

I YIELD TO DESTINY

FROM SHOP TO SYNAGOGUE

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By

ISRAEL WOLWOFF

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CANTOR WOLHOFF

Foreword

THIS is the story of an immigrant Jew, buffeted from land to land, laboring, suffering, planning, and ultimately impelled by fate to seek a late livelihood from a life-time avocation. The author writes simply, in the sequence of events, without regard to literary style or arrangement. He tells of his unusual boyhood and young manhood in Russia, and his varied experiences in this land of refuge. Though the account is not lengthy, it provides a new tale of two worlds, and offers a fitting portrayal of Jewish struggle and achievement during six decades.

I YIELD TO DESTINY

From SHOP to SYNAGOGUE

WHEN I was seven years old my father was living in a little village in Russia, called Znaminka, with a population of 5,000 gentiles and twenty Jewish families. My father had two trades; he was a glazier and a flour-sifter. He owned four sieves which he would bring with him to the farmers, so he could sift their flour on the premises.

Our home at this time was made up of one large room with four windows and a vestibule, and an attic where we kept straw. One morning, a horse and wagon came to our home, and the driver of the vehicle began to remove all our household belongings. These consisted of a bed and divan, a few chairs, bedding and pillows, and a table. Then my father, mother, and all the children climbed into the wagon. The children included my older brother, Michael, my older sister, Sarah, myself, and Hyman the baby. About three weeks before my father had carried home some lumber from the woods and we children had been given to understand that he had brought a baby together with the wood.

In the home that we vacated we had had a tremendous oven occupying one complete wall. We used to bake large breads in the oven and also utilized

it as a bed, (there was a space on top where we could sleep). The top was made of bricks. One night while we were all sleeping, the children on the floor—on beds made of straw under feather bedding—we were suddenly awakened by the strange cry of a baby. This was about one in the morning, and who should be coming in with this new disturbance but Laya Dobrishka, the midwife. When I asked the meaning of the newcomer, it was then I was told by Laya that Papa had brought the baby from the woods together with the lumber. When we heard this we were all happy; we jumped and laughed with joy all morning because we had a baby in the house. The baby was called Abraham. My mother, of course, was in bed. The removal, three weeks later, was to a larger village, housing approximately 25,000 gentiles and 400 Jewish families. There my mother would be able to help father make a living. This village was called Mitterkiefke. We moved into a house consisting of two rooms—one large living room and a smaller one. The rental was \$25 per year.

One day a wagon arrived with a sack of flour weighing 200 pounds—this proved the beginning of the *knishe*-baking business for mother. She started immediately to bake knishes to be sold—in that way hoping to contribute to the family larder. At this time of my life I was attending public school, and after school hours I used to help my mother, who had a stand where she sold her *knishes*. I would come to relieve her so that she could go home and make more of her wares. Towards evening, when

the day's business was over, and all my *knishes* were sold, I would go home also. In the evening my mother would knead the flour and prepare the dough for the next morning. At dawn she would fill the squares of dough with potatoes and buckwheat, and then bake them in the oven—by morning the *knishes* were all ready for marketing.

My father would take his sheets of glass and sieves, and go about his two businesses in the nearby villages. With horse and wagon he would travel from one village to another, remaining away all week except during the week-end beginning Friday afternoon. From these businesses all that we could manage to live on was bread, vegetable soup, and for Friday—the big day—a soup made of meat and bones, which father would bring home especially for the Sabbath meal.

Meanwhile my mind was on the alert—I was trying to find another business in addition to the *knishe* stand. I discovered a store in Mitterkefke which sold matches wholesale. Near our village was another called Defiefke, approximately seven miles from us, and on the other side one called Chviderka. On alternating Sundays the farmers and merchants would come to these villages to sell or buy in the market places. Now the merchant from whom I began to buy my cases of matches would deliver them each Sunday to the village where the marketing was to take place. Two hours before dawn, all the merchants assembled in the marketplace. I used to pay a peasant ten kopeks to take me with him. Early in

the morning I would put a rope around one of my cases, bind it upon my shoulder, and drag it through the aisle between the merchants' and farmers' stands, crying, "Who will buy my matches?"

The day's business was over about two in the afternoon. Then all collected the wares remaining, piled them in their wagons, and rode to their homes. I, too, counted over my sales—and, after figuring my cost and my expenses, including transportation, and meals costing 30 kopeks, I found my profit to be \$1.50, sometimes 25 cents more, varying with the market. When I came home in the evening I would give my mother \$1.00 and keep the remainder for myself. With this I would buy a top or marbles, and, sometimes candy.

I was then a grown man of eight years. I plied the trade of selling matches for six months. After that I discovered another way of earning money. I encountered a wholesaler who would send wagon-loads of heavy salt (the size of rocks) to the market to be refined by the peasants, who hammered them down to a refined stage. His wagon was equipped with scales, and he had a place in the market especially marked for the salt wagons. I arranged to be entrusted with a wagon or two, and I told him that I would try to sell the salt for him. He used to charge 40 cents a bushel (forty pounds) and whatever I charged beyond this price was my profit. I surmised that the salt business was a better one than matches, and I gave up the latter business. I would make about the same profit on the salt as on the matches,

but I was considered more truly a merchant, selling salt.

But I had to give up the salt business also about six months later, because there were other men and women purveying salt and I used to undersell them. These people complained about my competition. They maintained that I, being only a child, did not require so much—while they, grown folks, had to make a living not only for themselves, but in many cases for their families.

When I was forced to stop selling salt, and until I began selling fish, I tried to buy rabbit skins. The peasants used to shoot the rabbits and would dry the skins and bring them into the market and sell them. I used to watch how they were bought and noticed that they were sold for 15c each. I found out that the dealers paid from 20c to 25c for each, according to the quality of them. I decided that I was not going to lose time and would go to the fair.

I borrowed \$4. A peasant was going to the fair to sell his products, such as potatoes, garlic and other things, so I promised to pay him 25c for the trip to and back from the fair. I told him that I would be on time and he would not have to wait for me, as he wanted to reach the fair before daybreak.

I had to meet him at three o'clock in the morning. As I did not have a clock, I awoke a few times during the night and watched through the window. There was a saloon that I could see from the window, that closed at three o'clock. That night the moon was shining and there was a heavy snowfall. As soon

as I saw the saloon close, I dressed and went to meet the peasant. When I came there, he was already packing his products. I sat in the sled which had hay and straw inside which made it warm and we drove away. We had driven only half way, when the sled split in half.

Near the road were many forests that were called "Black Forests." In these forests many wolves were to be found. Hardly a night passed without wolves going into the village and taking sheep and goats. This happened especially in the winter.

The only thing the peasant could do was to go to the village and get a sled and put everything on it and bring it into the village. He sat on the horse and went to the village to bring the sled. He left me matches and warned me that in case I see wolves running, I should make a fire and the wolves would keep away as soon as they saw the fire.

Even if I did not see any wolves, I kept imagining I did and kept making fires. I did this for one half hour until another peasant passed by who was going to the fair. He saw that I was there and I asked him to take me to the village and he obligingly did so. I left the broken sled and products in the field. When I came to the market, the sun had not risen yet.

I went into an Inn. There I found many men sleeping and snoring on the floor and on the benches and the room was filled with smoke. These men were waiting for the market to open. I asked the owner, Becky, for a hot glass of milk for two cents. She boiled the milk and I warmed myself up with this.

In the morning, I went to the market and bought two dozen rabbit skins and discovered that the peasants who brought the skins in, had their own customers and it was difficult to get someone to buy them from, as most of the skins were sold before they were brought in.

Hence, I had to look around for still another business. I found a place where they sold *kopchunkas*—a smoked, salt, dried fish, which came in bales. These were strung together by their mouths by dozens on a string. They were sent to me to the market-place. Although the profit I realized was no more than on the articles previously sold, still my status as a merchant grew more respected. I still continued to help my mother with her *knishe*-selling during the week, as the market for my own merchandise was held only once a week, on Sundays.

I became a well-known figure amongst the tradespeople. I now had an assistant—in the person of my brother, Hyman, seven years old. I promised him a few cents in addition to his meals.

On one Sunday, about two-thirty in the afternoon, one Moses, a cattle dealer, approached me and asked if I wanted to earn a few cents extra on the way home. He said, "Take these calves and run them home from the market to my yard at Mitterkiefke, and I will pay you \$1.00."

I agreed to this bargain. With five cents out of the dollar, I bought "*bagels*" for my brother and I also gave him fifteen cents for himself. We drove the calves home to Moses' yard, but it was not as easy a

task as is here narrated. It took three hours for the seven miles. It stormed and rained in bucketfuls. The calves refused to run, and we continued to chase them. I had not only a hard time getting the calves home through the blinding rain, but it was with considerable difficulty that I managed to get my brother home, as he was not satisfied with the money given him for his share of the work.

And still I helped my mother with her *knishe* business. Near her stand, there was a big store of dress goods, and the merchant who owned this store had a large porch, under which we sought protection when it rained.

Now that I was a merchant I would dress better than the other boys of my age. I wore shoes, while they still ran about barefoot. It happened that because of my better appearance I succeeded in securing odd jobs now and then from the owner of the dress goods store. I capitalized on my new clothes and my worldly experience. The merchant or his salesmen sent me on errands; sometimes I would carry papers out of the store, in addition to sweeping and performing sundry other tasks. For each of these services I would receive a small payment.

One day the merchant told me that he would take me with him in his wagon to the big market in the large city of Karillov, about 100 miles away. They loaded several vans, drawn by fine horses. My previous trips to the markets could not be compared to the one I was now to make. We were to do business in a large city, where the sales would run into thou-

sands of dollars. I was overjoyed to know that I had been elected to go and serve as a sort of mascot.

After I had made several such trips, they dressed me up nicely in boots, topcoat, a cap, and a shirt, and I looked even smarter than before. At home I was an important person. I had money to do with as I pleased and could give it to whom I pleased—a big man of eleven years! But I was beginning to realize my true situation and understood just what my future would be if I were to go on in the same cycle—traveling to marketplaces, selling *knishes*, and facing impoverished home conditions.

In spite of our poor existence, however, when my father came home on Friday after having earned \$1.50 or \$2.00 during the week, a certain holiness pervaded the atmosphere. He was much respected by the entire family, and received as much homage as was paid to a noble—in truth, he was honored like a lord. The children knew that father meant *Home*. On Friday everyone washed himself more carefully than on other days. Everything was clean and pleasant. Mother prepared *kugel*, meat, and fresh *challah*, (baked especially for the Sabbath) which foods we did not taste all week long. When father and the children came home from the synagogue, the house seemed blessed with something I could not see in other houses. My father had a patriarch's face, always with a godly smiling expression. He had the largest beard in the city—and it was always well brushed. His eyebrows were shaggier and larger than the average. He was called Ezekiel, the one with

the large black beard. In general appearance he was not unlike Dr. Herzl. When we came into the house mother already had a kerchief upon her hair and the candles were lit. She would light seven candles—three on a brass candelabrum, and four on a flat rock. The three symbolized Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the four, their wives, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

When father came into the house and said, "Good Sabbath!" mother answered with a smile. We came to the table quietly, and with the highest devotion recited the *kiddush* prayer—first father, and then each in turn according to his age. On the table there was spread a beautiful white cloth. A large wooden soup bowl with a big wooden spoon was placed before us. Mother would take off the top of the soup for father, because the top had all the fat, and we honored him in this manner. No one started the meal until father had put his first spoonful to his lips.

Thus we lived on until I made a suggestion that I saw no future for me in Mitterkiefke. I knew of a big city with a population of 100,000 gentiles and 25,000 Jews. This was Elizabethgrad. Big merchants traded there every day. My mother's stepmother had a retail grain business there, in a store worth about \$300. The produce was kept inside the little wooden shop, except when it was brought out in bundles or sacks for trade in the open street.

