the morning and go to the *Tchortkover Klois*, where he had a seat next to the Holy Ark.

I knew every corner of these houses of worship as well as I knew our own house. They are gone forever.

THE ROV OF ORININ

The *rov* was the final authority on what was *kosher** and what was *tref*,** what was clean and what was unclean, what was permitted, and what was forbidden to a Jew. He derived this authority by virtue of years of study in the *yeshivah*, the rabbinical school, and by ordination before he accepted the call to be a *rov* to Jews. His verdict was final, and no one dared contradict him.

*Hebrew, "prayer shawl".

***Kosher*, Hebrew, "fit to eat," ritually clean according to the dietary laws. *Tref*, Hebrew, animal not slain according to ritual law; any food which is not Kosher.

The *rov* belonged to the entire community, but no one ever met him on the streets or in public places. He sat constantly at a long table strewn with open books of varying sizes and thickness and seldom spoke to anyone. His main duty was to *pasken a shaaloh*, to rule upon an inquiry. These inquiries were on a variety of subjects:

What was the housewife to do when a dairy dish was mingled with meat dishes?

A chicken was seemingly slaughtered by the *shohet*, but on the way home it came alive, ran away, and expired a little while later. Is the chicken *kosher* or *tref*?

The innards of the goose were exposed, and a rusty nail was found in the gizzard. Should the entire goose be discarded?

There were also questions relating to puberty, menstruation, and infidelity.

In such cases, whenever a woman came into the house, the *rov* would cover his face with his hand and call his wife from the kitchen. She served as the interlocutor. The woman making the inquiry asked the question of the *rebbetzen*, the *rov's* wife, who would transmit the question to the *rov*, who then consulted some books if the *shaaloh* was a difficult one. He next pronounced his decision to the *rebbetzen*, who transmitted it to the inquiring woman.

Thus, the *rov* would be spared the sin of being alone in the same room with a woman not his wife, speaking to a woman not his wife, or coming in contact with a strange woman when there was a need of examining a chicken or goose or any object brought in as evidence.

Jews seldom went to courts of law. In the first place there were no courts to settle litigations in Orin. In the second place the proceedings in the courts in the big city nearby were extremely slow and cumbersome. When two Jews had a case of contention between them, they resorted to arbitration. Each picked an arbitrator, and they came before the *rov* and presented their arguments. The *rov* listened and gave his decision after consulting rabbinical precedents. The two sides abided by that decision. It was not the decision of the *rov*; it was the opinion of the rabbis of old.

Twice a year the *rov* spoke at one of the houses of worship. On *Shabbat Hagadol*, the Great Sabbath before Passover, he spoke in the Old *Shul*. On *Shabbat Bereshis*, the Sabbath when the *Torah* is rolled back to the *Sidrah Bereshis*, to be read again for the coming

year, an event that takes place after *Succot*, he spoke again. And that was the extent of his public utterances.

The *rov* had no contract with the *Shtetl* and no fixed wages. His subsistence was derived from two sources: from donations and from yeast.

Whenever a man was given an *aliyah*, the honor of going up to the reader's desk where the seven weekly portions of the *Torah* are read every Sabbath and on holidays, he would donate toward the livelihood of the *rov*. Each gave according to his means. From these donations the *rov* received his wages. The *shammos*, the sexton of each house of worship, would collect the sum given by the donor and bring it to the *rov*. The second source of income was from the sale of yeast for the Sabbath bread, the *halē*, which Jewish housewives baked every Friday. A penny's worth of yeast was sufficient for a family. The *rov* had a monopoly on the sale of yeast, and the storekeeper who sold yeast to housewives was guilty of *masig gvul*, infringement on the rights of another person, in this case the *rov's* livelihood. *Hasogas gvul*, infringement on someone's territory or means of livelihood, was a great offense.

Another source of income for the *rov* was the sale on Passover Eve by Jews to non-Jews of non-Passover foods and grains. This was called *mechiras hometz*, selling of the leaven. The *rov* was the seller of the *hometz* for the entire community. It was a token sale, of course, and the sales contract was null and void the day after Passover.

The *rov* was highly respected in Orinin, as well as in other towns, because of his piety, scholarship, and impartiality.

As time went on, the town was left without a *rov*. He had passed away, and none of his heirs was suited to take his place. In such cases the *hazokoh*, the right of perpetuation of the office in the family, returned to the community.

But Orinin could not decide upon a single *rov*. Two factions arose in the community, and each brought in a *rov* of its own. The *Shtetl* was divided, and friends of yesterday became enemies of today. They were at loggerheads, one against the other.

Unfortunately, the days of the *Shtetl* were numbered, and both factions, each with its own *rov*, were doomed to extinction. Came the Russian Revolution. Came the Second World War and the Nazis. The *Shtetl* disappeared.

The old *rov* was spared all this.

A YARID IN THE SHTETL

The livelihood of the *Shtetl* depended on the *yarid*, which was held once or twice a week. In Orinin the *yarid*, the market day, was held on Tuesday and Sunday. Merchants, peasants, horse dealers, and artisans of all kinds mingled on this day. People watched the skies days before the *yarid* to foretell the weather for the market days.

Yarid, by the way, is a Hebrew word, meaning a place where people get together for selling and buying or exchanging merchandise. In Yiddish the word *yarid* took on the meaning, in addition to that of a market place, of confusion, noise, disorder. Sholem Aleichem, the Jewish humorist, compared life itself to a *yarid*. You come full of hope and expectation, run around, hustle and bustle, take a lick of this, a smell of that, and at the end of the *yarid*, when the evening of life approaches, you feel empty, disillusioned, and are very tired. Such was the *yarid* in the *Shtetl*.

Orinin had four market places for the *yarid*. The largest of the four was the horse market. Horse dealers came from far and wide and parked their horses and wagons around the stone fence of the *Pravoslavny* church. With the break of dawn, peasants from the surrounding villages congregated in the square, each leading a few horses nicely combed, their harnesses attractively decorated, glistening in the sun, impatiently neighing and stamping. Buyers approached sellers and the drama of the *yarid* began.

The horse dealer would hold out the palm of the peasant's hand and ask: "How much for this undernourished horse?"

The peasant would grab the outstretched hand of the dealer and reply: "You call this an undernourished horse? Why, look at his calves! See how impatient he is! He wants to be harnessed to a wagon!"

The peasant would quote an impossible sum of money.

The horse dealer would begin to laugh. He called to his partner. After telling him the sum of money asked for the horse, they would both laugh aloud. While all the time the dealer held onto the peasant's palm. The other partner would in the meantime look the horse over from all sides. He would look at his mouth, kick his shins, pull him by the tail, drive him through the square. The dealer would raise the price while the peasant would lower it, to the accompaniment of slaps on the palms. The quotations would fly back and forth, and the slaps would grow in frequency and intensity, until finally they arrived at some price much lower than the peasant asked for, and much higher

than the dealer wanted to pay at the start. At the end buyer and seller departed to the nearby saloon and drank "*Na Zdorovia*", To Health! and everything ended happily.

The second market place was for general merchandise. Itinerant merchants would put up tents the night before and sleep in them. When morning came, they opened the tents and displayed a dazzling array of manufactured goods. There were ornaments and jewelry, ribbons and kerchiefs, scissors and knives, ikons and candles, crucifixes and beads. And the colors of the merchandise, the flattery of the merchants, the bargaining of the buyers, these were all part of the *yarid*. The merchants in the tents came from Great Russia. They were called *katzapes*, and they were recognized by their dress: high boots, wide trousers tucked in the boots, and billowing white shirts tied together with wide colorful belts. On their heads they wore small caps with leather visors. They always held long pliable whips in their hands to scare away intruders such as cats, dogs, and pigs and to crack over the hands of would-be pilferers. The children would fear them and at the same time were attracted by them and their wares.

We were fascinated by the toys which they displayed. They had trumpets made of tin, singing birds made of clay, drums and drumsticks beautifully carved and colored. And they had wooden soldiers painted with colorful costumes. But what could we buy for the kopek we were allowed for the *yarid*? We stood open-mouthed and watched.

The third square was used for the grain market. The merchants had storage bins for corn and barley, for sunflower and caraway seeds, for wheat and buckwheat. The merchants held scales in their hands and weighed out the bundles brought by the peasants' wives. It was less colorful than the horse market but more business-like.

Down by the river, where the slaughterhouse stood on the hill, was the market place for lambs, goats, calves, and sheep. The noise in that market place was not that of buyers and sellers, but the baaing and mooing of the animals as they were being separated from their herds.

But the *yarid* spilled over into the side streets and alley-ways of Orinin as well. There was hardly a house that was not involved in the *yarid*. At one place women bought chickens and geese and eggs from the peasants. In front of houses people put up little tents and displayed pots and pans, sieves and funnels. Artisans of all kinds sold their wares and implements. Coopers made barrels right on the spot,

and the rope maker walked back and forth with wads of flax around his loins as he twisted lengths of rope for the waiting peasant.

A most exciting place was the farm tool and implement market. Peasants would pick up a scythe, a sickle, or plow. They would listen to the sound the implements made as they hit them against a stone, and from the sound they would decide whether to buy.

There were smaller merchants who bought a bunch of rareripes or garlic, pumpkin seed, or dried beans. Everybody was busy on the days of the *yarid*. But when evening came and the peasants departed, the out-of-town merchants drove off with their spirited horses and wagons, the tents and stands were folded, and the horse dealers gathered the horses they had bought and sent them off to the nearby Galician border, peace descended upon the *Shtetl*, and people began to prepare for the next *yarid*.

Not bad, the *Shtetl* people would say to one another. But it could be better. Maybe next *yarid*. Next week.

The *Shtetl* would return to normal. Normal worries. Normal anxieties. Normal petty squabbles.

LOVE IN THE SHTETL

Boys and girls of Orinin, as of any *Shtetl*, were paired off at an early age. The mother of a girl who had her eye on a boy of a friend would send a *shadchen*, a matchmaker, to the parents of the boy, and the *shiduch*, the engagement was arranged. The boy and the girl both attended *heder* and played hoops nearby yet never spoke to one another. But for all practical purposes they were engaged to be married.

Two *Hasidim* met at the court of their *rebbe*. It turned out that one had a son and the other a daughter; so they arranged an engagement. They then drank to the *hoson-kaloh*, the bridegroom and bride-to-be, and the *rebbe* wished them health and good fortune. The two shook hands and made a *tkias kaf*, a hand-shake in the presence of other *Hasidim*. A *tkias kaf* had the power of an official agreement. It could not be broken.

The boys and girls were left out of the agreement entirely. The boy received the traditional gold watch and chain and was known as the *hoson bohur*. The girl received a beautiful kerchief, and became known as *kaloh moid*. Both of them continued whatever they were doing in their parents' homes. Nothing was changed, although the *Shtetl* knew that they were engaged to be married.

Most boys and girls became engaged through a *shadchen* or a *shadchente*. Both men and women were proficient in the profession. The *shadchen*, the male matchmaker, usually brought together out-of-town couples, while the *shadchente*, the female matchmaker, had a local clientele.

A successful matchmaker had an abundance of patience. He (or she) would come to a prospective client on a Saturday afternoon for a visit and a glass of tea. They would be dressed in their Saturday best, and would talk about everything under the sun, until the *hoson* or *kaloh* were mentioned in a round-about way. The parents knew what the matchmaker wanted, but no one mentioned it.

When the *shadchen* was encouraged in his conversation, he would proceed further, lavishing praise upon the bride or bridegroom. But when he sensed a reluctance on the part of the parents to continue the matter, the *shadchen* would bring the conversation around to another prospect for marriage. The *shadchen* knew everyone in the *Shtetl* and knew the foibles of each family. He must be careful of the sensitivities of parents. But when the match was made, the two young people were not consulted. The match was between the two families and not between the young people.

