WORLDS THAT PASSED

A. S. SACHS

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BY

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PREFATORY NOTE

I wish to express my thanks to Mr. Harold Berman for translating this book into English and to Mr. Judah Joffe for his collaboration in the English version.

THE AUTHOR.

THE JEWISH HOME THAT IS GONE

(Instead of an Introduction)

Like a deluge the war has overwhelmed and drowned in torrents of blood and tears hundreds of thousands of Jewish families that for many past ages had been solidly established in towns of Samut and Lithuania. Like trees pulled up by their roots from their native soil, so was the Jewish life violently torn from the land to which it had been united by inseparable bonds for many centuries.

Great as may be the tragedy of the individual, when suddenly forced to uproot himself and family, to run helter-skelter without knowing why or whither, and to leave his scant belongings to the mercy of strangers; the tragedy of an entire people—the Jewish people—placed in such a position is still greater and infinitely more bound up with all the elements of calamity and sadness.

The individual may sooner or later find a little nook somewhere on the face of the earth where he can continue his existence. An entire people, however, cannot readily find a place where it can resume, without hindrance, the broken thread of its own peculiar life and revive its own individual traditions and customs. The individual Jew may live and prosper in Russia, Poland, Germany, America or anywhere else that he may choose to make his home; the Jewish people can

never regain that which it has left behind in the home of its ancestors.

The bonds that for so long have served to tie the many individuals into one corporate body, the threads that have knitted the many shreds into one whole garment, are now torn asunder and scattered to the winds. It is quite possible that other and different threads may ultimately be woven, under the new conditions about to be created; it is possible that a new life may once again crystallize out of the present chaos and uncertainty. It is possible to predict that new temples may be erected out of the ruins of the demolished ones. Yet, the fact remains that the venerable life of the Jews as a people has been totally destroyed by the smoke and the fire of the battle, so that it may never again live in the glory it has known in bygone days.

Perhaps we need shed no tears over some of the customs that are gone. And yet, when one remembers the many truly beautiful customs and practices associated with the Jewish life of Lithuania and Samut that are now gone forever, one's heart cannot but ache. Many of the ancient Jewish customs were full of a native grace and charm and informed with a beauty and sympathy peculiarly their own, and there is no equivalent for them in any society, cultured or uncultured.

It is therefore natural that just at the present time, when all this glory is being turned into a heap of ashes, our hearts should begin to yearn for the beautiful

customs that have characterized the life of the Jews in Lithuania. We cannot but heave a sigh of regret at their loss.

Modern society boasts of the comparatively recent democratic spirit that is supposed to have penetrated our life. We pride ourselves upon our popular institutions under which every member of the community enjoys a voice in the government. And we sneer—justly, to be sure—at the past, when violence was habitually done to the will of the great masses of the people. But does anyone know, or wish to know, that the democracy in vogue in the now defunct Jewish communities in Lithuania was far superior to and far more thorough than the democracy practised at the present day in any of our so-called progressive republics?

This may sound ridiculous to many moderns, but it is nevertheless true. One should not laugh at the old dirty *Heder*, or the disheveled and ever angry *rebbi*. Under the unclean skull cap of the rebbi a powerful brain usually was at work, and a warm heart beat beneath his ragged coat and shrivelled breast, a heart that held much more of genuine love for the small urchins entrusted to him than that of the average modern, and better trained, teacher. One must accord the full measure of respect due the rebbi's wife who, in the midst of her own great poverty, would yet give of her time and effort for the care of the needy. We may occasionally poke fun at this or that office of the town leadership, or *Gabbaim*, but we still have much to learn from the spirit of democracy that reigned in the

communal life of our fathers, and of their fathers before them.

And not only for the romantic sentimentalist, for the one who yearns for the dead and the dying in man's experience, for him who loves the things of past ages because he can paint them in roseate colors of his own exuberant fancy—not only for such a one does the life of Lithuanian Jewry have interest. Even for the sober-minded and practical man of every day life there is something pertinent in these time-worn customs and practices of our fathers.

These customs and institutions I will attempt to recreate for the reader in the following chapters.

I

The Heder

The classroom where we were taught our *Alef Bet*, *Ivri*, *Humash* and *Rashi*, *Tanak* and *Gemara*, was dirty and crowded; the air was damp and heavy, the floors were covered with filth and spittle, the ceiling was black, in winter from the smoky lamp and in summer from the swarm of flies.

The rebbi was usually a sick man and often subject to frequent paroxysms of coughing, during which he could not catch his breath. Besides, he was forever anxious and worried over the bitter struggle for existence. Tuition fees were meager and never on time. However modest the needs of the small-town *Melamed* were, he could not make ends meet. Always ailing and heavy-hearted, the rebbi was wont to vent all his wrath on his pupils, lads of eight, nine or, at most, ten years of age.

At the beginning of the semester, before he had formed a close acquaintance with his pupil and was not yet certain that he would remain in his school, the rebbi would be lenient and avoid excessive severity. At the end of the semester, too, the rebbi would play up to the pupil, for there was the fear of jeopardizing his chances when he came between terms to solicit the father's patronage for the next term.

But all the days of the week were not alike. The

early part of the week—Sundays and Mondays—the rebbi was least irritable. He was rested from the Sabbath and was generally on good terms with the pupils. He would jest with the little tots, pat their cheeks and tell them pretty stories. But the older the week grew the more rarely was the rebbi in good humor and the more wretched was the lot of the children.

We, too, grew restive. Studies began to pall on us. The attraction of the open grew stronger. The rebbi, worn and distraught, could not resist treating us quite frequently to a pinch rather than a pat.

The worst day in Heder was Thursday, when dire want howled loudest in the rebbi's house. During the rest of the week it was more or less bearable. Not being too fastidious in matters of food, the rebbi and his household filled their stomachs with anything. "Nothing-broth" was an almost daily meal.

The real trouble came on Thursday, when the rebbi's wife would nag him to death with her eternal questions about provision for the Sabbath. The Heder on Thursday was absolutely intolerable. The rebbi walked about like one in a frenzy, and we feared him like death. The rebbi's wife, Sore-Rivve, had but one designation from him: Shrew! This, despite the fact that in his heart of hearts he knew that she was a good and pious woman and, poor thing, could not be blamed for the misfortune of being the wife of Bini Velvel, the melamed.

The rebbi was only too well aware that *he* was the "Jonah" and not she; that if he had not, right after

his wedding, while still boarding with his father-in-law, managed to lose her dowry by entering into a partnership with the old miller, as a flour bolter, Sore-Rivve, his wife, would never have become the scold that she was, nor spouted those deadly curses. But just because he knew that he was the ne'er-do-well, he was eating his heart out and was so resentful. Anger burned within him, and he had to relieve it somehow. So he would yell at Sore-Rivve that she was a spendthrift and did not know how to take care of his hard-earned money.

"Shrew!" he would shout—each word a sputtering effort. "Where am I to get the money from? Who do you think I am? A millionaire? Shahne Zalel's? Rothschild?"

This was in reply to his wife's reproaches that all the other women had already bought their provisions for the Sabbath, their fish and meat, whereas she had not even bought the flour for her *Halah*.

"A king's treasure would not be enough for her, the gad-about," he would mutter to the Heder boys. His blood would rush to his eyes and his sunken chest heave excitedly. The rebbi knew that he was scolding her unjustly, that she was no gad-about, by far; that, in fact, a few cents went further with his wife than a dollar with other women. The trouble was that even the few pennies were not forthcoming.

We boys loved the rebbi's wife, who often poured her heart out to us. We pitied her and were angry at the rebbi for his lack of consideration.

There were other reasons for the Blue Thursday.

Thursday was the day when we had to know our lessons for the week. Many fathers would examine their children on the Sabbath. The rebbi therefore would make sure on Thursday that we were letter-perfect.

It was a rare thing for a Thursday to pass peacefully, without scoldings, kicks and blows, without whippings and weepings. "*Goy!* Stupid! Imbecile!" were some of the pet names the rebbi showered upon his pupils on Thursdays.

We hated Thursday like poison. At the beginning of the term we consulted the calendar for holidays and town fair days, when there was no school. We regarded it as a special piece of luck when these free days fell on Thursdays. "A rotten semester," we would say to each other after fingering through a column and not finding a single free Thursday.

The crowded Heder was not the only place where we spent the days of our childhood. In theory the children were supposed to be cooped up in the Heder from early morn till late at night. In fact, however, the youngsters spent enough time outdoors in games of all sorts.

In Heder there were no classes such as there were in school. There were only groups: a group of Alef Bet babblers, an Ivri group and a beginners' group in Humash. With a Tanak melamed the groups started from a higher level, from the Humash group to that of Mishnah. The Talmud teacher had a group for Tanak, a group for Gemara without *Tosafot*, and one for Gemara with Tosafot and *Meharsha*. As the Heder

consisted of but one room, all the groups had to be together. When one group was working with the rebbi, the other would con its lessons. This "conning" was a real godsend for the boys.

No sooner would the crowd of youngsters espy that the rebbi knitted his forehead and was absorbed in thought over some intricate matter, than they would begin to recite at the top of their voices, to the utter confusion of the rebbi.

"Children," he would say to them, "are you through reviewing? Go into the courtyard for a while and rest. But mind you, leave Mendel the coachman's old nag alone."

This, of course, was exactly what they had hoped for. In the twinkling of an eye they were at the door and out of the room. The little rascals schemed to devise still other means of getting out under the open sky.

If we got wind of the fact that a pair of beautiful white pigeons had appeared in the courtyard and were pecking at the seeds, or if through the windows came the music of the hurdy-gurdy man, who invariably had with him the stereopticon box, through which one could see the River Sambation, the Mountains of Darkness, the Turk in the red breeches, and other such curios; or if acrobats were performing in the street, the urge to run outside would grip us. But how was it to be done? The lesson had not yet been memorized and just then the rebbi did not happen to be deep in difficulties. So we would hit upon a scheme: One after the other would go over to the rebbi and ask per-

mission to leave the room for some reason or other, which would be granted after much nagging on the part of the pupil.

The Heder was not always a source of tribulation for the young folks. It had its good days, when the rebbi and his pupils were like pals, like the best of friends. There was *Lag ba-'Omer*, when the rebbi and his pupils held a banquet in memory of Simeon ben Yohai, and occasionally we also had an outing into the woods to drink *Sheelah*. There was the eve of *Shabuot* when the rebbi and his pupils sang the *Akdamut* so beautifully. And then there was the good day when the rebbi had to move to new quarters.

We always looked forward to it impatiently. In the first place, we did not have to study on that day, and then, we had a good time in general. By rights, we were only required to carry the books from the old dwelling to the new one, but actually we helped the rebbi and his wife to pack and transfer all their duds, the pillows, beds, chairs—all their wretched belongings.

We did not choose the shortest way to the new place. We would parade the rebbi's rags through the streets and maneuver to pass the other Heders, so that those boys, with whom we were always at war, might burst with envy.

The rebbi's wife was rich in rolling pins, I remember. She had three varieties of these, for meat dishes, neutral dishes, and dairy dishes. Some she had inherited from her grandmother, some from her mother-in-law, some from her mother, and some she had bought herself. She had so many rolling pins that

they were enough to go around for our whole group. The trip with the rolling pins was the most joyous of all.

We would form a line like soldiers, our hats turned upside down, the rolling pins, on which we had tied our shoes and stockings so that they might look like bayonets, on our shoulders, and we would march through the streets with great pride, singing:

Kamez alef ah,
Bayonets on Shoulders place!
Kamez bet bah,
Boys, Right about face!
We want naught
All is well with us.

The rebbi's moving was a great event in our childhood world, and long, long thereafter we would still be talking about it.

II

The Paper Bridge and the Steel Bridge

My teacher, Bini Velvel, enjoyed a local reputation as a student of the *En Yakob* and the Midrash. The scholars of the town thought but little of him and his scholarship. He had never been admitted to membership in the *Hebrah Shas*, nor did he ever sit at the daily Talmud lesson where the scholars of the town displayed their profound learning. That, it was felt, was the place for brilliant youths with minds sharpened by study and polemical discussion.

Bini Velvel was quite an ordinary man. He could not attempt to breast the currents of the Talmud ocean, nor could he lead the metaphorical elephant through the eye of a needle. His was far too weak an intellect to plunge into the depths of Talmud commentaries or to engage in hair-splitting subtleties and solve hypothetical problems. But he was deeply beloved by the mass of ordinary, every day people. These simple and unsophisticated folk would devour his exposition of a chapter in the En Yakob or a similar haggadic tale or legend.

On Saturday afternoons, between *Minhah* and *Ma'arib*, the small study room of the synagogue would be thronged with men who breathlessly swallowed Bini Velvel's glowing words. His manner of retelling the stories and fables of the En Yakob and the Mid-

rash was so fascinating that no one would notice the passing of the twilight and the coming of the shadows of night. He captivated the hearts of his auditors. His haggadic tales were full of charm and beauty, while his low, almost moaning voice was strangely mellow. And Bini Velvel had really much to tell his listeners.

His store of tales was inexhaustible; they flowed on and on as if welling up from a spring. He seemed to know exactly the way the sainted men of long ago had lived and died and what tests and trials they had gone through in the course of their life on earth. He also knew what was going on beyond the gates of Paradise; the way the righteous were whiling away their days in joy and happiness, seated on golden thrones, golden diadems on their heads, and studying God's Torah. Even his critics had to admit that Bini Velvel was thoroughly versed in these cabalistic books that treat of the mysteries of creation and kindred matters hidden from the ken of the ordinary mortal. Bini Velvel knew every angel's name and the place he held in the Court of the Almighty. He knew the mysterious deeds of God Himself and could describe the appearance of the fiery chariot in which the prophet Elijah had ascended to heaven. Besides, he knew to the minutest detail all the wars Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus and Alexander of Macedon had waged, and knew by heart the places of their victories and defeats. He also knew well the causes of all these victories or defeats. Nothing, in brief, was hidden from Bini Velvel, the Hebrew teacher, who taught me

the Pentateuch and the Bible. Bini Velvel was no hoarder of knowledge. On the contrary, whatever knowledge he possessed of the great past and its men he was happy to impart to his pupils as well as to the members of the En Yakob Hebrah.

Voluble as our teacher was regarding the past, even so restrained was he concerning the future. Indeed, people of the town whispered that Bini Velvel carried in him some great and holy secret which no ordinary mortal was privileged to know. Nay, he was even said to know the secret of the prophesied "end of days" when the Messiah is to come and redeem God's chosen people. But no one would dare to ask for any information on this matter, nor would Bini Velvel volunteer to offer it.

I recall an unusual event at the Heder. It was on a winter's night. Out of doors a cold wind blew, accompanied by a heavy snow-fall. The wind tore angrily at the window shutters, but it was warm and comfortable within. The lamp was burning brightly and cheerfully. The rebbi's wife was seated in a corner, knitting a sock. The rebbi was in good humor and pretended not to notice the pranks of the lower grade boys who had long since finished their lessons and were having a lot of fun.

We, of the higher grade, sat over our open books in reverential mood, feeling certain that the rebbi was about to tell us some wonderful tale. There was mystery in the air, a mystery that was soon to be unveiled to us, and to us only. With thumping hearts we awaited the moment for the rebbi to begin his tale.

The rebbi, however, did not display any impatience; on the contrary, he sat unconcernedly in his accustomed place, rubbing his eyes, blowing his nose, dallying until the arrival of the moment that so mysteriously beckoned to us.

All of a sudden, the rebbi became deeply absorbed in his thoughts. His black, somewhat weak eyes, receded behind his thick eyebrows and began to sparkle. He waved his hand to one of the boys sitting opposite him, who took up his recitation in a clear and loud voice. "And it will come to pass at the end of days....."

"This means," the rebbi explained, "this means, in the future when the Messiah will come; when the Messiah will come," he repeated once again, in a muffled voice as if to himself.

And now the rebbi raised his head and began in a low voice as if, afraid that the breeze would snatch up his words and carry them to some unhallowed place, to tell us what will take place in the days when the Messiah will come.

"Before the Messiah's arrival," the rebbi said, "there will be a great war, the war of Gog and Magog. One half of the world will be at war with the other half. Many people, millions of them, will perish. The fires of Gehenna will be let loose upon the people of the earth. Delilah, with her 24,000 devils, will stalk through the settlements and brazenly destroy those who had been spared in the war. All sorts of woes and evils will descend upon the human race, the plagues of

Egypt will come back to harrow the people and then the war and misery will end. . . . . ."

"The Messiah will come!" one of us hastened to say. "Yes, the Messiah will come"—the rebbi agreed—"but not the real one; the false one, the Messiah of the tribe of Joseph."

Noticing, however, that we were full of fear of what he had told us, he hastened to add words of comfort. "The Messiah of the tribe of Joseph will not stay long. He will endure but for a while, and then the real Messiah will come; the Messiah of the tribe of David."

"The Messiah ben Joseph"— the rebbi further reassured us—"will gather to himself great armies. He will have no end of weapons, no end of swords and spears. But God will not grant him His favor and he will be beaten by the true Messiah who will command much smaller armies and fewer weapons."

"The false Messiah," he continued, "will march over an iron bridge, while the true Messiah will lead his armies over a bridge made of paper. And a miracle will take place—the iron bridge will crash down and hurl the false Messiah and his hosts into the ocean, while the true Messiah will lead his men, marching over their paper bridge, safely into Jerusalem."

"Rebbi"—one of the boys asked—"the swords of the true Messiah's followers, will they also be made of paper?"

"Yes, my son. The swords and the spears will also be made of paper," the rebbi answered as if filled with certainty.

When the rebbi noticed, however, that our childish

minds failed to grasp the possibility of this great miracle, he leaned carefully over in our direction and, casting a cautious glance about him, whispered almost into our ears his explanation: "God's ineffable Name shall be engraved upon them!"

This answer at once satisfied all of us. We knew at once the mystic power that will be in the true Messiah's sheath, and refrained from all further questions. It became as clear as crystal to us.

Since the events of that memorable evening, about thirty years have passed into the abyss of time. My teacher has long since been gathered to his fathers, while no vestige remains of our school. Our books have become shreds long since eaten up by age and worms, my schoolmates have been scattered to the four winds, while the rebbi's wonderful tales have been displaced by more substantial and logical rules and scientific formulas. The waves of the sea of life have washed away the dust of the Heder air. And yet, it is just during the recent days, since the entire world has become one mass of steel and all is war and destruction, that I have become more than ever conscious of the tale told me by the teacher of my childhood days, of the failure of steel to conquer an idea if the idea but have the *Shem Hammeforash* engraved upon its banner.

III

Little Folk's Societies Boasting Big Achievements

It is quite true that from the purely hygienic aspect there was little in the life of the Jewish child of Lithuania and White Russia to call out envy in anyone. Aside from being shut in on most of the days of the year from early morn till evening, within the walls of the narrow and damp Heder, the tender-aged lad was compelled to overburden his youthful brain with a great many things that not only were hard for him to understand, but even to a great extent useless.

And then the rebbi's cat-o'nine! That terror-striking implement was ever hanging like a Damoclean sword in full sight of the little children, expecting to become the victims of its sting at any moment.

But there were also some special "Children's Days," as the modern pedagogue would designate them. On these specially favored days, the young hopefuls would be freed of all of the Heder's irksome burdens, so that they not only spent these days in joyful pastimes but became veritable heroes, the very center of attraction for the folks of the entire town.

On these days the adult population of the townlet would respectfully step out of the way of all honor and emolument and permit the little urchins to become the center of gravity of the town's spiritual life.

Let us pause here for a while to speak of the juvenile societies called the Rose Blossoms that were so popular all through the towns of White Russia, Courland and Lithuania. The very name given to it, so redolent of poetry, was sufficient proof of the esteem that it enjoyed among the great masses of the people. This esteem had been fully earned by it; the objects it set out to accomplish were worthy ones, indeed.

The aim of the Rose Blossoms society was the purchase of books for the synagogues and the houses of study of the towns. And truly it was through the indefatigable efforts of the youthful members of these societies that most of the Talmud tomes as well as the writings of the early and late sages found their way into the study halls of the ghetto.

When one entered the study hall of any Jewish town in Lithuania and White Russia his notice was at once attracted by the great leather-bound folios of the Talmud and other sacred books. Nor could he fail to notice as well that at the center of the right-hand corner, inside of a little diamond-shaped enclosure, was stamped in gilt letters the legend: "Donated by the Rose Blossoms Society, Year....."

The Rose Blossoms Society was composed exclusively of children. The society constituted a veritable children's realm. Children composed its membership; its officials, its secretaries and treasurers were children, none of them over thirteen or fourteen years of age. Fourteen was the maximum age allowed its members. But there was no minimum age set, a baby boy one day old being frequently found on its rolls, while there

were some whose very being was at the time of enrollment only a hope or a prospect, the expectant mothers enrolling their yet unborn children in this 'Little Boys' Kingdom' in order to assure themselves that sons, and not daughters, would be born to them.

The Rose Blossoms Society was a strictly democratic body, admitting female as well as male members. But the girls did not possess the right of suffrage and could neither elect nor be elected to office.

As already said, the maximum age of the members was thirteen or fourteen years. But this was a rule which, like every other rule, had its occasional exceptions, and it frequently happened that elderly men who had already given up all hope of ever having any children of their own and yet were anxious to participate in this holy work, were admitted to membership in this primarily juvenile organization. The rights of such an adult member were not however any greater than those of the occasionally admitted female members. They were graciously permitted to pay their dues, but could neither elect nor be elected to office. These were solely the prerogatives of the aristocratic class, the little urchins.

The presidents usually were boys of about twelve or thirteen years of age; boys who had recently become *Bar Mizvah* or were about to enter into that blissful state. Their principal duties consisted of collecting the dues, which in some cases amounted to as much as a single kopek a week.

Every Friday afternoon right after the closing of the Heder, the youthful presidents of the societies would

start on their perambulations about town and go about from house to house to collect those weekly kopeks from the members. The town was divided into sections; the market place, the "German" Street, the Synagogue Street and so forth, the respective officials collecting their doles in each one of these sections. One of the officials would make the proper entry in the book, while the other held a red handkerchief in which to gather in the harvest of kopeks and other coins.

Their account book was a unique and yet serviceable instrument. It was divided into fifty-two sections. At the top of each section was the name of the weekly portion, written vertically, while the names of the members were entered horizontally. When a certain member paid his weekly dues, a small circle within the given space duly indicated the fact, while if these tiny circles were missing opposite one's name, it meant that he had not paid his dues for the week or longer. Thus, it was easy to tell at a glance who had and who had not paid his weekly dues.

Two to three rubles weekly was the usual amount raised from these collections. At the end of the year the society would have about one hundred and fifty rubles in its treasury—a tidy little sum to purchase books with. Thus it happened that the Rose Blossoms Society came to occupy an honored place among the organizations of the town, enjoying all the privileges and honors accruing to all the others, though composed of children only.

It was the custom of the townlet to assign one Sabbath yearly to each legitimately established benevolent society for its own exclusive use and emolument. Thus, the *Hebrah Kadisha* had one Sabbath allotted to it, the *Hebrah Tehillim* another, the *Hebrah Bikkur Holim* still another, and so on and on down the line.

The organization's treasury invariably was the beneficiary of this Sabbatical assignment. All the donations made by those 'called up' to the reading of the Law in the Portion of the week would go into its treasury. It often happened that one or the other Hebrah invited a famous *Hazzan* for its Sabbath and raised considerable money by the sale of admission cards. This, however, depended upon the state of the treasury as well as upon the spirit of enterprise prevalent in its membership.

The Rose Blossoms Society also shared in this beneficial arrangement. In our town, as I recall it, the week of the double Portion *Vayakhel-Pekude* was assigned to it. And not without reason. Quite aside from the fact that these sections constitute two distinct Portions, they also boast long chapters that could easily be split up into many convenient parts. This was an advantage to any society, even as would be a benefit performance given in a theater having a large seating capacity, since thereby the prospective gross income was greatly increased. The heads of the Society would previously arrange with the Reader to divide and subdivide the Portion, so that in place of the seven men usually called up to the reading, there would be several times that number.

The *'Aliyot* were assigned by these boys themselves. The two officials to whom had been assigned the collection of dues in the most important section of the town (in our town, the market place) would stand at the Reader's desk and duly assign the honors.

These little boys were named in the blessings after the reading of each particular section; they were consulted as to the person to be honored at the Law; and they were the ones whom the person called up to the reading, be he the rabbi himself, specifically thanked for the honor.

It can readily be imagined that all this constituted a great honor for the youthful officials, an honor duly reflected upon their parents, whose happiness was perfect, indeed, on that Sabbath of Sabbaths. And not only their parents, but the faces of all their near as well as distant relatives beamed with joy as they beheld the youthful heroes of that day of days. On that day, even the women's gallery of the synagogue would be thronged to the very doors, as, aside from the young official's immediate family, many another woman, blessed with a growing daughter for whose future welfare she harbored great ambitions, would come there to cast an admiring glance at the much envied youths.

Just as soon as the Reader had finished the Eighteen Benedictions and was getting ready to begin the reading of the weekly Portion, there would be a rush and a hubbub in the gallery. The women craned their necks the better to see the visible evidences of the sway of these twelve or thirteen-year rulers of the day.

This rush of the women invariably called out loud protests on the part of the men folk who considered themselves as duty-bound to suppress any manifestations of the spirit of independence on the part of the feminine section of the community. As usual, it was mainly those men who had had to contend with their wives' pranks previous to their going to the synagogue, that now asserted themselves the loudest. For here they were sole masters, able to display their superiority without hindrance.

The beadle would, as a matter of course, do his utmost to appear entirely impartial in this quarrel. But duty was duty, and he would execute a feint attack upon the occupants of the gallery, exhorting them to be quiet and not to honk 'like geese.' 'Geese' was the usual term applied to the women folk by their Lords; especially so when the weaker sex found itself hemmed in by the separating partitions of the women's gallery, unable to repel the verbal assaults hurled by their 'admiring' partners.