I journeyed to this stepmother of my mother's, and she helped me find a job in a grocery store. I was not quite twelve when I began to work, staying two

months on the basis of \$20 per year together with room and board. My early leaving was due to the fact that I became ill with a touch of pneumonia. I was brought to my grandmother, who nursed me back to health and then sent me home.

Elizabethgrad suffered a big pogrom immediately after my departure. This was in the year 1881. The stores were robbed, my grandmother's among them. Her bundles of grain were thrown into the street. Some Jews were killed. But soon there was peace again. The police came into the city and took control. But I in Mitterkiefke with matches and knishes, fish and salt, still felt that these were not big enough businesses for me to deal in. I had other aspirations since seeing the big city of Elizabethgrad. My family came to the conclusion that it was no use remaining where we were, because it was very difficult to eke out a living in our home town.

At this time a man by the name of Abraham Zinkofsky, who delivered flour to mother every week, sent a sheriff to our house one morning to collect a debt of \$15. As my father could not produce the necessary funds, the sheriff took away metal articles such as the candlesticks and *samovar* to make up the deficiency. My mother wept and said that she was ashamed to go out into the street. She and my father discussed the situation all night. It was finally decided to move from Mitterkiefke to Elizabethgrad, the big city. This would be better for the older children, especially for me, since I was most dissatisfied in Mitterkiefke.

We came to Elizabethgrad and rented two rooms, a kitchen and one other room. My mother went to her stepmother to become acquainted with the grain business. Soon thereafter the stepmother died and left the business to mother. Father used to go to the smaller villages outside Elizabethgrad to do business. Meanwhile I too was looking about for something to do. I worked in a dress goods store for several months, but quit because the salesmen and boys threw pieces of goods at one another, one of which found its mark in me. Then I obtained a job in a leather store owned by David Valodarsky. He hired me for three years (board and boots gratis) at \$15 for the first year, \$30 for the second year and \$60 for the third. I found this job very difficult, as the servant, a Jewish girl, would not give me enough to eat, unless I performed her errands for her. I had to bring pails of water from the well, and wood for the fire, and take out the garbage also; but still I was always hungry. I was then thirteen or fourteen years old. The only person who helped me was my mother. When I passed by her store she would give me a piece of bread, which I would eat while walking, she holding it for me to expedite my combined walk and meal. I always had crumbs in my pocket.

During the three years at Valodarsky's I learned the technique of salesmanship. Valodarsky himself was considered a man of unusual abilities in selling. When he dealt with a customer, he always managed to complete the transaction, regardless of price. His policy was never to deceive a customer—that was his main principle of salesmanship.

But after my three years with Valodarsky, I was counseled by people who knew me to look for work elsewhere. They advised me for my best interest—because they were accustomed to seeing me abused all the time. On more than one occasion they had come into Valodarsky's to find me crawling to my feet after having been thrown to the floor and given a beating. I explained to the neighboring storekeepers why I could not leave my boss. He had taught me how to handle a customer—not to be hasty, but size him up coolly, inquire just what he wanted to buy, and how much he wanted to spend; then proceed to show him not the merchandise he asked for, but to follow a definite policy. Some were to be shown the most inexpensive wares, then the medium-priced, and finally the most expensive stock. With others, it was necessary to display the most expensive stock first and the least expensive at the end. I must hypnotize the customer with my words and impress upon him the fact that the merchandise I wanted to sell him was the best to be obtained for the money he could afford to pay. If I did not recognize the type of goods my customer could buy, and therefore did not make a sale, my boss would beat me. Yet I felt that if I should leave him now, I would never have another chance to become a thoroughly capable salesman and know how to handle a customer properly.

My only recreation at this time was reading books—which I would do until two o'clock in the morning. The books I read were mostly novels. Whenever I

had a chance I would go to the synagogue and pray. I enjoyed hearing a cantor *daven*. As I walked from the synagogue, I would imitate the manner in which he had sung the hymns and prayers. By the time I reached home I knew the songs by heart. I had an excellent alto voice, and everyone told me so. Soon I had become an amateur cantor, although I never wanted to sing for people or show them that I could sing. When I had finished my three years and was fifteen years old, I told my neighbors that I intended to leave Valodarsky for good.

A man named Gomberg, doing business with his brother-in-law, asked me my intentions. It was now June, I told them; next month the annual fair would be held in the outskirts of Paltava. From all countries of Europe people would come, and put up tents to display their merchandise. I imagined I would meet some there who might give me a position. In the meantime I would seek work for the month, to earn a few dollars for my expenses. The merchants at the fair usually brought no salesmen; I felt certain of securing such a position. I planned then to find a permanent position with one of the merchants come to purchase. Gomberg and his brother-in-law assured me that they too would be there and would be glad to help me if necessary. I told my mother and father and the rest of my family that I was going to Paltava to look for a job. It was absolutely necessary for me to leave, because I had worked for Valodarsky, and out of loyalty to him other employers in the city did not think it fair to engage me.

These merchants were all to be found in a radius of two streets. From Elizabethgrad to Paltava is 180 miles, and the traveler between must ride all night and all the following day. My entire capital consisted of \$6.25—\$3.25 of my own and Gomberg's loan of \$3.00. My idea was to start out Saturday night and arrive in the morning at Kriminchuck, ninety miles off, which I had to pass through on the way. In Kriminchuck there were many stores in which salesmen were employed. I planned to stop over to see these men for several hours, and then continue by the next train. In particular, I wanted to see a highly reputed merchant called Moses Yedlin. I would have a talk with him and find out if he needed another salesman. This would entail no additional expense.

My mother had prepared underwear, shirts, and stockings, which I kept in a sack. She also gave me half a chicken, half a loaf of bread, sugar, and chicory, for which I could buy hot water for a penny. My mother brought the sack to me Saturday night. The children came along. Then I bought my ticket. Suddenly I was on the train—it whistled, and pulled out from the station. I was only fifteen years of age. All night I sat on a bench on the train and dreamed, until eight in the morning, when the train pulled into Kriminchuck. With the sack with all my belongings I jumped from the train, but as I did so my shoe burst and the sole separated from the upper. With a string I kept the parts together until I found a shoemaker. He agreed to mend the shoe for thirty-five cents. I left my shoes with him and betook my-

self to a restaurant next door, where I made a meal of the food I had carried from home and the chicory steeped in hot water. The hot water and a glass cost me two kopeks. After my meal I returned to the shoemaker for my shoes, but he denied that I had ever given them to him. I started to cry lustily and women began to gather about to ascertain the trouble. After two hours of weeping and argument, the shoemaker finally returned them to me.

It is important to note that in Kriminchuck half the population consisted of Jews.

After the encounter with the shoemaker I left for Moses Yedlin's place. I arrived at eleven in the morning and found him in the store. His daughter was the cashier, and he had one salesman about 40 years old and another of 25. I told him I was going to Paltava to look for a job, and that if he needed a salesman I could do the job for him as well as any one, if not better. He said he would be in Paltava and we would see each other there, also that he was interested in me as a salesman. He would inquire of the other merchants about my references. After my interview with Yedlin I returned to the station and bought my ticket for Paltava.

On the train a young gentile boy of eighteen, who was going home to his people in Rastoff, sat down next to me. He was a salesman in Kriminchuck. He said he would like to stop over in Paltava on his way home, and asked me to stay with him at his hotel for the night. I told him I had not enough money to lodge in a hotel, but would go to the fair and sleep in a

tent or on the open field. It would be two or three days before the fair opened. The young man told me that he would pay my expenses at the hotel. After we had registered, he suggested I go downstairs with him and play billiards at a nickel a game. I really wanted to go to the synagogue to pray, but inasmuch as this young man was paying my way, I felt I had to reciprocate.

Two days later he left and I went to the fair. There I met Solomon, a merchant from Vilna, whom I asked for a job. He was a manufacturer of leather goods. Since he had known me from Elizabethgrad, he agreed to give me \$15 with all expenses paid. I asked him to advance me five dollars. Then I went to the city and bought a tie and shirt and new cap, all of which helped to freshen my spirit.

Merchants began to arrive, and I soon had an offer, at \$120, to go to the city of Neiman. But I held out for \$150. Another merchant offered only \$100 for me to go to another town, but I had set my price. Moses Yedlin had come from Kriminchuck and I was certain he would give me \$150. I preferred to work for him, in any case. But he offered only \$60! In the meantime the other merchants departed and I had no other alternative.

Moses Yedlin introduced me to his salesmen and took me to his home. He had nine children, five daughters and four sons, most intelligent people. They gave me a separate room with a nice bed. I also had excellent meals at the family table. They made me feel very much at home. In the store Yedlin

recognized that I was a good salesman, that I had a certain technique in selling merchandise. Therefore, when an important customer came in, I was given the opportunity to serve him—these were the instructions delivered to the other salesmen.

The news spread about town that Moses Yedlin had brought a salesman from Paltava, one that could sell goods. One day, when I was going home for dinner, a Yekaterinslav merchant stopped me and said, "Your name is Israel, is it not? Someone recommended your services to me, and as long as you are in the market for a job as salesman, I would like to make a proposition to you. If you care to work for me—I will give you \$175 a year. You will like your surroundings with me."

I had six months more to serve Yedlin under our oral contract. The \$175 tempted me strongly, as against the paltry \$60 a year I was receiving. But I was still obligated to Yedlin. I told the impatient bidder for my services that I would notify him of my decision as soon as I made it. He said that he would leave a deposit in his hotel to be given me when I was ready, for travel expenses. I immediately penned a letter to my parents asking their advice. I had decided to leave Yedlin in favor of the higher bid and wanted to get final assent from my parents.

My father wrote in effect as follows: "Do not dare to leave Yedlin until you have completed your agreement to work with him for the entire year. If you do otherwise, I will disown you. Never call yourself my son again!"

It happened that Yedlin had got the letter first and read its contents. Someone must have told him that I had been seen with the other merchant. After supper that night he brought out the letter and showed it to me, saying, "I have a letter for you, which I opened by mistake. I see that you intend leaving my services and going elsewhere. But regardless, I want you to know that you have a fine family, because you asked your father for advice before doing anything yourself. Now it remains to be seen what you will decide. I shall not give you more than the \$60 promised you, until the year is completed. But I insist that your father is a very fine man."

I declared that I did not wish to disobey my father and go against his wishes, and would remain as I had promised. Just a month before the year was up he asked me how much I wanted for the next year, and I told him my price was \$175. This drew laughter from him. He said he would give me no more than \$75, regardless of my own ideas.

Two or three weeks passed and we kept on bargaining steadily. Finally I decided to remain with him for \$150, which I thought would be better than to go to a new place for an additional \$25. During the second year I was able to send a few dollars home, dress properly and leave myself with \$100 besides.

Then Yedlin suggested, "Do you want to save the \$100? Leave it with me, and I will give you 2% a month for it."

I did as he suggested. One day I came to him to

say that I needed the \$100 in addition to the interest due for six months. He gave me \$112 and asked the reason for withdrawing the money and losing further interest. I told him I wanted to help my mother in her grain business, and that in Kriminchuck there was a large mill producing cereals for sale to jobbers. I intended to buy the cereals at wholesale, and send her half a car load right away.

Two soldiers used to come in to Yedlin's house who knew the two older daughters. The parents did not allow the girls to go out with them because they were soldiers and soldiers did not have a good reputation. However, these two soldiers were of the better class. They used to work in the office of the headquarters. They were quite wealthy and their uniforms were custom tailored.

Years ago, a soldier could be bought in Russia for a certain amount of money to take the place of another person who did not want to go into the army. That is why a soldier had a bad name, especially when it came to taking girls out.