There were certain basic principles that every *shadchen* or *shadchente* had to observe in bringing a prospective match to a family:

1. *Yihus*, lineage, or caste, if you please. Lines were drawn between rich and poor, *balebos* and laborer, dwellers of the upper and lower streets. These lines were seldom crossed. The son of a tailor was not good enough for the daughter of a *balebos*. But it was different if the son of a poor water carrier happened to be a scholar, a *Ben Torah*. In such cases the *shadchen* would be sent to the *yeshivah* in the town where the boy was studying, and the brilliant boy would be selected for the rich daughter of the merchant in the *Shtetl*. A scholar, a *sharfer kop*,* a *masmid* in the *yeshivah*, a diligent student transcended *yihus*. Such was the value the *Shtetl* put upon learning and scholarship. Every poor mother dreamed of her son becoming a scholar and being chosen by a rich man as his son-in-law.

2. Names, first names, had to be gone into before a match could be brought up. The name of the mother of the *hoson* and that of the *kaloh* could never be the same. In some families it was considered bad luck for the father of the bride and the *hoson* to have the same first name.

*"Sharp head". Yiddish.

3. Priesthood could not be violated. A widow or a divorced woman were forbidden to a Cohen, a man of the priestly family. Every man with the last name of Cohen, Kahn, Katz, Kaganowitz, Kaplan, or Kagan was most certainly a descendant of priests. But even when the last name did not suggest priesthood, there were family traditions, handed down from time immemorial, from father to son, about their genealogy. A *shadchen* had to make sure about his prospects.

4. "Blemishes" on either side could not be overlooked. Apostasy in the family, no matter how distant a relative involved, was considered a blemish. *Farflecken di mishpocho*, to soil the family, was an unforgettable offense.

In all of this the feeling of the *hoson* and the *kaloh* were not taken into account. Tradition and family considerations came first. Love was not a prerequisite to marriage.

The task of the matchmakers was not over with the bringing together of *hoson-kaloh*. There were many obstacles to overcome. There was the delicate deliberation about the *nadan*, the dowry, and the promise of board and room to the *hoson*. The parents of the bridegroom always held out for a greater dowry and insisted on a longer term of board and room from the parents of the bride. At any moment the *shiduch*, the engagement, was in danger of being dissolved. *Oplosen a shiduch*, to let an engagement dissolve, was even worse than a divorce. The shame to the bride and her family was more than they could bear. The matchmakers shuttled between the two sides until a compromise satisfactory to both sides was reached.

Then and only then did the *shadchen* and the *shadchente* receive their commissions. There was no set fee. The greater the *nadan* and the promise of support, the larger the commission.

Matchmaking came into disuse by the time my generation was ready for marriage. A quiet revolution had taken place in Orinin and in the towns all around. Boys and girls met on their own in various places. We met in the *Beth Am*, which was at once a community center, (People's House), a library, and a lecture hall. We met on the Doroshka, the pathway which divided the two streams of the Big River, one continuing its course around the town of Orinin and the other diverted to turn the stone of its grist mill. The Doroshka ran for about half a mile between the two streams and was a shaded place, very quiet, very romantic. We would walk back and forth on the Doroshka and would observe the moon rise, and the willows by the river grow pensive, and the cicadas chirp away through the long evening.

The matchmaker continued to practice his skill for many years, but for most of us it was considered "old-fashioned," a relic of days gone by. We were emancipated. Little did we know that matchmaking was still going on — in America! Loneliness is not limited to the *Shtetl*. One can be lonely in the big cities as well.

WELFARE IN THE SHTETL

No one went hungry in the *Shtetl*. Poverty there was, but hunger did not exist. The poor did not know where tomorrow's meals would come from, but for today their needs were provided for by neighbors.

Widows and orphans were first on the list. Every *balaboste*, the wife of a merchant or store keeper, as she baked her weekly supply of bread would bake an extra loaf for a widow. Every Friday when the same *balaboste* baked her *halē*, the white twisted bread for the Sabbath, she would also braid an extra *halē* for the poor. And so it was for the Holidays. The poor did not have delicacies, but they did not lack bread. The portions of bread and meat and other necessities were sent to the home of the widow or sick in secret. The woman of the house would send one of her children with a covered basket. The child was told to leave it on the kitchen table and tell the widow that mother had sent what she owes her.

The poor, the sick, the orphaned, and the widowed were cared for by the *noshim tzidkonioteh*, the good-hearted women of the *Shtetl*. The men contributed to a general fund that was maintained by the *gabbai*, the elected head of each house of worship.

There was a fund for *hachnosath orhim*, the sheltering of the strangers. When a poor stranger came to town he immediately repaired to a house of worship. There he was sure to find a place where he could rest his feet from the long walk from the last *Shtetl*. In the evening worshippers would come, would greet him with *Sholom Alechem*, and inquire where he came from and when he was leaving. The *shammos* took him to an inn and then to a *balebos* for supper. On Sabbath Eve strangers were particularly numerous. I hardly remember a meal without an *orah*, as the strangers were called. A guest for Sabbath was the norm rather than the exception.

Hachnosath kaloh literally means "bringing the bride under the canopy". There was a fund for the purpose of providing a full wardrobe for the bride of the poor. This included *nadan*, a dowry, no matter how small; a bed, chairs, and table; and kitchen utensils. Very often a stranger would come to the *Shtetl* bearing a letter from his *rov*

(rabbi) stating that the bearer was the father of a grown daughter in need of a dowry. The *gabbai* saw to it that the stranger did not leave the town empty-handed.

A *nisraf*, a man who was impoverished by a fire, was a common visitor to the *Shtetl*. He, too, brought with him a letter from the *rov* of his town testifying that a fire had consumed everything the man possessed, and that he was worthy of receiving aid from the town. He was not only given assistance from the common fund, but was recommended to a select few who helped him rebuild his house and restore his livelihood.

Moes hittim, money for wheat, was an annual charity that was scrupulously observed. This institution, which was brought to America and is still observed, is very ancient. Jews could not conceive of the idea that a person would sit at his Seder table loaded with all of the Pass-over foods, while another sat at an empty table. So much was this tradition observed, that it was said of *Moes Hittim*: either one gives, or one takes. More gave than took.

Bikur Holim, visiting the sick, was the duty of the entire *Shtetl*. It involved sitting at the bedside of the patient all night so that the family would be able to sleep. Men or women were hired for this purpose and paid from the community fund. The men sat all night chanting psalms, while the women read *techinos*, supplications for women.

Hevrah Kadisha, the Holy Society, was another of the Jewish institutions brought to this country from overseas. When someone died, the *Hevrah Kadisha* took over the arrangements for the funeral. The body of the deceased was washed, purified, and dressed in the *tachrichim* (the shrouds), and wrapped in the *tallis* (the prayer shawl), which every male had used while he was among the living. The body was carried on the shoulders of the members of the *Hevrah Kadisha* by a route mapped out by the society: From the house to the house of worship where the deceased had prayed, to the Old *Shul*, and then to the cemetery. All of the time, the *shammos* would precede the funeral procession with a metal box and cry: *Tzedaka Tatzil Mi'moves*, "Charity saves from Death". The money collected would be used for funerals of the poor.

Every once in a while an appeal would come to the *rov* or the *gabbai* for *Pidyon Shvuyim*, "Ransom of the Captives". This goes back to the days when Jews would be captured and brought to a Jewish community for redemption money. This was practiced quite commonly during the Dark Ages. The *Shtetl* was called upon to aid in the defense of a

Jew who was falsely accused of some offense which he did not commit. Aid for this purpose was also called *Pidyon Shvuyim*, "redemption of the innocent", and immediately dispatched wherever it was needed.

Eretz Yisroel, the Land of Israel, always sent out emissaries, *meshulachim*, for various purposes. It might be a *yeshivah* they could not support by themselves, or a hospital that needed help. Sometimes the emissary himself was stranded and would ask for a return ticket. Emissaries from *Eretz Yisroel* were in a class by themselves and were aided generously.

There were a dozen funds to which the *balabos* contributed annually. On the eve of *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, the entrance hall to the house of worship provided some idea of the extent of charitable funds to which every Jew had to contribute. Dozens of plates were arranged on a long table. Each plate had a card near it telling the name of the charity, and every Jew entering the house of worship left something in the plate.

The town was small, and the needs were many, but the Jews gave as much as their means would allow. The donations were voluntary. The *Shtetl* had no power of coercion. But the funds were always well subscribed.

SABBATH IN ORININ

All who have written of the *Shtetl* have marveled at the miraculous change that came over it as soon as the Sabbath arrived.

The inhabitants threw off their workday yokes and became Sabbath princes. The men and their women and children all took on an extra *Neshomoh*, a Sabbath soul. The interior of the houses, the clothes of the people, the very streets of the *Shtetl* had another—worldly aspect.

The transformation took place on Friday afternoon, for which Jews have a name, *Erev Shabos*,* the Eve of Sabbath, not just another day of the week. The *Shamos* of the Old *Shul* would make the rounds of the *Shtetl* streets, stopping at every second or third house, and in a hoarse voice chanting: "*In Shul Arein! In Shul Arein! In Shul Arein!*" "To the synagogue! To the synagogue! To the synagogue!"

Immediately the stores would be shut down, transportation would stop, and all business dealings would come to a standstill. Soon the *balegoles*** would roll down the hill, bringing passengers home, and

*Yiddish. *Erev Shabbat* in Hebrew.

**Drivers of wagons or phaetons for hire.

merchants in their one-horse coaches would quicken their steeds to get to the stables with all dispatch.

Out of the houses came fathers and sons, hurrying to the public bath with towels and underwear under their arms. With water dripping from beards and heads, they would rush back to their houses to dress for the Sabbath. The women, mothers and daughters, would set the table for the Sabbath meal and put finishing touches on the houses. Black clothes for the men. White linen cloths on the tables. The women dressed in their Sabbath best. The whole house would take on a Sabbath mood.

Mother would bless the candles while the whole family stood around her. She would cover her eyes with both hands, her lips moving in prayer, and then she would greet everyone with: "*Good Shabos. Good Shabos*" ("*Good Sabbath, Good Sabbath.*")

The same procedure would be repeated in hundreds of homes in the *Shtetl*. Tables set with *halē* and wine. Candle flames swaying. From now on no work will be done. No fire lit. No hilarity allowed. No music played. No dancing allowed. No frivolity tolerated. The day of rest has arrived.

Father and sons would walk slowly to the houses of worship along quiet streets past cheerfully lit houses, joined by neighbors as they approach the synagogues.

Again greetings of "*Good Shabos*" when father returns and he chants the *Sholom Aleichem* ("Peace to you, Angels of Peace. Come in peace, bless us with peace, and depart in peace, you Angels of Peace"). Father also sings the *Eshes Hayil*, a Woman of Valor. While the family stands, father sings the *Kiddush*, the sanctification of the wine, and everyone sips from the cup.

Supper lasts longer than any other evening meal, and the meals are different, special for the Sabbath. The *Zmiroth* (hymns), the chants between courses, are part of the Sabbath supper. *Zmiroth* of thanksgiving. *Zmiroth* of exultation. *Zmiroth* of prayers for the rebuilding of the Holy Temple and the coming of a day which is wholly Sabbath.

The Sabbath day is devoted entirely to prayer, study, and rest. The Sabbath prayers last a long time and the family remains in the *Beth Midrash*, the House of Study, from early morning till late in the afternoon. After a Sabbath nap father returns to the *Beth Midrash* to study, to hear a *magid*, a preacher who comes from afar, or to chant *Tehillim*, the Psalms.

At home, mother would read from the *Tzeenu Urenu*, a book in Yiddish for women, translating the *Sidra** of each week and adding beautiful legends from the *Talmud* and *Midrash*.* A few neighbors would gather to listen to her reading in a sing-song, shaking their heads and wiping a tear for the sin of Adam and Eve, for Noah and his Ark bobbing in the waters of the flood, for Abraham binding his only son Isaac, for Joseph being sold to the Ismaelites, and for the destruction of the Temple in Zion.

The young people of the *Shtetl* are out on the *Shosee*, the paved highway out of Orinin on the way to Kamenetz, or on the *Doroshka*, the pathway near the Polish church by the river. They promenade back and forth until evening falls on the *Shtetl* and it is time for the evening meal.

In the half dim house mother wishpers the "God of Abraham:"

God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob.