The mode of procedure was as follows: When Abraham-Hirsh, the beadle, felt bound to call the denizens of the women's gallery to order, he placed his prayer-book or his Pentateuch on the palm of his left hand, while he delivered a good and echoing whack upon it with the flat of his right hand. This served the same purpose that the gavel or the bell does for the presiding officer of a modern organization. After delivering this thump, the beadle would turn his face towards the women's gallery and inform the occupants in as loud a voice as possible that they were in a holy

place, and that the women were expected to conduct themselves like human beings and not like a flock of geese.

The women, on their part, had long since become accustomed to such gentle hints and paid but scant attention to them. They went right ahead with their talk, paying but little heed to the beadle and his words. As for the pet name bestowed upon them, they accepted it most complacently, harboring no grudge against the generous bestower of the title. As a matter of fact, they were so thoroughly impressed with the men folk's generally assumed superiority and their own utter insignificance that they accepted this flattering designation with all due humility and meekness. They felt that, after all, they were only women, knowing next to nothing of what is written in the holy books. Especially so after Leah Nohum's, the Gabbai's wife, had ranged herself upon the beadle's side and deliberately started in to upbraid her companions for their immodesty; for their crowding to the front of the gallery, in order to steal a glance at the men through the cracks.

What we boys experienced in those happy moments can be appreciated only by professional performers, habitually appearing before great assemblies. These have lived through our own emotions on their first appearance before an audience. Our feelings were, of course, very much mixed, verging at times upon extreme fear, and at others upon great pride, by reason of the unusual distinction that fell to our lot. At certain moments we felt our knees knocking against each

other, and the chattering of our teeth from sheer fear and bashfulness.

I particularly recall how I lived through the most critical 'foot-lights' fever of my entire life. Long after I had been duly installed in my place on the platform I still felt too bashful to raise my eyes towards the assembly. I glued my eyes instead most obstinately upon the pages of the Humash without however seeing one word written therein.

That Sabbath served also as the cross-roads for many a youth. It was the turning point in his career, the point of departure from the years of childhood to the days of boyhood and youth. It was duly expected of him that henceforward he would forsake all childish carelessness and easy-going paths and begin to think seriously of his future as a man.

IV

The Siyum (Commencement)

A few weeks after the Vayakhel-Pekude week the *Siyum* of the Rose Blossoms took place. It was the day when the books donated by them were duly brought into the synagogue. The envied privilege of buying these books had been officially assigned to the care of the youthful wardens of the Hebrah. They had raised the money, they had officiated at the distribution of the honors on the assigned Sabbath, and it was now their turn to make the choice of the books to be bought, as well as to decide into whose hands the binding of them should be entrusted.

As a matter of fact, it was really the Advisory Committee, composed of adults, that bought the books. In the records of the Society were inscribed not only the names of the officials for the year but also the names of the members of the Advisory Committee. This Committee was always selected by the officials of the Rose Blossoms Society. It usually consisted of the best known young men in town; young men who had been trained for the rabbinate.

But these advisers would not move a finger without the boys. The boys had to be present when the purchases were made and approve the deal, as without their written approval the treasurer, usually a leading

man of the community, would not pay out the required money. It must be remarked, however, that both of these bodies always worked in perfect harmony, and that claims of priority or jurisdictional questions never arose between the two.

The week of the Siyum usually witnessed a revival of joy in the town. For days and weeks previously, the forerunners of the joyful holiday spirit were everywhere in evidence. The mothers of the boy-officials, as well as many other God-fearing women, were busy running about from one gingerbread baker to another to get the price-quotations on this indispensable delicacy of the feast. At the same time, they saw to it that the cakes should be made out of the previous year's crop of wheat and that really fresh eggs and pure bees' honey were used in the baking. It frequently happened that many of the women would show resentment when this great honor of supervising the baking of this festival gingerbread had been assigned to others. For this supreme honor and virtuous deed was coveted by many, the pursuit of it now and then reaching the unpleasant stage of a wordy encounter between the opposing aspirants for the office. As a rule, they managed somehow to divide the honors amicably between them; one would buy the flour, the other would provide the eggs out of her own hennery, another would supply the needed honey, while still another would furnish the yeast, the oven in which to bake it and the home in which to prepare it. In this manner, the gingerbread to be eaten at the feast became the product of a collective effort. Each

one of the happy mothers of the members managed to secure for herself some share of the *Mizvah.*

On the Friday previous to the party, the collectors went about dressed in their Sabbath garments. As they went along from door to door, collecting their doles, they distributed to all the members, male and female, chunks of gingerbread. On this day, also, all arrears in dues were punctiliously paid up by all the members.

The deacons themselves did not carry the honey cakes about for distribution. This was the prerogative of the beadle of the Bet Hamidrash. The honey cakes would be tucked away carefully within a cleanly-washed and carefully ironed pillow case, and it devolved upon the beadle to carry it around the house until the case became emptied of its precious contents. It was the invariable practice for the parents of the young members of the society, on receiving their portion of the honey cake, to make a special donation, over and above their regular dues. This was just what the officials of the Hebrah were looking for. It was expected all along that these donations would equal the amount to be expended upon the binding of the newly bought books.

The real celebration would, however, be deferred to the day of the Siyum. Though it had been known all along just where and when this celebration was to take place, it was nevertheless the invariable custom for the beadles of the various synagogues to inform the worshippers of these facts at the conclusion of the service on the Sabbath previous to the celebration.

"*Rabbotai*!" the *Shammash* would call out in his loudest tones— "Be informed that on Tuesday, the third day of the coming week, there will be held the Siyum of the Rose Blossoms Society in the home of Menahem Mendel, Mendel the Inn-Keeper, in the market place. Be prepared for the occasion!"

For a day or so previously both their mothers and grandmothers were busily occupied in washing and ironing for the little fellows. On Tuesday morning they were dressed in their holiday attire. Everything that children wore, even to babies' pinafores, were changed on that day. Meticulous care was taken in the combing and the brushing of the hair and the face-washing of all children, even the five-or six-year old boys. Everything was bright and immaculate on that day; so much so that if a stranger, entirely unfamiliar with the internal concerns of the town, chanced to come into town and observed the joy with which the young folks were racing for the Heder, dressed in their holiday attire and with happy faces, he knew at once that this was the day on which the Rose Blossoms held their annual celebration.

The celebration commenced about ten o'clock in the morning, at the very time when Daniel the Chimney-sweep and Moshe-Menashe the Glazier arrived at the Bet Hamidrash, where the youthful officers were already in attendance.

Daniel the Chimney-sweep and Moshe-Menashe the Glazier were not by any means among the leading householders of the town. Their place was with the *hoi polloi*. They not only knew nothing of the mys-

teries of the Talmud or the Mishnah, but it was freely whispered that they didn't even know how to read their prayers properly. They usually occupied places behind the *Bimah*, or central platform, when they went to the synagogue, and would always be among the last to be 'called up' to the Reading of the Law. Daniel walked about the town for six days out of the seven of each week, dressed in the typical outfit of the chimney-sweep; a tall, glossy hat, a long-handled broom and a coil of rope upon his shoulders. His clothes were liberally covered with soot, his face being equally black and gloomy from the worries over his daily bread. For the munificent sum of seven and a half kopeks weekly that each householder of the town paid him he kept his chimney clean and free from the accumulated soot and damp. By these means he managed to eke out some sort of a miserable existence for himself and his family.

Moshe-Menashe was even a poorer man than Daniel. Sometimes entire weeks would pass before he had the handling of a seven-and-a-half kopek piece. And owing to his bald pate and his greasy and well-worn cap, a cap exchanged for a new one not oftener than once in several years, he became the bearer of a nickname that had better remain unmentioned.

But Daniel the Chimney-sweep and Moshe-Menashe the Glazier were by birth and disposition men of exceeding good nature, endowed with innately poetic souls and kindly hearts. They were true poets, men of tender emotions and fine sentiments. It is to be regretted that they were not capable of expressing

these tender feelings in words. Their love of children knew no bounds. Daniel the Chimney-sweep was, in addition, possessed of a fine folk-humor. When he was invited to a wedding, he at once became the life of the gathering, succeeding far better than any professional entertainer. When he launched out into his many mirthful jests and humorous epigrams the assembled ones simply split their sides with laughter. To this day I still am under the spell of his deep, blue eyes that shone through his black and sooty face, and of his good natured and happy smile.

Moshe-Menashe, on the contrary, had a forbidding exterior. He was rarely seen smiling by any one, a deep melancholy always mantling his bewrinkled face. The only day of the year, aside from *Simhat Torah*, on which Moshe-Menashe would throw off the burdens of his daily lot and become lively and happy, was the day on which the children celebrated their holiday. Moshe-Menashe's face then brightened with joy. People would, of course, say that Moshe-Menashe had taken a drop too much and was tipsy. But for the sake of the truth it should be said that he was drunk not with liquor, but with the sheer joy of the holy occasion.

And it was these two devoted and sincere friends of childhood that, by their arrival, gave the signal for the actual beginning of the Siyum. The initial duties of the officials and their friends, Daniel the Chimney-sweep and Moshe-Menashe the Glazier, consisted of the gathering into one place of all the school children of the town. For this purpose they diligently made

the rounds of the *Hadarim* of all grades. The boy wardens remained waiting out in the street while Moshe-Menashe and Daniel knocked upon the shutters of the school room. This knock simply meant to say that it was 'time to come, boys!' As a rule the youngsters had been awaiting this announcement with as much impatience as the pious Jew awaits the coming of the Messiah.

In the twinkling of an eye all the boys would hurry out to the street and join in the procession with the Gabbaim. The crowd of little boys would grow bigger with each subsequent visit to a Heder. In the course of one hour or so all the Hadarim of the town would be emptied of their pupils, the entire youth of the town being marshalled in the streets under the combined leadership of the youthful officials, Daniel the Chimney-sweep, and Moshe-Menashe the Glazier. When the last one of the school rooms had been emptied of its pupils, the crowd repaired in a body to the bookbinder's where the newly bound books were awaiting them, impatient for removal to their new home.

At the bookbinder's house the Gabbaim, with the aid of the two adult leaders, carefully divided the books among the boys. The Talmud students were given folios of the Talmud, while those of the Bible classes received copies of the Books of Moses. Even the Alef Bet children were not overlooked in this distribution, all the boys, on the receipt of their books, immediately stepping into the street to await their comrades.

By about two or three o'clock in the afternoon all the assembled children had already been supplied with their books, so that when Moshe-Menashe called out the command: "Boys, to the march!" the entire assembly started up at once. With proud and joyful faces the youth of the town would begin their march through the streets. The shops and business places of the town would immediately close upon their arrival in the street or section of the town in which these shops were located.

The crowd kept growing from minute to minute. Mothers fetched their babes in their arms and all sorts of idle or curiosity-smitten people joined in with the procession.

"Make way for the Rose Blossoms!" "Clear the road for our holy books!" Moshe-Menashe kept calling out excitedly every few minutes. The crowd answered these exclamations with joyful 'Hurrah's', that fairly filled the atmosphere and vibrated through the entire town.

At about the time of the Minhah service the throng arrived at the home of Mendel the Inn-keeper, where the real festivities were to take place. Mendel the Inn-keeper's house was large and roomy and situated, besides, in the very center of the town. And that was why the Siyum was always celebrated at his home. Long tables, set with a variety of drinks, honey cakes and doughnuts, were already awaiting the young heroes of the occasion. The rabbi, the advisers, as well as some few of the leaders of the town, were already sitting around the tables, while the town band

under the leadership of Hayim the Klezmer was assembled at some nearby table. Even Shelomoh the Cymbalist, an old man of eighty who had long since given up playing at weddings, was here, dragging along his heavy cymbal, in order not to miss this greatest of all occasions.

Just as soon as the vanguard of this young army, consisting of Daniel the Chimney-sweep and Moshe-Menashe the Glazier, accompanied by the boy wardens, hove into sight, the band struck up a lively tune of welcome and the leading men of the town, arising from their places, went forward to receive the leaders of this celebration.

As soon as the band ceased its playing the Hazzan and his choir would start upon some lively Simhat Torah tune, and the entire assembly, both old and young, would immediately become transformed by an inner and holy joy, Daniel and Moshe-Menashe striking out in advance, the rest of the assembly keeping time to some pleasant tune or other.

Meanwhile it grew dark and the time for the evening prayer had arrived. The evening prayers were recited right there at the home of the festival; and, in accordance with a long established custom, it was not the Hazzan who read the prayer but Daniel the Chimney-sweep, Moshe-Menashe the Glazier acting as his chief assistant. Daniel and Moshe-Menashe were not, however, the only ones to show their skill at this prayer meeting. The entire assemblage would assist in the praying and singing, a chorus of several hundred voices being formed wherein the basses and the

baritones of the adults blended harmoniously with the altos and the sopranos of the children, all of them uniting in sending up a paean of praise to the Almighty.

The prayers over, the crowd directed its attention to the generously laden tables, which, however, were soon denuded of their contents. Nothing was left of the contents of the bottles, of the honey-cakes or the preserves, every one doing as full justice to the good things as though he were sitting at his own family board.

With their bodies considerably refreshed, the procession started on its journey to the Bet Hamidrash. This procession was so rich and varied in its colors that it would require the pen of a truly great artist adequately to describe its beauty and the wealth of color encompassing it. More than once did I participate in Russian revolutionary demonstrations. I also took part in several torch-light processions during my student years. I witnessed the gigantic First of May demonstrations both in Germany and in America. Yet, none of these demonstrations, howsoever great and important they were, can possibly claim to be the equal of the processions that I witnessed in my native town when the Rose Blossoms carried their books to the Bet Hamidrash!

All the houses that lined the route of the procession were duly illuminated by candles placed in the front windows, the youth of the town also carrying lighted candles or tapers in their hands as they marched bravely along. But all these bright lights were thrown completely in the shade by the bright glow of the

faces of the Jewish children in their experience of a great and holy ecstasy. The band marched at the head, playing its tunes, the Hazzan and the choir following directly behind them, chanting their songs, while the public at large indulged in song and dance. The young and innocent Jewish maidens lined the streets, casting admiring glances upon the proud, fresh and happy faces of the grown boys, while the happy mothers of the little boys wept out of sheer joy. Even wrinkled grannies pushed back their Turkish shawls, clapping their hands, the while the grandads chimed in by the clapping of hands and the snapping of fingers. A great and inexpressible joy was inscribed upon the faces of all the assembled ones, just as if the Shekinah had made its abode among them. There was joy everywhere; joy, cheerfulness and warmth. It seemed to proclaim that this day was a holiday, differing from all other days of the year. Even the stars in heaven looked upon the town with a twinkle that seemed different. They seemed to participate in the rejoicing that was taking place in the town in honor of the youth of the People of the Book.

After the books had been duly deposited upon the central platform of the synagogue and the assembled had more or less calmed down from their great excitement, the rabbi would ascend to the *Almemar* and deliver a discourse on some subject pertinent to the day's celebration.

I still recall the fact that during the year of my wardenship the rabbi's discourse dealt with the passage of Proverbs: "Train the youth in his own manner,

so that when he becomes a graybeard, he will not depart from it." I do not at present recall what the rabbi preached upon this text. My heart as well as my head was so full of such a great multiplicity of thoughts that there was no possible room left for the rabbi's words. Undoubtedly he discoursed upon the education of the young, as was usual on such occasions.

Following upon the rabbi's discourse, the wardens and their parents, and also the rabbi and the leading members of the community, adjourned once more to the home of Mendel the Inn-keeper, where a banquet, consisting of noodle and rice *kasha* and other delicacies prepared by the young officials' mothers, was spread. Rice kasha was considered as one of the main props of a Jewish organization, and no celebration was conceivable without the presence of this delectable dish on the board.

While the assembly feasted, Daniel the Chimney-sweep and Moshe-Menashe the Glazier served in the dual capacity of waiters and entertainers, and the feasting and rejoicing lasted till long, long past midnight.

V

Local Pride

In one of his inimitable tales, Peretz tells the story of the two stage-drivers, Yankel of Yachinka and Yekel of Yechinka, and the unceasing war that raged between them. Yankel was insanely proud of his town, Yachinka; while Yekel was equally proud of his native Yechinka; so that, on the basis of this silly local pride, great battles were fought between the two. Yankel insisted that Yachinka was the very center of the universe, while Yekel would prove by irrefutable evidence that Yechinka really was the center, and that the other town was nowhere near it.

But it so happened that Yankel's son became betrothed to Yekel's daughter, and then the future parents-in-law of the couple could not possibly agree as to the proper place for them to settle. Yankel insisted that the couple should settle at Yachinka, because that town was much prettier, far nicer, and its people more honest than those of Yachinka, while Yekel was equally insistent that the couple must settle at Yachinka, because that town, and not the other, was the paragon of all the virtues. In this tale Peretz has hit upon one of the characteristic shortcomings of the small-town dwellers of the Pale.

The Jew is, by nature as well as inclination, proud of the place of his nativity. He loves every tree, every

stone and hillock of his native town. He boasts of the great men that grew up in his own town, and is equally anxious to gloss over the short-comings of its evil-doers, whose deeds possibly may work harm to the good repute of his townlet in the eyes of strangers.

The Jew of the Ghetto never does quite consider himself as an individual sufficient unto himself, but rather as a small part of the larger whole; as a member of that society in which he lives and has his being. He considers himself as somehow or other responsible to the world for the evil repute that either his town as a whole or certain individuals thereof have earned for themselves, and is equally proud of any honor or distinction that may come to any of them.

In the White Russian and Lithuanian towns this local pride attained to a particularly luxuriant growth, both among the representatives of the younger as well as those of the older generation. The pupils of Yankel Hatze's school boasted a feud of their own with those of Wolfe Menaker's school; a feud in which many angry words and even blows were frequently exchanged; while the Talmud students of the Old Synagogue could under no circumstances be induced to live on amicable terms with their fellows of the New Synagogue. Within one's own circle everything was nice and rosy, while all that claimed the ownership of the opposition group was despicable and nasty. The entire town was thus divided into cliques, made up of the students of the respective schools and synagogues, who were engaged in eternal civil conflicts and strifes.

This unnatural local attachment was even more

strikingly noticeable in those so-called twin towns; towns that by some one physical attribute—such as a stream or a hill—had become divided into two. And there were many such in Lithuania. The great world without and even the residents of neighboring towns, were not at all aware of the difference between the several sections of the town. But to the inhabitants of the town itself it seemed to make a world of difference as to whether a certain occurrence had taken place in the older or in the newer section of the town.

On the border line of the Provinces of Kovno and Courland there is the town of Zagor. This townlet is divided at the center by a tiny rivulet which, in turn, empties itself into the river Aa at Mitau, where some of the bloodiest battles between the Russians and the Germans in the late war took place. And this tiny rivulet it was that caused the division of Zagor into two practically distinct, little townlets, 'Old Zagor' and 'New Zagor.' Old Zagor boasted its own rabbi, its own ecclesiastical court, its own *Shohetim*, its own Hazzan, synagogues and schools, as well as Town Hall and Mayor. New Zagor followed suit, also having its own rabbi, its own assessors, Shohetim, ritual baths, schools and synagogues, as well as a Town Hall and Mayor.

The inhabitants of New Zagor were exceedingly proud of their own townlet and equally disdainful of Old Zagor and its inhabitants, while the Old Zagor folk fully reciprocated their neighbors' sentiments as regards the others' town. The people of New

Zagor had their share of tales in which the people of Old Zagor were duly held up to ridicule, and so had the inhabitants of Old Zagor. The people of Old Zagor referred to their neighbors across the streamlet as 'the New Zagor Sinners,' while the others referred to them by no other name than 'the Old Zagor Corpses.' Many are the tales told as to the origin of these respective pet nicknames. But these explanations would be of interest to no one but a native of these towns.

Once upon a time it happened (and things will happen now and then, as we all know) that a 'sin' was committed in the town. A young man and a young woman, both residents of New Zagor, were caught strolling alone amidst the trees of the Old Zagor Cemetery at the midnight hour. This couple had evidently come there not for the purpose of bewailing the dead but rather to amuse the living. Immediately the two townlets were in an uproar. A sin had been committed! And who could indeed foretell how many innocent nurselings will pay with their lives for this sin? As was usual in such cases, they started to search diligently into the occurrence, to investigate it from all its angles and antecedents. When the sad case had been sifted to its very bottom, the inhabitants of Old Zagor were thoroughly convinced that the sinners of New Zagor were solely to blame for this breach, while those of New Zagor were equally certain that were it not for the Old Zagor dead and their graveyard, nothing untoward would ever have happened.

The so called bridge spanning the tiny stream would get out of repair nearly every other day; and then there would begin an interminable series of meetings and stiff arguments as to whose duty it was to put that bridge in working order again. The people of New Zagor maintained that the Old Zagorites ought to stand this expense, because if it were not for the Old Zagor horses that trampled on it, it would never have broken down. But to this the Old Zagorites usually replied that were it not for the New Zagorite gamins, the bridge would have lasted forever.

A child of New Zagor was afraid to cross by himself into Old Zagor, for fear that the dead men in the cemetery of that town would throw stones at him or, perhaps, choke him to death; while the child of Old Zagor was afraid to show his face in the new town for fear that one of its 'sinful' inhabitants would strike him with a stick over the head, or commit some like assault upon him.

Quite often serious battles broke out between the urchins of the two little towns. When such a war broke out, the respective armies barricaded themselves on the opposite banks of the rivulet and, after the proper signals had been given by the leaders, the battle began in earnest. Stones, broken bottles, and blocks of wood flew from one camp into the other, and the fight was kept up until the grown folks interfered and called a halt to this civil war by bestowing a good and impartial beating upon the combatants on either side of the river. This interference on the part of the elders,

however, usually led only to an armistice, never to a permanent cessation of hostilities.

The 'Sinners' of New Zagor could not, howsoever hard they tried, make up their minds to live in peace with the Old Zagor 'Corpses,' while the Old Zagor Corpses felt eternally obliged to engage in occasional battles with their neighbors, the New Zagor Sinners.

VI

The Jewish Maiden

The Jewish maiden of our small town was pure and innocent as the flower whose petals the sun has not yet unfolded. Her soul was gentle, her heart tender and compassionate, and upon her face lay the natural, unembellished charm of Jewish womanhood. With her mother's watchfulness always upon her the Jewish maiden grew up pious and God-fearing. But her piety was not expressed in the mere reading of the Bible in Yiddish, nor in weeping at the Benediction for the New Month. Her piety lay imbedded in the inmost recesses of her young soul. Faith was a deep, soulful sentiment, a sort of attachment to "the Unknown Something," a vague philosophic conception that filled her whole being with a rich, spiritual content.

Far removed from the outside world, the Jewish maiden remained naive, demure and virtuous, crushing, as one crushes a venomous snake, the call of the woman that at times ruffled her equanimity. She never harbored any sinful cravings, regarding such feelings as base temptations to be shaken off.

At home she was trained from childhood to be a housewife; not a mother, nor a wife, but a mistress of the household. The Jewish mother was proud of her daughter, upon whom she could fully rely, while her daughter felt flattered at the thought that the whole

household was entrusted to her and at the opinion of the townsfolk that she was a clever girl and ran the household single-handed.

Proudly the little thirteen-year old girl carried her bunch of jangling keys in the pinafore that encircled her tender waist—the keys to the bureaus that held, under lock, the jewelry, the few pieces of gold and silver ware, and the cupboards in which were stored the jars of preserves that she had helped her mother to prepare.

Not infrequently quarrels broke out among the rest of the children who resented their sister's ruling the roost in the house. The younger scape-graces refused to acknowledge their sister as their mother's deputy. They could not brook her domineering tone, and, what was still worse, her securing under lock and key all the pastries, the sweetmeats, the jellies, and the preserves. There was noise and uproar, occasional scraps and complaints to father and mother, who usually brought about a compromise, or decided in favor of their darling daughter.

The Jewish maiden of the small town had no social life. She knew nothing of merry gatherings. She had heard that in the great centers, in Riga, in Vilna, and in other such "loose-living" cities, young fellows and girls met and danced together. She had heard of many other strange goings-on; but she did not envy these girls. She was certain that she could not live in those "free" cities for the space of one minute, and thanked God that her father and mother did not live there.

The only days on which the Jewish maiden took leave of her housewifely duties were the Sabbaths and the holidays. On these days she would put on her ironed dress, rub olive oil into her thick hair, and go out for a walk with her girl friends.

The street was a pretty sight when the Jewish girls promenaded there. The air was filled with a wholesome freshness, a freshness like that coming from citron in early bloom. Their gait was graceful but natural, even as natural as was the complexion of their faces that beamed youth, life and health.

The heart of the Jewish maiden was rich with sentiments of love. But that love rarely was for some definite being. Her thoughts would often wander far, far beyond the narrow confines of her town. She had dreams and reveries of romantic figures—of a hero, a prophet's son, a messiah .... The embodiment of her yearnings that rose before her fancy was ever in consonance with her moods and emotions.

When her father, in a jocular mood, announced to his daughter the fact that she was quite a grown-up young lady, ripe and ready to become a bride, and that before long the match-maker would begin paying visits to the house, she merely lowered her eyes, while her face was suffused with a transparent flush—the hue of chastity and innocence,—as she sought for a pretext to change the conversation.

This shy, charm-laden Jewish girl later on became the pure, devoted wife, the house-mistress, the beautiful, splendidly garbed Princess of the *Seder*, the official business woman, the mother of the little "Mosheles"

and "Shelomeles," the boys with the clear, expressive eyes, with the bright little faces and the minds of little *Iluys*.

Not all Jewish maidens were quite so chaste and modest. Some loved to dress up on week days, to giggle loudly over everything, to look too much into the mirror, to run out into the street dishevelled and to the very spot where gathered the unmarried apprentices and store clerks, who were fond of telling immodest tales, suggestive stories and spicy jokes.

The girls would make a pretense at upbraiding the young fellows for their loose talk, curse them that they should bite off their tongues. But at the same time they would open their eyes wide and cast roguish glances at the merry fellows, who knew full well that the girls were really not much offended. These belonged to the class of "talked about" girls. This reputation surely did not aid them in getting married, and if such a girl was so unfortunate as to remain a spinster, the people had very little pity for her. "He who starts too early ends up too late," remarked Leah Nohum's venomously, when one of the group of women at the butcher's confidingly whispered into her ear that the would-be bridegroom's mother had returned the marriage contract and broken off the engagement with Beilke Yente's because she had discovered that the bride-to-be was "talked about." "As one cooks, so one eats," she enforced at the end of the conversation her previous malicious remark.