However, the girls wanted to go out with the soldiers and the parents finally agreed, with the condition that I go with them. They used to take me with them when they wanted to go to the theatre. They would get me a ticket for the gallery and I was to meet them at 11:30 in the lobby to go home together. When we would walk home, I would remain about a block behind them in order to give them a chance to be together. Ordinarily, the walk from the theatre to the house took five minutes, but it took them a half

hour until they came to the door, and until they went inside it took another hour. I had to wait for them and would get angry quite often as I wanted to go to sleep and could not say anything to the girls.

The second year passed and Mr. Yedlin started to talk terms for the third year. We agreed on \$300. During this year I received a telegram on the first night of Hanukkah, that my father had passed away. He had succumbed to pneumonia while working a thousand miles from the city sifting flour in a mill. Soon thereafter, when the stores were to close for three days at Christmas time, I told my boss I should like to go home to see my family.

I asked for \$100 and with this sent another load of cereals to my mother. While I was at home, my sister, Sarah, and my mother told me of their plan for me to become a partner in business with Nathan Reznikoff, son of a cousin of ours. The father had money and would support us with additional funds if we needed more. They suggested that after I terminated the third year at Yedlin's, I should consider coming home and opening a business. Nathan and I decided to write often until the end of the year so that we might become better acquainted. I said goodbye to everyone and left again for Kriminchuck.

There were four Jews in my compartment, so I went in search of six more to make up a *minyán*. I had to say *kaddish* for my father. In the second compartment I found five Jews, and in the third the needed tenth. The sixth Jew I secured to make up the ten was an elderly man with a great beard. When

I respectfully invited this patriarch to join the *minyán*, he replied he would be most pleased to oblige me.

I said *kaddish* with the afternoon service (*minchah*), and I asked them to please remain in their seats until time for the evening (*maariv*) prayers. In the interim I had a talk with the elderly tenth man, who informed me that he had come from Bapoli and was going to Rastoff. He was a dealer in fish. I told him I had an uncle in Bapoli, whom I named. He asked me if my name was Israel, the son of Ezekiel. It turned out that he himself was the uncle from Bapoli.

In Kriminchuck I resumed my work. Sarah kept writing that she was making arrangements for the partnership with Nathan. She requested that I come home a month before the expiration of my year with Yedlin. But I also received a letter from my mother saying that the cereals I had sent her were very good—delicious—in fact, so much so, that between using them for her own culinary purposes and selling them, she had no more left, and no money with which to pay the rent. From Yedlin I secured \$120 with which I again bought cereal to send home.

A month before the year was up I informed Yedlin of the partnership with my cousin, who was advancing all the necessary money, and that I would have to leave him at once to take up residence at home and help my family. Before I departed Yedlin asked if I wanted to remain—provided he gave me

more money. I explained that my income was not profitable enough to warrant my staying.

When I arrived home, I let Nathan's father know of my coming. We went together to Yussel, the cantor, and made our contract. I was then eighteen years old. Yussel asked us to be seated. He took out a sheet of paper, which he cut in half with his pen-knife, writing the contract on one half and then on the other, in duplicate. The contract stated that Nathan's father gave us (Nathan and myself) \$2000 in cash, and \$2000 more to be lent at 1% for use in the business if necessary. I would get 60% of the profits after expenses were paid and Nathan would draw 40. Yussel then wrote at the bottom the Hebrew letters, A, B, C, D—symbolizing A—Honesty; B—Blessing; C—Cheating (which would spell Failure); and D—Dallis (poverty).

I rented a store and got a license. With the \$150 brought from Kriminchuck I spent \$50 to clothe myself and the rest to rent and furnish new rooms. Then I journeyed to Paltava to purchase merchandise for \$2000, while Nathan remained in Elizabethgrad. I did not write at first as I had to look around a bit before buying; when, after a week, they finally received a letter from me, Nathan's mother fainted, because she thought I had run away with the money.

I bought the merchandise, and came home ready to do business. My mother was more cheerful as she saw a pleasanter home with more conveniences. With my salary we kept the house going. But after a partnership of one and half years I was drafted

into military service. I was given one month's time to liquidate the business—from the 27th of November to the 27th of December, 1890. At four o'clock on November 27th, I was physically examined and pronounced fit to enter the army. At home I found my partner, my mother, sisters, and brother waiting to hear the result of my interview. My sister, Sarah grieved most, because she had hoped to make better personal connections through my being in business.

"Now I shall have to wait," she mourned, "to see if you draw a ticket to permit you to leave the service after nine months and not after the full four years."

During the night I dreamt that I was fighting the Turks, that I was shooting and guns were being fired at me. The next morning I went with Nathan to the store and asked him if he would remain in the business, but he said no. We had to sell all the merchandise during the month, together with the fixtures. Nathan declared he would go to America, lest he have to serve as well the following year. After everything was sold at a loss, I had \$126 left. Of this I gave my sister \$120.

The next day an order arrived from the government that I appear at the station ready to entrain. At the third signal I entered the train. I had on a pair of gloves which my mother had knitted for me; these I threw to her as I bade her goodbye. In the compartment were fifty recruits. They sang and danced and smoked and drank as we rode to Nickolai,

where we were to serve. We were counted and taken into the armory.

Before I relate my new life in the army, I want to give an inkling of how I conducted my religious and social life. My father had been a pious man but not a fanatic in religion. I used to see him at home praying in prayer-shawl and phylacteries. He used to discuss the Talmud at the synagogue. He observed the Sabbath, and he never swore. He would always say, "God wills it so." My mother was also a pious woman, without fanaticism. Her father wore a fur *streimel*, a hat used only by very pious Jews. (To complete this costume, the very pious wore white stockings to the knee, with black slippers, and a high lustered coat that touched the ground. Knee pants were also a part of the outfit.) He was a worldly man, too, acquainted with current events.

Three of my mother's brothers were rabbis. Nevertheless, she did not cover her hair with a wig as did the very pious Jewish women; she was quite modern in her views. On Saturday, at synagogue, she would wear a shawl over her hair, as the head must be covered when entering the synagogue. There she sat with a group of women who could not read. To these she recited and explained the Hebrew words in Yiddish. Such a woman was called a "sayer."

Our parents never forced us to pray. I was more religious than my brothers or sisters, and would *daven* every day in the synagogue at daybreak. I also recited a portion of the Psalms every day. I observed the Sabbath fully; when I took a walk with

the boys in the late Sabbath afternoon and prayer time came, I would say, "Boys, wait on the corner," while I entered the synagogue. The boys protested, because I broke up the promenade.

My grandfather was my teacher when I was a little boy. When he became older he went to his other son in Hubifke, my father's older brother. This town in which my uncle lived was about twenty miles off. My grandfather died at ninety-three during the time I was in partnership with Nathan Reznikoff. He was always told that I was a religious boy and a daily attendant at the synagogue. One day I received a letter from him to come at once to see him. I went there immediately. A very old man, bent over like a question mark, greeted me.

"*Shalem alechem*, grandpa," I said; "you sent for me, so I came."

"Listen, Israel," he replied, putting his hand on my shoulder, "my father was called Israel, and you were named after him; and I was your teacher when you were a small boy. I lived with you before you moved out of Znaminka, and I went to live with my other son in Hubifke. Your father died, and I live here in a village where there are nine Jews and we have no *minyán*. When I die, your uncle will not be able to say *kaddish* for me. Therefore, I would like you to say it. In case your mother does not like this, since she may be superstitious while still alive, tell her that as a grandfather I have the same rights as a father, when the father is not living."

I promised to adhere to his wishes, and my mother

too consented. My grandfather was unusually pious. Before daybreak he would don *tallis* and *tefillin* and recite all the prayers taken from Psalms and Talmud, as well as the entire morning ritual. This might take him until 1:30 in the afternoon. He ate twice a day—after his prayers he had breakfast and lunch combined, and in the evening he had his dinner.

One day at 11:30, he called his son, my uncle Leb (Louis), and said, "Give me a little glass of whiskey, from the shelf."

His son gave him the whiskey.

Then my grandfather said, "Give me another."

My uncle was surprised. "Father, what is the meaning of this? I never before saw you take a drink during your prayers. When you asked for the first glass I thought you needed strengthening for the other two hours of praying, but when you ask me for still another glass, I am puzzled."

My grandfather answered, "First pour my second glass and then I will tell you, because the time is too short."

Whereupon my uncle poured in the other glass.

Then my grandfather shook hands with him and said, "L'chaim! When you arrive at the point where I now stand, you will also take two."

He drank the glass and added, "Call the children and I'll say goodbye to them, but first remove my *tallis* and *tefillin* and lay me down upon the divan."

Very shortly after the children had been hurried in, my grandfather bade them goodbye and passed away.

Now to go back to my life in the service. I was in the armory on my first day. The room was a dormitory containing 200 wooden beds, in four rows of fifty beds each. The mattresses were made of straw and so were the pillows, (much more healthful than feather pillows). We had plenty of blankets.

There were only three Jews amongst the 200. The remainder were comprised of Russians, Chachlos, Tartars, Polacks, Czechs, Carushions, Czerchessons, Malachanas, and many others, who had never seen a Jew. They were under the impression that a Jew had horns. That was the mildest way in which Jews had been described to them. After arising from my first night's sleep in these new quarters, I took out my *tefillin*, stood near the bed, and began to say my prayers. They all watched me strangely. But no one laughed. The sergeant came through to see that everything was clean, and inspected the satchels. But when he looked into the satchel of my Russian neighbor, he found it full of dirty clothes. He left with an order that everything be cleaned as a matter of stringent army discipline. I asked the Russian if he had soap. He replied that he had no money to purchase anything. I gave him six kopeks—three for soap and three for shoe polish. He looked at me in wonder and said, "I will never forget you. I was given the wrong impression about Jews." Every day he swept the floor around my bed, and also shined my shoes.

A few days later I received the first letter from my mother. She wrote that this Saturday, when someone

had been called from the congregation to recite the *musaf* prayer, all the women had turned to look at her. They were always jealous because I had been regularly called to *daven* this prayer. "But today they were all sympathetic with me, when someone else was called in your place, and I felt a cold sweat breaking out over me. I had to be assisted home."

In every letter she would remind me of the times when I said grace at the table. "Your way of saying *Rachem* always comes up in my mind and the tears come to my eyes."

In the city of Nickolai, where I was stationed, there lived a rich man by the name of Samuel Salevov. They said he was worth half a million dollars. Many merchants came to him from Elizabethgrad for loans. At times I would get a furlough to the city. It took me half an hour to reach the city from camp. Since I was a Jew and they knew that Jews would not get drunk or create a scandal, I had preference in obtaining leave. Once at Salevov's house I met some merchants from the city. They introduced Salevov's family to me and I was invited to come there often, to be a regular visitor.

I used to live on 20c a week. With this I bought molasses, chicory, and sugar. At night I would go to various homes similar to Salevov's and disport myself with their sons and daughters. But my problem now was: *how to make a living*. I visited a thoroughfare where old clothes were bought and sold. Here the peasants brought their farm products for sale also, and bought themselves new clothes and boots. Having been in the leather-goods business, I knew

something about leather and would buy up old boots from the peasants. Those I would bring to the army shoemakers for repair, after which I returned them to the market to be sold. In this way I earned \$5 or \$6 per week. I was thus able to give my sergeant a weekly dole of two dollars. He in return granted me special furloughs. He would let me go for a full night, and I had a great deal of freedom. In my barracks I became the go-between for the others when they had committed an offense and needed the favor of the sergeant. The sergeant in turn would talk the matter over with me and consult me on how to handle it.

Our barracks were near the harbor. When the ships were to be loaded with wheat, (this had to be completed before dawn) the manager of a ship came to the barracks and impressed about fifty men for that work. The sergeant would get a few dollars, as well as the men who performed the labor. On one occasion the manager came at night and offered three dollars to each of fifty soldiers to load the ship with coal. The soldiers were already dressed to go (the sergeant would have earned \$100 by this job). But I jumped out of bed, ran over to the sergeant, and cried, "Stop! don't send them! You will get into trouble; the boys will get so dirty they will not be able to clean themselves for a month. After loading wheat they can wash themselves and be clean immediately. The corporal will see them in the morning and you will get into trouble."