The queen Sabbath is departing,

The week of toil is coming back.

Send us sustenance,

Guard us from evil,

And grant us peace.

And soon father comes home, chants the *Havdalah*, the prayer of separation of the Holy Day from the weekdays, and says *Kiddush* over a cup of wine and lights the twisted candle.

As if someone had waved a magic wand, the splendor of the Sabbath is over, the wine cup is put away in the cupboard, the festive Sabbath clothes are changed to weekday drab garments, and the house is back to its worries, its problems, and its humdrum existence.

But there will be other Sabbaths, days of delight and refreshment of soul.

A DAY IN THE SHTETL

The *Shtetl* was astir with the break of day. The first *minyan*** was already at worship in the Old *Shul* as the first rays of the sun appeared in the east. The streets were blueish and eerily quiet, so that the scraping of doors and the unlocking of gates were heard all over town.

**Sidra* (Hebrew) is the weekly portion of the Pentateuch read publicly in the Synagogues on Sabbath. *Midrash* (Hebrew) are commentaries and interpretations of the Bible. Leo Rosten states: "The very highly developed analysis, exposition, and exegesis of the Holy Scriptures".

Whether Yiddish or Russian, it certainly derives from the French *chaussee*, meaning "highway".

**The quorum of ten men, necessary for worship.

The *balegoles*, the drivers of wagons and phaetons who take passengers to and from the big city, were the first to line up on the market square. Some had steady customers. As soon as they saw them coming they would run to meet them and to help them with their satchels. They left as soon as all of the seats in their vehicles were taken. Other *balegoles* were not so fortunate. They had to wait for fares, to bargain for prices, and to set new fees for each of the customers.

The merchants would drive out of their alleys in neat wagons or in sulkies drawn by one horse, trotting smartly on the cobbled Post Road. They were off to the other *yaridn* (markets) in the neighboring towns, or to supervise their interests in the villages around Orinin.

The market women, the poorest of the poor, put up their fruit stands in the square. Summer and winter they stood at these stands and tried to eke out a living with fruit and vegetables displayed on a space no larger than an ordinary kitchen table. Their stands were placed next to one another, and the jealousy among venders added to their miseries. When a housewife appeared in the square, they all proclaimed the virtues of their wares, and followed the would-be buyer until she stopped at a stand.

The storekeepers opened their shops and brought out bulk merchandise to the sidewalks in front of their business houses. Sacks of salt and squares of salt for cattle to lick. Barrels of black sticky tar to lubricate the wheels of vehicles. Bundles of dried, salty herring hung on nails over the doors of the stores. Casks of nails in all sizes for various purposes. All of these were waiting for the peasants as they came into the *Shtetl* for their supplies.

From the butcher street came the cry of lambs as they were taken out of the pens and led away to be slaughtered. The coopers rolled out their wares from their storage places, barrels of various widths and heights, and the hollow beat of their hammers could be heard in the distance.

Old men returned from their *klois* or *Beth Midrash* where they had been praying and studying on empty stomachs since early morning. They would return to study and prayer soon after they had eaten something.

The *meklars*, the cane twirlers, the *luftmenschen*, persons without an identifiable profession, stood in circles in front of stores and exchanged the latest news.

Children were taken to the *dardeki melamed*, the teacher of young children, by the *behelfers*, the assistants to the *rebbe*, while older children, with their books under their arms, were rushing to their various *hedorim*, rooms of the teachers, for a day of study.

The daily routine of the *Shtetl*, established so many years ago, was repeated with minor seasonal variations from day to day.

Smoke rises from the chimneys of the houses. Housewives stand at their kitchen *pripetchoks*, the fore-ovens, preparing the meals for their families. It was a laborious time-consuming chore. The housewives, in fact, spent most of the day cooking and baking. Washing and ironing, cleaning and scrubbing — in addition to baking, cooking and canning — were the daily routine of the housewife.

With the setting of the sun the *Shtetl* had a rhythm of its own. Children returned from the *heder*. The travelers came back from the big city and from their dealings in the villages. Children waited at the bridge for their fathers' return and were picked up for the short ride to their homes. Old men rose up from their studies and began the evening prayers. Lights appeared in the windows and people sat down to a long evening meal.

With the coming of the night the *Warta* showed up on the streets of Orinin. The *Warta* consisted of young men who guarded the *Shtetl* at night. They took turns every month traveling in twos, walking the streets and alleys of the *Shtetl*. They carried no arms. When something suspicious occurred, they would raise an alarm and drive off the would-be thieves or other disturbers of the peace. But the nights were quiet, and in the summer months the aroma of growing things, of flowering things, and of ripening things, and the murmur of whispering things filled the air of the *Shtetl*.

At midnight a candlelight would flicker in some houses. Grandfathers and fathers would arise for *hatzoth*, the lamentations at midnight. They would lament for the "Presence" of the Holy One who was exiled, for the Holy Temple that was destroyed, and for the Land of Israel that was taken away from us. And they would study in their sing-song, swaying over the large folios of the *Gemoro*.

The *Shtetl* had its charms day and night, and we who knew them can never recapture them.



Beryl and Chaya Segal, posing with a group of Emigrants at Orinin, Russia early in 1918 (Winter of 1917-1918).

A JEW IN THE RUSSIAN ARMY DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

by BERYL SEGAL

ORININ AT THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR*

Orinin, where we were born and spent our youth, was a classical example of a small town in the Ukraine at the turn of the century. Our town was about twenty miles from the capital city Kamenets-Podolsk, in the Province of Podolia, the seat of the *Gubernator*, the Governor, and cultural and legal center of the state. It was also about ten miles from the Austrian border to the west.

Early in the morning a caravan of horse-drawn wagons, groaning under the weight of sacks of wheat, corn, barley, beans, sunflower seed, and flaxseed, and hordes of horses made their way westward toward the Austrian border. At the same time merchants in private single horse *bridghas*,** or in sleighs during wintertime, would drive out of Orinin to the business and industrial city of Kamenets-Podolsk.

But Orinin itself was a world apart, untouched by the advances in communications and industry of the new century, still surrounded by fertile fields and green woods, and waters teeming with fish.

We had no telephones, no telegraph, no electric power, no plumbing, no railroads, no newspaper. Our clothing was fitted by tailors, our shoes made by shoemakers, the furniture in our houses was built for us by master carpenters, and the very houses in which we lived were constructed of wood, which was plentiful in the forest around us.

With all the abundance of field and stream and forest, many could still afford only a hovel made of mud bricks and thatched roofs. Houses were heated in the wintertime by straw or wood, and straw mats on the floors were used for bedding. The poor were always

*This series of anecdotes, suggested by a piece written by Mr. Segal for *The Rhode Island Herald* of September 20, 1970, is a continuation of his sketches titled "Orinin, My *Shtetl* in the Ukraine," which appeared in the previous issue of these *Notes* (*Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 6:542-577, Nov. 1974). The combined series tell the story of the life and death of a *Shtetl*. Mr. Segal may well have been the last future Rhode Islander to have lived in a *Shtetl* in czarist times.

Although many of the definitions and explanations in the footnotes have already appeared in the original installment, they are repeated here for the convenience of the reader. Ed.

***Bridgha*, a cabriolet, a one-horse, two-wheel, two-passenger vehicle. (Russian)

with us, and it was an accepted fact of life that one out of every ten households was supported by the *Shtetl*.*

Yet civilization was encroaching upon us step by step.

We knew, for instance, that Kamenets-Podolsk had a railroad station from which one could travel to all parts of the great Russian empire. But for some reason that railroad never reached the *Shtetlech** around us. The universal means of transportation and travel was the horse, the Ukrainian horse, small and swift and patient.

There was a telephone in the *Shtetl*. Not far from town was the estate of Pan Rakovitch. He was a member of the Tzarist family and had a seat in the Royal Duma, or Advisory Council of the Tzar, for the State of Podolia. Pan Rakovitch was usually away from his estate. But for the few months of summer when he came back to Orinin the Government had strung a line of telephone poles from Kamenets-Podolsk along the Post Road, the Main Street of the *Shtetl*, to the estate of Pan Rakovitch. We, the children of the *Shtetl*, when we ran home from *heder*** evenings, would stop by these poles and listen to the hum of the wires, and we would say: "The Tzar is talking to Rakovitch!"

News of the world traveled slowly and unreliably. We depended on three sources:

1. Newspapers arrived from Warsaw or Vilna or Odessa, in Yiddish or Hebrew, usually two or three weeks late, but nobody cared about the dates. These newspapers came to subscribers, of whom we had four or five in the *Shtetl*, and from them we learned about all the pestilences, catastrophies, and plagues in the world, also of discoveries that seemed unbelievable to us. But mostly we read the newspapers for the literary masterpieces, old and new, translated and original, that appeared in their literary supplements. There was a local Russian newspaper published in Kamenets-Podolsk, but no one read it.

2. Merchants who ventured out into the world would come back after an absence of a few weeks and tell of the great wonders they had witnessed in the Big Cities. People listened to these tales, but they preferred to stay in the safety of Orinin.

3. Rumors that made the rounds of the *Shtetl*, highly exaggerated, passed from mouth to mouth, with everyone who told the rumor add-

**Shtetl*: small town or village, diminutive of the German *Stadt*, meaning "city" or "town". *Shtetlech* is the plural. (Yiddish)

***Heder*: the school or room where Hebrew is taught, literally "room". (Hebrew)

ing something of his own, while the listeners were assured that it came from a "reliable source".

In this way we learned about the beginning of the war later designated the First World War and destined to change the peace and quiet of the *Shtetl*.

One morning the caravan of grain and horses returned from the Austrian border cities bringing back the loads they were assigned to deliver. Merchants surrounded the wagons and listened to the bad news: The borders were closed; the roads were clogged with vehicles bringing men and ammunition to the front.

The causes of the war were never clearly understood in Orinin. They were too fantastic. A prince was assassinated. The Austrians rushed to avenge the death of the prince. But what did that have to do with Orinin? Why the sealing of the borders? Who was the prince that was the cause of it all? And what was that little Slavic country of whom nobody had ever heard? It was all too fantastic to comprehend. Little did they know that because of this bizarre incident a chain of events would unfold in the world whose ultimate consequences cannot yet be envisioned.

My father brought home a Hebrew newspaper "*Hazman*"*, and soon the house was filled with listeners eager to learn about the war. My younger brother was lifted atop a table, and with people standing all around he read the Hebrew at sight and translated into Yiddish the full story of the war. The listeners were more impressed by my brother's reading and translating of the Hebrew newspaper with such facility, than by the explanations of diplomacy, strategy, and international intrigue.

The only comfort the *Shtetl* had was that the Balkans were far away and the assassins and the victim were not Jews.

THE WAR COMES TO ORININ

Early one morning, as the people of the *Shtetl* emerged to greet a sunny day, they saw as they stood at their doorsteps twelve Austro-Hungarian hussars on horseback on the *Skala***, a high stony outcropping on the western side of Orinin. They were resplendent in their high hats bedecked with feathers, in red uniforms decorated with gold braid, girded by shining swords worn on the left side, and in high black

**Hazman*, "The Times". (Hebrew)

***Skala*, a rocky hill. (Russian)

boots with spurs. The horses were restless as they stood on this high point overlooking the town. They, too, were dressed as if on parade, their bodies covered with multicolored coverlets underneath the saddles.

They remained motionless, man and beast, surveying the *Shtetl* with binoculars, and then, just as suddenly as they appeared, they turned their horses and disappeared toward the border in a cloud of dust. Then the rumors took over:

Rumor that the twelve hussars were sent by the Kaiser Franz Joseph of Austria to the Tzar of Russia offering him a peace treaty. The message was to be delivered to Pan Rakovitch, but the hussars got lost on the way.

Rumor that the twelve hussars were surveying Orinin to see whether it was big enough for the General Staff of the Austrian army.

Rumor that the hussars were Jews. A peasant who was hiding in the fields had heard them speak Yiddish.

Rumor that the hussars had come to Orinin to collect gold and silver contributed by Jews for the war, and that the gold and silver was delivered by the water carrier who was seen early in the morning at the same spot pretending to draw water from the well under the *Skala*.