There was a still lower class of girls who were truly in every one's mouth, and with whom no one dared to

have anything to do, "the dissolute ones." These were mostly the daughters of female water-carriers, washer-women and *mazzah*-rollers, poor widows who lived in hovels on the outskirts of the town and went without bread, fuel, or candles.

The sons of these widows were usually under the supervision of the community. Up to Bar Mizvah they were sent to the Talmud Torah and after that they were apprenticed to some artisan. But no one looked after the girls. They rolled in the gutter, went about in tatters until, because of our many sins, they became wanton and dissolute.....

VII

The Political Struggle in Lithuanian and White Russian Towns

The Jews within the Lithuanian and White Russian towns led a secluded and extremely isolated life. The village populations that surrounded them lived on a greatly lower cultural level; the only intercourse between the two was an economic one. The Jewish town and the gentile village comprised two entirely distinct, though not always hostile, worlds; two worlds that spoke two distinct languages, whose life interests never met.

The gentile population within the town was in most part made up of the government officials; the Police Chief, his deputy, the clerk of the Town Hall and some few others, who kept the town in a constant state of fear and nervousness. The dwellers of the town paid frequent bribes to the Chief, and were happy to think that he readily consented to accept them without demur or argument. The minor officials were like leeches that fastened themselves upon the bodies of the Jewish traders and shopkeepers, draining them of their last hard-earned kopek. Under such circumstances, there could not possibly be any thought of friendship between the Jews and the officials.

The same unwritten rule held true with regard to the political life of the townlet. The political interests

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and policies of official Russia were as strange and as unknown to the dwellers within these towns as the secrets of the Chinese Court. News of the Chinese Court and its Empress would now and then filter through the metaphorical ghetto walls by means of the Hebrew newspapers, the "Hameliz" and the "Hazefirah;" but these organs never uttered a word about the occurrences within their own Russia. Outside of the occasional and infrequent laconic telegrams, informing the reader that "His Majesty, accompanied by Her Majesty" had 'graciously' made a trip from Petrograd to Czarskoe Selo, or had deigned to take the trip in the opposite direction, nothing was ever whispered of Russian happenings. It was before the day of the Yiddish newspaper. The Russian language was a sealed book to the greater number of the people and the Hebrew newspapers were read only by the few *Maskilim*, usually newly-married youths who were given free board and lodging in their parents-in-law's home.

The dwellers of these small towns did, however, have not a little of political and social energy. Their native social instincts were developed to a high degree, and if these could not be employed in the larger field of national interests, they would find their level in the specifically Jewish, small-town communal affairs and interests. Even as happens in every political and social problem of the great outside world, so here also there were two parties to every petty local question, these two groups being ever at logger-heads with one another. These differences of opinion not infre-

quently led to blows, and what is worse, to "information" to the government officials, which act was properly considered as nothing short of treachery on the part of the better element of the town.

It was characteristic of these small town squabbles that the opposing sides usually divided according to their respective economic positions. In a certain limited sense, it may even be assumed that in these petty struggles we behold the unconsciously sprouting seeds of the future class struggle that was soon to arise between the several opposing groups. This budding class struggle usually showed itself not only in purely economic questions, but in the so-called "political" questions, if the communal interests of a small town may be so termed.

At every public gathering, no matter whether the question under consideration was the election of a representative to the Town Council, the building of a new almshouse, the repairing of the synagogue or the bath house, there always were two opposing factions; the aristocratic and the democratic factions. The so-called aristocrats, the rich men of the community, invariably considered every question from their own exalted standpoint. They would build in harmony with their own tastes; they sought beauty as well as comfort in the buildings to be erected. The democratic masses, on the other hand, always looked for simple, unadorned utility in all public institutions of the townlet. And thus the battle raged all the time and unceasingly. This constant and unceasing struggle between the men of wealth and the common clay

or, as they were called, the "heads" and the "boors," would become especially virulent at a time when a new rabbi was to be engaged for the town.

The rabbi of the small town was expected to attend not only to strictly ritual questions and problems, but he was also the acknowledged secular leader of the town. His opinion counted for as much as that of all the other men combined. Nothing was ever done within the community without the rabbi's consent. Even the rabbi's knowledge of the Law was but secondary to his administrative abilities and organizing capacities.

It is self-evident, then, that the various factions of the town, all of them with axes of their own to grind, must perforce disagree when such a question arose for their solution as who shall be the leader and guide of the community? The leaders always were in a numerical minority, so that were it merely a question of numbers to be decided by ballot, they would certainly have lost out each and every time. But a rabbi was never selected by lot, but appointed. It was the leaders, therefore, who could always get their candidate appointed, and not the great bulk of the town's dwellers, composed as it was mainly of mechanics and laborers, the most of them poor and struggling men who had enough to worry about their next day's bread.

The masses harbored a deep, instinctive grudge against the few wealthy men and their toadies. Quite frequently it happened that they engaged in a quarrel over the rabbi that the leaders had chosen, not because they had any grievance against him, but simply in

obedience to their resentment against the few rich and powerful men who had not consulted the wishes of the community at large. "We pay our 'meat-tax' just like the rich. We pay all the communal taxes in equal proportion with the men occupying the 'East Wall' seats, and we ought to have as much to say in the selection of a rabbi"—was the refrain of the aggrieved 'boors' or 'thick heads' within as well as without the synagogue.

"Whose advice shall we seek?"—the leaders always replied—"Dovidke the tailor's? Yoshke the shoemaker's? or Afroike the butcher's? Shall they examine the rabbis? What do these *men-of-the-earth* know about it? Are they able to understand the rabbi's homilies? And can they appreciate his pilpulistic keenness?"

One needs but to compare the arguments advanced on both sides in these small-town battles to discover in them the same arguments since employed in the struggle between the two great classes—capital and labor—in the great world without, in their eternal struggle for the possession of political power. Yet, the truth must be told that most of the quarrels had more than this shadowy question of sovereignty behind them. They quite often had a clearly-defined underlying principle, or reason. The rabbi that was entirely suitable for the leaders and men of learning usually was unfit to be the rabbi of the common herd; and vice versa, the one fitted to lead the herd could not possibly suit the better educated element.

The leaders always sought for a rabbi who boasted a

solid reputation for erudition and keenness of intellect. His attitude on the *Kasher* and *Terefah* question did not concern them overmuch; he could be as severe as he liked when such a question came up for his decision. Neither were they concerned overmuch about his ethical outlooks and conceptions. As a matter of fact, the man who was absolutely incorruptible and no respecter of persons was, *ipso facto*, disqualified in their eyes. They were always looking for a man after their own hearts; a congenial person, one who would pay proper homage to the rich and powerful, seek association with them and have as little as possible to do with "the herd."

"The herd," on its part, did not care very much whether the rabbi was a greater or lesser scholar, but wanted him to be a man of exemplary conduct, modest, unassuming, and approachable; a man to whom one could tell one's troubles and ask for advice. They wanted him to lean on the side of mercy in ritual questions, to attend the weddings and circumcisions of the poor as well as the rich, and to pay as much attention to the poor man's argument in a lawsuit as to that of his rich opponent. In brief, the leaders wanted to have an aristocratic rabbi, while the herd sought for the democrat and the popular leader of the people. In those towns where the arguments between the opposing factions had gone so far that each faction engaged its own rabbi, one was always sure to find these enumerated qualities in the two respective rabbis.

Even the matter of the initial reception given to the newly-arrived rabbi differed essentially in each of the respective factions. The aristocracy would come out of the town riding in a beautiful coach which necessarily accommodated but a limited number of people. They invariably entered the town at night, at a time when the crowds were out of the way, while the rabbi himself acted in a thoroughly distant and superior manner, scarcely allowing the masses of the people to come near him. "The herd," on the contrary, received its rabbi in a thoroughly democratic manner. The artisans dropped their tools for the day and journeyed forth to the railway station in a number of plain conveyances and wagons. The horses drawing these carts were quite often of the common garden variety. In his bosom each one carried his bottle, out of which he allowed himself to take an occasional nip. If it happened that the rabbi lived in some nearby town, having no railway connections, the crowd simply drew up to the front of the rabbi's home, led him out in proper style, and escorted him at the head of the celebrating crowd right up to their own town, where the rabbinical throne awaited him.

The rabbi did not, however, enter the town in the humble conveyance. His admirers, as soon as they came near the town, usually rolled up their sleeves, pushed their caps to the backs of their heads, and placing themselves within the shafts, led the rabbi triumphantly into the town. A triumphal entry such as this was vouchsafed only to the rabbi who had been chosen by the so-called "thick-heads" or "boors."

The various economic groups of the towns of White Russia and Lithuania had fully developed ideologies, practices and habits of their own. They had their own varied interests and outlooks upon life. And it was these so greatly differing interests that furnished the soil out of which grew great diversities, which in turn were the nurseries of the practically unceasing quarrels over local public interests.

VIII

Anonymous Libel Sheets and Ditties

Tiny as was the average Lithuanian townlet, insignificant as its place on the map appeared, it was yet full of life, bristling with energy and courage. The pulse of life ever beat strongly within its tiny limits. Never a week passed without some public meeting, without the organizing of some new society or other, or without the general indulgence in arguments on some public matter.

The populace usually divided itself into parties and factions, each faction seeking the overthrow of the other, by all proper and improper means. As already stated, there were standing feuds between the so-called aristocracy and the "thick-heads," between the few rich and the people at large; between the few high and mighty ones and the masses, over the management of the town's affairs. These quarrels were, as a matter of fact, quite unavoidable, because the vital interests of the various economic groups within the townlet were seriously interwoven with them and their outcome. The leaders and the men of wealth were anxious to arrogate to themselves all the power, while the masses seriously objected, maintaining that some little prerogative in the affairs of the town belonged to them as well as to the others, because they also paid their share of taxes, as much, in fact, as those standing about the public trough.

At times, the struggle between the parties became so heated that the rabbis of near-by towns, fearing the possible odium to the Jewish name involved in the protracting of the struggle, would come to the town and use all means possible to bring about a cessation of hostilities. Not infrequently it indeed happened that some hot-headed person quietly sent a report to the County Attorney at the County Seat, who brought about the sort of peace that his own none too tender sense of justice dictated.

The opposing parties were not, as a rule, able to tell clearly what they were after. At the gatherings, there would be noise, alarms and yells that reached to the very heavens. The ring-leaders on either side were not sparing in opprobrious names and epithets to be applied to their opponents. They did not hesitate to enumerate all their real and imaginary sins, their own sins as well as those of their relatives, so that the position of any one of the leaders who had any sort of a stain on his family escutcheon was not at all an enviable one.

If one of the town's officials, or leaders, chanced to be too powerful for the launching of an open and acknowledged fight against him with any prospect of success, this was usually done by means of secret and underground work. They sought to render him dead politically by means of libellous hand-bills and ditties.

The libel-sheet was a weapon that was frequently resorted to in a battle against a personal enemy; against the one who made too free use of the meat tax

moneys, or against those who generally arrogated the management of the town's affairs to themselves. By means of the libel-sheet, revenge was sought on the individual offender, and it usually was found in such a thorough-going manner that he was rendered innocuous for ever after. Quite frequently it happened that the object of the libel-sheet was unable to show his face in public for quite some time thereafter.

The libel-sheet was identical in its effect with the so-called "sensational disclosures" which a modern newspaper often brings to bear against an opponent in a political struggle. It happened, for instance, that there were murmurs in the town against the treasurer of the Poor Aid Fund for his too frequent calls at a certain young widow's house. People were afraid to come out in the open with their accusations as there were no witnesses to his acts, and there was also the possibility that the rabbi would punish the bearers of the tale for defamation. So the anonymous sheet would be resorted to, which created a genuine sensation in the town. All the inhabitants, big and little, spoke of the libel-sheet that had been affixed by some mysterious hand to one of the walls of the synagogue.

The libel-sheet would usually be discovered on the Sabbath morning, at a time when the people were flocking in great numbers to the synagogues. There were two reasons for this procedure; first, because everyone had ample leisure on that day to digest the news and to disseminate it among his friends; and, secondly, because no one would dare to desecrate the Sabbath by tearing it down on that day, and the *Sab-*

bath-goy came only on Friday nights to put out the light and on Sabbath mornings to remove the candlesticks. Between these periods he was not to be seen around.

It is worthy of note that these anonymous sheets always were written in Yiddish, though all other public announcements were written in Hebrew. From this it was readily to be inferred that the writers of these sheets were men unacquainted with the Hebrew tongue. If on Saturday mornings, at prayer-time, one noticed small circles of people grouped around the synagogue, one at once inferred that some libel-sheet had been discovered. The practical joker of the town, and even some of the more solid inhabitants, invariably got a great deal of joy out of the incident. For these sheets usually were written in a pointed and witty style, affording a maximum of pleasure to their readers. Sometimes the wording would be garnished with some biblical passage or a little ditty, and it often happened that the entire sheet was written in rhymes.

As effective as the anonymous libel-sheet, was the inditing of a ditty or ballad dealing with some one of the inhabitants—a thing of no rare occurrence. It often happened that in the case of a betrothed couple some ditty spontaneously sprang up, a ditty in which the couple's conduct was described in none too modest terms. If it became known that some money lender had charged usurious interest to some poor shopkeeper, then a song about it soon found its way into everybody's mouth, the "leech" getting his due with proper and liberal interest.

There were youths aplenty in those days—especially *Yeshibah* youths—who were unexcelled in the art of composing a ditty on any and every occurrence. Those men who were aware of being under suspicion feared the consequences of a ditty as much as one fears the flames. Some aggrieved one would even employ it as a weapon before the deed; he would simply let it be known that he intended to circulate such a ballad. Usually, some melody was at once found for the words of the ballad, and the work thus became complete.

In our own town, Avromke the Singer was a great adept in finding the proper air for any song. This as well as his sweet voice made him an object of fear to the girls of the town and brought them all to his feet.

The song composed about the treasurer of the Poor Aid Society, already mentioned, and his too great intimacy with the young widow, ran in its initial verse, as follows: "Rather than go after Ma'arib to the Bet Hamidrash to study, He went to knock at the pretty widow's door. La-la-la, la-la-la!"

Just how the person attacked by the libel-sheets and songs felt can readily be imagined. Many of them did indeed feel extremely uncomfortable. To have one's name on everyone's tongue was an experience far from pleasant, so that not infrequently one of the victims felt obliged to leave his native town forever.

IX

Free Loans

The custom of making loans without interest was developed to a greater extent among the Jews than among any other people. It would really be no egotistic or chauvinistic boast to claim that the idea of "free loans" is a purely Jewish one. The general opinion (among Gentiles) that Jews are usurers, capable of taking the last bite from a debtor, is only an anti-Semitic fabrication. Among no other people is an interest-seeker so hated as among the Jews. A usurer used to be pointed at, and people feared to have any dealings with him whatsoever. "Interest-taker" was a term of opprobrium used as a most venomous shaft against an opponent. There were, indeed, a few loan-sharks in every town who spread their nets to catch the needy, and afterwards to fleece them; but such gentry were the exception, and were designated with such appellations as "leeches" and "blood suckers," and were shunned by all.

To take interest for money loaned is not a Jewish trait; at least, it was not native to the Jew when he led a patriarchal, small-town existence. On the contrary, the lending of money without interest was wide-spread among them. Whole towns carried on the entire business of life through the help of free loans among each other.

The present day is called the "era of credit." Credit is the basis of all modern commerce and industry. If anything amiss happens to the credit of a country, then a "crash," a "crisis" with all its sequels, is inevitable. The Jewish towns had no conception of the modern system of credit. There were no banks or other financial institutions. But commerce through cash was impossible even a few decades ago, when modern industry was not so thoroughly developed. Other means were necessary for carrying on trade; and the most important of these was the free loan—not by associations bearing that name, where Jews could vie with each other in playing the rôle of men of importance, but between individuals.

Economists are at odds as to what proportion of cash there should be in the world of trade and commerce; how much credit, for instance, one could obtain with a capital of a hundred dollars. Such a problem would have become very interesting in the small towns I speak of, where all trade exchange was based on free loans. Every silver ruble then was handled and used by relatively more people than today, when money has become the soul of the world.

In the Lithuanian towns merchandise was bought through commission-merchants in the larger cities. In our region these commercial centers were Riga, Libau, Moscow, Lodz, etc. For merchandise bought no cash was paid, of course; only notes were given. The notes were dated for terms of three, four, five and six months. The merchandise was generally sold before the expiration of the term, and if a merchant was not

tied up with too many other matters he would lend out the money in free loans till the note fell due. Thus the money would circulate literally from hand to hand throughout the whole town, for at no time did anyone keep the money, but passed it on constantly as free loans.

Every town had its market days, when the peasants from the neighboring villages came to town and sold their products, grain, eggs, chickens, geese, etc., and for the money bought their own necessities. In our town the market days were Tuesdays and Fridays, and on the business transacted during these days depended the prosperity of the town. A good market day caused a general rise in the economic status of the community; on the other hand, when the weather and roads were bad, there was an economic depression. The peasants did not come to town; no money was taken in; there was not enough to pay the notes that fell due; and the whole business machine began to creak.

Monday and Thursday the merchants began to gaze at the sky for weather-portents. "No rain as far as I can see," Yankel the store-keeper, a Jew of about fifty with a long beard and purblind eyes, would say. He made his forecast not because he was especially favored by the weather-prophet, but just so—out of good nature, to make his neighbors feel less worried about the weather on the morrow. Yankel had great faith in Providence, who, he asserted, would surely keep back the rain on market days.

When a dispute arose about the weather forecast between Yankel and Jeruham—a Jew of about Yan-

kel's age, but a gloomy, worried individual, with an embittered countenance—and when the latter would point to a distant cloud from Shavler as a sure portent of rain, the doubters would begin to turn the leaves of the almanac.....“to take a look and see what the almanac says.”

Right after the day's business, even before the merchants had had a chance to take account of their profits, the free loan seekers began to file in. And to give out the profits in free loans was as customary and ordinary a proceeding as—let us say—the quick recital of Minhah before sundown. If the day's business had gone badly, there was less worry about the unsold merchandise than about the people who would not be able to get a free loan.

The money that was held in readiness for free loans must not be touched by any one, just as if it were a contribution to the *Meir Ba'al ha-Nes Fund.* “This is free loan money and must not be used for living expenses,” was an oft-heard remark in the town, when a child, or the mother herself, asked for money, pointing to the box containing the free loan reserve.

Many of the richer citizens used to give out several thousand rubles in free loans. Just as a bank knows approximately how much credit this or that merchant may be trusted with, so these free loan apportioners knew pretty well how much they might give to this or that individual. One got forty, another fifty, another a hundred, etc.

When one Jew promised another a free loan on a certain day, the promise was as good as gold. People

placed as much faith in the word of a lender as they do today in that of the banker. Everyone realized that to mislead a neighbor in the matter of a free loan was a great wrong. "It is no trifle, it is a question of a free loan." Just as the lender of the loan was punctual in lending the money, so likewise was the borrower in returning it. Whatever else might happen, a free loan must be paid back on the minute, even if the borrower went bankrupt, it being somewhat like a first mortgage nowadays. But of one who created great havoc in the town through his bankruptcy people would say: "He even devoured the free loan money!" And he was for that reason looked upon as an unscrupulous swindler; not a penny would be loaned to him afterwards.

The giving out of free loans was considered a rare pleasure. A fairly rich man was envied not so much for his wealth and comfort, as for his power of giving out free loans and doing favors in general. No one envied a miserly man of means. "For all the pleasure he gets out of his riches he might as well be a pig."

The great pleasure of giving out free loans was felt most keenly, of course, by the commission merchants (or "sojourners," as they were called) at Riga, Moscow, Lodz, etc. Their families remained in the smaller towns, and the merchants would come home during the holidays to spend a few weeks with them. These "sojourners" did not deposit their money in banks, but brought it with them on their holiday visits and distributed it among the needy in free loans. They were the financial mainstay of the town, and its inhab-

itants eagerly awaited their arrival. Through their aid notes were paid, and with their capital many undertakings were started.

When such a sojourner arrived on the day before the holiday, he found his house already filled with free loan applicants, and happy indeed did he feel if he could satisfy them all. The consciousness that he had relieved his neighbors and that he was not living for himself alone filled him with gratification and true holiday spirit. But when the year had been a bad one and he had no money to distribute in free loans, he felt quite depressed, and his holiday was without joy.

It even happened occasionally that a big city sojourner failed to come home for the holidays because he was ashamed to face the free loan borrowers empty-handed. At such a time there arose a veritable "crisis" in the town. All notes and promises had been made to fall due on the particular date of the arrival of the sojourner, and when he failed to come, or when he came empty-handed, the whole town naturally was perfectly helpless and in despair. Notes were not redeemed; payments were not made; credit sank; merchandise was not delivered; in a word, the whole economic life of the town came to a standstill. Modern economists call such a state of affairs a "crisis." Free loans, without recompense, without the smallest interest payment, served as grease for the wheels of commerce in Samut and Lithuania.

X

Encroachment or Unfair Competition

Serious indeed were the daily worries that beset the average dweller of the Russian Pale of Settlement. Jewish sources of income were woefully restricted and meager in their yield. Competition was keen. Every man had a family, and every one of the children needed food, clothes, shoes and shelter.

The bread-winner of each household was ceaseless in his frantic effort to provide some sort of a livelihood for his wife and children. He would undertake all sorts of hard and degrading work, bearing cheerfully the insults and the brow-beatings of the peasant or the local magnate as long as any or all of these led to the road of self-support and comparative independence. One simply bit his lip and bore the insults and hardships in silence. For each and every one was conscious of his great obligations to his dependents, and was therefore quite ready to bear all sorts of miseries of a cruel fate for their sake.

As great, however, as was the struggle of the people for their daily bread, and as poor as was their yield, there were yet certain well-defined limits beyond which no self-supporting Jew would go. Intense as was the strife of competition between people, there was yet a boundary line that no one would overstep. If one kept a shop whereby he earned his livelihood, it never

occurred to anyone to open an opposition shop, or to force his removal by the offering of a higher rental to the owner of the house. If one of the petty traders was standing near a peasant's cart haggling with him over the price of a bag of grain, no one else, however anxious he may have been for a deal, dared to approach the two. Or if Yente the Plucker, the would-be buyer, was seen fussing with a goose, weighing it in her hands, twisting or turning it this way and that in her effort to convince the peasant woman that the goose was all skin and bones, didn't have an ounce of fat on its body, and that, therefore, the price offered for the goose—seventy-five kopeks—spelt nothing less than bankruptcy for Yente, her competitor in the business, Yahne the goose-dealer, would never dare to come forward and offer a better price, though she was able to tell even at a distance that the goose would be a bargain at twice the amount offered.

Encroachment was considered not only a sin, but also a great anti-social deed. No one, accordingly, dared to be guilty of such a heinous act. If a person occupied certain premises, whether as a home or a place of business, it was his duty to see to it that the obligations undertaken by him were fulfilled to the owner of the premises or to his customers. But he was never haunted by the specter of some one standing behind his back and trying to snatch the premises away from him. He was very well aware that this would never happen; that neither the rabbi nor the residents of the town would countenance such an act.

If a person wanted to rent certain rooms, he took the precaution to ask the actual tenant whether or not he intended to remain in his premises. If one sought to become an employee of some business house, he found out first of all if the actual incumbent of the position intended to remain in it. And if a rabbi received an invitation from a larger community than the one he was serving at the time, he always inquired very carefully if there were not any quarrels between the actual incumbent and the community.

Unbearable, indeed, was the lot of the one who disregarded the social laws of the community or made light of its ethical prescriptions. He was immediately ostracised; every one within the townlet pointed a finger of scorn at him. He was disqualified from holding office, he would never be called to the reading of the Law, not to speak of ever becoming the leader at prayers, or receiving some other sacred honor. It was this force of public opinion, this overwhelming moral force, that effectively kept one from trying to compete with his neighbor, from stealing a march upon any one, howsoever anxious he may have been to do so.

Difficult indeed was it for the inhabitants of Lithuania and White Russia to earn their bread. But it was bread honestly earned, and no one could say that it was obtained by unfair means. Our fathers in Lithuania had to endure a veritable martyrdom in the effort to earn their bread, but clear and untroubled was their conscience. They had never been the cause of any

one's tears, and no one could say that the prosperity of any one of them was based upon the ruin of those less well equipped to fight the battle of life. Do, indeed, the so-called more civilized successors of these men boast such virtues?

XI

A Guest in Honor of the Sabbath

There seemed nothing more degrading to me as a child than the custom of "eat days" among the talmudic students; a custom which forced them to subsist by begging their board from a different family on each day of the week. I hated this repulsive form of sponging, than which there is no greater corrosive of a man's dignity. The term *Orem Bohur* conveyed to me so much that was loathsome and humiliating that I would shed bitter tears on hearing that one of my chums was going to a Yeshibah to start his "eat days." The Maskilim of the "storm and stress" period did great and useful work when they came out against the despicable "bread of charity."

What a demoralizing effect it had on the character of a lad of fourteen or fifteen when he was obliged to repair three times a day to another man's house in order to obtain a meal! It is true that upon some lads these "eat days" had exactly the opposite effect—they developed a loathing of and a revolt against idleness and sponging. Indeed, the best known fighters in the *Haskalah* period and even lately in the days of the Russian Revolution were former Orem Bohurs who in the spring days of their youth had tasted "eat days" at strangers' tables. In their case, these "eat days" had enhanced their hatred of everything that was

ancient and obsolete, and had served but to demonstrate how utterly contemptible and shameful the time-worn practices were. However, the "eat days" had this effect only upon the *Yehide Segulah*, the chosen individuals who felt humiliated at going to seven different houses in the course of a week in order not to go hungry. But on the whole this custom of "eat days" served to undermine and cripple the character of a lad. It developed in him the feelings of a beggar and sponger; it suppressed every bit of self-respect and made him an idler, a flatterer and a boot-licker. If we have among us a goodly number of flatterers, spongers and parasites that live on the community, it is to some degree due to the revolting custom of youths leaving their homes for the "eat days."