The sergeant, realizing the import of my words,

immediately halted them. After this incident, he always consulted me. This ship was supposed to leave before dawn. The manager of the boat could not get dock hands to load the coal on time, hence came to our regiment. The manager later approached another regiment and there obtained men to do the work. He paid \$5.00 to each soldier, and the sergeant received \$150 emergency pay. The following day, when the brigadier general came for inspection, he noticed many boys with black eyes and streaks of black on their faces. The sergeant had to tell what had transpired the night before. The general ordered him before a military court, which found him and his men guilty of violation of military discipline. The sergeant's stripes were removed and he was demoted from his rank. He was punished further by being given fifty stripes, while one man held him by the hands and another by the feet. All the men from the other regiments were called out to witness this punishment, while music was played. The culprit was then sent to the hospital; when his wounds healed he was incarcerated in the military prison for two years. One can imagine how deeply indebted my sergeant felt towards me, since I had saved him from a similar fate.

In this way I lived for nine months, until the time came to draw the tickets. Out of the company of 200, only 10% could draw numbers permitting them to go home; the others remained the full four years. The day before the draw, which was Thursday, I fasted and recited psalms. The gentiles wished me to be one

of the lucky ones, and the Jews prayed for me also. Everyone knew I had a large family dependent upon me at home. Yussef, a colleague of mine, and several other acquaintances asked with a smile, "You're fasting? We have fasted with a piece of pork!" and laughed at me.

On the next day they were the ones to draw the lucky numbers; and I was doomed to remain. I sat on my bed and stared glumly as each one came to offer consolation. The gentiles wept and the Jews were obviously upset. Those that had drawn lucky numbers sent telegrams home; but there was no need for me to do so. The following day I received a letter from Sarah. She wrote as follows:

"I waited for you to draw a lucky number, and had hopes that you would come home and take care of me so that I could realize my ambition of getting married. But now, that you will have to remain more than three years, you will be about 24 yourself when you return home, and you will have to think of yourself; so that the only thing left for me is to go to America. Zlinkoff and his family are going and I will travel with them. When I leave I will write to you. They are going this month. Be well; may God help you. I am on my way to America to find my luck."

Broken-heartedly, I gathered together my *tefillin*, my prayer-book, and psaltery, packed them up, and decided not to pray any more.

The lucky numbers had been drawn in August. We were living in tents instead of barracks. My regiment was called the Praski-Polk, divided into sixteen companies of 200 recruits each.

In my barracks there were but three Jews, but in the others there were as many as 30 or 40. There were rabbis among them and other educated people, with whom I became acquainted. I called a meeting of some twenty of my Jewish friends and told them the story of the lucky numbers, as a result of which I had packed away my praying shawl and prayer-book with the firm intention of never *davening* again. They decided to meet night after night to discuss the matter pro and con and to decide whether I was right or wrong. We met for two weeks in the fields, debating and arguing, until it was decided that one must pray, nevertheless. But for these two weeks I did not *daven*. After that I resumed my devotions, begging God's forgiveness for having sinned against Him. When not praying I was in a state of melancholia, but when I started to pray again I found myself greatly relieved. I wept bitterly and felt much lighter at heart.

Christmas came. And as is customary at this time, a tree was lit with candles, however, instead of lamps, as there were none to be gotten where we were. The tree was hung with 200 candles and trimmed with colored paper streamers. The gentiles went to church for the evening and I remained as watchman. After a while I fell asleep and one of the candles fell over, causing the entire tree to become enveloped in flames. One of the sergeants, lying on a bench a short distance away, saw the glare, and ran toward me, calling out, "Watchman!" At the same time he threw the tree to the ground. With his shoes

he extinguished the flames of candles and streamers. When I ran over, he started crossing himself and thanked God, saying to me, "You are lucky that I saw it." I certainly was, as for this accident I most likely would have had a military trial because it would have been said that I had done it intentionally and I would have been sentenced to years of hard labor in Siberia.

I served my three years. Sarah wrote from America that she had married Nathan Reznikoff, who had been my partner before I was forced to serve in the army. I continued my business of buying and selling old boots. Nights I would enjoy myself at the homes of some very good people.

I used to sing in my lyric tenor and my tent was always crowded with soldiers harmonizing with me as leader. Sometimes the officers (even the captains) would stand outside and listen, and they always begged me to sing for them. My rendition of tragic songs often brought tears to their eyes.

At this time a few girls tried unsuccessfully to attach themselves to me, and to accomplish this purpose (which would give them a claim upon me) they wanted to lend me money.

Before I completed my fourth year of service, Czar Alexander III died. Therefore, the soldiers were kept on an extra month. Tovarofsky, son-in-law of one of the merchants of Elizabethgrad, at whose home in Nickolai I had spent many a pleasant evening, gave me \$75, as I had no money with which to

buy civilian clothes, I promised that when I reached home and began to earn money I would return it to him.

I arrived late in the afternoon, before Yom Kippur. My mother was already in the synagogue, so I ate rapidly and rushed off to services. By the time I entered the third Kol Nidre was being said. During the recess after this prayer I sent someone upstairs to call my mother down. After tears and embraces, we arranged to go home together as soon as the services were ended. I looked around and saw the bad condition of everything. There was no furniture; everything was broken; and I realized that this was no place in which to live. I was introduced to a young man living in my mother's home, who, I was told, was engaged to my sister, Frieda. The other children had been distributed among various merchants, with whom they worked and lived. Only Frieda and my mother had remained.

The day after Yom Kippur, on going into the market I felt strange, as though I had just been born. I had been thinking and making plans. I did not want to be a salesman because I had already been a merchant (and besides, a salesman's salary was never very high). And what girl would desire me if I were a salesman? I could make a much better match if I were in business. But where was I to get the money? That night I went to see Jacob Reznikoff, an uncle of Nathan Reznikoff's. We discussed the future.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"If I had \$500," I said, "I would do something."

He answered, "I am a salesman, (which I have been all my life), and I have managed to save \$500. I also have five children. I will lend you the \$500 until you are again on your feet."

He then asked his wife Sarah for her opinion. She said, "Give it to him and may God help him."

He added, "You can have it tomorrow; I shall go to the bank and take it out."

I told him not to withdraw the money until I asked him to. All night I could not sleep, in my excitement.

The following morning I went to see Yusseff Dubinsky, a friend, and told him that I had \$500 to start with in business.

He said, "I will give you \$200 for four months, on a note."

I then turned to Moses Dubinsky, saying that I had \$700 to venture into business, and he said he would lend me \$300 for six months on a note. I collected the \$1,000 and went out to rent a store for \$120 a year. I paid three months' rent and took out a business license at the city hall for \$24. I fixed shelves and counters and made signs with "Israel Wolwoffsky" in large letters, so that everyone might see that I was back for business.

I told my mother of my intention of fixing up a nicer home, since I was a young man looking for a wife. I took rooms in the heart of the city, and bought new furniture. This all cost me about \$75. I was left with \$850. Then I met Isaac Maslinikofsky, a commissionaire for factories. His word was law in

the market. I told him that I was riding to Charkov where the market was situated. He said, "God speed you, I will see you there. I will see what I can do for you."

The remaining cash was sewed into my vest pocket. I stopped at a hotel on the public square, where there were also the synagogue, restaurants, stores, and temporary stalls, which were rented out for one month. There Isaac Maslinikofsky met me.

"Well, Israel, what are you doing?"

"I'm just looking around, that's all. I haven't bought anything yet."

He then said, "Come with me."

He escorted me to a Moscow merchant named Rastofstov, one of the largest traders in leather goods. Maslinikofsky said, "I want to present a new merchant, an honest boy."

Rastofstov turned to me. "All right; pick out merchandise; I will give you \$1,000 credit for six months on a note."

I selected \$1,000 worth of merchandise to be sent me. When I left Rastofstov and approached other merchants I gave his name as reference. I bought \$2,900 worth of merchandise without paying one cent. I then went home with the \$850, which I used to buy certain small lots of merchandise that I needed to fill in. I bought my sister a sewing machine, as she had none despite being a dressmaker.

Then I started to do business. Becoming acquainted with the commander of the regiment in Elizabethgrad, I got his order to furnish the troops

with leather for soles and heels. I made a living, paid my bills, and my inventory showed \$6,000!

Now I began seriously to consider marriage. Each evening I would see a different girl, but none seemed to please me. One evening I came home and in disgust told this to my mother. She replied, "Don't worry, my son; when you meet the right one she will undoubtedly please you."

I still owed Jacob Reznikoff some money but did not want to take cash from my business for this purpose. I was waiting for a possible dowry with my future wife, so that I could pay off this debt. A matchmaker proposed that I see a girl who had been brought up by her grandfather, and was still living with him. The grandfather had a tobacco store on the next street. He had two grandchildren whom he had brought up and he proposed that I see the older one. I met the girl and she pleased me very much. I was promised a dowry by the grandfather, who was thought to be wealthy. The girl (fifteen years of age) and myself were engaged, and the wedding was arranged to take place within a few months. I then went to Jacob Reznikoff to report that the wedding would soon be held, that before that time the grandfather would surely give me the dowry, and that I would then be able to give him back the \$500 with interest.

It was the law in this city for all stores to be opened on Sunday at eight sharp and closed at three. After having dinner, which took an hour, six friends would come together—the same friends who had

helped establish me in business—to play cards. On this Sunday I told them I had an appointment with my bride for six and therefore would not be able to play more than two hours. Now it happened that I won fourteen roubles, so that when I rose to leave the others were dismayed. Despite my explanations, one of my good friends arose and shouted emphatically, “Sit down! you can’t leave; you have to keep on playing cards!”

The rest sided with him and demanded that I remain. Their demeanor was not short of murderous. I tried to explain that I had warned them I would have to go after two hours and there was no means of informing the girl that it was not possible for me to meet her. But I found argument futile. They were my friends, without whom I could not very well stand on my own feet when I needed assistance.

Meanwhile my bride was impatiently waiting. I sat and played to eleven o’clock, until I lost back the fourteen roubles. I made a promise then and there that I would never play cards again, a promise which I kept over thirty years. When I came to my bride the next day, she wept bitterly as I tried to explain. But finally we became reconciled.

The time was approaching for the wedding. Her grandfather called me into a separate room and handed me \$400. He said, “Here is \$400; I’m sorry I can’t give you any more than that.” The dowry had been stipulated as larger than that amount. But I said no word to either my bride or my mother. I just bit my lips and took the \$400. To this I added \$200,

which I drew from the business, and went to Jacob Reznikoff, saying I had come to pay him back the \$500, with \$100 interest.

Frieda was married and I took my mother to live with me. I had a big wedding. Then I furnished a home completely with new furniture. After a while we were blessed with a child, Ida.

My brother Michael, the eldest, died, and his three children remained orphans. I took one of them to be reared by me.

Business was not bad. I went to Charchove to buy merchandise. One huge building was the entire market, in which merchants, manufacturers, and importers gathered. The owner of the market was a gentile, who had built a synagogue especially for the Jews. Friday night, when the time approached for prayer, the question was asked, "Who can be the cantor and conduct the services?" The congregation consisted of 150 people. A neighbor, Nuzik, from my city, who sat near me, pointed out that I could perform that duty. But I had never attempted to pray publicly in another city, amongst so many strange people. I finally acquiesced, and was widely acclaimed. On Saturday morning, I was again asked to serve. There was a still larger crowd. It was the Saturday of the blessing of the new moon. Once more I was acclaimed. The following day, Sunday, when I went out into the market to purchase merchandise, everybody greeted me and declared that I would make an excellent cantor.