The last rumor was soon repeated on many occasions. Variations of the rumor, all about gold and silver being given to the enemy, were soon told in many a town in the Ukraine. Someone in a high place saw to it that the rumor would be told and retold until it was accepted as authentic. Jews were disloyal. Jews were traitors to Mother Russia. Jews were on the side of the enemy, Austria-Hungary and Germany.

The policy of the Tzarist government towards Jews all through the war was based on this rumor. In the name of this rumor as the war progressed, Jews were evacuated from the border towns. Jews were asked to contribute their jewelry to the war chest to prove their loyalty. Jewish homes were searched, and all copper and silver utensils were confiscated and melted down into instruments of war.

But Jews were accustomed to be singled out by the authorities for persecution, for discrimination, and for blame for all failures and blunders in the land. We knew that the treatment of the Jews was a barometer of the success or failure of certain policies of the government. So the people of Orinin patiently bore the indignities, the mistrust, and the suspicions.

Then came the day of the recruits.

Every year, during the fall season all males who had reached the age of twenty-one were drafted into the army. In peaceful times the recruits from the neighboring villages would gather in Orinin, the seat of the *Volost*, the County House, and after registering would descend on the *Shtetl* itching for a fight. Jews would close their stores early, and nobody would show his face outside until the local police had seen the last recruit out of town.

But this time, the first year of the war, the recruits were given a free hand. The police were nowhere to be found. The recruits swooped down on the *Shtetl* and in less than an hour wrought havoc in a number of stores. They beat up several people who happened to be outside, and they left a trail of blood, tears, and heartache for many in Orinin. The police then came and gathered them up and sent them off to Kamenets-Podolsk.

"Beat the Jews and save Russia" was their cry as they destroyed, tore to pieces, and vandalized everything that came under their hands. "The boys deserved their fun" was the lame excuse of the local police. The boys had their fun.

But bitterness grew in the hearts of the Jewish boys — helplessness, shame, humiliation, and hatred, and a burning desire for revenge. In the long evenings of the winter we would gather in secret places and plan how to avenge ourselves for the atrocities, and also how to defend the town from future attacks. We organized a secret militia for self-defense, and we patrolled the *Shtetl* at night.

The *Shtetl* was divided as to self-defense. The opposition argued that we would only incite the police, and the suspicion that we were helping the enemy would be given greater credence. Why do the Jews roam around at night? they would ask. Besides, they argued, what was done was done, and by next fall the war would be over, and the recruits would be kept in their place just as in previous years. We lived among the Ukrainians, and they were a peaceful people. Ignorant, but peaceful. The sooner we forgot about the "fun" their sons had had in the *Shtetl*, the better off we would be.

So the arguments ran, and also the hope that the war would soon be over. But the war was not over in a few months as the "experts" had predicted, and the self-defense was soon to prove futile in the light of what happened in Orinin.

THE DON COSSACKS*

The war was still far away, but the traffic of the war began to be felt by the town. Infantry and cavalry usually passed through Orinin at night. We would be awakened by the roar of the wagons and the rhythmic marching feet of soldiers. They passed by the Post Road up toward the *Skala* and to the border of Austria-Hungary.

Those of us who lived on the Post Road had a free show of the sights of war. We would stand by the windows and peep through the curtains in the darkened houses. We saw endless rows of infantry, the officers riding on horses, the sergeants by the side of the marching men, urging them on, issuing commands, while bringing up the rear were the corporals and the younger officers. In the morning we would describe the goings-on to the folks of the *Shtetl*, and we were the envy of those who lived on the other streets.

Soon the heavy artillery would come to town. It passed through during the day, and the two policemen of the *Shtetl* would go from house to house and warn us not to step out of the houses. Why the secrecy we could not understand. The artillery was pulled by horses, and the houses actually shook as the heavy armaments on wheels rumbled through Orinin, their guns pointing up toward the sky. Though warned not to show our faces on the streets, we could not resist and took a chance of standing behind closed doors and watching with bated breath as the might of Russia passed by.

Cossacks on horses marched through Orinin. They wore long black caftans, with rows of bullets sewed to the upper parts of the garments. They were armed with swords and rifles, and looked formidable with their long mustaches. As they rode by they sang of the girls they left behind, of the fields of standing corn they had not harvested, of the war that would not end until all the enemies of Mother Russia had been vanquished forever — all of this to the clip-clop of the thousands of hooves on the pavement of the Post Road and the swinging of their tall Cossack sheep caps. It was all very exciting, and we looked forward to the next night's adventure.

But one night we were awakened by the two policemen and told to clear out of one room because the Cossacks needed the space. They also requisitioned all of the stables in Orinin for their horses. No sooner were the policemen out of the house than the Cossacks were

*The River Don flows through European Russia to the Sea of Azov. The Cossacks were an elite corps of Slavic horsemen from southern European Russia.

in and settled in the room. They ordered tea to be made and ransacked the kitchen for food. They were hungry and ate ravenously.

We found out that these were Don Cossacks, coming from the most fertile marshes and steppes of the Ukraine. They had utter disregard for private property or for other men's wives, and were contemptuous of discipline imposed by anybody but their own commanders.

At daybreak they spread out over the town and knocked on the doors of the closed stores. When they were opened, the Cossacks would pick out what they wanted and leave. Confronted by bills for the goods, they replied with laughter that shook the store: "The Father, the Tzar, will pay for everything. Send the bill to him."

In the beginning the storekeepers would go to the commander, who made his headquarters in Orinin, and present the bills for the goods. The commander would listen to them and say: "Just name those rascals and I will deal with them", and he would then laugh the same wild laugh as the Cossacks did.

The Don Cossacks went around town undisturbed. They drove their swift, small, wiry horses through crowds in the streets, and when they trampled someone to the ground they would give out with a wild shriek and continue through the streets of the *Shtetl*, their leather knouts whistling in the air. The young women and girls of Orinin disappeared into the cellars in fear of the Don Cossacks.

Sunday was a half-holiday in Orinin. Traditionally the peasants would come to town for prayers in the domed church, and at twelve noon the big bells would begin to ring and the stores would open for the peasants to buy their household needs: sugar and salt, herring and *kapchankes*,* and kerosene and matches, as well as ribbons and colored beads for the young ladies.

As soon as the church opened its doors at the end of the service, the Don Cossacks mixed with the peasants and began to make sport with the merchandise as if it were their own. They especially favored the young women and pressed on them goods they did not want. "Take, my beauties. We are leaving tomorrow. Take with our compliments."

They ransacked the stores. What they could not give away they spilled on the streets and threw underfoot or tore to pieces. At the largest store in town a Cossack stood at the door and gave out

**Kapchankes*, a smoked dried fish with white meat. (Ukrainian)

goods until the shelves were empty. The storekeeper shouted: "Why? Why are you doing this?" He shouted and beat his head with both fists, crying like a madman.

Someone ran for the Father of the church, who came with his big crucifix dangling in front of him. At the sight of the Father the peasants slunk into the side streets and departed, and the Cossacks dispersed laughing. "Why, Father? I ask you Why?", continued the merchant, and beat his head with his two fists.

That cry still rings in my ears after all these years.

Some of the goods were later recovered. The two policemen somehow knew where to go and what to look for. But the wounds remained. Jew and peasant could no longer look each other in the eye.

IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

During the Passover holiday two Don Cossacks decided to conduct a house-to-house search in Orinin. They went to the house of a butcher and came out dragging two boys after them. The two brothers, sons of the butcher, were home because of the holiday. Otherwise they would have been sent to the villages to buy sheep and cattle for their father's shop.

Some say that the Don Cossacks were drunk, others that they were enraged because one of the boys was of military age and should not have been at home. Still others say that they seized the boys because they found a rifle in the house. But whatever the reason — as if the Don Cossacks needed a reason! — they tied the two boys to the saddles of their horses and tore down the Post Road, the two boys flailing their hands and feet as the horses sped on. And the Cossacks roared with joy. Outside the town the two boys were shot, and the Cossacks fled.

A pall of sadness suddenly descended upon Orinin. It was spring-time; a holiday spirit had pervaded the town; the townspeople were out on the streets, enjoying the first sunny days, as well as the holiday. And then they witnessed this outrage in broad daylight. They brought the bodies of the two boys home, and the whole town cried in unison with the parents.

Again they asked the same question: Why? For what reason? And by whose authority? Are the Don Cossacks free to do as they please? Is there no one to stay their hand?

No investigation was initiated. No witnesses were summoned. No punishment was meted out. The Jews of Orinin suddenly realized that their lives were at the mercy of the Cossacks. And what was worse — every peasant, if he were so inclined, could do to Jews whatever he pleased and not fear reprisal.

The town of Orinin suddenly shrunk and shriveled. It lived in a sea of hatred, or at best indifference to the fate of the few hundred households. Jews who lived in the surrounding villages took refuge in Orinin and told stories of horror. They abandoned their homes with only the clothes on their backs, leaving all their possessions behind, lucky to escape with their lives.

Those who were able packed their necessary belongings and left Orinin for Kamenets-Podolsk or towns even further on. The young people, especially the girls, disappeared overnight, some into the big cities, some in hiding at the houses of friendly townspeople of the Christian faith.

Cellars and attics became regular living quarters. At the first sight of a Cossack in town all women and children went either down to the cellar or up to the attic. In some houses blind rooms were made. They closed up the windows and barricaded the door with a clothes chest or a bookcase. In these windowless rooms they kept their children and grown daughters. Orinin was turned into a town of old people.

In the meantime incidents multiplied, rape and murders became a daily occurrence, and Jews took their lives into their hands walking the streets.

There were periods of quiet. As the Don Cossacks were advancing into Austria into the District of Galicia across the border from Orinin, the Jews of the surrounding towns breathed a sigh of relief. They were saddened, however, by the news that filtered in through travelers attached to the army. The towns in Galicia were utterly destroyed. The Jews of Galicia, like all Jews living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, lived a free life. They had never known fear of the army, and in fact many Jews had served in its armies. A fair number of them had distinguished themselves in the military and earned high honors. Only a few miles from the border of Russia, and what a difference!

The Don Cossacks were particularly ferocious in their devastation of the towns, both because they were in enemy territory and because they were settled by Jews. The Galician Jews had never seen a Cos-

sack in their lives. They were entirely unprepared for their onslaught. Prosperous thriving towns and cities of the District of Galicia were mercifully destroyed.

Other Cossacks came to Orinin. They were from the Caucasus and were mostly Moslems. They were surprised to be among people who, like themselves, did not eat pork. They were circumcised as were the Jews, and they found other similarities in their customs. They were very scrupulous in bathing their bodies, they did not steal, they honored elders, and had strong family ties. These Cossacks found the peasants in the village morally disgusting and their table manners atrocious. They therefore clung to the Jews with whom they felt a greater affinity, and punished severely anyone who attempted to vandalize Jewish property, because they reasoned that Cossacks are Cossacks and Jews are Jews, and should do as they pleased with their lives.

During the stay of these Cossacks, Tartars, Cherkessians (Circassians), and other tribes of the Caucasus, Orinin returned to normal. But the war was going badly for Austria. The Russians penetrated more and more deeply into the land, and the army quartered in Orinin received orders to advance and take up positions nearer to the front.

Jews in Russia had a peculiar resilience. As soon as a wave of pogroms and persecution had receded, they would quickly shake off its effects. When a ray of hope appeared, they would pick up their lives as their fathers had before them, bury their dead, replenish their goods, repair their workshops, and again face their neighbors.

Many Jews prospered from the war. The army needed supplies of everything. Communications with the interior of Russia were very poor. The army needed clothing and shoes, fodder for the horses, and food for the personnel. There was a brisk trade in horses and vehicles. Everybody was busy working for the army: tailors and shoemakers, wheelwrights, and smithies were particularly in demand. The merchants were given protection to go into the villages and buy grain for the men and horses. Saloons and beer houses sprang up overnight. The armies which came to Orinin after the first year of the war were of a different brand from those which had earlier passed through the town like a storm and took their toll.