Somehow, these "eat days" were considered one of the most important factors in education, a school that everybody had to go through. A boy was sent away to a strange town not so much because he would study there with greater zeal, but principally because it would "make a man" of him. "A boy must get the taste of 'eat days,'" a father would proclaim gravely, when a loving mother would plead against the sending away of her darling child to live among strangers and eat at another's table. "Never fear, Never fear! It will not hurt him at all"—the old grandfather would chime in—"to knock about a bit away from home." And when the mother still remained disconsolate and wept because her young son was being sent away "to pick the crumbs off other people's tables," his grand-

father would ejaculate angrily: "Fool, what are you crying about? Such is the path to the Torah!"

Quite different in character from the "eat days" was the custom of bringing a guest for the Sabbath meal. If giving an "eat day" to a poor lad was considered an unpleasant obligation, a sort of duty one could not escape, to invite a stranger in honor of the Sabbath was, on the contrary, a sort of festal occasion.

"Friday night every Jew is a King." He throws off his week day worries of making a living; he washes and dons his clean Sabbath clothes; every nook of his house is bright, tidy and clean. The "old woman," who all week long had been pottering in her kitchen and the market place, turns into a Queen straightway after the lighting of the Sabbath candles. As for the "King" himself, he assumes an "additional soul" and hobnobs with the angels serving at the Lord's Throne. Gone is the chagrin of yesterday, done the worry for the morrow. All the nervousness of the struggle for existence has vanished. The "King" is in high honor, the "Queen" is calm and watches with delight the dying candles and the freshly-polished silver candle-sticks she had received as a wedding-gift from her mother. There is no envy, no malice. Gone is the monotony of the weekday and the drabness of everyday life. The holy Sabbath, the day of rest, the beautiful, peaceful day has brought into the home an especial warmth, a peculiar serenity. At such a time what can give deeper pleasure, keener delight, than a guest with whom one can chat idly about "politics," and other world-matters? A Sab-

bath meal without a guest at one's elbow was somehow without charm or zest, and no matter how good the fish and how well-cooked the noodles, they would simply not go down.

The Sabbath guest was particularly necessary in a family where the son-in-law was boarded by his wife's parents. Here the guest was indispensable for the *mezuman* for saying grace; and Mordke-Hayim Yoshe's, who supplied the strangers in honor of the Sabbath, would always bear such families in mind.

"Reb Mordke! Please do not disappoint me!" Reb Yisroel Tsesne's might remind Reb Mordke Yoshe's at the Bet Hamidrash on a Friday afternoon just before the prayer of "welcoming the Sabbath." At the same time Reb Yisroel would raise his right hand and shake his index finger as if to warn him that in case the guest in honor of the Sabbath were not forthcoming, things would be bad indeed. "What are you saying? Why, Reb Yisroel, God forbid! Don't I know that you are short for a mezuman?" The lady of the house knew full well that her husband would not return from the synagogue without a Sabbath guest, and placed betimes a special chair at the table for the unknown guest.

As a rule people did not fuss much over a poor lad who had come to "eat his day." If time was short or there were grave worries, people would get through with him very quickly. Not so, however, with the guest in honor of the Sabbath. The most comfortable place at the table and the finest and most generous portion of food were his. The poor lad was looked

upon as an unavoidable nuisance; the Sabbath guest was considered an ornament that sweetened the Holy Day.

The habit of having a stranger in honor of the Sabbath had nothing to do with the commandment of "hospitality to strangers." In the latter one felt that he was the giver and the other was the recipient; but the Sabbath guest was practically a person of greater importance than the host himself. The Sabbath guest was invited not for the sake of a good deed so much as for sheer pleasure. And what greater Sabbath joy could there be than to sit around a table laid with an immaculately white cloth, the large silver bowl full of fragrantly steaming noodle-soup, and to converse the while with one who can both listen well and talk a great deal about everything in the world?

And then, what of the *Zemirot*? A hymn like *Zur mi-Shelo Akalnu*, when one sang it alone or even with one's son-in-law, lacked the mellowness and the sweetness it possessed when the visitor joined in the Zemirot and punctuated the singing with *bam! bam! bam!*.

Quite frequently the guest, if he was musical, sang a different setting of these hymns, in the manner of Nisele of Belz who had learned this tune from the youthful "Master of Vilna." On such occasions the meal would be prolonged, and the neighbors, hearing the strange melody, would hasten their meals to drop into Reb Yisroel's house to meet the stranger.

The visitor usually was the means of obtaining all the news of the town he hailed from,—how this one or that one was getting on; whether the dowry a cer-

tain man had promised would be paid in cash or in promissory notes that were to be redeemed after the wedding-day; whether the young woman suggested as a match for a youth, native of their town, enjoyed good health; whether she had red cheeks or—the Lord forbid!—she was pale and "people talked about her." And the guest, who may never have looked at a strange woman, was expected to be thoroughly posted on all these details. Indeed, in many of the matches made and remade between the small towns, no unimportant part was played by the guest in honor of the Sabbath.

XII

Delaying the Torah Reading

Nowadays if one wishes to direct public attention to some matter, he has the Press ready at hand as a medium. By means of the press one may readily propagate his ideas or principles. By means of the press the public is properly kept informed of all the unsavory deeds of trusted public officials, while the press also is a convenient vehicle for any and every voice of protest against the abuse of public confidence by individuals or institutions.

The Jewish townlets of Lithuania and Poland did not, however, enjoy these advantages. The press was a little-used instrument, exerting but scanty influence upon the life of the people. The place of the newspaper was occupied in these townlets by the Shammash of the rabbinical court. He knew all that happened in the town, and retailed his gossip faithfully. He invariably informed the people not only of the things that happened in the town, but even of the things that did not happen. If the Shammash just happened to be angry at some one, he had no difficulty whatever in making that individual the victim of pranks that could not be easily gotten over with or forgotten. If one of the parties to a match became angry because the promised dowry had not been paid over, and had therefore sent back the marriage-con-

tract, the first man to know of it was the *Bet Din* beadle. And, as the beadle never was wholly impartial in any one of the town's affairs, he usually colored the news so that the one who happened to be persona non grata to him at the moment had sufficient cause to worry over. Indeed, the Bet Din beadle of the townlet exercised functions not much different from those of the newspaper reporter in our modern communities.

But what were the means employed for influencing public opinion? What weapons did the poor widow have at hand for calling public attention to the iniquities of, say, the money-lender who had taken away her bedding for his debt? How did the poor artisan who had lost his case at the rabbi's judgment seat manage to bring before the public his grievance against his neighbor Reb Hayim be-Reb Abeles for building one of the walls of his new house on the ground which he, the poor artisan, had inherited from his late father? How indeed could this be managed when the beadle, as the servant of the rich, usually was found on the side of the men who practised these iniquities, and not on the side of those who suffered from them? In our town the people did, however, discover a weapon; a good and effective weapon. They delayed the reading of the weekly Portion on the Sabbath!

On the Sabbath morning, just before the removal of the Scroll from the Ark, those who had a grievance against the community, against the rabbi, or against any private individual, would simply mount guard on

the steps of the Ark and prevent the removal of the Scroll from it; and as the taking of food previous to the Reading was forbidden, the one who caused the delay had the upper hand in the battle. This delaying of the Reading was, therefore, a potent weapon for any one who had a grievance that he desired to air before the public.

Even the rabbi himself would not altogether disdain this means when he had some communal business to bring to the public's attention. Towards the end of the summer, at the time when the autumn winds began to blow about the town, as if in an endeavor to warn the people of the approaching winter season, as if to indicate that the time was ripe for the revival of the moribund Poor Aid Society and the providing of fuel for the needy, the rabbi usually preached a sermon in the synagogue, inviting the public to attend a meeting called to consider this matter. But if these meetings were not well attended, or if, owing to internal dissensions, the assembled ones could not arrive at any definite decision, then the rabbi would delay the reading of the Law, demanding that each one promise there and then to donate, according to his means, for the named purpose. The rabbi resorted to the same tactics at the Passover season, if it was found that the relief provided for the poor against the approaching holidays was not sufficient to supply them with the needed unleavened bread and wine for the festival.

This practice proved an even more effective means for adjusting a grievance than is the press of the present day. The press is capable only of stirring up

public opinion by calling attention to an existing grievance; but this causing of a delay in the service served not only as the means of calling attention to an evil, but also brought about an immediate adjustment of the grievance, if for no other reason than from the simple desire on the part of the people to avoid becoming the laughing-stock of their neighbors.

This weapon was most frequently resorted to when it became a question of personal grievance or insult because the arm of the law had failed in its effort. It was also employed, however, in the case of laborers who had grown weary of their employers' ill treatment for which, being within the law, there was no other remedy. Indeed, the delay of the Reading may properly be considered as the very first weapon seized upon by the Jewish workers in their struggle with their masters. The first public protest of the tobacco workers in a certain well-known factory at Grodno against their employers—so the story goes—was expressed by means of delaying the Reading at the synagogue. It was by these means that the oppressed workingmen sought to call public attention to their grievances. For, quite aside from the fact that the general and disinterested public usually sided with those who had a grievance, it also served as a means of shaming the evil-doers by pillorying them before a great assembly, a thing that every one sought to avoid at all possible cost. It was this fear of being exposed to public ridicule that quite frequently acted as a deterrent upon many an evil-inclined person.

Of the numerous instances of such delays in the Reading that I am able to recall at the present writing, there is one that stands out in particular vividness. This particular interruption took place on a certain Saturday morning in the early part of the winter; at a time when the monotonous and dreary life of Lithuania becomes even more dreary and monotonous through the gloomy and cloud-laden days that follow one another in regular succession. The synagogue was cold and bleak on that particular Sabbath morning. The Hazzan himself did not seem to be in a happy mood that day, indulging in a good deal less of virtuosity and tonal display than usual. The entire audience was impatiently awaiting the end of the first half of the prayers, so that the Reading might begin, to be followed by the rest of the prayers and a quick and early departure for home.

The Hazzan had hardly managed, however, to finish the last few verses of his Eighteen Benedictions than a loud commotion was heard far down near the entrance of the synagogue. There ensued a hurried rush by all towards the door, in order to see what was taking place. From the midst of the surging crowd soon were heard heart-rending sighs, accompanied by repeated sobs! Little time elapsed before the crowd divided itself into two parallel groups, clearing a path for a cot that was carried by two ragged workingmen. On the cot there reposed an elderly and sickly woman, moaning all the while. In an instant, the cot and its occupant were at the very front of the synagogue, right before the Ark.

"My child! My child! You are murderers! Take pity and give me back my only child!" The woman wailed in her weak voice, a voice choked by the tears gathering in her throat. We children knew this woman quite well. It was Tamar, the bean-woman, a woman who used to carry about a basket filled with boiled beans, peas, ginger-wafers and other delicacies from schoolroom to schoolroom. All of us knew that this good old woman was now confined to her bed and quite helpless. And we also knew that the cause of her illness was due to the forcible drafting of her only son, Borukke the Tinsmith, into the army. We had also heard frequent comments at our homes on this heartless deed of the Town Elder in taking away this poor widow's only son in exchange for the few hundred rubles that he received from David Refoel's for letting his own son—his fourth son—escape his duty, by finding a substitute for him in the son of the widow; the son that she had brought to the estate of manhood by the toil of her own hands since the day when he became orphaned, at the age of two. The entire townlet knew of this iniquity and in the privacy of their homes had denounced it as a great outrage; but publicly they were afraid to speak of it. They were afraid to start a rumpus with the Elder who enjoyed the friendship of the town's Police Chief.

Everyone in the Congregation immediately put aside his Pentateuch and paid the closest attention to the bed-ridden widow's supplications. The only one in the assembly who pretended to be unconcerned in the matter and began to read aloud to himself the

weekly Portion, was David Refoel's. This painful scene lasted but a few brief minutes when from behind the Bimah there emerged Honeh the Shoemaker who, with his fists doubled, rushed over to the Elder and yelled out in a voice choking with anger: "If Borukke Tamar's is not freed from military service you will all be sent in chains to Siberia! Do you think we don't know that you have bought substitutes? Take care!"

An informer usually was hated by the town folk. But in this case they all gave their approval to Honeh the Shoemaker, who had been brought to make this threat out of pity for the poor widow and her son. It took just about one week before Borukke's claim to exemption on account of being an only son was properly recorded and he returned to his mother's home, a free man.

XIII

The Election (Kalfe)

On the second day of *Hol Hamo'ed* of the Passover, right after the morning prayers, the synagogues, big and little, of Lithuanian towns were galvanized into a new life. On that day the fate of Wardens, Trustees and other officials of the various benevolent and other organizations of the town was to be decided.

It is quite true that there were no election campaigns in the modern meaning of the term. There were no public speeches and no caucus meetings. The people of the earlier generations were so far "benighted" that they had no conception whatsoever of any of the weapons employed for such purposes in modern times; such as nominations and resolutions-committees and the like. They were so far behind the times that they knew nothing of parliamentary rules, of points of order and appeals to the Chair. And yet, despite all this, their elections usually were more democratic and far freer from corruption than our present day elections, the officials being far more zealous in the honest discharge of their duties than their modern successors.

The election machinery was so set that there was no chance for any canvassing or "pulls" to do their nefarious work on behalf of this or that candidate. And up to the very last minute no one was able to tell with whom the decision would lie, whose voice would be the decisive factor in the contest.

These elections were rather indirect than direct. The entire membership of the organization did not participate in the elections, but only five of their number. These five Electors had the sole privilege of electing the officials for the coming year. Moreover the Electors were not chosen by any pull, elimination or the like, but by lot. And as the fate of the election depended entirely on the results of this drawing, especial care was taken that it should come off in a thoroughly impartial and honest manner.

The names of the members of the congregation or society were written down on separate slips of paper of equal size. Then there were ten blank slips and an equal number of other slips, on five of which was written respectively: Elector 1, Elector 2, and so on, while the other five bore the inscriptions: Substitute 1, Substitute 2, and so on. These two sets of slips were carefully rolled up and placed into two different skull-caps, the names of the members in the one, the ten blanks and the other ten in the other. These slips were then thoroughly mixed up so that no one could possibly say that any one slip was distinguishable from the others. Then two small boys, aged about seven or eight years, were directed to draw the slips from the separate caps. Each slip of the cap that held the list of the officers was unrolled as it was taken out, and if it was blank, the one that was drawn out of the other skull-cap at the same time was thrown away unopened, while if the slip happened to have the name of some office written upon it, then the slip taken out of the other receptacle was opened and the name of the lucky

one became known. This man then became an Elector and assisted in the choosing of the new officials for the organization, and so on all the way down to the fifth and last one of the five Electors. The one who drew the slip marked "Elector 1" became the legal President of the Board; he became the presiding officer as well as the arbiter in case the vote resulted in a tie. The names of the actual incumbents of the various offices were not entered on the election lists. It was feared that, in the event of their being chosen as Electors, they would be tempted to cast their vote for themselves. Even the names of the Electors of the previous year were not entered. It was considered inexpedient to assign the office to the same man twice in succession. But the Electors of the previous year would act as the Overseers or Inspectors of this year's election. As neutrals, who had no chance to be elected, they could be implicitly trusted.

As soon as the names of the Electors became known, the Shammash of the Ecclesiastical Court, who was also the synagogue-summoner, the administrator of the ritual lashes to the sinners, and the overseer of the ritual bath, immediately went forth into all sections of the town, inviting all the newly-chosen members of the election board to attend their meeting. Usually the Bet Din Shammash was not at all an acceptable visitor to most people's homes, because his errand usually betokened a request for a contribution to some cause, for which purpose he held out his large metal receptacle (*Pushke*). On this, the second day of Hol Hamo'ed, however, he was more than welcome. And

before long the newly-chosen Elector's wife, and even the Elector himself, would worm out of the Shammash all the inner politics of the organization, such as the honesty of the retiring officials, as well as of their prospective successors; the Shammash being one who exercised not a little of indirect pull for the benefit of his friends and the opposite for those whom he disliked.

While the Electors were gathered at this meeting, usually on the evening of the day on which the drawing took place, no outsider was permitted to invade their sanctuary, the only exception to the rule being the Shammash, who, as usual, had free access to the assembly. The impatient people outside, therefore, resorted to him for information as to the apparent chances of this or that candidate.

The Electors, not having received their training in any school of practical politics, usually chose the men most fit for the discharge of the duties expected of them. As the wardens of the Hebrah Kadisha, elderly men, with plenty of experience and unafraid of staying alone with a corpse, were selected. As wardens in the Bikkur Holim and *Linat Hazedek* societies they usually selected young and muscular men who could render the needed aid to the sick when called upon.

As a rule, all these honors were divided among the wealthy and influential men of the town. But this also was a rule that had its exceptions. I recall on one occasion when Simon the Shoemaker was elected as one of the wardens of the Psalm Readers Society. This Simon, as can readily be understood, was not one of the occupants of front seats in the

synagogue, but had his place full four rows below, not far from the Bimah. An uncle of mine, one of the leaders of the town, also was one of the wardens elected at the time; so that on the very next day, when the list of the newly-elected officers became public, one of the town's tattle-tales came running breathlessly into my uncle's presence and, evidently laboring under great emotion, yelled out the following: "Did you hear, Reb Yosef Yakob, what scurvy trick the Electors of the Hebrah Tehillim played on you?" "What sort of a trick?" my uncle asked in astonishment. "Why, didn't you know it? They elected Simon the Shoemaker as a Gabbai". "Well, what of it?" asked my uncle again. "What! And you accepted willingly an office in which you will serve together with a cobbler"? "Yes, I accepted it," my uncle answered quietly. "Simon the Shoemaker is an honest man. He has to work hard for his living. He is an honest man and will make as good a Gabbai as any one of us. Wasn't Rabbi Johanan ha-Sandler a great sage?" And that ended the argument.

As a small boy of eight years, I began right there and then to look with a great deal of respect upon Simon the Shoemaker. I even began addressing him as Reb Shimon, on that very day. As young as I was, I already could understand that even a shoemaker, working hard for his living, can be an honest and pious man and enjoy the privilege of being elected to a wardenship.

XIV

The Redemption of Captives

Simon the shoemaker was not at all prominent in any of the town's Hebrahs or charitable orginizations. He was, it is true, a member in the Hebrah Tehillim, Bikkur Holim, the Poor Girls' Dower Society, as well as other associations wherein membership was not denied to one belonging to the artisan class. But he occupied a position of trust in none of them. He was not even to be found among the Ten Founders, whose names adorned the front page of the registers of these societies.

Simon the shoemaker was just one of the crowd. At any one of the many celebrations of the townlet he usually remained unnoticed. He participated in none of the town's quarrels, never taking sides in them. He did not raise his voice at their gatherings and did not seek to be heard ahead of anyone else. He invariably permitted his individuality to be swallowed up in the collectivity of the mass—in the mass of the hard-working people whom no one noticed or paid any attention to. Despite all this, Simon the shoemaker was one of the pillars of the community. He was one of its main supports without whose aid the community would not, most likely, have been the community that it was. Without Simon the shoemaker the townlet would have borne an entirely different appearance. It

would have been, so to speak, minus an eye or minus its heart. Its very being would have been much altered and for the worse.

Simon resided in the poorest section of the townlet. He owned an old shack somewhere on its outskirts, in a narrow alley in the vicinity of the public bath-house. Yet everyone in town knew exactly where Simon's home was. Simon the shoemaker's home was indeed a sort of Town House, a house belonging as much to every one of the town folk as did the synagogue and the wayfarers' shelter; because Simon was one of those who helped, heart and soul, to weave the web of the town's social and spiritual life.

What, indeed, would the townspeople have done without Simon's aid when the *Etape* and its convicts were passing through the town? Who would have taken the trouble to find out the crimes of which the convicts were accused, whether they were in need of food or clothing, whether any of them were sick, had any messages to send to their families, or whether it were not possible to send someone to the District Judge or to the Police Chief to plead for the one who had been caught in the net for a crime he had not committed? It was Simon the shoemaker that would promptly set himself the task of uncovering all these things. It was Simon the shoemaker's task to provide the prisoners with white bread and fish for the Sabbath and with *mazzot* and wine for the Passover. It was for this purpose that he constantly sought the friendship of Yauni the policeman, whose duty it was to supervise the local prison.

Simon the shoemaker would purposely hand Yauni a liberal dose of vodka and a generous portion of boiled fish, in order that he should not pay any attention to Simon's talk with the prisoners. When the Chief heard of it, he would indeed carry on like one possessed, spout profanities, stamp his feet and menacingly double his fist. Yet neither Yauni nor Simon would be the least bit disturbed by his antics, aware as they were all the time of the true meaning of these fireworks. Simon would immediately race through the town and raise sufficient money to shut the official's mouth for the time being.

Simon could not possibly boast a mastery of the Russian tongue; but having once served in the army, he had somehow acquired the knack of properly addressing a Russian official. Simon had grown up a complete orphan. Both of his parents had died of the cholera while he was still an infant. For a long while, Simon shared the miserable lot of all ghetto orphans, spending a day here and a day there. And God alone knows what would have become of him if it had not happened that Haykel the Melamed, a distant relative of his father's, of blessed memory, had taken pity on him and apprenticed him to a shoemaker. When Haykel, at whose table he ate his Sabbath and holiday meals, died, Simon was left all alone in the world.

Simon loved to pass his leisure hours in walking about town, absorbed dreamily in his thoughts. He would then seek to find out why God had created the world in such a manner that in it there were both

rich and poor, fortunate and unfortunate, good and bad. He wanted to know why it was that some people lived in such bright and cheerful homes while others lived in cold and damp cellars and still others were locked in foul prisons and cells.

The sight of the prison would call forth in Simon's breast many melancholy and disagreeable thoughts. He feared and was attracted by it in turn. He had a mighty desire to penetrate into this inferno, to see how so many human beings made of flesh and blood, even like himself, were made thus to suffer. He pitied these unfortunates sincerely, pitied them for being thus confined behind iron bars, in a foul cell full of insects and rats, and without air or light. The clanking of the convicts' chains would affect him so that he would lose all self-control and become restless and fretful. The chains tugged and gnawed at his heart-strings. In these bitter moments he felt all the more keenly the misery of his own lonely life.

It was during those early years that Simon had made the vow that if God would but be kind to him and he would grow up to manhood and earn his bread, he would devote himself to the cause of all those unfortunates who are suffering at the hands of cruel oppressors. And right after his marriage, just as soon as he had set himself up a workshop, he proceeded to carry out this early wish of his. The redemption of the captives became his life's great obsession, to which he devoted the greater part of his time.

Most of the time Simon had little to do at the town prison, which served but as a temporary halting-place

for prisoners en route to the District Prison, and not as a regular place of confinement for convicts. Accordingly on those days when no convict transports arrived, Simon could sit calmly at his work-bench from early morning till late at night, humming to himself, as he worked, the tunes of the New Year and Atonement prayers.

But Simon became a busy man indeed when the etape came to town. He would then hang about the prison all day long, and sometimes even till late at night, seeking for an opportunity to approach his friend Yauni, to put something into his palm or his palate, so as to obtain a chance of talking with the prisoners.

The etape usually arrived in town either in the late night hours or early in the morning. But Simon the shoemaker would always be found at his post, never missing the golden opportunity of meeting it. No matter what the weather—rain, frost, thunder, lightning or wind—Simon was always there. He performed his self-imposed task faithfully and joyfully, and with inward happiness. It was at this time that he once became thoroughly aware of his own worth; of the true cause of his being here upon God's earth.

When people saw Simon dressed in his Sabbath clothes, running through the market place in the direction of the police station, they knew at once that a new etape had arrived in town, and that Simon was bent on an errand of succor to these unfortunates. At that moment Simon the shoemaker became the most important personage of the town. He would

become transformed into a veritable giant; a giant towering above everyone, even above the rabbi and Reb Nottel, who regularly bemoaned the Destruction of the Temple in the midnight watches of the night, and, wearing his phylacteries and his *Talit*, studied the Torah all through the long day. Everyone now instinctively felt that Simon the shoemaker stood head and shoulders above him, and was of far greater service to the community than all the rest of them. Every one envied him his extraordinary good fortune. On Fridays and Saturdays even more than on any other day of the week, Simon would be busy with the etape. On Fridays, Simon's home was like a busy market place. Yahe, his wife, cooked fish for the prisoners, and was as busy as if she were making ready for a wedding feast. Some of the housewives would come in to assist her, so that the work would be done more expeditiously, though with no less care. Simon himself, in the meanwhile, would be scurrying about the town, collecting white bread for the prisoners. With a generous-sized pillow-case thrown over his shoulders, Simon would tramp from door to door, collecting rolls and loaves for the unfortunates. Every one would contribute willingly, no one refusing his mite. People would leave the half-baked or burned loaves for themselves, and give only of their choicest to Simon. Besides the pillow-case, Simon carried a large bottle for the *Kiddush* wine. This privilege of supplying the Kiddush wine was, by the way, duly claimed by Mottel the wine dealer, who refused to part with it for all the wealth in the universe.

But smooth sailing did not always attend this venture. Now and again it would indeed happen that the police captain would insist on sending the etape forward on the very eve of the Sabbath. The townlet would be thrown into a turmoil. Every one would become excited and deeply indignant with this evil doer. The communal conscience of the townlet would become awakened, urged on to greater activity, while Simon the shoemaker would go about as if in a daze and keep mumbling to himself and sighing continually: "On the road on the Sabbath, and among Gentiles!... .... Without Kiddush, without wine, without white bread and fish, and to subsist on mouldy bread and water! How can one allow this to happen?"

He would run to the rabbi, to the householders, and to the communal leader. He would implore, beg, cajole and threaten to cause a stoppage in the Reading of the Law on the Sabbath. "You will see!"—he would threaten and plead at one and the same time— "you will yet see what I will do..... I will not let you 'Read' tomorrow. I won't let you take the Scroll out of the Ark. What do you expect, indeed?"

Simon's warnings usually had the desired effect. The leader would be obliged to leave his business and run to the Police Captain, in order to prevail upon him to rescind his evil decision; not, however, without the outlay of some bribe money to the official. But who cared for money when the observance of the Sabbath was at stake?