Again in my home city, I was invited to officiate in

a synagogue, the proceeds to be used for the purpose of getting wood for fuel in the holy place. We collected twenty-eight roubles that Saturday, and they had enough wood to heat the synagogue for the entire winter. I was constantly invited to preside as cantor for benefits, and I became most capable. In my house the neighbors would gather around to hear me and join in. Especially when I sang Friday eve Sabbath songs there was a crowd listening to me. After the Sabbath supper when I recited the grace the women neighbors would cry with emotion. When a cantor came to town for the Sabbath he was my guest. The entire household re-echoed with our chanting.

I was asked time and again why I did not choose to adopt the profession. But I replied that I preferred other means of making a living, and that I enjoyed singing for my own pleasures and that of the people. On one occasion Cantor David Rutman's father-in-law Abraham, who was sexton of the "blue" synagogue, called me over and said, "God gave you a diamond, which is in your throat, and there will come a time when Nature will question, What did you do with His gift?" He told me this because I sometimes refused to perform services in the synagogue. "If the people like your *davening*, you must *daven*," he added. "I advise you to give to humanity the great gift which you were blessed with and which all of the people enjoy so much."

In the largest synagogue there was a noted cantor called Jacob Schnurman. I went to his home and re-

requested his honest opinion of my voice. Though I had no desire to turn cantor, I did not propose to make a fool of myself by singing at popular request if my voice was not adapted therefor. After hearing me he proclaimed that I had a wonderful lyric tenor, and that if I were to study I could become a great cantor.

In the business section where I kept my store, I was appointed by the Jewish community board to care for all strangers who were in need, to see that they had food and shelter and enough money to continue on to another city. I had a charity box in my store from which I would take to give to the needy. I also would loan money to troubled business men with the consent of the rest of the board, after I had set forth the case of the recipient. At this time I had three salesmen in my store, and was fairly prosperous. At noon I would close my store for lunch and at two re-open. Before evening I left for the synagogue, where I served as *gabbai*, and where all awaited me for the evening service. When a cantor came to the city, I would make arrangements for him to earn a few dollars, and provide his Sabbath meals at my home.

One winter Friday night, when the ground was covered with snow, as I approached my home I found a baby wrapped in a blanket, upon my doorstep. My mother and I took the infant girl to the police station, where we left her to be taken care of.

On another occasion, when I was returning from business, the entire block was surrounded by people

gazing toward my home. I could barely push my way through. I asked what was the matter. My servant was dying—could not move, I was told. A doctor and a policeman were called. Meanwhile a rumor went about that the Jew had poisoned the girl. Sometimes an incident like this was sufficient to instigate a pogrom. The doctor took off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves. While the policeman carried her by the feet and I held her hands, the doctor kneaded her stomach for three hours until she finally managed to breathe a little. By ten o'clock she sat up. It seemed she had been ironing and had been overcome by gas from the coal. It would have been sufficient for one of the crowd to yell, "Hit the Jew!" to start a pogrom.

While we lived here Edith and Bella were born.

On the same block that I had my store a man moved in. It was his own store and it had been empty. This same man had another store on the same block, but on the other side of the street, and he used to do his business there. The other store, however, burned down and he moved next door to me. He had a salesman, Mr. Alter, who was with the owner for ten years. This man used to aggravate me, as he spoiled my business by taking my customers away. I felt that if he stayed in that place much longer, I would have to close my store as he would ruin me. The only thing I thought I could do was to give the salesman a better price than he was getting and hire him, thereby forcing the other store to move out. However, I thought this would be a sin and I hesi-

tated in doing this, as according to the Bible, a person was not allowed to take something that belonged to another and this salesman was with that store for ten years and really belonged there.

Into this city Rabbis used to come who were well known throughout the world. They were called *Tsardikem*. They came from Tvarskis. I decided to ask advice from one of these rabbis, whether or not I could take this salesman away and would explain the circumstances that were forcing me to do a thing like this and would also tell him that if I took his salesman away, I would ruin him instead of him ruining me.

I went to see this rabbi and he told me not to take him, as the owner was going to move out in a few days. That week he moved out.

It is worthwhile describing my feelings when I came into the rabbi's home. When I entered the house and went into his room, I shivered when I looked at him as his face was something that I had never seen before, and I have seen many people in my course of life. He was about sixty years old and had a very holy face.

Dr. Theodor Herzl's name was well-known at this time. He started the movement for building up Palestine, and the first congress for this purpose was held in Basle, Switzerland. The people of Elizabethgrad selected Rabbi Toumpkin to represent them at the congress. Upon his return to our city a mass meeting was held, and Toumpkin told us that the congress had resolved to establish in the Colonial

Bank of London, a fund for the specific purpose of buying land in Palestine, this money to be realized through the sale of stock at \$8 a share. Also, whoever sold 100 shares was entitled to have his name written in the bank's Golden Book. In a short period I sold 100 shares and my name was thus inscribed.

It was my custom to bring home for the Sabbath a poor man to be given food and shelter. Every Sabbath there would be twenty to thirty such men from other cities. Each business man who could afford it would take one to his home. It once happened that I pointed out a certain man to the sexton to be my guest. I asked his name and his mother's name, and recognized him as a boy from the village of Mitterkiefke. When my mother used to bake *knishes* his mother baked bagel. I proposed to start him in a small enterprise—to get him a license to peddle baskets of oranges and other fruits instead of begging for a living. I told him that as soon as he showed results, I would be willing to help him further.

But he answered as follows: "Israel, do you think I didn't recognize you? I ride past here every two years, and I see your business is larger than it was two years ago. However, let me tell you that I am much better off than you. I've been riding around like this for the past twenty-five years, and when I leave a city I always leave it with a nice few dollars. But you can't sleep because you worry so much—you have to worry about your business. You have to pay notes. Sometimes you don't do as much business as you should and are left with surplus merchandise on

your hands. With me it's entirely different. In my business there are many fools who give and give and keep on giving. Even if I were to live 1,000 years I would still have enough fools to take care of me by furnishing me with food, lodging, and money too. So, my friend, what use is a business to me—a business of the sort that you just recommended? Good luck! Be well, and I'll see you again in two years!"

In this interval one of my brothers was ordered before a commissary to be examined for the Army. I had a contract with the government to deliver the leather which they purchased for the soldiers. I was known as a *padrachnik*—one who sells products to the army. Therefore I was well acquainted with the head of the commissary and the doctors. I paid them \$400, for which I got a white pass stating that my brother was not fitted in health for the service. I, myself, had to go into training for three weeks every five years—this was a procedure ordered by the government for soldiers on reserve until the age of 50. Since I was a *padrachnik* and knew the proper persons I paid \$100 and received my own white ticket to the effect that I was not fitted for military duty.

My brother, Abraham, who served in the army for four years, came home at this time in his uniform. He had no civilian clothes to wear—in fact, he had no money, either. As I was in business and my credit was good, I brought him into a clothing store to be fitted for a suit of clothes. I also gave him a few dollars. My mother went to live with Frieda and I took Abraham to live with me. I provided his room

and food until he should be able to get upon his feet.

"You are at the age when people try to get you a nice girl with a dowry, so that you can marry and settle down," I told him, "and if you were in business it would be still better for you."

I took him to Zaslowsky Brothers and also to the Derzowitz Company, and they extended him credit, for which I signed. He was able to open a dress goods store, without personal expense, because he was living with me. He became engaged and received a dowry, but when the notes came due for the merchandise he refused to pay them with the money thus received. I argued with him and told him how foolish it was for the dowry money to be lying in the bank, when he should be paying the notes with it, and that I had not enough money myself to pay for his merchandise. I added that I was threatened with bankruptcy. But he still insisted that I pay for the goods while his money lay in the bank. In three months he realized the money required. Because of this incident we have not spoken to each other for thirty-five years.

After a few years, when I already had three children, my stepfather and mother-in-law and Alex Reznikoff went to America. In the year 1903—May 1—in the city of Elizabethgrad, a conflict arose between the Russian government and the working class. The government ordered the stores closed, as Cossacks and the police were fighting with the working people. I closed my store, came home at 9:30 in the morning, and told my wife, "In order to save our

children and ourselves too, we must emigrate to a foreign country. Last week when the rumor went about that a pogrom was expected, I hid my merchandise between the ceiling and upper floor which I tore apart for the purpose. As far as I can see now the future looks very dark; and while they are young is the time to leave, so that the children will have a fresh start in a new country where there are freedom of speech and peace of mind."

I called a meeting of all my nearby friends and relatives, I outlined my plan and showed them my reasons for leaving the country. They told me that what would happen to their children would happen to mine; to take my chances and not break up my business. But after several meetings, I decided definitely to liquidate my merchandise. This took four months, after which time I was off with my wife and children to America.

I had four thousand dollars with me when I arrived at New York on a Tuesday morning, September 15, 1903. Hence I did not have to pass through Ellis Island. The boat docked at the 50th Street pier and I came ashore. With a horse and carriage we proceeded to the home of my stepfather and mother-in-law at 76th Street and First Avenue. There they conducted a jewelry and pawn shop. They called my sister Sarah and my brother-in-law, Nathan Reznikoff, and we had supper together for the first time in America.

While I was at the table, my brother-in-law told me to remove my goatee, lest I be stoned by the

FROM SHOP TO SYNAGOGUE

boys. I answered that if a person could be stoned for wearing a goatee in this country, I would go on to another land.

Next day at the corner of 73rd Street and First Avenue, I took a three room apartment and furnished the rooms with all necessary household equipment. Friday morning after breakfast I took a walk to City Hall and at eleven o'clock obtained my first citizen papers, for which I paid twenty cents.

The following week I sought out a Jewish neighborhood where Yiddish was spoken. This was on Hester Street. I felt that I was back home in Elizabethgrad, and decided to open a business there. I engaged a salesman by the name of Mutchnick at \$14.00 a week and opened a retail dress and dry goods store. We went to H. B. Claflin on Worth Street, where we selected \$1,000 worth of merchandise, and purchased additional wares from others. I opened my business at 98 Hester Street on the 25th of the month in which I had arrived from Europe. Then I took a four room apartment near my store, at Forsythe and Hester, for which I paid \$16.00. Thereafter Isaac Liss, a relative, arrived in America; and I arranged to make him a partner in my business. He brought with him \$1400 in cash. We were each to draw \$16.00 a week for living expenses. Saturday the store was to be closed—that was my decision.

But after six weeks with Liss, Nathan Reznikoff, a foreman with Eddelson in house dresses, offered to join me in business; and he paid back the \$1400

Liss had contributed to the first partnership. We became the firm of Wolwoff & Reznikoff. We also drew \$16.00 a week each, but could not meet expenses. Reznikoff insisted that we were losing business by keeping closed on Saturdays. So one Saturday he opened the shop without my knowledge. After this incident we decided to dissolve the partnership, as I refused to have the store open on the Sabbath, and the business did not realize enough for me to remain.

An auctioneer was called in and we asked \$2700 for the merchandise. But when I told him that we had to get out of business, he assumed that we owed money for the merchandise and wanted to sell it and run away. We decided to go to a lawyer on Rivington Street to make out a bill of sale, and the \$2700 would be delivered to me there, with the lawyer as witness. When the lawyer opened the door he pretended he had been sleeping. The auctioneer requested him to make out a bill of sale to the effect that he had bought merchandise from me for \$2700. When the lawyer sat down to write the bill the auctioneer put the money on his desk. Reznikoff, my partner, and Bershovsky, my salesman, were at the lawyer's also. When the lawyer gave the bill to me for my signature, the money was still lying on the desk. I declared that before I intended to sign, I wished to count the money and deposit it in my pocket. The lawyer said, "You're not giving your confidence to the auctioneer when you sign the bill, but are entrusting it to me, your lawyer; and here

is the money right on the table." I was able to comprehend that everything had been premeditated with the auctioneer, that I give my signature and receive in return just a few dollars—not the amount agreed upon. I told him that I believed the top one to be the only \$100 bill, and the rest just dollar bills. I ordered them to take off the first bill and let me see what the others were. They refused. Reznikoff, Ber-shovsky, and myself left, and the deal was off.