Every once in a while, however, an incident occurred that reminded the Jews of Orinin that they lived on the rim of a volcano and that it could erupt at any moment.

THE DAY BEFORE YOM KIPPUR

*Yidden, Me'kaptl!'** ("Jews, they are grabbing us!").

That was a signal for all young people to hide. It was a common practice, even in the best days of the war, to seize people for work. They were sent away to the border villages to dig trenches, to clean the streets, or to transport materials of war. The story was always the same. After you had done your work, they gave you a receipt for the number of hours you put in, and you were told that the Commandant would pay so much per hour.

The Commandant was never to be found. He either was too busy, or he went away to Kaments-Podolsk, or he was sent to the front. The peasants were worst off. The army would impress them, confiscate their horses and wagons, and send them away for weeks at a time. They transported the wounded soldiers from the front lines to the interior of Russia.

The soldiers were out man-snatching early in the morning. At that time the town was empty except for older men who were not fit for hard work. In the afternoon, when the "grabbing" was over, the quota of men and wagons having been filled, it was safe again to walk the streets.

But on the day before Yom Kippur, when Jews were preparing for the most awesome day of the year, soldiers entered houses and ordered all males to take shovels and picks with them and gather at the quarters of the Commandant. They seized old men on their way to the Public Bath where they were purifying themselves for the holiday. They snatched youngsters who were home from *heder*, the Jewish school, for the holiday. They seized their teachers too. They took the artisans away from their work and the storekeepers from their shops. They even entered synagogues and snatched men at worship. In addition to picks and shovels the men were told to take along food for a few days, for no one knew how long the digging would take. The cries of women, the wailing of little children, the protestations of the older men were to no avail. "Yom Kippur? What is that? Tell it to the Commandant."

And so the soldiers rounded up the entire male population of Orinin and brought them to the headquarters. Did the Commandant know what Yom Kippur was? Was it a purposeful act? He must have known that Jews would not work on this fast day. What was the purpose of bringing all these elderly men to do the digging? And

*Yiddish.

youngsters eight or ten years old who were also caught in the net of the head-hunters. What could they possibly do?

We stood quietly on the lawn of the estate of Pan Sadowsky, where headquarters were located. Our hearts were heavy. We were angry and ashamed. Angry at whom? At the soldiers who did as they were ordered to do? At the Commandant who was nowhere to be seen? Ashamed at being herded like cattle and not even being told where we were going and what we were to do? An intense hatred filled my whole being, hatred for the army, for the Tzar, for the country, and a resolve to avenge myself for this spiteful atrocity.

How and on whom to avenge myself? I knew that it was helplessness that spoke within me. Tears welled up in my eyes, and I felt a lump in my throat when I looked at the old men standing on the lawn of the estate, with Orinin visible below in the valley. So near, yet so far. And *Kol Nidrei*?* On the night of *Kol Nidrei* with picks and shovels? Isn't there anyone to tell the Commandant what sort of a day Yom Kippur is?

Just then Reb Menasha came running up the hill, and, avoiding the soldiers standing on guard, he went straight to the Commandant. Reb Menasha was a well-to-do merchant in grain and flour. He rented the flour mill standing at the far end of the town from Pan Sadowsky. In his youth he had been a soldier and was stationed in Petrograd. His unit had performed for the Tzar and his family. He knew how to stand before the Commandant.

Reb Menasha explained to the Commandant what Yom Kippur meant to Jews, what a fast day is to Jews, and what a special night *Kol Nidrei* was. "Take me as a hostage", he told the Commandant, "and let my people go home for the holiday. I guarantee that they will come to do the work you assigned to them after Yom Kippur."

The Commandant who was of the Tzar's family (every Commandant was of the Tzar's family) argued that Jews are clever, that they are good at getting out of work, that this was the only chance to get them all. But at the end he said: "I want you to know that this is the first time in my life that I ever did any favor for Jews." He ordered the soldiers to let the Jews go, and refused to take any hostages. He was sure that after Yom Kippur they would come back on their own.

On the appointed morning the young men of Orinin who were able to work presented themselves to the Commandant, and they were

**Kol Nidrei* is the plaintiff prayer that ushers in *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. (Aramaic)

sent to the Austrian border, where they dug trenches for several days. They came back bringing the news that the Russian army was deep into Galicia, but the number of killed and wounded was staggering. The Germans and the Austrians had long-range cannon, they said, and they took a heavy toll of the Russian army, which advanced on foot unprotected, and thus were perfect targets for the German-Austrian cannon.

The war had its bright side. As the armies moved deeper into Austria, life in Orinin became stabilized. The confiscation and the impressment for work had ceased. Orinin was in the hinterland. Jews became involved in supplying the army with food, clothing, and horses. The military were now of a different stamp. They were all of the reserves and milder men. Jews did business with the army. They suddenly discovered that Jews could get them what they wanted. And they paid for what they purchased. Jewish merchants were given identification cards and permits to travel wherever they needed to go. Some were even assigned soldiers to accompany them when they went out into the faraway villages.

A new type of Jew appeared in Orinin and in the surrounding towns. They were *podrachiks*, entrepreneurs, who rode around in army vehicles with soldiers at their side to buy anything and everything the peasants had to sell, and to confiscate whatever the army wanted.

In Orinin and in every town there were Jews who became rich, the new rich, as they were called. They lived dangerously. They were brash; they were daring. But they were the envy of the town.

At that time my turn came to go into the army. I was all of seventeen then.

"They are scraping the bottom of the barrel", people of Orinin said to one another. "Germany beware", the wits of the town would say with a wink. "Look who is coming to fight!"

ON THE RIVER VOLGA

My father engaged a peasant to take us to the draft board in Kamenets-Podolsk. He wanted to have us avoid the eyes and the remarks of passengers on the public conveyances. Though we had plenty to say to one another, we nevertheless sat quietly all the way and each thought his own thoughts, although we communicated silently.

The draft board was in a government building surrounded by a high stone wall with an iron gate at the entrance. Two soldiers stood guard at the gate and separated me from my father. And that was the end of our journey together. They did not even allow me to say goodbye to father. He stood at the gate and watched me go up to the building and disappear inside.

I met some boys from Orinin and some from other towns who were *yeshivah** boys with me in Kamenets-Podolsk. But we didn't have much time to talk to one another. The army doctors worked like machines. We entered through one door, were asked a few questions, undressed, were given a physical examination, and were then sent out through another door. After a regulation haircut and a shower we were given uniforms and sent out to the drill field where we paired off according to height.

Towards evening we were taken to the railroad station and put in windowless wagons,** counted, and locked in. That was my first glimpse of a railroad and my first ride in a train.

We traveled three days and nights. In the middle of the night we stopped at a station, were told to get hot water from the boiling kettle that brewed at every station, and drove on. We sat on the floor of the wagon, some singing, some sleeping, and some brooding. It did not occur to us to ask where we were being taken, and anyway there was nobody to ask. The officers and soldiers who were sent with us recruits were riding in the front wagons, and we saw them only in the morning when they counted us and gave us food for the day and locked the doors.

We finally arrived at a town in the middle of the night and were glad to stretch our legs. We were taken to our barracks and were assigned bunks. We fell asleep immediately and were awakened by soldiers going from bunk to bunk and yelling and pulling us out of bed.

It was the first time in three days that we saw daylight. The sun was shining, and a breeze came up from somewhere. It was a steady breeze, and it cooled us off. Later we found out that the breeze came from the Volga River nearby. The famous Volga. There the river lay, wide and shimmering in the sun, down the hill from where our barracks were situated.

**Yeshivah* was a Hebrew academy. (Hebrew)

**Continental usage for railroad freight cars.

We did not have time to feast our eyes on the legendary river of which we had heard so much in story and song. The drills began. Endless drills and marches and exercises and training. And inspections. Yes, and singing. An army marches on songs, we were told. And also running. Running and singing.

We were hustled out of the barracks early in the morning. We were lined up in front of an array of officers, and after an inspection we were taken to a field where corporals and sergeants ruled over us with an iron hand.

Face right. Face left. Present arms. Stop. Go. Stop. About face. Run. At ease. On the double. Stop. All morning long. Then there was lunch served from kitchens on wheels. We were lined up for this too. No pushing. No rushing. Everyone presented his mess utensils for inspection. These were part of the pack which we always carried. If a dish or utensil was found to be unclean, we would be taken out of the line and ordered to shine the offending soup bowl or spoon. If we were late for formation we went without lunch that day. A soldier must be punctual. After lunch we rested for a half hour and again to the marching and training.

In three months they were going to prepare us for the front. The wits of Orinin were right. Germans beware!

On Sundays we were allowed to go to the river. The Volga revealed itself in all its glory. At this point the river was so wide that we could not see the other side. The Volga constantly changed images as its waves splashed by. Patches of white and patches of brown and patches of gold as the sun was caught on the crest of a wave.

I cannot remember a single incident of race discrimination in the barracks. Neither the soldiers nor the officers ever made an anti-Jewish remark. The period of training passed by without any unpleasantness. On the other hand, the few Jews who were in our company were chosen for office duty, hospital duty, or services in the officers' mess hall. I was not so lucky. It was my duty to stand guard at the officers' club every other night. The officers of the regiment gathered every night in a big mansion with spacious gardens, located near the edge of the barracks. At nightfall we were stationed around the officers' club and kept saluting every officer who passed through the gates.

We saluted and kept up our vigil. We did not talk to one another, although we were only a few paces apart. Nor were we to react to what was going on inside the gardens. The women had been there

before our arrival. After they ate and drank, the officers made merry with the women. Cries and laughter reached our ears through the fence around the gardens, and shouts of conquest punctuated by screams of delight made our spines tingle. But soon the lights in the club went out, and we were returned to the barracks, and not a word was said by us. Speak only when you are spoken to, was the rule.

The worst part of training was stabbing the belly of a straw-stuffed effigy with our bayonets. In turn each of us faced the effigy and with a scream of triumph rushed toward it and pierced the "Germanetz", the German.

All this time we practiced with unloaded weapons. We had our bayonets mounted on empty rifles and pretended they were real arms. We learned to "load" and "unload" the rifles when the order was given to "present arms". But on the last week we were given ammunition and were taken for rifle practice. We passed by the hanging effigies and down an incline in the field. There we came upon a rifle range with its target boards painted with concentric circles, each with a bullseye in the center.

We knew that the time had come when we were considered to be soldiers, not just the recruits we really were. Now we marched, singing, heads up, with bodies straight, not slouching as we had done only three short months ago.

We boarded railroad wagons with long benches instead of separate seats. We needed space, since each of us carried the regulation knapsack and the rifle which we were to keep near us for the duration of the war.

"You are married to your rifles", we were admonished by our mentor. "This is your best friend!" And, believe it or not, we came to look upon the rifle as part of us, never to be separated from us.

We traveled again for three days, and when we alighted and marched through a town, one much like Orinin, we were a sight to see. People stood on both sides of the streets as we passed by singing, our rifles slung on our left shoulders, our right hands swinging back and forth, our uniforms of light green color, heads held high and our eyes looking straight ahead. The wits of Orinin should have seen us.

From this point we marched to the front lines. Wagons carried our rifles and sacks, since the front lines were still quite a distance. After a day's march we caught up with our equipment and made ready for the night. There were few houses in sight. We were now in hilly country.

Where we were and where we were going nobody knew. We were admonished not to ask questions. A good soldier, we were told, attends to his own business. He leaves the why, when, and wherefore to others. There is a higher-up who knows all the answers.

But rumors still circulated. On the other side of the mountains, one rumor went, was the city of Lemberg, the capital of Galicia, and we were headed for that city. Lemberg was well known to me. When someone went abroad from Orinin to Lemberg, he came back speaking German, dressed in European clothes, and forever yearning to return again to Lemberg. It was the seat of learning, the symbol of European culture, also the city of great contrasts — great rabbis and Hasidic *rebbes*, and also great *apikorsim*, unbelievers and devotees of enlightenment. But others claimed that we were not going to Lemberg at all. We were on the way to Czernowitz, a renowned big city in Bucovina and that the city was just across the hills.