On the Sabbath, Simon the shoemaker would rise early, attend the early morning service, and, together

with a few other artisans who desired to participate in this charitable deed, would proceed to carry the bags of Halah and the platters of fish to the prison. If the guard did not permit them to enter the prison proper, they would pass the individual portions through the grating of each cell. A considerable crowd would then collect about the prison building; a crowd that would look pityingly at the unknown but unfortunate persons who had been thus forcibly separated from their fellow men and put behind the cruel bars of this dingy and clammy prison.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, the hour when everybody else had already had his afternoon siesta and was ready to go to the synagogue for the Minhah service, Simon still hadn't had his breakfast. His Halah had not yet been broken and the sealed-up dishes were still in the oven. For Simon the shoemaker had been busily preoccupied with the Mizvah of the Redemption of the Captives and was utterly unaware of gnawing hunger.

XV

PASSOVER

The Jews are celebrating their deliverance. Oppressed and enslaved were our fathers in days of yore. For more than four centuries they groaned and moaned under the yoke of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who tortured them cruelly and mercilesssly. They finally achieved their freedom; and such an event deserves eternal commemoration and yearly celebration by the children of Israel.

If festivals are instituted expressly to commemorate the most important moments in the historical unfolding of a nation's life, then Passover is the most important of holidays; for the deliverance from bondage is the greatest event in the life of an individual or nation. The tyrant Pharaoh lorded, indeed, despotically over the people of Israel! He forced his slaves to knead clay and carry bricks. He reared colossal pyramids by wageless labor. He went so far as to bathe in the blood of children. And—what is even more dreadful—all these atrocities came very near strangling the longing for freedom; they almost succeeded in crushing the aspiration toward deliverance. Slavery is terrible; yet it is still more terrible when the slave has become callous; when his longing for freedom has died out.

Fortunately, but few among those who were forced to labor had the feelings of bondsmen and the souls of

slaves. There were but a few who felt contented with the flesh-pots given them by their hard-driving masters. The majority of that generation still cherished the hope of ultimate freedom and readily listened to the cheering words of Moses ben Amram. The call to a new land where all would be free citizens had inspired those in bondage. The aspiration, long dormant in the hearts of the clay-kneaders and straw-gatherers, awakened,.so that no sooner had the moment arrived than, with their heads high, they left the land of slavery.

Passover does not merely commemorate our Exodus from Egypt, where Pharaoh kept our ancestors enslaved. Our long history boasts indeed many a Pharaoh. There has never been any dearth of oppressors who bathed in our blood, who were eager to defile our souls. Every generation had its oppressor, and for all that we have instituted no festivals commemorating them. Passover is the festival of the Jewish national birth. It was then that the Jewish nation was born.

Like wandering Gypsies the Jews were when they first appeared in history; they lived in scattered clans and groups. As shepherds they roamed about from place to place with their flocks, in the mountainous lands of the Orient. Like all primitive, nomadic peoples, the Jews, too, lacked the consciousness of self, the "national ego" that unites and fuses all individuals into a uniform whole.

On leaving Egypt the Jews all at once became a strong and mighty people. The feeling of national consciousness swayed them. The erstwhile slave forthwith became the guide of nations. Soaring on

eagle's wings, he rose above all idolaters. He became inspired by high ideals; he went forth to show the world the true meaning of good and evil, of life and death. And it is this great event, the Birth of the Nation, that is celebrated on Passover.

The thousands of years that have elapsed since the Exodus could not blot this great event from memory. On the contrary, the longer one lives, the dearer one's birthday. Each passing year adds a new leaf to the Book of Life of the Jewish people. Each passing year makes the miracle of the Jew's existence ever greater; and Jews who live in ghettoes, and can therefore sense more deeply the import of Jewish deliverance, celebrate the Passover as the greatest festival when the echoes of the Exodus resound in every home. Majestic indeed is Israel when celebrating his national birthday in the towns of Lithuania and Samut.

This festal mood would come to pervade the Jewish home just as soon as the *Hamez* had been burned. The very removal of the leavened bread would cause the home to look brighter and more spacious. The freshly washed and ironed clothes, on which not a speck of dust was tolerated, imparted a peculiar charm to the women wearing them. Even the men folk, who, as a rule, were not especially particular in the matter of "dressing up," would, on Passover eve, put on genuinely clean holiday clothes. Particularly noticeable was the coat of Bere the Mazzah-carrier. Bere had worn his Sabbath coat during the entire four weeks since Purim, while delivering the baskets of mazzot to the housewives. On Passover eve he changed

this coat for a special red calico cloak which the townfolk had duly dubbed "Bere's *Shemurah* Coat."

On Passover eve the rabbi of the town would send by Bere portions of this particular kind of unleavened bread to all the prominent householders. That was why he had to put on a specially kasher garment, which was famed throughout the town. This garment, to be sure, did not exactly fit Bere's figure. Bere was a lanky man whose one shoulder was higher than the other, and looked like a hump. For Bere this kind of a shoulder was a blessing. He could comfortably place on it the huge wicker basket filled with mazzot, and merely support it with one hand. The Shemurah coat was a garment made of one piece of uncut cloth and resembled rather a woman's petticoat than a man's garment. "This looks like Bere's Shemurah coat," people would caustically say to Zerah the Tailor, when one of his creations did not fit well. Bere himself apparently was not the least bit worried that the cut of his garment was not exactly up to date. "You little silly, it is only for Shemurah," he would calmly answer his only daughter, a beautiful girl, when she complained that she was burning with shame over her dad's coat. "This is not an ordinary garment; it is for Shemurah. You see, it must be kasher, and needs to be washed. Let but a grain of flour, be it as small as a mustard seed, get on this coat, and the Shemurah (may God save and protect us!) may become questionable, Lord forbid!" Bere would thus elaborate painstakingly upon the importance of the Shemurah,—as if this had any bearing upon his daughter's complaints,

and as if it explained why the coat fitted him like a bag.

Another person who was very busy on Passover eve was Reb Velvel Avrohom's. It was Reb Velvel's undisputed prerogative to distribute *Haroset* gratis to the whole town on that day. Indeed, Reb Velvel's Haroset was renowned. He prepared it with nuts, wine and many kinds of spices, so that it had a heavenly taste. Reb Velvel would allow no one to assist him in the making of his Haroset. He considered this task as his own from A to Z, to the final distribution of the condiment. He allotted each family its proper share. "Reb Velvel," some servant girl would say, as she held out her silver beaker, "we have a visitor for Passover. The *Hossen* has arrived. Please don't forget it!" "Am I a stranger in town," Reb Velvel would retort rather offended. "Why, don't I know that you have a guest at your house? Don't fear, you will find a share for the Hossen, too." Actually, however, the Passover celebration did not begin until nightfall, when everyone sat down to the *Seder*. Like a proud King, the Jew would sit upon the *Hese-bett*, together with his wife—now turned Queen—and surrounded by his children, the Princes, and recount the tales of wonder, the miracles that were shown our forefathers at the time of their deliverance from the yoke of slavery.

The baby-boy of the family intones the *Mah Nishtannah*, and the father and the older children answer with the beautiful and absorbing tale, recounting from beginning to end how our ancestors had been

enslaved, how Pharaoh tortured them, how that greatest fighter for liberty, Moses, had awakened their longing for freedom, and how he finally succeeded in outwitting Pharaoh and led his people forth from slavery to freedom.

The Passover Seder! How bright, how cheerful, is the Jew's home on that evening! The poorest of the poor must have a Seder, with mazzot and the four cups of wine. All the bitterness of life has vanished together with the leavened bread. The *Galut* feeling of dejection has been cast off, even as the dust has been shaken off and the mould wiped away that accumulated in the course of the year. The great Jewish *Neshamah Yeterah* of the sons of freedom, the free soul of the nation, is felt in every nook and cranny of the house. The Shekinah itself has come to grace the Seder and to hear the reading of the *Haggadah*.

It is no easy task for a Jewish woman to bring the Passover into the home. It means four long weeks of scrubbing, scouring, washing and ironing. The house is a veritable market place. There is shouting, noise and tumult. No one knows what the other is doing, each one being completely engrossed in his own work. But all this toil is worth while for the sake of *Pesah*. Such supreme festive moments as the Jew lives through on the Seder night are worth all the preliminary labor and a great deal more. When else can a Jew recall so many beautiful memories of the past, and where else can he cheer himself with so many sweet hopes for the future as at the Seder on Passover? Even the free-thinking Jew, who is not particular

about many a Mizvah, will observe the Passover with all the minutiae, for his children's sake if not for his own.

Passover is not a religious but a national holiday. It implants more of the Jewish national spirit than all the other days of the year put together. An ineffably sweet light irradiates the Jewish home on that holiday. Father, mother, children—all beam and radiate joy in honor of the Passover. The mistress of the house has arrayed herself in her costliest jewels and ranged the table with all the little silver and gold that she keeps carefully tucked away—wedding gifts for her children, when, God willing, she will live to lead them to the *Huppah*. Candles burn brighter on Passover. Not alone the house, not alone the vessels, have been cleansed, but the Jew himself, as it were, has been washed and cleansed in honor of Passover. No wonder! A great guest is expected: The Prophet Elijah is to come!

One enjoys but little the Passover foods. The elder folks, the grandparents, go through tortures before they manage to chew the hard and dry Mazzah Shemurah and the piece of horse-radish. But what matters food on Passover after all? Like a single drop of impurity in a limpid flowing river is the grain of bitterness in the ocean of joy in which the Jew is immersed.

How serenely do father and sons read the Haggadah, and how beautifully do they sing the Song of Miriam! Somehow it seems that the Passover has brought spring and all; that but for the Passover we would for-

ever have winter and cold. . . . All Nature has become rejuvenated in honor of Passover. She has decked the Earth with a beautiful green coverlet, under which lie cuddled countless millions of new lives. Streams of incense float from field and forest and sweep into the cleansed pure Jewish homes. Even the sky, overcast and cloudy all through the long winter, has now cleared its angry brow for the Seder and shows its deep blue. It is the Guarded Night! The light of the moon itself must illumine the path of those making the exodus from Egypt.

At certain times, especially in the last decades, Passover, the Festival day of Freedom, that had been the source of happiness to the Jew, has been converted into a season of fear, a season that has filled the Jewish homes with fear and terror. This great and beautiful Freedom Festival of the Jew, the Song of Songs of the Jewish nature poetry, has been seized upon by various dark and savage elements as the season for the most shameful calumnies and the most blood-thirsty persecutions. The birthday of the Jewish nation has become the season of Jewish misery. The Season of Freedom has become the season for Jewish persecution. At the very time when we are refreshing our souls with joyous recollections, our enemies are preparing for a fresh attack. The festival of Jewish Springtide, of Jewish sunshine, has become darkened by the slaughter of Jews. The very season of love and joy has become the season of destruction and death. At a time when the Song of Songs was to be chanted, the doleful *Ekah* had to be intoned. The

present has become the bloody abyss between the past and the future. The Guarded Night has become a Night of St. Bartholomew.

Yet, Israel the Eternal, who has been celebrating Passover for four thousand years, who has carried the holy Jewish traditions treasured in his heart for so many generations, will continue on his path, the old wanderer's staff in his hand, until Mankind will come to see its great Springtime, the "Passover of the Future."

XVI

LAG BA-'OMER IN A JEWISH TOWN

During the *Sefirah* days Jewish children used to feel like birds in a cage. Spring, with its golden days and silver nights, had at last come from some distant warm clime to waft its beneficent breath over the drowsy town. Out of the neighboring fields and meadows, freshly-torn by the peasant's plough, the breezes brought strong, refreshing aromas. All of us school boys now felt an overpowering longing for the vast stretches outside the school room, where the yellow and purple flowers and buds were beginning to spring up. We hankered to be out on the wide Church Square, to watch the flocks of pigeons alighting with a great flapping of wings to peck at the scattered grains. Happily, there was nothing to fear from the gentile youths who considered themselves the rightful masters of the place and with whom we were therefore engaged in constant warfare. They were at this time of the year in the surrounding villages, working on farms. Moreover, in the near-by woods, the bare trees were beginning to wrap themselves in green, tender leaves, and the ever present, mysterious, supernatural power kept drawing us towards it! But we were confined in the Heder day after day from early morning until late at night. "In the Sefirah days"—the rebbi would solemnly admonish us—"one must be

in a sober mood. One must forego all pleasures and joys on those days of national mourning."

Why must school children be sad-hearted on the very days when the sun begins to shine so brightly, after these many dreary months? Why must we not raise our voices just when one can make such fine flutes out of the tender flexible reeds that grow so luxuriously by the river bank? Why are we forbidden to crack a smile just at the season of the year when Patoitwes, the town Sabbath-goy, has already exchanged his winter felt cap for his ancient and greasy straw hat, a sure enough sign that spring is here? Truly, our immature childish brains were too weak to grasp these inexplicable mysteries!

But our rebbi had commanded us to be downcast and gloomy, and it was for us to obey, without questioning his reasons. We could not make merry, though the glorious spring days continued to bring joy. We had to maintain a morose exterior despite the fact that out hearts were bubbling over with joy and happiness! We were not permitted to raise our voices, though our inner beings were aflame with song in unison with the universal chorus of the happy springtide. We were obliged to keep our eyes riveted to the ground, despite the fact that the bright skies overhead kept enticingly beckoning and smiling to us.

Have you ever seen a young twig forcibly prevented by the rope-knots from turning its face toward the sun, the source of its life and strength? Have you ever observed the bud that is unable to unfold its beautiful

leaves because it has been deprived of moisture and sunshine? Their life-giving forces are not gone. They are still there in all their potential strength, hidden away in their bowels. But they are awaiting the magic moment of release, when they will be enabled to bring forth their gifts in full abundance into the patiently waiting world. Even so, the greater the gloom imposed upon us during the Sefirah days, the deeper our impatience to enjoy the forbidden fruits of the glorious spring. The longer the hours we were compelled to spend at the Heder, the more feverishly we looked to the only free day we had at that season of the year—Lag ba-'Omer. And indeed, Lag ba-'Omer was the only day when both elements of our town—the grown ups and the children—would form into a sort of reception committee to welcome the season of love and life.

On Lag ba-'Omer the town assumed a holiday aspect. Marriage contracts were written and marriages solemnized. The streets of the town were filled with bustling fathers of grooms and brides, their garb carefully chosen, their beards and side-locks combed and brushed. Women sauntered along, attired in rustling silk dresses and bright-hued Turkish shawls thrown gracefully over their shoulders. The young girls put on their white satin dresses and hurried to offer assistance to their bosom friends who were about to enter a new state of life, the mysteries and intimacies of which only their mothers were permitted to discuss. Youths, in their Sabbath best, accompanied by the town band, were hastening in a large open wagon to meet the bridegroom, a native of some nearby town.

Ever since early morning the bewitching tones of Hayim the musician's fiddle, mute for several weeks, were floating in the clear air of the town. Hayim himself, as well as the other members of his band, was now in his happiest mood, because he had at last been given a chance to exercise his skill upon the instrument which had been allowed to accumulate a layer of dust these past few weeks.

On Lag ba-'Omer the members of this band felt the thrill of a paralytic suddenly conscious of returning life, and they were thankful for this mercy of a kind God. Mirthful tunes, in harmony with the beauty and cheer of nature, resounded through the town, finding an echo in everyone's heart.

But even more than the adults, we youngsters felt the joy of this day. We rightly regarded Lag ba-'Omer as our own holiday! On that great day we left our homes behind us and were like the birds of the forest which freely hop from twig to twig, frolic and disport themselves, without seeking any one's permission.

On this day we emerged from our prisons and became a part of nature. Loaded with goodies and armed with our bows made out of saplings, we arrived at the Heder in the morning. Each of us had to bring along hard-boiled eggs, salt and a dish for collecting maple-sap. Without these requisites, no boy could expect to share in the festive meal spread in honor of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai. No less a personage than the teacher himself waited at the table. The quantity and variety of food brought for the feast was entirely

optional with each pupil, and depended upon his economic circumstances or good-will.

While the rebbi, with the assistance of the *rebbezin*, was making the preparations for the coming feast, most of us were busy testing our bows and arrows and our skill in using them. At the same time others managed to smuggle in a *klemendrik*, a form of exercise strictly prohibited on the ordinary days of the year. "Klemendrik," the rebbi would say, "is fit only for *Goyim*. The characters of kings, queens, princes and peasants are good enough for their games but not at all for those of Jewish children. Jewish children," he would add after a pause, "are in Galut and must have neither wars, nor kings nor emperors. This indeed was the source of all the misfortunes that befell Rabbi Akiba's disciples." Here the rebbi's words became more stern and admonitory than ever. "They tried to make war upon the Romans and they perished in the attempt."

On Lag ba-'Omer, however, the day on which the Angel of Death had finally dropped his scythe of destruction, this game was permitted to us; especially so since our weapons were nothing but bows and arrows, the time-hallowed weapons to which the Philistines of old had so ingloriously succumbed. Happy indeed were we when we descried in the distance Shmayah the Carter and his ancient mare. We rejoiced not so much at seeing Shmayah, but this mare of his that had been more than a friend to us. For whenever we needed a few horse-hairs, we knew that Shmayah's good-natured nag would let us have

them. The nag would prick up her ears and raise her tail as if to say: "Help yourselves, little boys, take all you want from a poor and hungry creature." After the pulling out of each hair she would give a faint kick with one of her hind-legs, and there the matter would end. In recognition of her resignation, we would show our gratitude by stealing loaves of bread and small bags of bran from our homes and dropping them into the nag's feeding-trough, for she could not have survived for any length of time on the fare provided by her master, Shmayah.

Once we had, with our rebbi's assistance, completed our arrangements for the journey, we would start for the march upon a road bordered with fields and farms until we finally found ourselves on the green meadows. And only he who has at least once in his lifetime experienced the exhilaration of emerging from the confinement of a prison into freedom, can possibly appreciate the exhilaration and joy that we felt on our Lag ba-'Omer march toward the woods.

The nearer we got to the woods the more agitated our hearts became, and the more swiftly our blood began racing through our veins. We were impatient for the goal; impatient to be at the objective of our dreams of these many days. As the youth embraces his beloved, so we sought to embrace with our slender arms the forest where the soil is so fresh and green; where young twigs and shoots send forth such spice-laden odors and the trees so generously give their sweet sap, while they are gently swaying in prayer to the Almighty God.

We arrived at the woods ahead of our provision wagon, in which the rebbi, in skull-cap and unbuttoned long-skirted coat, comfortably sat, conversing with Shmayah the Carter, who was trudging on foot alongside his winded nag. Our arrival in the woods was duly announced by our hilarious shouts and bow-shots. The woods answered us just as hilariously and heartily, so that we soon felt entirely at home in this more or less strange place. When the rebbi finally arrived, we first of all took the pots and other vessels out of the wagon and placed them under the trees so as to intercept the precious drops of tree sap. Shmayah would take down the bag of hay on which the rebbi had sat and unpack the bundles of provisions, which he would hand to the rebbi for safe-keeping. The rebbi, however, did not exactly carry out Shmayah's orders. He had become so thoroughly intoxicated by the sweet scents and the gentle breezes of the outdoors, that before long he was soundly asleep where he lay. Calm and peaceful was his sleep that Lag ba-'Omer day in the wide and open woods, the green soil his pillow, the azure sky his coverlet.

While the rebbi was sleeping we romped about all over the wood. We raced like young deer, climbed trees, played games, stood on our heads, walked on our hands, and generally felt as free as the birds up in the tree tops, who entertained us with their sweet song. When the rebbi finally awoke from his refreshing nap, he called us together in his gentlest tones, and, after we had washed our hands and pronounced the benediction, we all sat down to our repast.

The rebbi conscientiously dealt out equal portions to all of his pupils, irrespective of the size of the contribution each had made to the general stock of provisions. All of us enjoyed equally this feast in honor of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai of old, while the rebbi related the tale of the sage Rabbi Akiba and the tragic fate that befell his twenty-five thousand disciples. When the sun began sinking behind the trees, we began our homeward march toward the town.

On the morrow of this memorable day, when we reported at our school without our bows and arrows and the other paraphernalia of the holiday, we started on a new stretch of impatient waiting for our next excursion into the woods, on a hunt for green leaves and blossoms for the Shabuot decoration. The Lag ba-'Omer outing, however, was usually followed by an attack of sneezing on the part of our rebbi. "The air in the woods was too strong," the rebbi would affirm apologetically, "I must have caught a cold."

XVII

SHABUOT GREENS

Two holidays of the Jewish calendar take place in practically the same season of the year. They are both celebrated in the spring, the season of growth, and renewed life and bloom. Yet do they differ greatly one from the other in spirit and import, as well as in historical and symbolical significance.

On Passover, the Jews came out of Egypt; on Shabuot, the Law was given to them. On Passover the Jewish people were born, on Shabuot they were entrusted with the great mission to the world. On Pesah, the body of the Jewish nation was produced; on Shabuot, it was imbued with a soul. On Shabuot, the sacred flame was kindled—the flame which illumined the weary road of the Jewish people for thousands of years. On Shabuot the Jewish people imbibed the nectar of life and became immortal. Upon it was bestowed a shield which made it proof against the deadliest of arrows. On Shabuot the Jewish people was purified in the heavenly furnace, from which it emerged strong as a rock and invincible as a mighty man of war. On Shabuot Moses gave to his people the two Tablets of the Law on which the Ten Commandments were written—the eternal banner of the human race.

Shabuot is the feast of the harvest, the feast of nature, when the Jews in ancient times—while they

were still settled on their own soil—garnered their crops and began to partake of the new products. Until Shabuot they ate of the old store; on Shabuot they obtained permission to take of the new, to bring new sheaves of corn and new fruits into their homes.

To a people estranged from the soil harvest time is of no particular significance, and new crops are apparently of no great consequence. But the Jewish people do not live on the present alone; it lives on the memories of the past and on the dreams and hopes of the future. Therefore, when the Feast of Weeks comes along, the Jewish people transports itself, body and soul, to the days of yore, when it had ploughed and sown and reaped and garnered the fields. To the tiller of the soil it is a holiday indeed to see the ears of corn full grown, the corn which he himself has planted; and his rejoicing is great when he lives to see the day when he can eat the bread which has been produced by his own hand.

From the standpoint of Jewish observance, Shabuot gives more pleasure to the Jew than the other two of the "Three Great Festivals." *Sukkot* has its inconvenience; a cold wintry *Sukkah* is not the best kind of a dining-room. Passover, with its mazzot and restricted bill of fare, does not agree with everybody. But Shabuot, falling in the best season of the year and putting no restrictions on the food nor on the place in which it is to be eaten, is by far the pleasantest of Jewish holidays. On Shabuot, nature itself celebrates the festival.

In Lithuania, Shabuot comes at the height of the spring season. Nature is wrapped in a verdant veil of splendor, sending forth a fine vivifying aroma. Mother Earth, warmed and fondled by the golden rays of the sun, opens her breasts and nourishes the myriads of creatures living on her bounty. The multi-colored insects vie with the extravagant orgy of colors put on by the flowers to find grace in the eyes of these intermediaries of love and life.

All is fresh in nature, passionate, full of youth, love and the will-to-live. The buzzing of insects and the murmur of the clear transparent brook, blended with the singing of the birds that dance and hop and chirp a song of praise to nature, are the grand symphony that captivates the heart and carries you away in this great festival of nature.

The bounties of surrounding nature bring back to the Jewish people the memory of its own harvest-time in the days gone by; it evokes in its imagination a picture of the beautiful days of yore, when it was a child of nature, and seeks to revive in its memory—though it be a faint and feeble impression—its own life in nature. The Jew adorns his home with greens in honor of Shabuot. It is not gold or silver or precious wares that the Jewish woman sets on her table on this festival, but greens and flowers that the youngsters procured on the eve of the holiday in the meadows and fields and woods in the outskirts of the town.

Greens for Shabuot! How much joy these words aroused in us! How happy were we to be of some

assistance to Yeruham the carter in harnessing his old starved horse to the clumsy old wagon and to go with him to the woods for greens. The horse was starved, lame, and blind in one eye. Yeruham's table was not evidently much to the animal's taste; yet, no matter how uninviting the poor carter's table was, his horse was very much disinclined to leave his straw bedstead, where it was dozing to its heart's content, and come out into the open. Yeruham knew his animal and did not stand on ceremony with it. He approached it with an extremely impolite and ill-mannered kick, and, before the poor creature had a chance to utter its long whinny, intended to disperse the last remaining webs of sleep from its eyes, it found itself dragged by its unkempt mane to the courtyard. Meantime, while Yeruham was tending to his mare, we children pulled the wagon out from under the shed, hustled about for the harness, and fetched the grease for the axles. The wagon was never quite ready for use. There always was trouble. At one time the spokes were broken or the axle was out of repair; at another, the box was smeared with grease or a hungry goat had made a feast on the straw of the horse's collar. But to us boys this was of no moment; we were happy in the opportunity to help Yeruham "hitch up." In the first place, it was no trifling matter to us to bustle about a horse and wagon, and, secondly, we knew that the sooner we were able to make our departure from Yeruham's courtyard, the sooner we would be in the woods, where, with coats and shoes off, we would play various games and pluck greens for Shabuot.

When all was in readiness, Yeruham would take his whip, climb up on the box, and we—about a dozen of us—would follow him. Some of us would be seated on the box with the driver—this, of course, was a special privilege—while the majority had to be contented with a place in the wagon on planks laid across its width and supported on the two side-trusses which the driver called benches.

We were ready for the expedition, but the horse would not stir. "Whoa!" "Whoa!" yelled Yeruham at the top of his lungs. The animal, however, preferred to ignore his master altogether. "Mayst thou be visited by the cholera and the plagues of Egypt!" screamed the impatient driver, and, to give further relief to his anger, be bestowed a violent lash upon his famished breadwinner. The horse made strenuous efforts, but failed to pull the wagon out of the court-yard. Yeruham at first cursed his horse, then employed various other devices to effect a starting movement, but it was of no avail. "Children," he turned towards us, "children, we must all get out of the wagon. The stones are impeding the wheels." In a jiffy we jumped off the wagon, and, setting our hands and shoulders to work, we rolled the vehicle out of the yard.