The auctioneer ran after me shouting, "You green-horn you, you had better take the money or you won't get anything, because the creditors will take away everything tomorrow!"

The next day the auctioneer called up H. B. Claffin and other wholesalers and notified them that I wanted to sell my merchandise. The wholesalers called me to ask if this were true. I asked them what they had told the auctioneer and they replied that they had informed him there were no bills outstanding against my name,—that I was clear of any debts to them. I sold my merchandise at cost price to the retail public and tried to clear up all my old stock without additional purchases.

Saturday morning of the week after this experience with the auctioneer I picked up the newspaper and read that Mr. Horowitz the manager of the Windsor Theatre was advertising for cantors to appear Saturday afternoon at two for audition for the high holy days. They were to come to 270 Ludlow Street, to be heard by the choir director, Mr. Gazinsky, and by Mr. Horowitz. After my lunch I decided

to go over and see what was going on. Twenty-five cantors were already there, and each one was being tested in turn. Then Mr. Gazinsky approached me and asked if I wanted to demonstrate my ability. I assented and proceeded to give them a rendition of *Hashkivenu*, a prayer of Kol Nidre night. They came over that same evening to contract for three days' service at \$300.

Within a week the store realized \$1000. The auctioneer came to me and asked why I had not told him that my stock was *kosher*—that is, that there were no payments due. I sold him the remainder of my stock for \$1800, and Reznikoff and myself dissolved the partnership. Reznikoff went out to look for work, and I came to Morris & Mitchell, also to Tausend & Mountain, auctioneers on Leonard Street, who disposed of surplus manufactures of silks and ribbons.

Now I had two problems confronting me. One was to make a living, and the other to provide safety for my children, for we were living in a dangerous and congested neighborhood. I found a residential block and rented an apartment at 216 East 5th Street, next to Beethoven Hall. This street had practically no traffic.

Then, at Tausend & Mountain's, I found I was able to buy silk at 36c a yard every Tuesday, when a certain mill sent in its over supply. The following day I would receive the merchandise I had bought; I sold it at 42½c and thus made a living, \$35 a week. This continued for several months. One

Tuesday, when I came to the usual sale, I observed that the quality of silk that I had bought up to then was no more to be found. I felt and looked disheartened. Mr. Tausend, a man of 75, noticed the expression on my face. He called me into his office, and picked up a piece of paper from the desk, on which he wrote the following: Ashley & Bailey, 136 Spring Street. He told me that they had the silk I wanted and to say that I had been referred to them by him.

At Ashley and Bailey I beheld a tremendous stock of silks such as I had never seen in my entire lifetime. A salesman, named Childs, asked me what I wanted and I showed him the note from Tausend. I was able to obtain the silks without trouble. That day I bought three pieces containing sixty yards each, flung them over my shoulders, and proceeded to Broadway to sell them to the manufacturers. This procedure I followed every day. After a few months, just before Columbus Day (on which the banks are closed) I prepared certified checks from the bank so as to be able to pay for my merchandise, since I never liked to carry money with me. When I bought the merchandise I handed the certified check to Childs. (My goods had already been packed.) He handed the check to the younger Ashley (a man of about forty) whereupon he and Childs and the rest of the salesmen present came over to inform me that they must refuse to take the check, as they only wanted cash. I became excited and cried at the top

of my lungs, "Are you crazy? This is a certified check!"

Mr. Ashley's face turned as red as a beet, while the salesmen laughed loudly. He went off to a corner and told Childs to honor the check now but never to accept another check from me—every future transaction to be handled on a strictly cash basis.

Then Childs spoke to me quietly, "Do you realize that you screamed so audaciously to a man who is worth ten million and has a home in Long Island worth half a million?"

I still insisted that millionaire or not, he must be crazy to refuse my certified check, after I had been buying from them for over a year.

The following day I came again. Childs approached me and asked, "Do you want merchandise?"

I answered, "Yes, but no checks, or cash either. I want to open an account and I want to see the credit man."

Mr. Bailey, the credit manager, was pointed out to me. I came over to his office and saw a man of seventy, whom I informed of my wish to open an account. He motioned to me to have a seat.

"What is your name?" he asked.

I replied, "My name is Israel Wolwoff." I said I had been buying from the company for the past year for cash, and that I found it difficult to get cash all the time, and therefore, wished to be granted a credit account; that I was a depositor of the Jefferson Bank on Canal Street; and that I owed no one

any money, and had no other references save the bank.

He opened the ledger and saw pages and pages with the name Israel Wolwoff, as having made purchases two or three times a day. He called up the bank from another office, and after the telephone conversation, informed me that my credit would be good for \$1000. I came over to Childs and asked him to wrap up five pieces of silk for me, which I was taking for credit, not cash. He went to Ashley to check up, and was informed that the credit office had extended me credit up to \$1000. The look of consternation on Childs' face when he received this bit of information may be left to the imagination. I kept on buying these silks for another few months, until they discontinued their manufacture. Once more I was out of business.

My daughter, Lilly was born on 216 Fifth Street. My living quarters again became unsatisfactory. Various nationalities held their meetings at Beethoven Hall, and my children would run up there with the other neighborhood youngsters. I found a suite of rooms on South 4th Street, Brooklyn. I lived there for several years, during which time my wife gave birth to a son, whom we called Ezekiel. But I still was not contented. The children would stay out in the street at all hours—a practice of which I did not approve. Then in the East New York section of Brooklyn, on Barbey Street, I rented a home with my brother-in-law, Reznikoff. It was in this new home that my little girl Clara arrived.

During this time I was in various types of businesses—auctioneering, peddling, jobbing, installment selling—until I visited my sister up-town on 116th Street. I noticed a red hat in the window of her ground floor apartment. She explained that while Nathan, her husband, was looking for a job she had gone to Wellerman and studied millinery.

"I made this red hat and here is another one," she said. "You are a business man; go ahead and try to develop this business. Nathan is a good inside manufacturing man. I can help too, and you can be the outside man."

I replied that I would try her plan—start out with four samples, after she had made up two more hats.

At this time my son became ill of mastoiditis, pleurisy and pneumonia. After seven weeks he recovered, but the operation and other medical attention had cost me \$700.

When I came to my sister again she had the four hats made up for me. I went to the corner of Houston Street and Broadway, where there were many millinery stores. Before starting, I had arranged with my brother-in-law and sister the price the hats were to bring. The cost to us was \$8.00; they were to be sold for \$12.00. I went into a corner store owned by Johnny Miles, and he ordered four dozen at that price. In the next building Sullivan & Drow gave me an order for four dozen of each (sixteen dozen altogether). When I saw that I had thus made \$80 in two sales, I decided that this was a worthwhile business. We earned a good livelihood.

A neighbor heard that I was a capable cantor. He and a committee came to me with the request that I conduct services for them on the high holy days. We rented a hall at Schenck and Dumont Avenues and made \$1500 profit. I took no money for my services. This money was the foundation for the building of the Dumont Avenue Talmud Torah, which is still in existence today.

There was a *minyan* in a little house at Ashford Street and Blake Avenue, and I came for the last two days of Passover to conduct services there. The understanding was that a collection would be started for the purpose of building a synagogue. \$280 was collected that evening, and today a large synagogue is in existence as the result of that first offering. Its name is Atereth Tifereth Israel, so called as an honor to me for having proposed the idea of building it.

We made out well in the millinery line and managed to save enough to buy the house we lived in—572 Barbey Street. Reznikoff and myself thus became partners in our home too.

One Saturday in 1905, while the Hudson-Fulton celebration was taking place, I watched a parade on Eastern Parkway. I observed that the air was much more healthful there than where I was living and also that the neighborhood itself was much pleasanter—almost like the open country. That night I suggested that I would like to move for I was dissatisfied with my children again staying out late with other youngsters. I knew that on Eastern Parkway

there were not so many children to play with, and that these were a more select group. I could not sell the house, because my sister refused to dispose of her part. I did the next best thing—I rented out my rooms.

Now, finally, I had found a proper environment for my children—where they would be indoors by eight o'clock safe in their home. But man proposes, and God disposes. My wife passed away, leaving me with six little ones, and one infant five weeks old. Her illness had cost me \$1400—the sum invested as my share of the home I had bought with my brother-in-law. I was notified by the hospital to take the child home, as they had no right to keep a baby unless the mother were there with it.

The old Mrs. Reznikoff came to visit me. She spoke, “Up to now you have been a father only. Now you have to be mother and father too. May God help you!”

To make my living I had to travel on the road two weeks in each month. Who would take care of my children? All day long they would be left alone. The oldest was fifteen. I needed a responsible motherly woman to take care of them and to cook, in addition to the Polish servant who did the housework. This girl spent one day washing, the next ironing, and the rest of the week in general cleaning.

I secured a woman to take care of the children and cook, but in the evening I was told that she had beaten the children. I immediately discharged her, and the employment office sent me another in her

stead, for which I paid them another fee. But I found out that this was all a racket. After the employment office had received their commission, they would notify the woman to leave, because they had found her a new place. And so the cycle kept on.

Now I was faced by another problem. I had to entrust the baby to a wet nurse. I finally found one at 150 Essex St. This woman nursed her own baby besides my own. The atmosphere in her home was unbearable. Her children were crawling around the floors, and the air was foul. Another nurse turned out to be just as miserable as the first one: and the change was not healthy for the baby. My expense was already great. I secured a third wet nurse who came to my house to live. That increased the number of strangers in my home to three. The result was that the older children cared for the baby themselves, in addition to the serving people.

I heard of a child institution on 188th Street, caring for infants up to the age of six. On investigation, I came to the conclusion that the surroundings were ideal—every child had his own bed and everything was clean. There was also a trained staff of nurses and doctors always in attendance. After speaking with the superintendent and securing all necessary information, I learned that the president of this institution was a millionaire philanthropist. I made out a formal application for admission of my baby, and another to become a member of the institution as donor of \$100 a year. They returned the applications together with the \$100, saying that

they could not accept the money and would not accept my baby, because their constitution provided that only children of the needy could be admitted. A Mr. Smith, owner of a department store on 14th Street, and others of my friends who happened to be members of the board of directors of the institution, advised me to pay \$20 a week, in addition to the \$100 donation, for the upkeep of my baby. Thus, they said, the institution would have nothing to lose. I took their advice and sent \$120 in advance, promising to pay \$20 weekly. Both the \$100 and \$20 checks were returned to me. They could not break precedent and go against their laws, and therefore, were obliged to refuse my petitions as they had done in previous cases. I was left to care for the older children, besides traveling on my business route. The baby passed away after four weeks.

I was appointed on a committee by my society, the Yelle Sovet Grad Society, to buy cemeteries. On the Mount Carmel Cemetery, we had an order to buy twenty plots. The price was \$175 for a plot which was 16 x 20 and made up fourteen graves. When we had to write up the contract, I insisted that we buy forty plots instead of twenty. There was a parcel of forty-eight and we made a contract for forty and the eight were left. We were to pay \$1000 in cash and the balance was to be paid in installments.

When we gave the report at the meeting that we had bought forty plots instead of twenty, there was a big protest and everyone claimed we had ruined the society. Mr. Lierof took the floor and made a

motion that they should suspend me from the society because of this act. I then took the floor and explained that it was a bargain and that I would take four plots for my father-in-law, my two brothers-in-law and myself and that I would give them \$100 profit on each plot, in cash. That meant that I would pay \$1100 immediately, \$1000 would be for them to pay for the lots and \$100 would remain in the treasury. They would have \$400 profit and would not have to invest anything in the deal.