It turned out that we were in the Carpathian Mountains, in a Slav country under Austrian rule. As everywhere in that empire the official tongue was German. The people, however, spoke Slovakian, while the Jews were adept in three languages and spoke Hungarian in addition.

We had not yet tasted the fear of battle, of defeat, or victory. We did not even hear the thunder of the big guns. Nor had we had a glimpse of an enemy soldier. We were stationed on one of the hills of the Carpathian mountain chain. Below us was a small swift stream, and on the other shore of the stream was enemy country. Up on the hill opposite us, they said, were trenches of the Austrian army. But we did not bother them, and they ignored us. Each morning we were sent out on patrol along the stream, and, when we were relieved by another detail of soldiers, we went back to our trenches prepared by a company of soldiers who had occupied them earlier. We were kept busy cleaning our rifles, scouring our bayonets, and mending our clothes. We were bored and craved for action. The evenings were magnificent in the Carpathian Mountains. We would leave our trenches and make fires on the protected sides of the hills. We would stretch out on the ground and sing songs of Mother Russia, of the girls we left at home, of the birch tree that grew in the field and the girl who pined away near it, and of the great prowess of the men in wars of old.

The officers, it seems, did not deem it necessary to be among us. They came only in the morning for the roll call, and then departed

to a village a mile or so away from the front line. The corporals and the sergeants, on the other hand, became closer to us, mingled with us, ate with us, and slept with us in the trenches, which, it must be said, were furnished by those who had preceded us with all the "conveniences" of home.

So we sat in our trenches, and to this day I don't know why this front was neglected or forgotten or ignored for weeks on end, and why neither the Russian nor the Austrian army tried to cross this narrow, shallow, playful little mountain stream.

YOM KIPPUR IN A CAVE

Naked children would come out of a cave and hold out their hands for a penny or two. Their mother would hide in the doorway of the cave and beckon to us with one finger. She was young, and her husband had gone to war. She lived by begging or by reading palms. We later learned that the Carpathian Mountains were full of such caves.

Some soldiers took off for the night to one of the caves and came back at the crack of dawn, telling us of the wonders of the gypsy cave villages in the mountains. The caves were cool in the summer and were well protected from the cold in the winter. The gypsies survived by making little trinkets, which they sold to Jews in the town near the bend of the river. This was the only time we had heard mention of Jews.

Only a week before I had received a letter from home in which my father told me that the Days of Awe, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, were approaching, and that he had checked the dates for me. At the campfire one evening we asked our sergeant for passes to go across the river for the holidays. He thought we were crazy. "Are you out of your minds?" cried the sergeant. "Across the river? You want to go into enemy territory?" "But the gypsy woman told us that she goes there to buy and sell," we replied. "Impossible," said the sergeant.

But we inquired again, and sure enough many gypsy women crossed the stream to work and to trade in the little town. We went up to the bend one day and saw the streets of the town across the stream. We also spied a *shul** in the midst of the houses. It was a big wooden building with a *Mogen David*** on top of the roof.

**Shul*, synagogue, from the German *Schule*, "school". (Yiddish)

***Mogen David*, literally "Shield of David", refers to the six-pointed Star of David. (Hebrew)

There were five Jews in our platoon, and one of the five served in the office. He was a corporal, though he did not have any soldiers under him. For a long time we did not know he was a Jew. He did not fraternize with us, and we did not seek his companionship. One evening he came to us and asked: "Do you boys know that our Days of Awe are coming?" "Yes, we know. We also know that Jews live on the other side of the stream. But how can we go across?" "Leave that to me", said the corporal.

He then told us that the Austrians had retreated, but that we still awaited orders to occupy the village. He also told us that there was a wooden bridge across the stream and that we, the Russians, had a guard standing there day and night, but that there was no one on the other end of the bridge.

We went to the bridge and were stopped by a sentry. We spoke the secret code word, and he allowed us to stay at the bridge and observe. The streets of the town came down to the very shores of the stream. The stream curved at that place and became a river. We saw Jews coming and going on the streets. We could almost hear their voices wafted across the water by a breeze. We asked the sentry whether people from the town ever came across the bridge. He told us that the gypsies from the caves crossed the stream daily. He knew them and didn't interfere with them. "This is no war", explained the sentry. "We waste our time here."

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah the corporal came carrying a permit from his staff officer, and we started out toward the bridge and crossed it. To our disappointment we found the town deserted. We were puzzled, but not seeing anyone of whom to ask questions we returned to our side of the bridge.

The next night I went out on patrol. I climbed a high peak of a mountain, and from there I had a full view of the bridge and the town. All the houses were dark. I could make out the synagogue among the houses, and there too not a light was burning.

But on the eve of Yom Kippur I noticed a startling movement of people toward a mountainside near which the town was spread out. From a distance it seemed that the houses were overshadowed by the mountain. The people, especially women and young children, carried bundles and disappeared inside the mountain.

I alerted my friends in the platoon. We crossed the bridge and wandered in the deserted little town. This time we knocked on doors, but there was no answer. We went to the synagogue, and there we

found an older man and his young son carrying something in their hands. From the way the old man hugged his burden I knew what it was. He was carrying a *Torah** covered with a linen sheet. He was startled. His son began to run. We spoke to them in Yiddish. The boy came back to listen to Russian soldiers speaking Yiddish. We told them why we had come over from the other side, and asked them to let us be with them for the Day of Atonement.

On the way out of the synagogue the old man told us to follow him quietly. He led us to a cave in the side of the mountain. When we reached the entrance of the cave, he told us to stay outside and he went in alone. We looked around us at the silent town, at the brooding mountain, and the gurgling stream that meandered through the mountains. A feeling of deep awe and fear came over us. Awe and loneliness. I thought of the *Kol Nidrei* nights at home when I was a child. The corporal whispered as if talking to himself: "This is the first Yom Kippur I ever spent away from home."

He had told us before that his father was a cantor, and that he himself was to be a singer. He was about to go to a cantorial school when he was called up to service. He would continue singing if ever he returned.

The old man came out and beckoned to us. We stood speechless at the entrance. The cave was quite spacious. Long benches were lined against the walls of the cave. At the eastern wall stood a make-shift Holy Ark covered with white linen curtains. Candles were burning on the ground in a corner of the cave. They were protected from sight by a low wall of rocks. There were about twenty men and women in the cave, men and women separated, each holding a prayerbook close to his eyes. There were two lights only at the reader's desk. We were told later that lights were forbidden by the authorities lest they direct the enemy, meaning the Russian army, to the town. Now that the Austrian army had abandoned the town, they still obeyed that law out of force of habit. The rich inhabitants had left town, and those who remained were the poor and the old. They would not talk of their experiences with the Russian army.

A man dressed in a white *kittel*** came forward to a platform in front of the improvised Holy Ark and spoke in hushed tones to the

**Torah*, literally "teaching", "guidance", or "doctrine". It has come to mean The Law, i.e., the Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses, or in turn the Scroll containing the Five Books of Moses. (Hebrew)

***Kittel* is the white garment traditionally worn by members of the congregation during prayer on the High Holidays. (Hebrew)

assembled people. He told them that we were Jewish soldiers stationed across the river, that we came to pray with them on Yom Kippur, and that one of us was a *hazan's*** son and would chant *Kol Nidrei*.

The corporal chanted, and everyone, including ourselves, wept. Some women cried out aloud, no doubt remembering their sons who were in the battlefields at that very moment. The *hazan's* son chanted the ancient melody with such sweetness and so much feeling in that *shul* in a cave in the Carpathian Mountains that it brought tears to the eyes of every man and woman.

After the service the people surrounded us, and besieged us with questions, such as: When will the war end? How far will the Russ go? Is it true that Jews are suffering in Russia? An old man sidled up to the Corporal and asked: "When will the Messiah come?"

We went back silently to the Russian side, each with his own thoughts, each with his own memories of a childhood that would never come back.

AT THE FRONT LINES

The order to move on finally came to our division. One morning we were lined up as usual for the roll call, and the officer in charge of the regiment announced that we would move to occupy the next mountain ridge at night. The announcement was received with relief, anxiety, and fear. Relief because we were tired of languishing there in one place, doing nothing but eating, drinking, and attending to our rifles. Anxiety because we still did not know where we were or what our task was to be after we crossed the next mountain. Fear because once we were on the front line we could expect anything to happen to us.

But there was also curiosity. What did the beyond look like? What new vistas would be revealed when we crossed the mountain? Our imaginations ran wild. Soon the fears, anxieties, and curiosity were all abated.

The regiment crossed the river without incident. We rounded the mountain and came to a pass and still another stream. Then toward evening we arrived at another town, also nestling in still another mountain and also on the shore of a stream.

We were tired from the long hike on narrow paths, strewn with rocks and boulders. We were immediately installed in the houses

***Hazan* means cantor. He sings long passages of the liturgy. (Hebrew)

of the townspeople. Some of the houses were deserted; in these cases we occupied the whole house. Others were inhabited; there the commander would assign two or three soldiers to each house, leaving one room for the owner.

We fell asleep as soon as our heads touched the pillows. We did not see the owners of the house we were in, but we knew that they were somewhere nearby. We could tell by the neatness of the house and by the smell in the room, the smell of food that had recently been cooked in the kitchen. I could also tell that this house belonged to a Jew. I saw a *mezuzah** on the doorframe, books in a bookcase by the wall, and candle holders on top of the mantle.

In the darkness that came over the house at dusk, I could hear someone moving in the kitchen. I held my breath when I saw an elderly man taking the candle holders from the mantle and tucking them into a sack filled with things he took from the kitchen.

I greeted him, and he scurried into the adjoining room. Then I spoke to him in Yiddish so as not to frighten him. I am a Jew, I said. He didn't have to be afraid in his own house. He could take anything he wanted.

Upon hearing Yiddish spoken the elderly man brightened, and he explained to me that it was Friday evening. He had come to take his wife's candle holders to bless the light for *Shabos*** and also to pick up a few things for the Sabbath meal. We came unexpectedly, and he did not have time to set the table for the meal.

I helped him carry the bundle of food, and he led the way to a back room which was completely windowless and dark. He called out to some one: "We have a guest for *Shabos*, Hannah. A Russian soldier who speaks Yiddish."

Hannah immediately blessed the candles, and the room was lit. She greeted me with "Good *Shabos*", and we sat down on the sofa, the only piece of furniture in the room. I left the room and came back carrying two chairs and a round table. The housewife covered the table with a white tablecloth. I placed the *halē†* and the candles on it, and we were ready for the *Shabos*.

**Mezuzah*, literally "doorpost": small parchments on which are inscribed the first two paragraphs of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21). Rolled tightly, it is placed in a small case or capsule and attached to the doorpost. *Shema* means "Hear", from "Hear, O Israel".

***Shabos*, the Sabbath (Yiddish) from the Hebrew *Shabbat*.

†*Halē*, a braided loaf of white bread, usually prepared for the Sabbath or Holy Days. (Hebrew)

The two elderly folk asked me about my home and about the war, and told me that so far no one had touched them. The rich people, of course, left the town when the Austrian soldiers retreated. But they were not rich, so they remained.

It was late when I returned to my bed. We could not break away. I told them what my father did for a living, what I did before the war, and how the Jews lived in Russia.

It was quite a while since I had heard the *kiddush** being chanted, the blessing over *halē* being said, and the *zmiroth*,** the Songs of *Shabos*, being sung at the table. What surprised me was the similarity of the *Shabos* customs and traditions in my home and here. I was struck by the change that came over the elderly pair as soon as the candles were lit and the blessing pronounced over them. Just as at home, I thought. It seemed as if I had known them before. The food had the same flavor as the dishes which my mother had served. Poor as they were, they were transformed into different people, he with his black *Shabos* kaftan and round *Kopelush*,† and she with a calico dress and silk kerchief.

I was just as anxious to talk with them as they were with me. Tired as I was, I asked them about their family. They told me that they had two sons. One was at the Russian front, and one was somewhere in Germany. They did not know the name of the city because he was on some secret army project. Now they were cut off from them, because the town and indeed the entire district had been abandoned, though they could not understand the reasons why.