The wagon was now out in the street, but we did not choose to get in again, knowing that our added weight was not particularly relished by the feeble mare. We knew that the poor driver's exhortations were not sufficient inducement for the animal to make any headway, and we decided to follow the wagon afoot, and even to help pushing it when necessary.

Cries of "Whoa!" "Whoa!" to encourage the animal, by which we accompanied every echo of the driver's shrieks, gave us not a little gratification.

Beyond the town border the State road lay level, smooth and even. Having with great difficulty passed the cobble stone pavement, which was not lacking in alternate depressions and elevations, we now found it comparatively smooth sailing. The horse uttered a long whinny, Yeruham took off his coat, we removed our shoes, and got back into the wagon, not to miss the long-awaited hitch. Here there was no more cause for exhortations and curses; the horse went at a rapid rate of his own accord. We felt cheery and care-free, and raised our voices in the old song, "Fear not, O Jacob, my servant!" The thick forest in the distance resounded with our voices and replied in our own words and in the same tune. Our hearts leaped with joy. Every now and then we would rise on tiptoe to look at the woods, unable to explain the secret magnetic force with which they drew our hearts toward them.

In the woods we were again of some assistance to Yeruham. Now we helped him unharness his horse and we took it to the murmuring brook, which was smiling in the brilliant spring sun and playing with its rays. The animal having now quenched its thirst, we returned to the wagon, where our clothes, shoes and other things were waiting for us. The horse grazed with apparently great appetite, and we set out exploring the forest for our quest—greens for Shabuot. We found many attractions in the woody labyrinth which

occasionally tended to divert our minds from the object of the expedition—such as climbing up trees and chasing sparrows, and various other sports—but we never for a moment forgot what we had come for.

On our return journey we decorated the harness with flowers. We filled the wagon with green leaves and flowers for our homes and in addition three bags of fresh-cut hay for Yeruham's horse, so that it should enjoy the holiday, too.

Dazed by the strong air of the woods and enchanted by the sweet symphony of nature, we came home, exhilarated and invigorated, with bundles of flowers and branches of fir trees and various other plants, which we had procured for Shabuot.

When the book of Ruth was read in the synagogue on Shabuot morning, the entire congregation was transported to the vast corn fields of three thousand years ago, when the judges ruled, and the congregation breathed once more the fresh invigorating air of the Orient. It seemed to us that the reapers on Boaz's fields were not far away from us and that we could see with our own eyes the beautiful Ruth gleaning in the fields.

How powerful, how effective, were the impressions after reading this ancient idyl! A plainly told tale, in plain, ordinary words; yet, how splendid and how charming this story of Ruth was!

XVIII

THE NINE DAYS (OF MOURNING)

During the Nine Days the whole town looked entirely different from the other days of the year. It seemed as if a black veil had enveloped the town and the people; let alone weddings, betrothals and other merry parties, even a smiling countenance was hardly to be seen. People's faces looked grave and worried, a peculiar sorrow gnawed at men's hearts; a deep and undefined longing was rending the soul. National mourning pervaded everything; in the homes, in the market place, and most of all in the synagogues and prayer-houses. The black *Paroket* that covered the Holy Ark told the old, very old mournful story.....

The cloudless, deep blue skies and the sunlight which is so plentiful in the Lithuanian towns during the months of Tammuz and Ab, lent to this sadness and longing a poetic charm of their own, yet were powerless to dispel them. On the contrary, the brighter nature was outside, the gloomier was it within one's heart. No strong drinks or fancy dishes were in use. Only in the case of the dangerously ill would the rabbi permit the slaughtering of a fowl during the Nine Days. The town as a whole contented itself with dairy food.

The fathers spent extra hours saying *Selihot.* The mothers shed tears over the Yiddish version of Ekah.

The marriageable young men went about with heads hung low, and the marriageable maidens removed the string of pearls from their slender white throats.

Even the river which on a summer's day was crowded with bathers, was deserted in the Nine Days. A melancholy and pensive silence now hung over it. The gloom which weighed over the whole town left its impress also on us, young rascals, who habitually turned the town topsy-turvy. During the golden days and moonlit nights of the summer season, we were fond of romping, frolicking and running about, and enjoyed so much God's little world. During the Nine Days, however, we did not dare even to utter a sound, let alone raise our voices in song. Even our favorite game of "hares," which was our pastime between Minhah and Ma'arib in the vicinity of the synagogue and the Bet Hamidrash, was taboo in the Nine Days. Instead of racing like hares we would gather upon the synagogue hillock and watch the little birds skilfully building their nests in the upper corners of the tall windows and bringing bits of feathers and straw for their still helpless little ones.

We were greatly fond of pigeons, sparrows and other birds; but we had a peculiar hatred for the red-throated swallows. This bird, we had been told, was the first to bring fire to the Temple. We imagined that in the Nine Days there were more red-throated swallows than at any other time, and we took it as an evil omen if they flitted too much about the Bet Hamidrash. We were mortally afraid lest they play

us a dirty trick after the manner of their ancestors of the days of "Titus the Wicked."

The gulf that always yawned between the rebbi and the children at the Heder did not exist during the Nine Days. We were eager to come to the Heder as early as possible. The rebbi greeted us with friendly warmth, a sort of pity writ plain on his face. During the Nine Days the rebbi was gentle and kind to us, and did not scold us even if our studies were not up to the mark. The misfortune of the destruction of the Temple united two such inimical worlds as those of the rebbi and the pupils, who developed a great love for each other during the Nine Days. The rebbi would spend hours at a stretch in recounting to us the outrages perpetrated by Nebuzaradan and Titus on our forefathers in the long ago. The spell of these tales was so intense and the pull at our heart-strings was so pleasurable that we never tired of listening to them all day long. Some of them would simply melt our hearts with pity and compassion.

The stories which the rebbi especially liked to tell and we to hear were of Hannah and her seven children and that of the Ten Martyrs. We tots greatly envied Hannah's children and were ready to stand torture rather than bow before the image.... Later, during the revolutionary period, when many of our comrades so fearlessly performed deeds of heroism, I always thought that the preceptor of these brave revolutionists was none other than the small town Melamed and his beautiful tales of the Jewish mother Hannah with her seven children, as well as of other Jewish heroes

who were so ready to throw down their lives for their faith. To this very day I am convinced that our rebbis had much to do with the deeds of daring of the Jewish revolutionists.

During the Nine Days our usual studies were put aside. The shrill, lively, but unmusical reciting of the Talmud ceased and the melodious notes of Ekah took its place. To this day I cannot forget the deep impression made upon our tender souls by Jeremiah. We could not as yet completely grasp the most tragical and poetical motifs of the world's literature, but we felt the deep pain and suffering that permeated them.

Our rebbi was profoundly musical. In his youth he aspired to become a Hazzan or a Shohet. After his marriage, but prior to his becoming a Melamed, his *Musafs* were greatly relished. The Heder grind gave him a short breath and a throat that was always choking with phlegm. His voice was hoarse and weak. For purposes of Musaf it was lost completely. Only in a propitious hour, when in good humor, he would enjoy rendering for us boys the *Wallachian*, the sweetness of which thrilled every fiber. This was an echo of his past glory. The rebbi's voice would gain new vigor and freshness when he taught us the Lamentations. Here his hoarseness was no drawback, on the contrary, it gave an added beauty. "Ekah yashebah badad," the rebbi would intone with deepest emotion, so melodiously, so heart-stirringly, that his mournful tones would sound to our ears like the most gorgeous-colored symphony.

If Tolstoy is correct in saying that art is what infects another with the same emotion, then our rebbi was a real artist, for we became so bewitched by the rebbi's singing of Ekah that we wished for nothing else but to sit and sit in the Heder and listen, and sing along, without pause.

XIX

SHABBAT HAZON

On *Shabbat Hazon* the silent mourning in the town became more pronounced. On week days one somehow managed to forget oneself through a thousand and one things. But on the Sabbath everyone was absorbed in himself and his thoughts. The "additional soul" did not bring joy but rather redoubled the gloom and made the deep sorrow the more keenly felt. Even the angels, who came with the additional soul and lingered with it till the dusk of Saturday evening, were shrouded in black. The joyous, sweet "Good Shabbos!" gave way to a scarcely audible greeting. Each one murmured something and did not look straight into his fellow's face.

The "German Street," which on Friday evenings swarmed with promenaders, was quiet and deserted like a cemetery. The Sabbath candles and the candlesticks shed their light uselessly. Aimless they burned, lone and forlorn. No one needed them.

It may be that some loving couple sat in close embrace under a tree in some side street or on the hillock and enjoyed so much the more the dead silence that reigned all around; it may also be that a gang of "good fellows" were spending the evening in the company of the "golden maid" (a young woman with a question mark against her reputation) at the "Red Inn," situated about two miles in the woods, and that they drank

beer, smoked cigarettes and did other forbidden things. But in the town, on the streets, everything was deserted, as if in time of siege.

On the morrow, the first Sabbath morning prayer was hurried over. Even the Reader of the congregation, Sholem-Hirsh, who loved to warble at great length at every possible opportunity, desisted from his indulgence. The Reading of the Law was also rushed through, until *Maftir* was reached, when the congregation awoke as it were. There was coughing, shrill blowing of noses, and other preparations for the reading of the Maftir, which was the leit-motif of the whole gloomy Sabbath.

Reb Feivel the Watchmaker, the *Ba'al Keriah* of our Bet Hamidrash, was a great celebrity in his line. It was a fact known to all that in the entire Kovno government and district of Vilna there was no Reader like Feivel the Watchmaker. The whole dispute between the Great Bet Hamidrash and the Shammashim Synagogue arose over this Reb Feivel. The authorities of that synagogue maintained that Reb Feivel ought to be their Ba'al Keriah because he lived within a stone's throw of it, while the wardens of the Great Bet Hamidrash held that a Great Synagogue must have the services of the Great Ba'al Keriah. "The shoemakers, the tailors and the butchers"—the people of the Great Synagogue simply announced—"can get along without Reb Feivel!"

Reb Feivel gained his renown not so much by his Reading of the Torah as by his reading of the *Megillahs*. In the reading of these, Reb Feivel showed his great-

ness. He would read a Megillah so sweetly, so mellifluously that the people could not stop smacking their lips in wonderment. Reb Feivel was great in the other Megillahs. He positively showed genius in the Megillah Ekah. In chanting Ekah he rose to heroic stature. Every verse he filled with so much grief, so much soul, so much heart, that one did not notice the time slipping by. It goes without saying that the entire congregation was awaiting with the greatest impatience the moment when Reb Feivel would commence in a sweet voice to read the *Haftarah* to the tune of Ekah, in which he was incomparable. "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem", Reb Feivel's chant resounded throughout the synagogue. Every word cut through the dense stillness. The congregation held its breath, and stood agape until Reb Feivel ended with fervor the concluding verse of the Haftarah that rang like a deep melodious song of lament and despair.

On the eve of the Ninth of Ab the entire populace of the town was busily occupied with the preparation for the fast; the women folk even more so than the men. Almost every open window showed a sheet of noodle dough drying in the sun. The handier ones among the housewives were already cutting them up into noodles. There were practically no carts in the market place, except those of the few vendors of dairy products. It was rumored that these dairy dealers made piles of money on *Tish'ah be-Ab* eve. Beile Notte's, for instance, would take in a fortune on that day, which covered half the rental for her dairy farm.

"Tears to some, joy to others," Yahne the Gabbete would caustically throw into Beile's face, because the latter had kept her waiting too long for her jug to be filled with milk. "May my enemies have no better than this, O Merciful Father!"—Beile would flare up, and cutting short her grudging remark, "May he have nought himself who begrudges you, so help me God!" Yahne would soften down, realizing that she had been a bit too hasty toward old Beile.

Everyone, rich or poor, bought milk on Tish'ah be-Ab eve. The rich purchased it fresh while the poor got the skimmed milk, but no home was without milk. On the eve of the fast, say our Holy Books, milk noodles are as obligatory as the four cups of wine at the Seder. True, some maintained that milk noodles before the fast were merely a custom, not a law, but to all appearances this custom was universally observed.

At noon the shops of the town closed and with the sun still high people hurried to the synagogue for the Minhah prayer, so as to be able to eat the pre-fast meal before sunset. In the synagogue and prayer-houses, the floors were clean swept; there was the agreeable aroma of fresh mown hay that had been spread over the seats of the elite and the front benches. The plain people who did not sit at the East Wall had to bring along bags of straw or small stools to sit on. The Shammash worried very little about the rabble.

Without the Paroket, the Ark, bare and open, with the Scrolls draped in black peeping out of it, gave one a feeling of awe. There was not a person who doubted that these parchment scrolls possessed a soul and that

they felt the destruction of the Temple far more deeply than the people.

In the Heder the day preceding the fast of Ab was among the most pleasant. That day the entire Heder studied the "Destruction." As a rule there was not too much democracy at the Heder. The boys of the upper grades had nothing to do with those of the lower grades; a boy of the Talmud grade thought it beneath his dignity to play with a Bible boy, and the Bible boy in turn would not recite the weekly section of the Pentateuch with a Humash boy. But on the eve of the fast, all boys were intermixed, there were no aristocrats. On that day all of them studied the Talmud and the identical passages. We of the Rashi group had informed our parents in the morning, with no little pride, that the rebbi had ordered us to bring along the tractate Gittin, in order to study the "Destruction."

Even the Heder itself had an appearance on that day entirely different from all others. The rebbi, together with the senior pupils, had arranged the tables and chairs into a rectangle, so as to provide seats for all the children with their *Gemaras*. The younger the urchin, the closer his seat to the rebbi, who, on this occasion, was without anger and cast kindly glances at his pupils.

When all the boys had seated themselves and opened the page, the rebbi would begin: "A rooster and a hen caused the destruction of Tur Malka; A cart-ox brought the destruction of Betar; The squabble between Kamza and Bar Kamza caused the destruction

of Jerusalem." And with the special melody to which the Haggadah is recited, the rebbi read to us from the Gemara and translated and narrated, narrated so beautifully, so delightfully, that we devoured every word, every gesture of his.

The rebbezin sat on a broken wooden chair, a ball of wool-yarn under her arm, the knitting needles stuck into her wig, and darned socks. She sat there, she, too, listening eagerly to the entrancing tales told by her husband, to whom she surely bore no malice now. All were now silent and motionless, their faces turned eagerly toward the rebbi. The rebbi spoke and read the Gemara with great gusto; he kept on until the rebbezin noticed that the poor little "chicks" (so she called us) sat faint with hunger, and that it was high time for them to have a bite. "There! here's a pair of socks for you without holes, for today and tomorrow," the rebbezin would end up, and lay before the rebbi a pair of thick, gray woolen socks, which she had darned especially for Tish'ah be-Ab.

XX

TISH'AH BE-AB

I have travelled much; I have toured half the globe; I have wandered from land to land and from town to town; I have crossed seas and traversed deserts, but nowhere have I seen sunsets as beautiful as in my native town in Samut, near the Baltic. Thueringen, in Germany, where I spent some of my student years, is known for its sunrises and sunsets. Goethe used to visit the Thueringen woods twice a day to worship nature at dawn and at twilight. There his great soul used to draw its inspiration; yet, magnificent as the sunsets of Thueringen may have been, they did not come up to those of my native town.

The sky assumes wonderful colors when the sun departs for its nocturnal repose in the Carpathian Mountains; majestic does the sun appear when it bids farewell to the day in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado; a peculiar solemnity pervades the atmosphere in the twilight of Sierra Nevada—but none of these sunsets can compare with those which seal some of the long, hot summer days in the town of Samut. . . . .

At about six or seven o'clock, the entire town appears as if it were set on fire. The window panes reflect rivers of fire; the upper branches of the trees are shrouded in red glowing flames which suddenly spread over the housetops. To a stranger, not familiar with

the manifestations of nature in these parts, it appears that surely, God forbid, a fire had broken out in town and that all the houses and stores would soon be consumed in smoke. Even the people brought up here are not altogether at home in the flaming red radiance which veils the entire little town as the pillar of cloud did the tents of the Hebrews in the wilderness. The tall structures of the many windows, such as the town church and the synagogue are more illumined than the rest, and their glass panes shower the red glow upon their environs.

"Gabriel is out for his celestial ride in a fiery chariot," the youngsters would whisper to one another. "The fire was turned on in the furnace of hell to burn and roast the wicked and flagellate them with fiery rods," was the belief of some of the other children. "This is a spark from the pillar of fire which illumined the road of the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness," was the assertion of others.

Frequently such remarkable sunsets would occur on the eve of Tish'ah be-Ab, and then it was said that God is showing His beloved people of Israel how Jerusalem looked when the holy Temple was in flames. . . .

It was a strange unintelligible feeling which the men folk experienced on taking the last meal before the commencement of the fast, when, as they were sitting on the ground and dipping a hard-boiled egg in ashes, the fire which consumed the holy Temple in Jerusalem broke through the windows and played on their faces. Quiet, speechless, they sat on the floor without appe-

tite, partaking of the last meal consisting of an egg dipped in ashes, round crullers and noodles cooked in milk.

Immediately after the silent grace, without bidding good night, the people left their home for the house of worship to read the Lamentations. There was no conversation in the synagogue. Even the most burning questions of politics, discussed daily by the oracular editor of the Hazefirah, under the caption of "Current Events," were left untouched. Every one removed his rubber shoes and sat on low benches or on the hay spread on the floor, a tallow candle in one hand, the Book of Lamentations in the other, waiting for Reb Feivel the Reader to begin. We little loafers gathered behind the platform, not to carry on mischief, God forbid, but to have a chat about the great disaster which had befallen our people eighteen hundred years ago.

"Just exactly at this minute, eighteen hundred years ago, Titus set fire to the Holy Temple," estimated one of us. "By this time, even the 'table' and the 'Menorah' were burned," remarked a second boy with assurance. "What do you know? At this moment there was not a remnant left of the Cherubim," interceded a third. Thus we stood quietly behaving like grown folk, full of rage against the Romans and their leader Titus and even against the Jewish rebels of whom we learned in the morning in our reading about the *Hurban*. In this way we stood behind the platform conversing till our fathers winked to us that it was time to sit down on the ground and listen to the reading of the Lamentations.

At home, when we returned from the synagogue, we found our weeping mothers on the floor surrounded by a number of women, themselves unable to read, rocking to and fro over the Yiddish version of the destruction of the Temple, depicted in the most blood-curdling fashion.

Owing to the many fires in town in the summer, the local rabbi ordered to close the women's section of the synagogue (the women were always the first victims) and our mothers were compelled to offer their prayers "in exile"—at home. The holy Rabbi Bahya—may I be pardoned for my daring statement—had written such terribly exaggerated stories about the Hurban that our mothers virtually melted in tears.

On the morrow we rose at dawn and went to the synagogue. Washing, except for the tips of the fingers up to the first joints, was prohibited by the law; hence, we were ready in the twinkling of an eye. Our mothers, notwithstanding their piety, strongly objected to our going away with our throats unslaked; but to us lads of seven and eight years of age it was below our dignity to breakfast on Tish'ah be-Ab before the service, and we swore a thousand oaths to assure them that our hearts were not fainting.

At the morning service there was not merely one cantor or reader, as usual, but honorable members in the congregation in turn commenced the chanting of the first passage of each chapter. It was the rabbi's prerogative to read the chapter about the Ten Martyrs. The other chapters of lesser importance were shared by the elder *Ba'ale Batim;* the "Zions" were the undis-

puted portions of the younger generation—the sons-in-law at the parents-in-law's table—the maskilim. These sons-in-law, among whom there were a number of *Choveve Zion*, considered themselves next of kin to Rabbi Judah Halevi: their relations with the great poet-philosopher were more direct than those of the elder folk.

Some of these sons-in-law really had a profound knowledge of Rabbi Judah Halevi's poetry and read it with feeling and understanding. It could be seen that in reading the poet's lyrics they actually lived through his sorrow and his longing for the land of the prophets.

The "Zions" introduced a more cheerful note in the services. The beauty of Judah Halevi's motives dispersed the gloomy atmosphere created by the Lamentations, and brought higher poetical experiences. The spirits rose higher when the cantor and his choir chanted so beautifully "Moan, O Zion," the concluding chapter of the morning service.

After the service the stores were opened and the hungry proprietors again entered the harness of every-day life. For us school boys the high tide of a good time came. We immediately ran home and told our mothers that we did not feel hungry, that we were "as full as soldiers" and that we would most certainly have an easy fast. Our mothers, of course, gave little credence to what we said and, first coaxingly and then by the force of their authority, made us break the fast; for our mothers were to a certain degree scholars and knew that minors before reaching Bar Mizvah were

exempt from the laws of fasts, and we had to do their bidding.

Without wasting any time at home, we armed ourselves with "guns" and made a move en masse to God's acre. These guns were on our minds a long time before Tish'ah be-Ab. Yosheh, the shingle maker, knew of our conspiracy when he roofed the house of Hershel Hone's, and he cast at us suspicious glances whenever we came near the heap of shingles. "The *Meshumadim* are after ruining me," he would say to Kalmanke, his assistant, on seeing us stirring about his shingles. "I'll tell the rebbi on you," he himself would warn us; but we did not heed him, and with extreme impatience were awaiting the moment when he should climb on the top of the roof.

Yosheh was an ill-tempered man and from him we could purloin no shingles; but to our good fortune Yosheh's boy went to the same Heder with us, and through him we gained access to his father's store. Yosheh's boy was a good fellow and cared more that we should have shingles for guns than for his father's roofing.

Besides the guns, we never forgot to take along small bottles of snuff drops. A fast day without snuff drops is like a Seder without Haroset, Purim without rattlers, Hanukkah without a top, or *Rosh Hodesh Elul* without a *Shofar*. Snuff drops were one of the principal articles in the drug stores, and even the German apothecary knew that on the eve of a fast day, especially on the eve of Tish'ah be-Ab and Yom Kippur, there is a big Jewish trade in snuff drops.

None of us knew, of course, the chemical composition of these drops—all we knew was that they were strong and good for fainting. I know now that they were nothing but a concentrated solution of ammonium hydroxide. For some consumers this solution was not strong enough and they added snuff tobacco to it, so that the odor could be sensed a mile away. If our little town had had a modern organization of government such drops would have been classed as drugs and their use restricted. But since there existed no such restrictions, every Jew that fasted snuffed from his small bottle and was comfortable. As soon as he began to feel the pinch of hunger, he carefully opened the little bottle which relaxed the pinch. A headache, to be sure, followed; but who in the world pays attention to a headache on a fast day?

On the way to the cemetery we treated one another to snuff from our various bottles. Encountering Jews with pale faces and dimmed eyes, we took pity on them and offered them snuff. The pale Jews would relish the drops and thank us kindly. It often happened that a little rascal would push the bottle up to the snuffer's face and the strong odor would enter the poor fellow's nose and eyes, and he would see stars.

Our expedition to the cemetery had a two-fold purpose, first, to visit the dead and to stick our varnished guns into the new graves, and second, to pluck the sticky reddish-gray burs. The second object was of greater moment than the first. On our return trip, our pockets were full of stickers, and woe to the boy, girl or even grown man of our enmity that

came in our path. The girls had the time of their lives getting their long braids free from the burs thrown by the little urchins.

After the Minhah service, when the sun commenced to set, the congregation assembled in groups around the synagogue and with parched throats inhaled the exhilarating air of the open. "Have you found the fasting easy today?" Avrom Hirsh, the sexton, asked Reb Mendel Itche's, the Gabbai, to whom he owed his bread and butter. "Quite easy, thank God. I hope it will be no worse the coming Yom Kippur. If only my heart hadn't begun to faint after the morning service, I wouldn't have minded the fasting at all. Now that the hunger has passed—my head aches a little, but it's nothing at all—I could go on fasting to the limit." While Reb Mendel was thus making light of his fast he would keep on surveying the sky and as soon as he could discern a star he would announce with joy: "Gentlemen, it is time to pray Ma'arib."

XXI

SHABBAT NAHAMU

By his very nature the Jew is a man of moods. His temperament is but seldom at the moderate, normal point. Usually it is at the extreme of joyousness or of pensive melancholy. Even as the waves of the sea are either above or below the surface, so the moods of the Jew's soul are either downcast and gloomy, as if weighed down by the burden of centuries, or exalted to the highest state of happiness. The People of Israel are in this respect the exact counterpart of the individual Jew. Jewish life, the life of the people as a whole, does not flow calmly and placidly; it is ever full of storm and stress, subject to sudden changes of ebb and flow. The Jewish town despises the slow, monotonous and gray everydayness. Rarely is it indifferent and dull, usually it is in the throes of some vivid experience. It is either depressed or joyful; it either wears sackcloth and ashes or is decked out in festive garb.

No sooner have the Nine Days of Mourning passed than the little town at once becomes alive and active again. The skies have cleared and the sun has begun to shine with added brilliance. But a single week separates *Shabbat Nahamu* from Shabbat Hazon. And yet, what a change these few days have wrought in both the inner and the outward life of the town! The

black veil of mourning has been torn from the faces of the community, which now displays the inner joy that has been hidden beneath the mask of mourning, while upon the cold embers of the ruins have now begun to glow sparks, the sparks of comfort and hope.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God!" A word of comfort has ever meant much in the life of the Jew. To bring a ray of hope to the despairing and the persecuted was rightfully looked upon as the noblest of deeds of man to a suffering fellow-man. The elderly folk would put aside all business and go to cheer the mourner. Their "old women" would never scold them even if they stayed away for many hours and threw their work and home upon their old women's shoulders. And really, is there any deed more righteous than driving away the perplexity and despair of one downcast? Is there anything more beautiful than cheering up the disheartened?

And now, the Eternal One Himself has come to utter winged words of hope to the mourners; words foretelling coming joys and breathing a new soul, as it were, into the dried bones. He is comforting as a father comforts his child, as a lover cheers his beloved. "Divest yourselves of your mourning garments"—He seems to say—"Take off your sackcloth, brush away your tears. Wash yourselves clean; put on fresh garments; and make an effort to live a new life, a life full of joy and happiness, forgetting all that has happened." Is it any wonder, then, that such words of comfort had their full effect upon our fathers, and that the entire appearance of the town has changed?