Another brother, Mr. Tumkin, made an amendment to this motion. He said that if I want to buy the four plots, I should give \$500 a plot. With this amendment, the meeting was brought to a close.

The meeting took place on Saturday. On Sunday night, I had to go to St. Louis on business, therefore, I rose early Sunday morning and called the manager, Mr. Rosenthal, of the cemetery, and told him I was going to see him. When I came there, I told him that as long as there were eight plots left, he should sell it to me. He told me that he could not sell it to an individual person as it had to be sold only to organizations. I told him I was forming my own society.

I called up my brother-in-law, Reznikoff, and told him of this plan and that he would be president and my father-in-law would be treasurer and I would be the secretary and vice-president. We called this society the Izrael Yelle Sovet Grad Society. I spent \$25 to send for a charter to Albany and thus was able to buy the eight plots at \$175 a plot.

When I came to the next meeting of the society, they told me that I made them buy forty plots and bought eight plots for myself. I told them I wanted to still give them the same proposition as I previously had wanted to and they should take the eight plots from me. They finally decided to give me the four plots for \$1100 and took the eight plots from me.

A report from one of the meetings many months after the last one told me that they had collected over \$10,000 profit after everything had been paid for and still had ground to use.

Now, I had vowed that although I never intended to make a livelihood from my ability as cantor, nevertheless, I wished the community at large to benefit from my gift; to that end I would offer my services gratis for the Sabbath and high holy days. I performed high holy day services three consecutive years for the Elizabethgrad Ferein, and the money received I sent to the less fortunate people of my home city. A committee came to me from a Talmud Torah (Tifereth Zion) in Eastern Parkway, of which Kapelovich, editor of the Jewish Morning Journal, was president. 200 children were attending the Talmud Torah, about to be closed if the mortgage was not paid. They begged me to save them, by conducting the services, thereby drawing capital with which to pay off the mortgage. This I did gladly, and saved the Talmud Torah.

At another time, while I was chanting at Lincoln Place, Brooklyn, a committee approached me on the Day of Atonement to conduct later services at Vic-

toria Hall, St. Johns Place and Schenectady Street, since they wanted to dispense with their present cantor, who had proved unsatisfactory. I said I would be glad to comply if those who attended give donations for the Old Aged Home at Howard and Dumont Avenues. They agreed and the contributions amounted to \$331. That same evening Messrs. Werbelowsky and Rosenblum and myself delivered the money to the Home.

The Mizraha Synagogue on 6th Street, New York, between First Avenue and Avenue A, had just been erected. President Orenstein and Vice-president Borenstein, who had businesses near my own, asked me to conduct services for the high holy days. They made a contract to send the money due me to my city, Elizabethgrad. I was to receive a receipt the day following the Day of Atonement. But I did not receive the document, and I had written to the people in Elizabethgrad that they were to expect the money. My old townfolk informed me they were in dire need and had not received the fund, I made mention of. I showed the letters and demanded the funds of the synagogue. After six months when they still had not forwarded the money, I went to Dr. Judah Magnes at 22nd Street and Second Avenue. He was chairman of the Jewish Arbitration Board. He summoned the officers to Rabbi Philip Klein, Rabbi M. Z. Margolies, A. Yarmulowsky, the banker, and the lawyer, Abraham Shomer. The decision ordered that the money I had earned by conducting the services be sent to Elizabethgrad.

My children, when they had to say *kaddish* for their mother, were able to do so in my own home, because I had a Torah which I had borrowed from the synagogue, and a *minyan* came to my house for that purpose.

My neighbors above told me that the woman I had engaged to care for my children would very often beat them. I immediately discharged her. I bought a one-family home to give my children the feeling that they were not in strangers' and neighbors' homes all the time. The house was situated at 1721 President Street, a half block from a park, which cut off approach of traffic. They were always safe. We had a porch and a back yard with flowers. The cellar was rebuilt for entertainment purposes and also had a room for a storage. Every two weeks I would go to Brownsville and buy bushels of tomatoes, apples, potatoes, and other fruits and vegetables, so that there would always be a sufficient supply on hand. Also each fortnight, I would examine the children's clothing and shoes, to see if they needed repairs and if the supply had to be replenished. They attended public school regularly and were in bed promptly at eight. The older children took care of the younger ones. They had their individual beds. Each room had two windows. Their environment was excellent. They played in the safety of the back yard and also in the park nearby.

Thus the children grew up nicely. I paid a Dr. Dottlebaum to visit them regularly to see whether they needed special medical attention. He was to

come more often when I was away on business. The doctor assured me that he would give them careful attention regardless of compensation.

I ordered a plasterer to make steps leading to my sister's home through the back yard, to enable them to visit their aunt without having to walk around the block.

There is a Yiddish quotation to this effect: "What the earth takes must be forgotten." The world moves on in a cycle. Those that die must be forgotten and those that live must go on with their plans just as though no break had occurred. I became a widower at forty-two, with six small children, the youngest three and a half years old. My mind was troubled by fear of careless servants. I was not home all day, and often left the city for weeks at a time. If I could find a responsible woman and companion to assist me in my parental duties, she would have the security of a good home in her own old age. For when the children were married I would be left alone; and a woman of this type would be the kind I should prefer to spend my last days with. I was profiting by the experiences of others who had lost their mates. They were left to their own devices—and in case of illness the children were too busy with their own affairs to nurse their parents back to health.

Now where would I find a woman who possessed all the requisite qualities and was willing to undertake the care of six children? Each neighbor tried to make a match for me without asking my consent

—the grocer, the butcher, the laundry man. A Hebrew teacher, Mr. Rosenblum, who came to my home to teach the children, suggested that I see a certain woman of a good family, a widow with a little girl of her own. The woman had a mother, father, brothers and sisters. They were respected and well liked. I met this woman and the members of her family. We came to a mutual agreement, but we had to consider the problem of the children. I invited her to the home of my sister, and also introduced her to the parents of my deceased wife. They all gave their consent, as they were impressed with her character and honesty. But would the children like her and agree to have her as mistress of the home?

The woman and myself agreed that if the children refused their consent we should not get married. I invited her to visit my sister, for the express purpose of finding out whether or not she would like my children. She was to be engaged in conversation with my sister. As the youngsters came into the house individually (I planned to have them enter at ten minute intervals) she would see them and form her opinion. The following day she reported, "They impressed me very favorably. They are clean and well behaved. Wonderful children—it is a pity that they lost their mother."

Now I planned to get the opinion of the children toward her, also to have her parents see the children. I called my three eldest, Ida, Yetta, and Bella, to my room and explained the entire situation in an

adult manner. I wanted them to have better care, and sought a companion for my own latter years. I repeated the same statements to my younger children, and I introduced the woman's twelve year old daughter to them. All my children thought she was a lovely person and promised to love and respect her as though she were their own mother.

I wanted her also to see how the six children conducted themselves at the dining table. The children, on the other hand, could observe her mannerisms and see how they liked her presence and actions while serving them their meals. I arranged to have them all together at the first Seder night, which fell on a Saturday. The woman, and her daughter, were to be present throughout; her parents and my sister and her husband were to come over after their own Seder. At two o'clock the woman arrived with her daughter, who played with my children on the porch. The children whispered to me that they liked the little girl and her mother very much and would like to have them as soon as possible. The parents of the woman also came to visit us, leaving at about five.

It was time to prepare the Seder meal and I went up to inform the servant to cook the necessary food for my intended wife and her child in addition. But the servant refused to make the necessary preparations, on the pretense that she had a headache. She had been laboring under the delusion that I would marry her—that is what the busy-body neighbors had told her, regardless of the fact that she had not been legally divorced from her husband. The pro-

visions were in the ice-box in readiness; there were fish, chicken, vegetables, and fruits. I went up and down the stairs trying in vain to persuade the servant to change her mind, and to spare me the humiliation and disgrace which I was enduring. Her final ultimatum was to the effect that she did not intend to do anything until the next morning.

Meanwhile, the hands of the clock kept steadily moving towards the hour of the Seder supper. My intended wife, seeing me nervous and upset, asked the reason for this condition. I told her the servant had just been taken ill, could not come to the kitchen and that I had an entire supply of provisions to be prepared. She at once asked for an apron, and kitchen information—rolled up her sleeves, and proceeded with the preparation of the evening meal. I called in my sister, who gave her some assistance. The entire meal was quickly provided and the Seder services were held. It proved a successful evening; the children behaved themselves in a manner most satisfactory to the woman. Her parents came and she departed with them.

But before she left, we had arranged to be wed Lag B'omer, five weeks after the Seder night. That day arrived and we were married. The day after my second marriage I went away on business. Instead of taking my wife on a honeymoon, she started her housewifely duties by taking inventory of the children's underwear, stockings, dresses and shoes.

Two weeks after our marriage, one of the younger children became ill with the measles; when this one

recovered another had it. It took six weeks until the last one had gotten over the illness. This siege of measles was my wife's honeymoon.

Neighbors' children, left alone because their parents were at business, often came to my house; and my wife treated them as her own. Late in the evening the parents came to take them home. No other of our neighbors would take an interest in these lonely, forlorn children of the streets. Generally speaking, these others became envious of our new family peace. They attempted unsuccessfully to antagonize my wife and children and myself. They would loudly sympathize with my wife because she had to take care of six strange children. Then they would incite my children against their stepmother by supposing that she treated her child much better than she did them.

I tried by all means to make the children comfortable. Though I had an eight room house, I had an additional bedroom built, so that we could have two sleep in one room. I also had an additional washroom put up for their convenience, besides extending the porch, and filling it with comfortable chairs for reading and lounging. Every season, I would take my wife and children to the shopping district of the neighborhood, Pitkin Avenue, where I spent several hundred dollars for clothes. When I bought my wife a fur coat for \$300, at the same time I also purchased fur coats for Ida, seventeen, Edith, fifteen and Augusta, fifteen (my wife's daughter). Each added coat cost \$130. I spent \$5,500 to improve my home.

It seemed necessary for the welfare of the children to introduce a new addition to our group, thereby linking us together into one big, happy family. After three years a little girl came to bless our union.

When any child became ill, my wife cared for her as for her own offspring. As a foster-mother, she felt it necessary to combat every possible criticism.

I determined that Lillian, Ezekiel, Clara and Sybil should have their tonsils out, because they were always sick with colds. The house bore the semblance of a hospital from eight to ten that evening. The children could have no better medical and nursing attention in the most exclusive hospital in the world.

I recollect the meals my wife used to prepare for the children—breakfast, luncheon, dinner, all punctually served, and catering to all their caprices. She would manage to have the meal on the table as soon as they came from school, so that they might quickly run out and play. Nothing came from the can or the delicatessen. She was not in the habit of cooking beef on Wednesday and serving the remains for days thereafter.

For the Sabbath my wife purchased chickens, and fish, and all things needful. All this purchasing and preparing proved arduous labor. Before holidays the task was even greater.

I was thankful to God for the devoted wife and mother who did all this hard work for a group of children not her own.

I dissolved the partnership with my sister and her

husband, and remained in business for myself, as a manufacturer of ladies' hats. I had been employing strange help in my office and for other inside work. Because of this I took my daughter Edith into the office and thus prevented her from completing a higher education. But I needed someone to rely upon in my frequent absences.

In the Eastern Parkway section sixteen neighbors and myself decided to build a temple on a modern orthodox scheme. Previously the children (fifteen in number) would meet in a room I had rented, where they were taught Hebrew and Jewish religion by a Mr. Paresky, whom I had engaged. At the end of each week, I would collect money from the parents in payment for his services.

When the temple was completed the Hebrew school moved. The executive officers of the temple were not in favor of having daily services, but I inaugurated the system of having a regular *minyan*, in addition to Friday and Saturday services. For twenty years I attended each morning. I established a tradition there to recite the Psalms of David each Saturday, after the afternoon prayer. In this half-hour ritual I was the leader during all these years. On the second day of Shevuoth, which is King David's Yahrzeit, I inaugurated the custom of lighting all the candles in the temple, and of conducting suitable memorial services; that ritual is still observed there. Through the synagogue I wanted my children to have a better social background for their future years.