In the days before the war people would come to the town from far and wide for summer vacation. Half of the townspeople were employed in providing for the summer guests. Every house rented a room or two to the city folks.

There was also a *rebbe* who resided in town. His *Hasidim*‡ would come to be with him on *Shabos* and for holidays. The old man was a *gabbai*, a traveling collector for the *rebbe* in the towns scattered in the Carpathian Mountains.

Early in the morning we started on our march to another town, across another mountain, searching for the Austrian army. When my platoon passed by the home of my hosts, I saw them standing by the

**Kiddush*, the prayer and ceremony that sanctifies the Sabbath and Jewish holy days. (Hebrew)

***Zmiroth*, hymns. (Hebrew)

†*Kopelush*, a broad-brimmed hat. (Yiddish)

‡*Hasidim*, members of a pious Orthodox sect originating in Eastern Europe in the Eighteenth Century. (Hebrew)

window waving at me and Hannah wiping a tear from her eyes. Before we separated the night before the old Jew took me to a cupboard and told me to take a *kameia*, a coin, from a drawer. "It is not money," the Jew explained to me. "These are *kameias* that the *rebbe** gave to the young men who went to war. They were all blessed by the *tzaddik** himself. The *kameia* will guard you all through the war, and you will come back in good health to your father and mother."

I picked a coin the size of an American nickel with a hole punched at the outer rim and put it in my pocket. It was supposed to be a charm to be worn on a string around one's neck or in a hidden place in one's uniform. I felt for the *kameia* in my pocket and felt reassured. I knew I had the best wishes of the two charming old people.

We soon came to the next town, and everywhere we heard the same story. The Austrian army had retreated, and half the town had left with them for fear of the Russians. We were still to see a single enemy soldier.

Then it suddenly became clear. The Austrians wanted to straighten out their lines. They couldn't do it in the mountains, so they abandoned them. It was not long before we heard the boom of heavy cannon. The front line was now not far from us.

The Austrians made their last stand on one hill of the mountain range. We dug in on the opposite hill. This was the last mountain in the Carpathians. After this the ground leveled out, and the roads were wide and straight. We were instructed to look out for camouflaged soldiers crawling up the mountain where we were located. Every night we sent men out on patrol. We stalked between the trees, stopped, looked around, and continued on, keeping the appointed distance between patrols. At night we rested, and in the morning we were awakened by the boom of the enemy cannon and the answer of our big guns. We were terrified, but the boom of the cannon was better than the silence between rounds. Each side tried to soften up the other, so we were told. Until the enemy ceased sending his cannon messages to us, we would not move from our dugouts. The

**Rebbe* (rabbi) was the term used by the Hasidic Jews for their spiritual leader. *Rav* or *Rov* was used by the non-Hasidic community. Rabbi is Hebrew for "my master", *rav* means "great". *Rebbe* is a corruption of the Hebrew *rabi* (pronounced rah-bee), angelized to rabbi. The Hasidic *rebbe*, though well-grounded in learning, did not necessarily have formal ordination from an academy or *Yeshivah*. *Reb* was also used as a title — a shortened form of *rebbe*. The subtle differences and apparent interchangeability of these terms is confusing, but probably not too important. *Tzaddik* means "a righteous man". He embodied the ideals of moral and religious perfection. Among the Hasidim, as compared to the non-Hasidic Jews, he went to more extreme lengths of piety and devotion. (All of the above Hebrew)

enemy wanted us to come out and fight, but we would weaken him by holding on to our positions. In the meantime between cannon shots we could count the minutes it took to answer the big guns from our side. We ducked and then raised our heads. Sometimes when we saw or thought we saw something moving between the trees we aimed our rifles at the spot. We were shooting blindly. No one was allowed to stand up and take aim.

Who knows what I was shooting at? Were they enemy soldiers? Women scraping together a meal? Woodsmen returning home? Or just figments of our imagination? Our rifles cracked at no one in particular. I hoped there was no one there.

The cannon fire grew in intensity and accuracy. The trench in which we were crouching came under increasingly accurate fire. Since we had only one line of trenches, we could not run for cover to another trench. Nor could we retreat to the rear, because we were threatened either with court-martial, which meant being shot to death, or with being shot immediately by any officer who caught us running away from the firing. But staying in the trenches was certain death sooner or later.

We counted the dead and carted away the wounded in confiscated wagons, sending them to the rear. The heavily wounded wailed as the wagons bumped over ruts. Surrounding the wagons were the bandaged who could walk. They held on to the wagons with one hand and trudged along. We were envious of the lightly wounded. They would go for a while to a hospital which was a long way from the front lines. Maybe they would never return to the front.

People are never content. Before, we were complaining of the boredom. We wanted action. Well, we had action. We cursed the rising sun, for with the rising of the sun the cannons began their bombardment. The nights at least were quiet. We slept standing up, leaning against the wall of the dugout fully dressed, our rifles at the alert. We warned one another of the coming of the sergeant. Woe to him who did not wake up in time.

Some nights when it was quiet the sergeant allowed us to sprawl out on the ground and assigned watches while the rest of us slept. But even then we could not put away our guns. We were married to the guns.

We now knew what life in the front line was like.

For several days we were spared the boom of the big guns. We were puzzled, but we had no one of whom we could ask questions.

Rumors took over. One rumor had it that the enemy had retreated and that we would soon pursue him. Another rumor was to the effect that we were surrounded and that one day soon we would all be taken prisoner. Peasants who were taken prisoner by our troops and brought to our headquarters, however, told of regrouping of forces on the mountain facing us, and reported that the Austrians had been sent to fight on another front while German regiments would occupy their positions.

On one such night I was sent out to patrol a stretch of mountain in front of our platoon. Patrols were not burdened with knapsacks and ammunition and carried only a rifle and one round of ammunition. They were to report anything suspicious to the corporal. The patrol never ventured more than fifteen or twenty feet away from the trenches. He was to be the eyes and ears of the platoon.

I crawled out of the trench on my belly, looked around, perked up my ears, and made it to a nearby tree. I looked about again, listened once more, and then, to the next tree. The night was dark, and the stillness was pregnant with rustles and murmurs and fear. I was on the ground for a while, and then again stood near a tree. I did not know when and why, but I found myself crawling down the crest of the mountain. My heart began to beat fast. Perspiration covered my body. I got up and wanted to run back to my platoon. Then it happened. A shout to stop. The rifle snatched from my hands. And a face and a voice from nowhere ordering me to go with him quietly.

It was all so orderly and gentlemanly. We were told that the Germans tortured their prisoners. They gored them with their bayonets and left them to rot in the forest. My first impulse was to run and yell. But the Germans held my arms, and running was out of the question. They warned me not to raise my voice or I would be silenced forever.

That was the only harsh word I heard, but even that was said gently. No pushing, no shoving, no cursing, no beating as I had expected.

I was led down the mountain, along a narrow path, during which time the two German soldiers walked one in front and one in back of me. The stillness was terrifying. No one spoke a word. I observed the man ahead of me. He was dressed in a long coat of green color. He was not encumbered by a rifle and bayonet, only a short knife in a leather sheath hung at his side and a revolver which he was carrying

on the ready. The man in back of me carried my rifle and ammunition.

Many thoughts crowded my mind, and trivial they were. Things I did in my childhood, stories I had heard at the campfire came racing one after another. These thoughts were without any logic, without reason. I should have been thinking of my platoon, of the reaction of my buddies to my absence, of the search party they must have sent out to find me. None of these things entered my mind as we walked silently along the path and came to a village. The crowing of a rooster and the barking of dogs sharpened my senses. The little houses were silhouetted on the horizon.

We stopped at a newly erected wooden office building.

IN ENEMY COUNTRY

With the coming of daybreak we looked around us. Frightened and disheartened we were huddled in a large waiting room. I say "we" because the room was full of Russian soldiers, the crop of only one night. We heard voices coming from the rooms nearby. Voices and laughter. I was amazed at the degree of my understanding of what was spoken in the closed rooms. They were talking in German, a language similar to my own tongue.

One by one we were taken into the rooms which opened into the waiting room. I was asked to identify my regiment, my division, and my commanding officer. The interpreter standing in the room whispered something to the inquiring officer. He brightened up and spoke directly to me. He asked in German, and I answered in Yiddish. He asked where I came from, and he informed me that he had once been in Kaments-Podolsk, but would not go into detail. He asked for my occupation, and I was at a loss to say what it was. I did nothing. Was I a student? It did occur to me that the *yeshivah* was a school and I a student. No, I couldn't qualify for a government school. Why? Because I was Jewish. What does this have to do with being a student? In Russia, Jews are excluded from government schools, except in very small numbers, and for that you need money. Why money? Because you have to go to Kamenets-Podolsk. In my town we had no *gymnasium* to prepare me for college.

That was a revelation to the officer and to the interpreter. They began to talk to one another excitedly. What would I do when I returned from the war? I hesitated, because I had really never thought about it.

The officer gave me a number in a sealed envelope and dismissed me. He put his arm around my shoulder and said: "When we come to your country we will send you to school." I came out into the yard and found a whole Russian army assembled there. Toward noon we were fed and sent off to a waiting train.

The rumble of the train, the experiences of the previous night, the sun shining in our eyes, and the rolling fields that flashed by through the windows left me feeling at once depressed and exhilarated. We still did not know where we were, whither we were being taken, or what was to become of us.

The train rolled into a city, and we saw a sign on the roof of the station with the words: MARMORESH-SEGET.

We alighted from the train and were assembled at the railroad tracks. The people spoke in a tongue I could not understand. The officers in charge at the station collected our envelopes and separated us into small groups. I repeatedly heard the word *Hust*. After an hour or so we arrived at a city named *Hust* in Hungary. All the prisoners in our coach were taken out, and the train rolled on.

We were put in charge of elderly soldiers, aged forty-five and over. To our eyes they looked ancient. One of them was the spokesman. He addressed us in Ukrainian. It was Ukrainian with a Yiddish accent. It turned out that he was from Tarnopol, a town not far from my *Shtetl*, where the people spoke German, Yiddish, and Ukrainian. He also spoke Hungarian very poorly, as I later discovered. He was quite clearly a Jew.

A group of ten from among twenty-five men were taken to a brick building that looked tremendous in my eyes. It was a marvel of construction to the mind of a boy from a *Shtetl* where all the houses were one story abodes, built of lumber or clay. The red three-story building had windows glistening in the sun and was surrounded by a wrought iron fence. It was a school building, we were told, now converted to a hospital. We were assigned to work in the hospital, some to help as orderlies, others to work in the kitchen. I was a cook's assistant. My job consisted of peeling potatoes and standing over the big kettle and mixing the contents with a wooden ladle.

I didn't stay at this work assignment very long. An officer, also middle aged, came to the kitchen and asked me to follow him. I was to be a storekeeper for the food and utensils requisitioned by the hospital. The store, or warehouse, was outside the hospital compound,

a few houses away, and I was entirely on my own all day long. The officer came in for a few minutes, asked me how I was doing, and, smiling at me, left. He insisted on calling me Albert, and this was my name all through my captivity. Evenings he called upon me to come to the officers' mess and help in serving supper to the officers. It was there that I learned the news of the war. I heard that the Russian army had suffered great losses, that the armies were in retreat, and for the first time in my life I heard the word Revolution! My officer was from the Tyrolian Mountains and knew no Hungarian. It so happened that I had picked up enough of the language to serve as an "interpreter" between the kitchen help and the officer. He often stayed late in the mess room and debated with another officer, who was Jewish, the subtleties of Theses and Antitheses, which I did not understand but listened to with great avidity. It sounded to me like the discussions in the Talmud in which my mind had been well trained.