Even as the shadows of the night disappear before the rising sun, so the depressing mood of mourning has vanished right after the Ninth of Ab. All the people became as if newly-born, refreshed, happy and joyful. Not a trace of yesterday's sorrows, of yesterday's tears. The innocent and hearty laughter of the Jewish maidens rang again through the town. The women's gossip and the menfolk's arguments were once more heard in the street, wherein the pulse of life again beat vigorously.

Shabbat Nahamu was the season of festivities in the town. Most of the engagements, weddings and Bar Mizvahs were celebrated either on the eve of or on the night following this Sabbath. For Shabbat Nahamu one would invite to his house the intended bridegroom or bride. On Shabbat Nahamu the Hazzan and his choir would sing at the synagogue their new tunes and charge admission for the privilege of hearing these new compositions.

On the very night of the Ninth of Ab and right after the breaking of the fast, the Hazzan would begin the preparations for his Shabbat Nahamu service, in anticipation of the great event that was to bring him perhaps the equivalent of a half-year's rent. The street where he lived would be filled with people who came to listen to the Hazzan's rehearsals. Of singing and instrumental music during the week of Shabbat Nahamu there was plenty, for, aside from the Hazzan's preliminaries, there were the sweet notes of the musicians who were preparing themselves for Friday afternoon weddings and the dance on Saturday night after Zemirot.

How beautifully the town band played the *freilachs*, and the "Kosher Dance!" Each vibration of the strings on Hayim the Musician's fiddle reverberated so sweetly and deliciously in the hearts of his audience that no one grew tired of standing the whole night beneath Hayim's window, listening to it.

During the week Kaileh the ginger-cake baker worked herself to death. Nights at a stretch she stewed and broiled at the oven and baked her ginger-cakes. Besides the cakes she had to bake for those directly concerned in the festivities, she figured that each housewife would most likely buy a ginger-cake to send to the two families in the case. "Why are you working so hard, Kaileh dear? Tempt not Satan! You may lose your eyesight. See how inflamed your eyes are from smoke!" Leah-Hode's would pityingly reprove the overworked Kaileh. "Everything done is that much gain. Never mind, never mind! After Shabbat Nahamu I'll get plenty of sleep!"—Kaileh would reply, adding that she had not as yet paid the Melamed a farthing of the tuition fee for her darling boy who had become orphaned while still in his mother's womb.

A very busy man was Reb Abba the Bet Din Shammash during the days preceding Shabbat Nahamu. Among his many jobs the task of inviting the guests to weddings and other celebrations was included. The hosts prepared the long lists of those they wished to invite, and Abba the Shammash carried out the mission. He was no expert in reading print, and script was a sealed book to him. But for a few pennies the assistant beadle would read to him daily the list: who was to

be invited to the reception and who to the benediction only.

Now and then it happened that Abba would make a mistake, so that instead of inviting one to the wedding of Reb Yankel's daughter, he would invite him to the pre-circumcision party of Reb Yankel's grandchild. But no one would make fun of such mishaps, for everybody realized that Abba had more than enough of responsibility on his shoulders during those days, that he was a mere human being, not an angel.

On Friday evenings the streets would be filled with the echoes of the sweet tune that Hayim the Fiddler had especially prepared for his band to play when escorting the bridegroom to the Huppah. There being many weddings on Shabbat Nahamu eve, the band had to split up into several parts, Hayim playing only at the wealthiest houses. The poorer wedding parties had to get along as best they could with the playing of Berel the clothes-mender and his brother, who had never studied the musical trade, but picked it up by ear. When too many weddings occurred on Friday, Hayim would call in Berel, and later give him a share of the proceeds from the dance.

On Sabbath after service all the menfolk would repair to a benediction. To visit the home of the celebrants for the benediction everybody considered his most sacred duty. "To pay a visit of this sort is like paying a debt to one's self"—said Avrohom-Hayim the head beadle who, incidentally, was rather fond of drink. "We are living beings, after all; each one has children

of his own, and likes to see his friends grace the occasion with their presence."

On Shabbat Nahamu the entire town was occupied with these visits. One went because it was some relative's wedding, another because it was a Bar Mizvah, still another because the groom had come on a visit to his intended bride; some were relatives of the groom, some of the bride, others went simply because it was considered a good deed to say the benediction.

To this latter class belonged Mordke-Hayim Yoshe's, who would never let pass the slightest celebration without saying a blessing. The townsfolk were well aware of this, and would always include Reb Mordke in the list of the invited. In order to manage to be present at all these feasts, Reb Mordke would get up at dawn on this Sabbath, say his prayers at sunrise, and then, after reciting his daily portion of the Mishnah, he would begin his round of visits. When Reb Mordke entered a home, he was served the first. The host knew that Reb Mordke could not stay long, he had other homes to visit.

Because of these parties on Shabbat Nahamu, Reb Mordke would wear his holiday clothes, which consisted of two heavy overcoats; one served as a coat, the other as an overcoat. One sleeve of Reb Mordke's overcoat was always empty, so that he might easily reach with his free hand the red bandanna which was girdled around the inner garment, the coat. He wore his handkerchief tied about his waist, although there was an *Erub* in the town and it was permissible to carry things. But Reb Mordke was a particularly care-

ful person and always feared that in the event of some gentile lad's breaking the wire of the Erub, he might be desecrating the Sabbath unwittingly. Hence, he always tied his handkerchief about his coat.

After the midday siesta the people would repair to the synagogue to listen to the rabbi's sermon. Of all the Sabbaths of the year, the rabbi preached on three only; on *Shabbat Shubah*, *Shabbat Hagadol* and Shabbat Nahamu. On the other Sabbaths preaching was optional but on these three it was obligatory; it was so specified in his contract.

The subject matter of these three sermons was dissimilar. On Shabbat Shubah the rabbi admonished his flock and moved them to tears and repentance; on Shabbat Hagadol, he delivered a sermon full of erudition and casuistry, while the sermon on Shabbat Nahamu consisted of words of cheer and comfort. He began his discourse with a passage from the Haftarah and elaborated upon it with many sweet words and comforting sayings. The rabbi would prove by quotations from the Midrash that the Jews are after all the chosen people, and that if God has punished us, He has done so as a father punishes his only child. God has forgiven our sins and will lead us back to Zion and Jerusalem.

"Nahamu, Nahamu, 'Ami: Comfort ye, Comfort ye, My People!"

XXII

THE MONTH OF ELUL

In order to form a proper image of the state of mind of the people of our town during the month of Elul, one must imagine people in mid ocean on a leaky boat, which a huge wave may turn over at any moment, and send all to the bottom. Or imagine people living on the top of a volcano that may, without warning, begin to spit fire and molten metal and thus bring destruction to them and their work of many years.

Elul time every pious Jew and Jewess experienced a peculiar restlessness; a peculiar uncertainty about their own lives and the lives of those near and dear to them. During those days every simple Jew and Jewess became a profound philosopher, despite the fact that he or she probably had never heard that word. They came to realize their insignificant place in nature. What, after all, is Man? A tiny grain of sand among the great gigantic mountains; a drop of water in the ocean; a puny worm on an isle of serpents and crocodiles, tigers and leopards; a mere blade of grass in vast fields and forests. One breath of the wind, one stamp of the beast's heavy foot, one swing of the reaper's scythe, and he turns into nothing but dust; he is buried under a heap of earth, and not even a memory is left.

In these Elul days the Jew becomes something of a Faust, who fully realizes his own powerlessness, and

knows that Mephistopheles is at his side mocking him. Oh, this Mephistopheles, this Satan! How the Jews of our town feared him! "What am I, and what is my life?" The Jew now begins to realize the great comedy of life and the tragedy of death. One labors, toils, hustles and rushes about like a wild cat. Then, suddenly and without warning, the Angel of Death comes along and makes an abrupt ending to all desires and struggles, aspirations and life itself. If there have ever been people, indeed, who have lived like philosophers and thinkers, men who fathomed themselves and recognized their own nothingness and insignificance in the great scheme of things, these were none other than the Jews and Jewesses of our small towns of the Ghetto.

It is easy enough to poke fun at the *Tehinot* or at the men's *malkot* and similar absurdly queer customs. Yet, are they not the result of the great philosophical awe before the unknown? Are they not the outcome of the impotence that Faust felt in the presence of the unseen Mephistopheles?

What would a prisoner do, confined in jail with his wife and children, awaiting sentence? He is aware that his fate and the fate of his dependants are in the hands of the judge who may sentence him and his wife and his child to death. He knows that he may rob him of his loved ones and leave him wretched and alone in the wide world; that he may deprive him of his livelihood, inflict sickness, sorrow and misery upon him. He is at the same time aware that this judge, if he but wishes, can make him happy and grant him worlds of luck and

joy; he can grant him health, riches, honor and all other blessings. Everything depends upon the judge; he need but will it—Would the prisoner then not bend and fall on his knees, beseech mercy, implore with bitter tears and seek other means to awaken the sympathy of him in whose hand he is?

And it is here that the full meaning of the Shofar becomes clear to us. The Shofar is not by any means a sweet-sounding instrument, nor was Sholem-Wolf, the *Ba'al Toke'a*, a great musician; but the blast of the Shofar confounds Satan. The sounds of the Shofar prevent the Accuser, the prosecuting attorney, from drawing up the indictment. And that is why a holy shudder ran through everyone on hearing the blasts of the Shofar; that is why this polished ram's horn, which made it possible to confound the worst enemy, the wicked Satan, was so sacred, so dear to everyone.

In the desert, when the Jewish hosts were scattered in their far-flung tents, the blast of the Shofar was the signal to start, to lessen the distance separating them from the Promised Land. When the fortress of Jericho was to be stormed, it was again the Shofar that was called into service. When, at some future day, the Messiah will come to gather the scattered remnant of the Jews, from East, West, North and South, no other instrument but the Shofar will be employed as the clarion. The Shofar blast is the freedom-call of the Jew, the symbol of his strength, of his ability to break the chains of slavery. And that is why the semi-wild and crude notes of the Shofar sound so beautiful and so inspiring to the Jewish ear. Courage, strength, hope

and heroism—all these are expressed by this old, primitive mountain signal, the crude call of the Shofar.

The Shofar did not enhance the gloom; it dispelled it. It awakened a feeling of victory, a desire to fight and win, to beat Satan the Accuser. It served as a reminder that in the future the foes of Israel shall likewise be routed with the Messiah's trumpet. The Shofar was the Jew's strongest weapon against all his assailing enemies, and on the first of Elul, immediately after prayer, when he heard the first *Teki'ah, Teru'ah, Shebarim, Teki'ah,* of the Shofar, he would resolve to do deeds pleasing to the Creator: stay longer at the synagogue, read more Psalms, give correct measure and weight, keep from speaking evil and slander; nay, even give more charity than during the rest of the year, when Judgment Day was not so near at hand.

And the Jewish women! Alas, how could they war against Satan! The sacred lore they do not know. They may not be counted in a *Minyan.* Nor may a Jewess receive the chastisement of the Malkot. The only thing left for her to do was to shed tears. And weep she certainly did! She wept for her own sins, for the sins of her husband and children, and the sins of all Israel. The Jewish woman, in the month of Elul, shed tears, gave alms in the name of Meir Ba'al ha-Nes, visited the cemetery, "measured the field,"* invoked the pious deeds of her forefathers, and, indeed, left no stone unturned, not so much for her own sake

*Stretched fine cords along the graves of the virtuous to be dipped afterwards in wax and the candles donated to the synagogue.

as for the sake of her little ones, who surely were pure and innocent and had not yet known the taste of sin.

Tears relieve a heavy heart. And indeed the Jewish woman felt after her weeping as if a stone had rolled off her chest. She consoled herself with the thought that, after all, she was not alone in the world, that God is a father, a God of mercy and compassion, and that if He should not heed her prayer, the prayer of a sinner, He surely would have mercy upon her for the sake of her sainted grandfather and her pious mother, who were surely by now enthroned in Paradise and gloried in the Shekinah. Those two virtuous souls had doubtless a voice among the ministering angels, and would intercede for her.

The Heder children, however, derived great joy from the Elul month. In the first place, Elul brought to mind the season of "'tween-terms," when one would be free all day, and in two weeks half-day sessions would begin. And then, they knew that the Shofar-blowing season was at hand, a thing which they so greatly relished.

Among us boys the best Shofar blower, what we should now call a star, was Hayimke Notte's. Hayimke's grandfather was the synagogue Shofar-blower, and Hayimke frequently got hold of his grandfather's Talit bag and borrowed the Shofar, the real pearl-inlaid Shofar which Benny the Turner had made from a ram's horn for the special possession of the synagogue.

Thanks to Hayimke, we all got a chance at a couple of blasts. It goes without saying that we tried not to get angry with him during this season of the year, and

when one was on good terms with him, there was hope. Hayimke was scrupulously fair, and forgot no boy in his grade. Every boy would get a chance at three blasts, no more and no less. Only occasionally a disagreement would arise as to whether a certain effort was a full or a half blast, and warranted repetition. Only so great an authority as Hayimke could settle such difficult questions, and his decision was final. Hayimke was also our teacher in Shofar-blowing. He would carefully take up the Shofar in his hand and give orders: "Now stick out your tongue—Not the whole tongue, just a tiny bit of it—Don't blow with all your strength, blow moderately."

We attempted to carry out Hayimke's orders most scrupulously. We blew and blew again, with the tongue and without it, with half strength and with full strength, until our lips were exhausted in the effort. We managed somehow to negotiate the simpler sounds of Teki'ah but the more sustained tones of the Shebarim and Teru'ah we could not produce at all, even after repeated and hard efforts, and it is my belief that there are many among us who to this day have not yet mastered the secret of blowing their horns.

XXIII

THE TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY TUNES

All through the centuries of the long Galut traditional tunes have sweetened and lent charm to Jewish life. All peoples sing at their church services. But, however beautiful, these tunes are not bound up historically with the life of the people. Like all singing, religious melodies elevate the spirit of those who cast off worldliness, humdrum everydayness, and come to a holy place to pour out their souls and to taste of spirituality and emotions of a higher order. Yet, the religious songs and melodies of other peoples do not beget the age-long echo that rings in Jewish hearts when a traditional high-holiday tune is chanted.

These melodies are not religious but national. They echo tragic events in our history; without the aid of word or rhythm, they tell us what we have suffered in the Middle Ages in Spain, what we have lived through in France and in England, in Germany and in Poland, and what we are going through in Russia now. These traditional tunes are deeply ingrained in the soul of the Jew. They came into being together with the Jewish woes, and were bequeathed together with them. To this day they re-echo the sorrows and the joys the Jewish race has lived through in the course of centuries. Every tune has a history of its own. Every one of them has sprung from some important event in the life of

the Jewish people, and is therefore tied to it by thousands of threads.

The Jewish tunes have no need of any organac companiment. The very strings of the soul serve as their accompaniment, lending their sweet and harmonious undertones to these touching airs. These traditional airs certainly do not altogether conform to the rules of composition and counterpoint. But, for that matter, does the whole historical life of the Jewish people conform to the laws of the birth and death of peoples? According to the science of music, the *Kol Nidre* of the composer Baruch is a work superior to the Kol Nidre that Reb Yossel the Hazzan of the Old Synagogue used to sing. But the Hazzan's Kol Nidre touched the Jewish hearts more deeply. The ear of the Jew hears in it the Jewish sob, he feels his kinship with it, and so the pious Hazzan's tune impresses him more deeply than Baruch's composition. The Jewish traditional tunes are old, but not aged. They bear the stamp of all that is past. It is the oldness of a violin which improves with the passing of the years.

The Jew leans toward sad and plaintive melodies. To him the *Oi-oi-oi* (the minor) is nearer than the *hi-hi-hi* (the major). Even in his Simhat Torah freilachs the motives are more sad than lively. In these Holy Day airs the Jew feels fully in his element. In them he feels his own frame of mind, the genuine Jewish frame of mind, which is balm to his broken heart and his wounded soul. The Jew feels considerably relieved when he can groan aloud, when he can, at least, sigh aloud; and on hearing a traditional tune, he sighs

to his heart's content. He sighs in chorus with all Jews who feel the need of expressing in song the deep-seated melancholy that is vast and heavy and crushes the heart in the narrow, puny chest.

Have you ever seen the graybeard Reb Yisroel Simhes, the *Ba'al Shaharit* of our synagogue, when he sang or rather sighed the *Hamelek?* We little urchins were warned against looking into the faces of the *Kohanim* during their blessing of the Congregation, or the Leader of the High Holy Day service, as he was on the point of becoming the *Sheliah Zibbur.* But we could not restrain ourselves and we would now and then cast a glance. Terror would seize us. Picture to yourself an ancient graybeard; a man who had already gone through seven decades of this life and boasts several married grandchildren, standing there with his bare and hairy chest, clad in a white linen gown, wrapped in a Talit, the *'Atarah* thrown over his head, rhythmically swaying over the open huge *Mahzor* and singing in a powerful basso voice.

He does not sing alone, the whole congregation sings with him. Young and old, big and little, all sing. Hundreds and thousands of men stand there, their heads wrapped in the Talit, and sing the tune of the Hamelek. Reb Yisroel, the Leader of the services, does not mind that his hundreds of choristers do not sing in tune. He himself has never in his life touched a tuning fork and he takes the octaves not as the "notes" prescribe, but as his mood dictates. If his heart is full, he takes a high octave and roars the introduction like a lion.

Reb Yisroel, the Ba'al Shaharit, was a powerful man of stout heart. He bore his private sorrows heroically. He never grumbled at fate and found just all the afflictions visited upon him. On hearing that his beloved son, one of the first pioneers who had settled in Palestine, had died of yellow fever, leaving a young widow and four little orphans, Reb Yisroel uttered no word of complaint against the Almighty. With a bleeding heart he uttered the customary *Baruk Dayyan ha-Emet*, then raised his hands towards heaven and said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away."

Reb Yisroel never wept in his life. But now, before the Hamelek, tears filled his eyes, rolled down his withered yellow cheeks and fell upon the Mahzor. To this day I cannot forget Reb Yisroel's tears; those big, warm tears that kept rolling and dropping on the huge prayer book. These were not tears of his own woes; they were not tears of an individual but of the entire race; tears that flow into the cup which stands close by the Throne of the Almighty—the cup which must be filled to the brim ere the Messiah can come.

Reb Yisroel was fully aware of the great responsibility that was his when he undertook to be the Sheliah Zibbur for a congregation of Jews on the day when God alone is King. He knew that if, God forbid, he made one slip in a prayer, the entire community might suffer. The slightest error might provide an opening for Satan . . . . And that is why he moaned and wept so much on the word Hamelek, the first word with which he began his prayer as Sheliah Zibbur. Reb Yisroel, the Ba'al Shaharit, felt in his singing of the

Hamelek what Reb Mordke Shemuel, the *Ba'al Musaf*, expressed in words a few hours later in his *Hineni*. And in both, the Hamelek and the Hineni, the congregation joined in with the Hazzan, creating thus a common, uniform and holy mood that prevailed through all the high holidays.

XXIV

THE FIRST SELIHOT

On the Sabbath preceding the First Selihot the little town lost its composure. A quiet terror spread its sable wings. The fear of Judgment Day when the Heavenly Judge would demand an accounting for every act was evident in all faces. Men and women, young and old, all began making preparations for the coming of *Rosh Hashanah*, when the fate of the absolutely wicked and the supremely righteous was to be decided.

Terror seizes one sitting in a courtroom where a capital case is tried. Those involved in the case shudder at every move of the judge. The preliminaries and the whole procedure of picking the jury sap their strength. And lo! here is the last Sabbath before the great World-Judgment! No sooner is the Sabbath day over, than the Supreme Judge will summon both the Prosecutor and Counsel for Defense to have their pleas ready. Is it any wonder, then, that one and all are filled with fear and trepidation during the days preceding Rosh Hashanah?

Prayer is one of the means of averting a cruel decree, and the people availed themselves of this remedy to the full. A great deal could still be accomplished by appealing to the Lord of the Universe in the few days remaining before Rosh Hashanah and one should not let slip the opportunity lest it be too late.

On this Sabbath, after the Minhah service, the people did not go home to eat their third meal as prescribed by custom, but remained in the synagogue. Meals were a matter of minor importance during the days intervening between the First Selihot and the ushering out of Yom Kippur. Indeed, pious Jews like Reb Notte Leah-Deborah's and others kept up the fasting throughout the period, fasting in the full sense of the word. Every evening they would swallow a couple of mouthfuls, no more, merely to refresh their hearts so as to be able to continue their fasting the next day.

Just as soon as the first signs of twilight had appeared, Shelomoh the Psalm Reader would mount the platform and begin to recite in a sad, tearful yet hearty voice: "Happy are the blameless of way, that walk in the law of the Lord;" to which the assembly would respond: "Happy are they that keep His testimonies, that seek Him with all their heart." In this manner Shelomoh and the whole congregation alternated verse with verse until the synagogue grew pitch dark.

Shelomoh the Psalm Reader did not belong to the community's official family. Times without number he had been asked to become Shammash in a minyan, but he had refused the office. "The Almighty, blessed be His name, has given me two hands and I want to live by their labor," he invariably replied in refusing public office.

Shelomoh was a man of many trades. In the summer he used to pother in his garden, which he had inherited from his father. He would gather in a few potatoes, carrots, turnips and other vegetables, pack

them into bags and carry them on his shoulders to the market place. In the winter Shelomoh turned bookbinder and felt happy when his hands had to bind the Talmud, the *Mishnayot* and other holy books. He was no scholar—far from it. Even at the Reading of the En Yakob he would sit by without interest and doze off occasionally. But, to make up for it, he was a past master at psalm-reading.

From a week after his wedding—some forty years previously—Shelomoh had never failed to recite at least one day's portion of the Psalms before morning prayer. This, however, was his task only on week days. On Saturdays, Shelomoh would read the Psalms to himself and recite them to others as well. In the summer, after his midday meal, while others still enjoyed a nap, Shelomoh would betake himself to the synagogue where, in the company of a couple of Minyanim of his Hebrah Tehillim, he would recite the Psalms from the first to the last. In winter, when the days were short and the Psalms could not be read through in an afternoon, Shelomoh would arise at three in the morning.

Everybody knew that these forty years Shelomoh had not missed a single Sabbath going to *Shul* for his Psalms. And to Shul Shelomoh came punctually on the dot. No storm, bleak frost or rain could force Shelomoh to be late for Tehillim. The denizens of the streets which Shelomoh had to pass en route to the synagogue had become thoroughly familiar with his footsteps and recognized his gait. Even the dogs of the town apparently knew well Shelomoh's manner of

walking—they never barked when Shelomoh wended his way. "It is three o'clock! Shelomoh is already on his way to say Tehillim"—a merry company that had lingered too long at some house, would suddenly realize. Night watchmen and the Gentiles of the little town, too, knew the time by Shelomoh's footsteps. Shelomoh never carried a lantern: he knew his way in the dark, in the forty years he had been traversing it.

This psalm-reading was to Shelomoh neither an act of faith nor a duty or obligation, but a sheer delight, a thing of worldly joy. Indeed, Shelomoh explicitely declared: "It is a worldly joy to recite a few verses of the Tehillim." The moment he uttered the first words he became strangely inspired, his countenance beamed and an inner exaltation shone forth from his eyes. His soul had been swept aloft by King David's poetry and one could see that after the lapse of thousands of years Shelomoh still heard every tone and vibration of the harp of David.

Since the Psalm reading took place at a time when the rest of the town folk were asleep, Shelomoh was seen very rarely during the year. However, from the first day of Elul, Shelomoh's appearance on the Bimah grew frequent even when people were no longer asleep, and between the Sabbath afternoon that preceded the First Selihot, and the evening before the Day of Atonement, Shelomoh was the real autocrat of the Bimah

No sooner had he observed people in the synagogue standing idly and chatting than he would strike the

reading desk with the flat of his hand and begin to intone: "Happy is the man" or "Happy are the blameless." And once Shelomoh had started, he kept on reciting till the time for evening-prayers came.

The introduction to the First Selihot was the Psalm which the Hazzan and his choristers sang before Ma'arib. This was the gateway and the overture to the Selihot Days and the Ten Days of Penitence. Each year the Hazzan had a new tune for the Psalm; yet, however new the melody might be, there always resounded in it, like distant echoes, the tones of the ancient melodies of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

A beautiful and solemn mood reigned during the singing of this Psalm. The synagogue was in darkness. An indefinable melancholy seized and wrung one's heart. Everyone felt that fearful and awesome days were approaching; days when the spirit must conquer the body, when matters spiritual must overcome the corporeal, when the soul must immerse itself in an ocean of prayers and supplications. The time was drawing near when one must divest himself of the petty mortal longings and desires, must tear himself away from things earthly and strive heavenward, when one must be more godlike than human. In keeping with this mood was the Hazzan's singing, the singing of a prayer and a song of praise to the King of Kings.

After Ma'arib, the people took leave of one another, soon to meet again at the First Selihot. That Sabbath night some went to bed too late, others too early. The

younger folk, the worldly ones, the merchants, stayed up till midnight and got through with their Selihot then and there. The pious Jews, on the other hand, went to bed early, to rise on the morrow before daybreak, while it was still dark.

At two o'clock in the morning, Abba the synagogue-summoner, carrying his thick cane in one hand and in the other a huge lantern in which flickered the dim light of a tallow candle, would race through the town, calling people to the First Selihot. He trudged from house to house and knocked on the window-shutters: "Bestir yourselves to worship the Creator! Arise for the First Selihot!"

A mother with sleepy eyes which she can hardly open is standing and rocking her baby that is so restless and won't cease crying. A shudder runs through her as Abba raps on the window-shutter and calls in his thick hoarse voice: "Bestir yourselves to worship the Creator! Arise for the First Selihot!"

Somewhere else, an invalid is tossing on his sick bed, where his pains give him no rest, and he bursts into tears when his ears are assailed by Abba's melancholy, heart-rending refrain: "Bestir yourselves to worship the Creator! Arise for the First Selihot!"