At about this time, a young man asked for my daughter Ida in marriage. I had a talk with him concerning arrangements preparatory to the wedding, and I felt satisfied to know that the young man had been favorably impressed with the atmosphere of my home. The first wedding to be performed in the newly-erected temple was that of my daughter. I furnished a home for her and her husband as a wedding gift. This I did also for my foster-daughter, Augusta.

As I have said, I used to *daven* for synagogues and other institutions gratis—never for money. At this time my physician advised me to change from the Brooklyn climate to the Bronx. I rented a room in which to sleep at 180th Street and Grand Concourse. One evening at six I passed the home of a Mr. Gladstone, a well-known figure in the woolen industry. He asked me what I was doing so far from Brooklyn, and I explained the situation. He remarked that he prayed on Fordham Road, because there was no synagogue nearer to him. Several other neighbors passed with whom we were both acquainted, and they stopped to talk with us. I declared that since we were six in number, if we had one more individual we could lay the foundation for a synagogue, and organize the necessary officers and members for that purpose. Gladstone was asked to call his son downstairs to make up the seven required by law to organize any institution. I then put four dollars on the table and the others followed suit.

Here was a total of \$28 to organize a synagogue!

FROM SHOP TO SYNAGOGUE

I suggested that Gladstone's nephew, Silverstein be elected president, that Gladstone himself become vice-president, and also that a treasurer and secretary be chosen. \$25 was given to a lawyer to be sent to Albany for a charter—three dollars was all that remained.

The synagogue was named the Concourse Center of Israel, "Israel" being in honor of me for having originated the idea. On a vacant plot on the Concourse a sign announced that a synagogue would be erected there, and that services would be conducted on the high holy days. We laid a floor of boards and erected a tent. I conducted the services without pay. At the Jewish Theological Seminary I engaged Rabbi Solomon Crayzel to preach, for the sum of \$225. This rabbi is now an instructor in Gratz College in Philadelphia. District Attorney Pollack made an appeal Yom Kippur night. The worshipers pledged \$10,500 toward building the synagogue. We bought the land for \$25,000 and erected a Talmud Torah and synagogue, the full cost of which was \$250,000.

As soon as I felt better I gave up the room in the Bronx and returned to Brooklyn. For five years I conducted services in the Utica Theatre, the donations for which I turned over to the Home for Incurables and the Day Nursery.

Mr. Samuel Rottenberg, president of the Brooklyn Jewish Center, came to me with Mr. Prinsky, chairman of the religious committee to ask that I favor them on the high holidays, as I had done for many other synagogues.

"You will save us \$700 or \$800 and we are badly in need of the money."

This aid I was happy to extend to the Center.

Another year, late one Sunday morning, a Mr. Mintz, director of the Choveve Torah Synagogue, came by. He was going to a special meeting, a week before the holidays.

"Where are you praying during the high holidays?" he asked.

"I do not know yet," I replied.

He promptly asked me to pray for them and that they would pay \$200.

I said, "I will accept not less than \$500 for these days. I will pray for them gratis, but of the \$200 let them donate \$100 to the East New York and Brownsville Hospital and \$100 to the Home of the Aged on Blake and Dumont Avenues. The money must be given to them in my name and the receipts turned over to me."

He came back to report that they could use the \$200 themselves.

While sitting on the bench, I looked toward the church nearby, which had been closed for two years by the former worshippers.

I rang the bell for the janitor, who told me that the pastor was in charge of the edifice. I asked the pastor for the use of the idle church during the holidays. The janitor was given permission to remove the cross on the building. I promised the pastor \$300 and I gave the janitor \$15.

As there were 420 seats, I took in a manager, Mr.

Kaminsky, whom I paid \$200. The seats were sold at four and five dollars each. I paid off the pastor. The donations were given to the Hebrew Day Nursery of Brownsville.

There were a few personal debts to pay off. I owed Alex Reznikoff some money. I called him up and gave him \$385.00. I still had a few hundred dollars left, and was badly in need of money myself.

Now began the depression and my family troubles. I lost my house, and moved to Eastern Parkway, corner of Utica Avenue, where I paid rent of \$150 for an apartment. This was of especial convenience to the children, as they were near the subway. Bella and Lillie were married. I could not spend as much for their weddings as for the previous brides. Disputes arose between the stepmother and my children. They threatened to move away, but I wanted to keep an eye over them all the time, I suggested moving to Union Street, into two apartments, one above the other, each consisting of four rooms and costing \$70 monthly. All this I planned for the purpose of being near my children.

Financial conditions grew worse, and I could not keep on paying for both apartments. My children were getting high falutin ideas. They wanted my son to go to college in California. He did so, regardless of my objections. Clara, my other daughter at home, left to live with relatives of mine. I remained with my wife and daughter, Sybil, for whom I took a small apartment at 961 Eastern Parkway, the rental of which was \$55. Ezekiel had gone to

California and I was obliged to send money for his maintenance. This went on for a year. But he had to return home again; I could not continue supporting him there.

Now I was worrying over everyday necessities. The two rooms and kitchenette proved very small. One of the bedrooms was mine and the other my daughter's. When Ezekiel came back from college, I had to rent a room for him in the next building at four dollars a week. He stayed there three weeks, but before I had a chance to secure other rooms, he had decided to live with my eldest daughter, Ida.

I stopped looking for a four room apartment and did not like the news. I pictured that the future would not be so good. My hopes and concern all my life were to provide a good home for the children and to be near them, and not that someone else should become their guardian and good samaritan. Clara was not at home and neither was Ezekiel and somebody would father them and stir up a hatred between the father and the younger children. They did not understand life yet and the different circumstances and all this would be enough to influence the younger children. The result would be that they would not have a home. The prophet Isaiah said, if any trouble will befall you, it will come within your own.

In the interim, my wife became ill of sciatica and was bed-ridden for three weeks. This was followed by a nervous breakdown. The doctor advised me to send her away to Lakewood. I vacated my apart-

FROM SHOP TO SYNAGOGUE

ment, put my furniture into storage, and became a boarder elsewhere. As my youngest daughter had to finish her last term of high school, I suggested that she go along with her mother to Lakewood, and finish there. I had rented a furnished room and kitchen in Lakewood for \$32 a month. I arranged to commute over Saturday and Sunday. My wife arrived in Lakewood on November 1 and although she became well in a month and a half, she remained until the 15th of June so as to enable my daughter to complete her school term.

On one of my visits I made the acquaintance of Mr. Cohen of the Stanley Hotel, and I conducted Sabbath services there just as is in a regular synagogue. I continued these services until the time my wife left Lakewood. Meanwhile my daughter became acquainted with a young man from Brooklyn, and this ended in an engagement.

On the way home from Lakewood I rented a bedroom in Jackson Heights for \$4.50 a week. Sybil went to live with my daughter, Lillian Siegel. I had to remain in Jackson Heights until I should get the \$100 needed to redeem my furniture, and added funds as a deposit for rooms. I struck up an acquaintance there with an Abraham Cohen and he, together with my brother-in-law, A. Levine, endorsed a note for me in the Morris Plan for \$100, upon which I was able to engage rooms.

But I became ill and had to have an operation. My daughter Yetta brought the money for the hospital.

Through my niece, Lillian Reznikoff, I obtained the surgical services of Dr. Ravich at no cost to me.

After my confinement I started pondering on earning a livelihood. The millinery line was very bad. In the synagogue I became acquainted with two young men, Lockowitz and Yankowitz, laundrymen, who were saying *kaddish* for their parents. When they asked me what I did for a livelihood I replied that I was jobless and could not find work. They proposed that, since I had been in the millinery trade for thirty years, I might canvass the people I knew in this industry and get them to hire towels from their laundry. I would work on a commission basis. For a year, I managed to make a living in this way.

I went in to Isidore Rosenberg of 65 West 39th Street and asked him to give me the towel service. He said he would give it to me. However, when I came to get the order he refused as he did not want to change from his old service. The commission for this was \$12.50 and I figured that I would have enough to pay rent for two weeks, but instead of giving me the order he gave me a check for \$25. I told him that I did not want any charity and that I would rather have the order. He told me to take it and I told him I would not take it unless he would consider it as a loan. He told me to figure it any way I wanted to. The thought ran through my head that with another \$5 I had enough money to pay rent for a month. I remained standing like Tolstoy, the poet said, "Between Moletok and Kovadle," which means

between the hammer and the iron underneath and the fire in between. I was in between. I took the \$25.

The first of the following month I brought the first \$3 and it took me eleven months to finally complete the balance. I thanked him for it and he smiled, and said that I was an honest man.

I came to Harry Steinberg of the Consolidated Millinery Co. of 417 Fifth Avenue, and asked him to help me get the towel supply orders from the manufacturers of the millinery trade, as it was very hard to get an order. They did not want to change. I asked him to give me a letter to the trade on the Consolidated Millinery Company's stationery with his signature and that would help me.

When I told him this, his private secretary and myself were in the office. He looked at me and he looked at his secretary and he started to walk back and forth and this continued about ten minutes, then he remained standing in one place and told the secretary to get a letterhead of the firm and typewrite what he would dictate.

"To Whom It May Concern:

Mr. Israel Wolwoff whom I know for the last thirty years went into the towel service supply. I would consider this as a personal favor to me if you would give him the business. I would be thankful for it."

He signed his name and handed it to me and wished me good luck. I thanked him and left the office.

I came to the manufacturers with this letter and handed it in the office to the girl and told her to

give it to the boss. When they saw the contents of the letter, I found no hardship in getting the order.

On one occasion, I sent in the letter to Mirkin and Margolin, and Dave Weisberg, the buyer of the Consolidated happened to be in the showroom. They gave him the letter and he read it. I immediately got the order. The result was that I made over two thousand dollars commission through this letter.

Now Sybil was to be married during the Christmas holidays. I thought that she would choose the place in which my three other daughters had been married, Temple Petach Tikvah, of which I was the founder, and where the cost of the wedding would be negligible. But Sybil declared her preference for the Brooklyn Jewish Center. When I told her that the cost would be \$150, she replied that she did not want the Center so much, but that it would be very nice if she could have her wedding there. I put on my overcoat and left for the Jewish Center.

I was shown into the office, and the president, a Mr. Schwartz, asked me what I desired. I told him that I wanted my daughter to be married there, but had no money. He thought I was joking. But Mr. Goldberg, the manager, came into the office—a man with whom I was well acquainted, and who in turn knew me. He told the president that I had once *davened* for the Center without charge on the high holy days. At that time I had never thought that I would ever have to ask a favor in return. The president ordered the manager to make out the bill for the wedding and stamp it “PAID.”

When the groom's parents heard that the ceremony was to be performed in the Jewish Center they expressed their desire of having a dinner also. I plainly told them that I had not the money therefor. The mother and father of the groom thereupon paid all expenses, exclusive of the ceremony.

One day, while I was passing 38th Street and 6th Avenue, I noticed a house of worship in the heart of the millinery district, called "Millinery Center Synagogue." I had always given my services at synagogues to everyone but the people with whom I had all my dealings for thirty years. I told the president, Mr. Brenner, that since the next week was Shavuouth I would conduct services for his synagogue during those two days free of charge. The synagogue paid only my hotel expense. At the close of the holiday the president and the board decided unanimously to engage my services as their regular cantor.

So it was that after a period of 46 years of activity, Nature outwitted me. I had to surrender and become a cantor, regardless of the fact that I had always tried to evade that necessity. In all probability I would have made a success of the profession because I still possess the requisite voice and aptitude. But I have succumbed. Today my sole occupation is that of cantor of The Millinery Center Synagogue, and there I shall remain.