The Hust days were the happiest of my captivity. No letters reached me from home, nor had I received any mail since I had left for the front lines. I was free to go to private homes in the evening. A family that lived next door to the hospital was particularly hospitable. They were, in fact, Jews. The man was a shoemaker, and his daughter, about my age, worked somewhere in the city. The demand for help was great everywhere. It was strange to speak in Yiddish to the family and to the neighbors who came to look at me. That never ceased to astonish me. The prayers on Yom Kippur in the cave had been the same as in my home town. The *kiddush* and candle lighting and the dishes were also the same as in my parents' home. And now I sat and talked to Hungarian Jews in my native language. They understood me and I understood them. A young woman who lived in the neighborhood came to tell me her husband had been taken prisoner by the Russians and was now in Kiev. She thought that I would know of Kiev since it was the capital of the Ukraine, and was surprised when she heard that I had never left my *Shtetl* until I was taken into the army. The freedom of travel and the ease of travel were things I could not cease to marvel at in this land of my captivity.

One day I was called back to the hospital and found the Jew from Galicia standing, wrapped in his *tallis** and *tefillin***, and praying. He motioned to me to sit down and when he was through *daven*†

**Tallis*, prayer shawl. (Hebrew)

***Tefillin*, phylacteries. (Hebrew)

†*Daven*, to pray. (Yiddish, possibly from the French "*office divin*". *Daven* is the participle.

informed me that we were being sent to a camp near the Russian border. If I had *sechel*,* "sense enough," I would slip out of camp and go home. He also told me that the Russian army was in disarray, and thousands of soldiers were giving themselves up to the German army.

We parted and promised to write to each other, which we never did. But I still remember the Jew with the red trimmed beard as he stood straight as a rod with only his head swaying back and forth as he prayed, with his *tallis* covering his whole body.

We were brought to a barracks in the middle of a field and assigned bunks. And that was all we saw of our captors. We were not supervised. We were not given any duties to perform. We were left to our own resources.

Every morning somebody was missing. It was whispered around that prisoners were going home. We were near the Bessarabian border, and I knew that Bessarabia was the state next to Podolia, my own state.

One morning when I stepped out of the barracks, I saw a lorry bringing meat for our kitchen, which was in a lean-to shack. It was horse meat and was thrown up onto the roof of the lean-to where flies immediately attacked the red, lean sides of the animals. My stomach turned, and I went to the common out-house and vomited.

That night three of us agreed to leave the camp. Two took provisions, and I was to carry the spoons and forks and plates. We agreed to meet at a clump of trees that could be seen on the horizon. There was no need for all our caution. No one pursued us. No one was standing guard at the barracks. I made my way to the trees, but found not a trace of my companions. I waited under the tree for a while and was elated when I heard a noise, but disappointed when it was only the wind in the trees. I waited impatiently, but no one showed up. I continued toward the sun, which began to come up on the horizon. Not a soul came my way. At a distance I saw what looked like a village. I thought I heard the crow of a rooster. The terrain was flat, and there were patches of plowed fields. Suddenly the village was before me. I was at the edge of the village, and a man came out of his house on his way to the barn. I greeted him in Ukrainian, and he answered, "God be with you". I asked him where I was. He looked me over and beckoned me to come into the house and said

**Sechel*, native good sense, common sense, or judgment. (Hebrew: understanding).

he would take me to the *starosta*, the elder of the village. He would send me to the proper authority. On the way he told me that the country was in turmoil. The army and navy and the workers had taken over the government, and the Tzar was in exile. Hundreds of soldiers came from captivity every day and passed through the same village. The Austrian border was only a few miles away, and nobody was guarding it, neither the Austrians nor the Russians.

I registered at the *starosta*, and a motley bunch of us was packed into a train that was to take us to Kiev. At one of the stations where we stopped I asked a conductor where I could take a train to Kamenets-Podolsk, and he pointed to a waiting train on a nearby track. I jumped on the train, holding on to a railing at the door because there was no room inside. But as the train stopped at various stations some soldiers hopped out, and we who were crowded onto the steps of the coach went inside with much relief. My fingers were numb from holding onto the railing.

The disorder was so great that in all this journey nobody asked where we were going and why. We arrived at the Kamenets-Podolsk station toward evening. I spent my last pennies on some food and started out on foot to Orinin and home.

A footnote to my adventures or misadventures after my escape from the prison camp: The other two soldiers, one from Kiev and the other from Kharkov, whom I hastily accused of deserting me, were caught by the guard and kept in camp for two more months. They never tried to escape again.

One day when I was in Kamenets-Podolsk I saw my two friends walking in the downtown area. I recognized them immediately, but they hesitated for a while when I approached them, because I looked so different in my civilian clothing. We exchanged experiences, and I directed them to the *Kehillah*, the Federation of Jewish Charities. They were sent on their way to their homes.

REVOLUTION AND POGROM*

Russia was elated. The Ukraine was jubilant. Kamenets-Podolsk and the surrounding towns and villages were exhilarated. There was dancing in the streets. Soldiers and civilians kissed one another and sang the "Internationale". A holiday spirit pervaded the streets and the squares of the cities and towns. Red flags hung from every

**Pogrom*, an organized massacre of Jews. (Russian)

rooftop. Red flags draped every vehicle. A huge red flag waved on the tower of the city clock in Kamenets-Podolsk.

For Jews the Revolution was a second deliverance, equal to deliverance from Egypt. Only this time it was not God who wrought the deliverance, or Moses the intermediary. It was "We the people," "We the workers," "We the army, and the farmer, and all who were oppressed".

It was springtime in Orinin. Nature had awakened, and so were the Jews of the town. Young people returned from the army. Suddenly they were transformed into orators. They spoke in the market place to the peasants: A new day had come for Russia. A new sun and new heavens. All over the land people were rising up. They were taking what was coming to them by virtue of their labors. Those who didn't work, didn't eat. Down with the Pan who owned the fields, and the forests, and the waters, and the very air you breathed. Arise and divide the land, free the forest, take what belonged to the Pan: cattle, sheep, implements, and his very furniture.

Organizers came from Kiev, from Odessa, and from nearby Kamenets-Podolsk. They all spoke the same language. They had the same slogans plastered on walls and on trees. The organizers wore uniforms of soldiers of the Red Army. The Red Star fluttered from every house, from every public place.

The rich were not forgotten. They must work. Those who are not willing to work have no place in the new social order.

During that honeymoon of the Revolution all traces of the Tzar's orders were rescinded. Equality for all. Justice for all. All national partitions that divided Jews, and farmers, and workers were erased. It was not uncommon to find Jewish young men at the dances arranged by the villagers and Ukrainian girls fraternizing with Jewish boys.

A commissar was appointed over Orinin and the environs. A workers' and farmers' governing committee issued new laws and new regulations.

The older folks of Orinin looked with jaundiced eye at what was happening. The Jewish boys were too prominent on these committees. They were the ones who led a crowd to the estate of the Pan and left nothing standing but empty rooms and barns. They were the ones who arrested the people who managed the estate in the absence of the Pan. They also arrested the *kulaks*, the rich land-owners and the Jews who were suspected of hiding grain and produce from the open market and asking exorbitant prices from the poor.

The order of things was reversed. The poorer a man was the higher he stood in the eyes of the commissar. The man who lived by the sweat of his brow was the man of the hour. The businessmen, the storekeepers, the men who had no definite profession had no standing in the community.

The time of the young had come. Fathers and mothers, and in fact anyone who was over forty, were reduced to silence. This new order would come into being by the will of the young. Anything that was created, believed in, and treasured by the people before the Revolution was old and had to be destroyed!

Needless to say, the churches and synagogues were nests of counter-revolution. No self-respecting son of the revolution would step inside them. New places of assembly grew up. New holidays were instituted. New values were introduced. Sons and daughters were estranged from their parents and, if they were not actually denouncing them, were indifferent to their plight.

In Orinin there was continual dancing and singing, and perpetual lectures on the new canons of the Revolution. There were exuberance and abandon in some quarters of the village and sadness and foreboding in others.

From Kiev came news of an uprising by the Ukrainians against the Red Army. The leader of that uprising was Hetman Petlura. Around Petlura gathered all the Ukrainian nationalists who wanted a separate Ukraine, governed by its own Rada, or Assembly, and independent of the Russian Republic. Petlura himself was a socialist, so his Jewish followers said. But the people around him were the riff-raff of the Revolution. Petlura installed himself in Kiev, called for a Peoples' Congress, divided up the work of government among ministers, and even had a Minister of Jewish Affairs. The army, however, had all the power. They called themselves Haidamaks and committed unbelievably bloodthirsty, barbaric atrocities. The historian of that period, Ismar Elbogen, writes:

Each of the parties (in the Ukraine) attacked Jews; the one side, because they were allegedly Bolsheviks; the other, because they were anti-Bolsheviks; all sides because they were unarmed and easy plunder. It was as if Hell had spewed forth all its fire and from all sides the flames were hurled upon the Jews.

Finally the Bolshevik armies defeated the Haidamaks, and Petlura and his bands were chased out of the Ukraine. But in the small towns, on the border of Austria, local peasants led by remnants of the

Haidamaks* still roamed the towns and villages and pillaged and burned as if nothing had happened.

Orinin was one of those towns.

NIGHT MARCH TO ORININ

Kamenets-Podolsk was in the hands of the Bolsheviki, but the small towns which were scattered about for some ten or fifteen miles around the capital city were left to the mercy of bands of Haidamaks. Every day the population of Kamenets was swelled by people who had escaped from these towns. They told stories that were all too familiar: robbing, rape, killing, and burning of Jews and their property. The Bolshevik army that was stationed in Kamenets could not undertake a campaign against these marauders. They were not organized into one army; they were elusive, attacking a town here, a village there. They consisted mainly of local peasants coveting Jewish property.

The Red Army had good advice for the towns. Defend yourselves. They are after your lives, and you can rise up and pay them measure for measure. A life for a life. But that was easy to say. Jews had no weapons. The roving bands of Haidamaks were armed.

One morning word reached Kamenets-Podolsk that Orinin had been pillaged and a demand made on the townspeople to supply a certain amount of money for the Petlura forces or they would pay with their lives.

A group of us from Orinin who were living in Kamenets-Podolsk at the time gathered at the headquarters of the Bolshevik government and demanded arms and ammunition to go out to Orinin and save the lives of the people. A certain Captain Ivanov volunteered to go with us. He assembled us, about twenty young men from Orinin and other towns, all army men in the past, at the former Governor of Podolia House and instructed us in the use of arms. The instruction gave us confidence to go out and take vengeance on the Haidamaks for their deeds of the past and for what they demanded now.

We set out from Kamenets in the dark and reached the forest at daybreak. Beyond the forest were the Haidamaks. Ivanov told us to disperse and to enter the town from all sides. We were instructed not to shoot unless attacked, not to engage anyone in conversation except to answer greetings if anyone greeted us.

*Named after an Eighteenth Century armed band of serfs who revolted against the feudal Polish landowners, and also tortured and slaughtered Jews.

The town was asleep when we arrived. We alerted the Jews to pack up and to leave the town. We could not stay in Orinin, we explained, but we came to save them from the hands of the Haidamaks. The Haidamaks, when they learned of a "great Red Army" coming to Orinin, rushed out of their beds and fled as fast as their horses could carry them.

A caravan of horses and wagons traveled from Orinin to Kamenets-Podolsk, and we, the frightened ex-soldiers, brought up the rear in case of an attack. The Haidamaks returned to Orinin in the afternoon as we were entering Kamenets-Podolsk and found the town empty. It was not long afterward that the Red Army did come to the villages and routed the bandits.

Who was Comrade Ivanov? He disappeared after the march on Orinin. He didn't wait to be thanked for leading us into battle. But I will remember him to the last day of my life. He was a stocky middle-aged man with a ruddy face and mild piercing eyes. He did not carry a rifle, but continually kept his hand on his revolver, and God help the man who stood in his path. Comrade Ivanov, our inspiration, our pillar of strength for one night. May your memory be blessed!

And Petlura? A captive of roving bands of Haidamaks who had committed inhuman atrocities in his name, he was assassinated by one of his victims. He was shot in Paris on May 26, 1926 by Shalom Schwartzbard, a watchmaker from the Ukraine, who had witnessed the murder of his parents in a pogrom.

He avenged for all the thousands of men and women, old and young, who had perished in the Ukraine at the hands of Haidamaks.