The wind is whistling and roaring and emitting all manner of odd, wild voices. The leaves of the moisture-laden trees huddle closely together and keep whispering secrets to one another. Many of them are dropping on the soft mud-decked earth. From far away is wafted the angry splashing of the waves in the

river, which flows and flows without end, without aim, while Abba the synagogue-summoner knocks at the doors and windows and calls: "Bestir yourselves to worship the Creator! Arise for the First Selihot!"

XXV

SHABBAT SHUBAH

Shabbat Shubah held an especial place in the spiritual life of our fathers and grandfathers. If it were possible to create a clear-cut plastic image of the sentiments and inner experiences during the Ten Days of Penitence, I would say that the Shabbat Shubah was a green, lush and lovely field between two great and towering mountains; or a beautiful gently-flowing rivulet that links two mighty rushing streams.

Between the blare of the trumpets, the loud, screaming, many-voiced prayers and entreaties of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Shabbat Shubah is the low and quiet inner voice that abides in one's heart and never comes forth into the outer world. Shabbat Shubah is the day of the "accounting of the soul," the day when one delves within himself, when the whole world of externals, all the deeds and events of the year, are re-written and re-appraised in the "self," in the Holy of Holies, the soul, where are hidden the greatest secrets and the deepest mysteries of life.

The heavenly Prosecutor as well as the Attorney for the Defense, have, in honor of Shabbat Shubah, suspended their arguments and claims. The Almighty Himself has doffed His judicial robes. The wars between Satan and the *Meliz Yosher* have come to a

stand-still, while the defendants themselves, awaiting their fate in the dock, have time to consider their own deeds, to weigh the good and the evil, to make a balance for the past year, to repent of the evil and to return to God, the Cause and Purpose of Creation. "Return, O strayed children, to the Lord, your God!"

On Shabbat Shubah the Jew does not utter his feelings. In the depth of his heart, within, there is repentance. But this sentiment is far too strong to be eased by words. It is far too sacred to be profaned by contact with the outer world. On Shabbat Shubah the individual Jew ceases to be a part of a multitude, a unit in an aggregate. His individual microcosm grows broad and large. He plumbs his innermost thoughts, he lays bare to himself the mainsprings of his actions, he ponders his relations toward the Almighty and seeks a way of coming nearer to Him, so that his soul may not stray about, lonely and desolate, in the world of homeless spirits, but may reach its goal and source.

During those Ten Days of Penitence, nature herself is in harmony with the Jew's thoughts and reveries. The soul of the Jew is in a certain sense the mirror of external nature. At this season of the year summer takes leave of God's world. The sun still shines, but is no longer so warm as in summer days. The green leaves have sered and withered. Every breath of the wind tears off the boughs from which they draw their sap of life, and carries them off into some stream or puddle where they rot and decay. The bees and butterflies flitting from flower to flower, which but yester-

day carried on their wings the germs of thousands of lives, are gone. Nature's season of love is over. She has already provided for a profusion of new lives for the coming year. She is growing older, less frivolous; she is forsaking her childish pranks, her coquettish smiles, her seductive verdant summer garb. She is gaining in dignity and pride, and does not greet one with an amiably coquettish mien. Instead of the roundels of spring, the Song of Songs of love and life, nature is now filled with autumn, the mood of Ecclesiastes—vanity of vanities, all is vanity—which makes sport of youthful dreams and hopes. Everything in sight is dying. Only the needle-decked pines in the woods have life, but they had never arrayed themselves in flowers and never dallied with the bees.

During the last days of summer, Nature takes, as it were, "account of the soul." With a cynical smile she scans the pleasures of life and life itself. But a while ago there grew in the field such superb ears of corn, green, tall and full-bellied. They had swayed so beautifully, so charmingly and so devoutly, and murmured so holy a prayer to the Almighty; and now, suddenly, the reaper came along and cut them down pitilessly with his sharp scythe of steel and left clods with rough stubble. But a little while ago birds had been building with so much art, pains and ingenuity the nests for their little ones, in the corners of the tall windows of the synagogue and the town church, and now the glazier came along and reluctantly, perhaps, destroyed the work of months in the wink of an eye. But yesterday beautiful multicolored flowers

were hanging from shrubs in the garden, spreading perfumed aroma, and at dawn the frost came and they are no more.

Wherever the eye turns it sees destructive forces which annihilate everything that bloomed but a short while ago. Some unseen hand is playing havoc with the sap of life that had erstwhile flowed through all the trees and grasses and brought with it freshness, youth and beauty. Two worlds clash in the month of Tishri. Two seasons, youth and old age, encounter each other. Life and Death are at war. The cheery warm summer turns to flight before the damp gloomy autumn; youth retreats before old age; Life is vanquished by Death.

Such upheavals and changes take place between summer and winter that they cannot but create a feeling of scepticism, of negation of all that exists; and one begins to seek the aim of existence not in this petty world of ours but somewhere else where the earthly forces of destruction have no sway.

The centuries of exile have developed in the Jew an earnest and philosophical attitude toward the outside world as well as towards himself, and in the days of "the accounting of the soul" he begins to grasp the deep import of the words: "Man originates from dust and will end in dust."

Thinkers do not bellow, shriek or shout. They avoid the hackneyed everyday babble, they lock themselves within their own world, a world of ideas, speculations and hypotheses. On Shabbat Shubah every plain Jew is a thinker. And that is why in the Lithuanian towns

on that day, one sees so many Jews preoccupied and enwrapped in thought, going from home to the synagogue and from synagogue home, so silent, calm and peaceful.

This meditative, introspective mood lasts till after Minhah. After Minhah the rabbi ascends the platform, facing the Ark, where the Shammash previously placed a reading-desk, kisses the flowing white satin Paroket, and begins his Shabbat Shubah sermon.

The sermon is full of words of reproof. Mercilessly the rabbi chides his flock for sins they have or have not committed, for transgressions intentional or unintentional. The rabbi chastises and weeps, while the hearers, men and women, shed tears with him, weep aloud like true penitents, who deeply repent of their past sins. The large white-bordered handkerchiefs are thoroughly soaked with the tears that ceaselessly flow from the eyes' well-springs.

This tear-saturated sermon lasts until shortly before Ma'arib. And there still remains a brief space for Shelomoh the Psalm-reader to take in a few Psalms and for the blue blooded connoisseurs of the town to express their expert opinion upon the rabbi's sermon.

XXVI

YOM KIPPUR EVE

The *Kapporos-Shlogen* on the eve of Yom Kippur is like a foul word in some divine drama; like a trashy bit of witticism in an inspired poetic creation. The screams of the hens and roosters when their legs are being tied for that rite; the beating of their wings as they are being swung around one's head, the feathers that fill the house, as well as the utter stupidity of the accompanying prayers, introduce a strange discordant note into the beautiful and lofty mood that reigns all through the Ten Days of Penitence.

Wild, barbarous, disgusting was the appearance of the yard in which these fowls were being killed. How I hated the Shohet as he held in his hand the struggling hen that beat its free wings against the executioner, while his right hand held the short, sharp-bladed knife! How I hated him at the moment when he forced the hen's head to its back, plucked the feathers off its throat and. . . zip! went the blade across it.

Once, I recall, I ran along to the Shohet to see him kill these *Kapporoh* fowls; only once, but that once was sufficient to implant in me an eternal hatred for the publican who charged a meat tax of five kopeks for the ticket without which the Shohet could not do the slaughtering; and a still deeper hatred for the Shohet himself who mercilessly slaughtered right and

left the innocent fowls, whose blood gushed out together with their life.

How does this survival of idolatry fit in with such holy and sublime days? How comes the slaughter, the destruction of so many lives on the eve of Yom Kippur? But the Kapporos-Shlogen did not spoil for long the mood of the Ten Days of Penitence. Immediately after the grave awesome mood returned.

In the early afternoon, while the autumn sun was still high in the heaven, long lines of people carrying long wax candles in their hands streamed from all directions towards the synagogue, there to pray Minhah and say *'Al Het.* At the entrance of the synagogue, in the ante-chamber, where the floor had been crowded throughout the year with boxes full of torn parts of holy books, there were now long narrow tables covered with clean cloths upon which stood numerous collection plates. The Wardens of the synagogue sat at the head of the table, the first before an open record book near the first plate and computed the pledges which each man owed the congregation. Every Hebrah had its own lead plate into which copper or silver coins were dropped. For the Sabbath-goy, the Gentile who put out the candles on the Sabbath, there was a special plate under his own supervision. The Sabbath-goy was a sort of Jewish institution, part and parcel of Jewish life, and he was fully entitled to Jewish money quite as much as were all other Jewish institutions.

As soon as they had settled their debts to the congregation and placed their offerings in the plates,

the elder folks passed into the small side-room where Abba the beadle administered the Malkot. Upon an outspread straw mat, men of sixty and seventy kneeled, their heads bowed to the ground and their eyes closed, and said *Viduy*. Each confessant devoutly whispered: *Ashamnu, Bagadnu, Gazalnu,* and beat his breast at each word, while his back was being lashed by Abba the Shammash with a strap. Abba unctuously counted each blow and took care that the prescribed thirty-nine lashes should be delivered in full. Just as soon as one gray-beard arose, another took his place, recited the prayer and received the lashes from Abba who, with eyes rolled up, lashed and counted, counted and lashed.

After the Malkot they all begged one another forgiveness. Yom Kippur atones only for the sins committed against God, but not against man. The sins committed against a fellowman could be forgiven only by the person sinned against. God could not do anything in this respect. "Forgive me, Reb Yisroel! Perhaps I have not always been careful with my lips. I regret it and ask your forgiveness"—Reb Nottel, feeling like a culprit, would implore Reb Yisroel, his side partner in Mishnah studies, with whom he frequently would differ as to the proper interpretation of a certain passage. "I forgive you from the bottom of my heart, Reb Nottel," Reb Yisroel would reply warmly. "Perhaps you also will excuse me, Reb Nottel," Reb Yisroel humbly rejoined, "perhaps I have been overhasty, and flared up too quickly." "With all my heart, Reb Yisroel! With all my heart!"

Reb Nottel would reply gravely, yet softly and tenderly as a father to his child.

Reb Nottel was a pious man, a man who spent his days and nights in the study of the Torah. His lips were closed to everything but the sacred lore. His wife Leah Deborah, the market woman, earned the few pennies needed for their living expenses. Her earnings sufficed not only for themselves but also for the occasional stranger that Reb Nottel would bring along from the house of worship.

It was Reb Nottel's custom never to let a wayfarer leave hungry. Every *Orah* was regaled with three meals, consisting of two penny cracknels and a glass of milk each. If it so happened that Leah Deborah hadn't taken in a farthing the whole day, and there was not a crumb in the house, Reb Nottel would repair to the rich man of the town and ask for a donation. Not for himself, the Lord forbid! He hated material assistance and would rather go hungry than apply to others. But he had a stranger at his home, who must not be permitted to depart hungry; and for the sake of the Mizvah of harboring strangers, he would solicit a few pennies from the rich man. This rich man would often get angry with Reb Nottel for bothering him. On the eve of Yom Kippur, however, after receiving the thirty-nine lashes, and asking and giving forgiveness to his friend Reb Yisroel, Reb Nottel would visit the rich man and with head lowered and tears in his voice, he would beg forgiveness. He, Reb Nottel, asking forgiveness of the stingy money-bag!

After the ceremony of begging forgiveness, there was a rush homeward for the last meal before the fast. In the house the Yom Kippur atmosphere was felt in every nook and corner. The table was covered with a spotless white cloth whereon rested the polished silver candle-sticks, in which great wax or stearine candles had been placed. The food was specially chosen and light, consisting of noodles and Kappo-roh-fowl. A white satin embroidered coverlet was spread over the artfully twisted loaves. The mistress of the house was dressed in freshly-ironed white apparel; the girls, who had to stay at home during the Kol Nidre service, wore their morning dresses, the boys were cleanly washed and dolled up. The *Mahzorim*—one with a Yiddish translation for the women folk, and another with commentaries for the men—lay ready on a small table nearby. On the same table were also the father's Talit and white linen robe.

During the meal all sat silent and pensive. Words were few and uttered slowly and softly and with a peculiar tenderness. Every one was absorbed in thought, the faces mirroring the state of mind within. A torrent of sentiments and thoughts was gushing through the brain. Fear and hope, doubt and confidence, were intermingled. One sat still and awaited the arrival of the greatest and most sacred day of the year, the great and awful day when the Judgment, the verdict of life and death, of health and disease was to be rendered. What is going to happen a year from today? each one thought to himself. Will the whole family sit together again and prepare for the fast, or

. . . or. . . . who knows? Black, glum, dismal thoughts stole into the mind, and the heart began to shrink and ache with fear for the future. One tries not to think, not to misconjecture, not to give Satan any suggestion. Notions incomplete, disjointed bits of ideas clash and result in a jumble of thoughts and experiences, a survey of the past year, a dizzy glimpse into the coming year. Indeed, what things do not sift through one's mind in the brief space of the meal on Yom Kippur Eve?

More keenly than anyone else in the family, mother felt the pangs of heart-ache. She, apparently, felt more deeply the doubts and uncertainties that gnawed and tugged at the soul. She gazed at father and us children and kept thinking. But to think long and keep to herself the diverse sentiments was impossible for her. She was too weak; and the moment grace was being said she burst out into loud sobbing. Terrible and heart-rending was mother's weeping that evening. A sea of vague, confused emotions was reflected in mother's tears, and the cloud that had been upon father's brow now became blacker and the melancholy that pressed the hearts of the children grew still heavier.

After grace, and while the sun was ready to retire to its resting place, father removed his shoes, put on his white robe, wrapped himself in his Talit and repaired to the synagogue, while we children accompanied our mother to grandfather's for benediction. None of us children would ever dream of going to the synagogue without his blessing. All the grandchildren

gathered at grandpa's. On other holidays such gatherings would lead to pranks and noise that would not cease until the elders had intervened and restored quiet. But on Yom Kippur eve the youngsters would behave with dignity and reserve and no one would dare to raise his voice or to make unnecessary movements.

Grandfather stood attired in his Talit and white robe. In the dim room the bright flame from the huge candles illumined his wrinkled face. The married daughters and the daughters-in-law who immediately after the Kapporos had gone through the ceremony of begging foregiveness, now sat and waited for grandpa to give them the cue. The youngsters clung to their mothers, and with a peculiar awe stared at grandpa, a holy man in their eyes now. We felt calmer and safer at grandfather's. We knew that he couldn't possibly wish us any evil, that he would bless us, and grandpa's blessing would surely come true. In due order, according to age, each one went up to grandpa; first the daughters and daughters-in-law, and then the grandchildren. Grandpa would raise his thin, trembling hands, lay them upon our heads and bless us fervently and wholeheartedly.

When we left grandpa's home the sky rim was as red as flame. In the silent streets we met men folk in prayer shawls and white robes; young women in white satin cloaks, the older ones, the grandmothers, wrapped in white sheets. All were going to the synagogue, to Kol Nidre. . . . . .

XXVII

TWILIGHT PRAYERS (NE'ILAH)

It is scarcely two hours before the end of the last of the holy days. Heavenly judgment has been rendered and sentence passed. The destiny of every living being, man included, is already inscribed, and almost sealed; there can be no great change now in the Lord's doom. He who has been adjudged worthy is now beyond the Evil Spirit's power. But he who has been found guilty, may still, though it is very doubtful, prevail upon the King of Kings to modify His verdict. Our blessed Lord is merciful, indeed; a gracious God of forgiveness and full of pity for His children on earth. Even at the eleventh hour He may change guilty to innocent, and many there are who do win such favor of the Lord, but they are the exceptions. With the generality, however, all possibility of change is passed; as their fate has been inscribed, so it shall be sealed.

The whole congregation feels a growing lightness of spirit; the fearful, awe-inspiring procedure of the long Day of Judgment is past. Calm after the storm. The heavy, leaden clouds that have weighed down the heart for almost six weeks have begun to lift and vanish. A soul-lightness and soul-freedom begin to pervade all the worshippers. The pall of gloom lifts; one's spirit is as if filled with light. No more weeping

and shedding of tears; what tears there were have all been shed. No longer is the heart oppressed with somberness. The burden of sorrow and sin has been washed away in the tears that so long bathed us. One's whole ego is as if translated. The baser portions and rank weeds of the soul have been completely rooted up. The soul itself has been liberated from its corporeal envelope. An angel has possessed himself of her and soared with her to heaven.

At such a time one feels a desire to sing paeans of praise with the angels to Him who hath created the whole universe and all living things and plants, making man lord over all. The twilight intensifies this lofty, poetic mood. The flickering flame of the wax candles that are almost burnt out, together with the twilight, fills the soul with a tranquil, peaceful yearning. The mood of peace-after-atonement is beyond the power of words to describe. Song alone can convey to us the nature and intensity of these emotions. And the congregation begins to sing.

The *Ne'ilah* melodies are simple enough, yet how superbly beautiful is their sound. The sanctification melody at Ne'ilah is the most essentially Jewish melody that we possess. Kol Nidre was composed in the course of history, but the sanctification melody was never composed; it was born with the birth of the Jewish race. In it one can discern our Oriental origin, as well as our long exile, and our hope for the future.

When the rabbi in our town, Reb Yankele Harif, began the Sanctification Prayer in his sweet, pleasant, deep voice, accompanied by the cantor's choir that

surrounded the Ark, lit up by the last rays of the Atonement Day sun, one felt as if a heavenly angel choir had descended on earth, and that this was their song. Hunger, weariness, and all the stress of tears and prayer vanished like smoke; the congregation was swept along by the glorious melody.

Twice a year the rabbi borrowed the cantor's choir: at the Festival of the Law and on the Day of Atonement at Ne'ilah. It was an ancient custom that at Ne'ilah the cantor should be the most venerated man in the community, the rabbi. The choir singers themselves felt more holy under his leadership and sang with all their heart and soul.

Ne'ilah is the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Holy Day. And the Ne'ilah melodies are the Song of Songs of prayer-music. There are moments when one even forgets that every mortal's destiny is being sealed. One forgets everything save the sacred beauty of the hour. God is holy. The angels are holy. The world is holy. And man is holy. The very gates of heaven are open then. There is no gulf between mortal and angel. The worshipper feels the presence of the divine spirit and would remain with it and unite himself with it forevermore: "Oh, that I might rest under the wings of Thy spirit."

The spirit, the divine flame, instils fresh life into the bodies of the worshippers though they have eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. It warms and gives light, though the sun has almost set and twilight shadows are creeping into the remote corners of the house of prayer. At Ne'ilah the Lord ceases to be the

Omnipotent Judge and becomes the symbol of holiness. And as God is holy, so His children of Israel are holy. At Ne'ilah every weekday Jew is sanctified. Many, very many, are ready for the Lord's trial, and would sacrifice themselves for the glory of His name.

So engrossed is the congregation that they have not even noticed the sinking of the sun; a single ray still lingers on the earth over which the mantle of darkness has already fallen. The candles are expiring; their flickering flame dances nervously, but the men in their white shroud-robes and, in the women's gallery, the women in their white shroud sheets, are still on their feet. The holy Ark is still open, and the scrolls in their white garments look down on the worshippers.

The Great Day must be ended with the blast of the ram's horn. All wait for it with impatience and fear. They know that when the horn is blown, not a line or a word will be cancelled in the Book of Doom. All is written and sealed. The Great Judgment is at an end. But the horn-blast will show what the verdict is to be for the congregation as a whole.

More atremble than all the others is Reb Sholem Wolf, the blower of the horn. He is anxious that the blast may be clear and pure without a flaw. But who knows? After all, he is but the Lord's voice. The blast will tell that which has been decided above.

He has ascended the platform. His lips are parched. His hands tremble. He gathers his strength together; he is full of faith: the Lord is an all-merciful God. It grows still. All hold their breath. Rabbi Israel Tsesnes cries out in his familiar bass voice: *Te-ki-'ah.*

And Reb Sholem Wolf renders a blast. It is a good blast, clear and faultless. Innocent! Not Guilty! is its meaning. This is the verdict from above.

All begin to breathe freely, their hearts relieved and joyful. The penitential oppression of the Holy Days is past and vanished. And all cry out in loud, ringing voices: "In the year to come,—Jerusalem!"

Immediately after Ne'ilah the women's congregation disperse to their homes, while the men remain till after evening prayer. By that time the new moon already hangs, a sickle crescent, above the courtyard of the synagogue, and the congregation pause to greet and bless her.

Full of good cheer each greets his neighbor: "*Shalom 'Alekem*—'*Alekem Shalom*"—"A good month to you"—"A good year"—"The same to you."

At home it is warm, bright, gay. The big paunchy samovar is standing on the table, glowing sparks flying from the chimney to the brass plate beneath. The water bubbles and boils merrily. Each relates to the other the incidents of the fast, and discusses the cantor's singing. Relatives, neighbors and friends come to visit and learn how everyone has fared.

After the banquet all go to grandfather's home who breaks his fast last of all. And between the courses he and the invited guests and the grandchildren all sing *Hodu* and the joyous holiday song of the approaching Festival of the Law. The same night the first nail for the *Sukkah* is driven.

XXVIII

SUKKOT

The Jew has become a stranger to Nature. He is alienated from forest and field, where one may breathe freely and enjoy the open landscape. However, the Jew's sensitiveness to Nature's beauties has remained undulled. His long exile has not succeeded in destroying his innate aesthetic sense. At every opportunity the Jew delights to commune with nature. He rejoices when he can escape from the confines of his dwelling and find himself under the open sky. He loves those virtuous practices which evoke in him memories of the ancient past, of the days when he dwelt "in his own vineyard and under his own fig tree."

Of all the holidays, Sukkot is the gladdest; it is the holiday of the harvest. Among all peoples there is rejoicing after the harvest days. Everyone feels so gratefully happy with nature, who gives nurture to all living things—the fish of the streams, the birds of the air, and the creatures of the land, both man and beast.

The Jew, likewise, rejoices when the grain in the fields has been harvested. He still retains the memory of the glorious days of yore when he, too, was a tiller of the soil—when he plowed and sowed and reaped and carried the grain into the barn. The Jew is loath to think of the approaching winter with its cold and damp, when worry about the bitter hardship of earn-

ing a livelihood will oppress him. He would sooner forget the future and lose himself in visions of the long-gone past when the grain was stored away under the roof, and the sides of the grainlockers bulged with the thick, fat ears; when provisions for a whole year had already been stowed away and all the blessings of God had already been fulfilled.

The Sukkah reminds the Jew of those glorious days, and that is why he occupies it with so much gladness, even though the autumn winds blow fiercely through the cracks of the flimsy walls. The roof of leaves and branches does not oppress him as does the ceiling of his weekday abode. The windows of the Sukkah may be very uneven, but the pious man feels quite at ease. Even the heterodox Jew, the skeptic, likes the Sukkah, first, because it reminds him of nature, and second, because the Sukkah is a symbol of our present exile, of our homeless, shelterless existence. Have not we Jews been knocking about for two thousand years in lightly built dwellings, ready to be quickly torn down and put up again where necessity might drive us? Has not our whole race known more shadow than sunshine? Our fathers, therefore, built the seven-day arbor-house with much glad fervor, their own hands sawing and hammering and nailing. And we youngsters with all our might tugged and pulled at the branches for the roof of the Jewish house that must have more shadow than light.

Perhaps even more than the Sukkah our fathers cherished the *Etrog* and the *Lulab*, the *Hadasim* and the *Hosha'anot.* With what tremulous tenderness my

father held the Etrog; how caressingly he wiped it to see that no speck of dust had lodged on it—God forbid! How he wrapped it in hemp that smelled of fragrant citron, and brought a greeting from the Holy Land, the home of our fathers.

No parents are more solicitous of their only child than ours were of the Etrog; it had to be perfectly sound, without the slightest flaw, even though it were no larger than a pin-head; it also had to be of a rich yellow color, mature and with a handsome, wellgrown *pittum*.

We, youngsters, before Sukkot, did not dare to go near the drawer in which the silver box containing the precious Etrog, wrapped in hemp, with the pittum uppermost, lay hidden. Mother, too, had worries in plenty on account of the Etrog. She had to see to it that it was neither too light nor too dark, neither too damp nor too dry in the room where the Etrog lay. She, however, did not grudge it this care; she knew that father was very particular about having a perfect Etrog, and she agreed with him.

In one corner of the room stood a tub of water, in which the Hadasim were steeped, one third their length, as the Etrog merchant had advised. The Hadasim had to measure at least three spans, and were bound together by leaves which must spring from one calix.

On a small table, in a half moistened cloth, lay the Hosha'anot, which the cemetery keeper had plucked. Leaning against the table stood the Lulab, the center of the whole sacred bouquet.

The Lulab had to be fresh and green and of the present season. A dried, withered, past-season Lulab was used only in case of great necessity, in times when no other was obtainable. The leaves of the Lulab were tender, fleshy, full of vital palm sap. They exhaled a fresh, strong, delicious fragrance. At the top, the Lulab must be perfectly sound; the two leaves which at the beginning, near the stem, are parallel, and further up spread apart in opposite directions, must spring from a common bud. A split Lulab was unfit and must not be used.

The purchase of an Etrog was not a matter quickly disposed of, by any means. First Reb Shelomoh Zalman unwrapped all the Etrogim, laid them out in a row, and compared them. The one chosen had to be the largest and finest of the lot. No sooner did the Etrog become Reb Shelomoh's possession than the news would spread through the town, for it was unquestionably the handsomest and costliest of all the Etrogim.

The first day of Sukkot, the old Jews would rise with the first rays of the sun, take out the Etrog and lay it in a bed of soft white cotton. The Hadasim were taken out of the tub of water and, together with the Hosha'anot, were bound around the Lulab with ringlets which the boys had skillfully braided from palm leaves. When everything had been prepared, all went into the Sukkah to bless the Etrog. In the Sukkah it was cold. The frozen dew was beginning to melt and drip from the roof foliage, which exhaled a strong forest fragrance. And with the Etrog in one hand and

the Lulab in the other, our fathers recited the blessing.

The roof of green, the beautiful palm branch, the fresh myrtle leaves and the beautiful citron awakened visions and memories of a life close to nature. After father came mother, to bless the Etrog. She was learned in these matters, and knew that the Etrog must retain its freshness till *Hosha'ana Rabbah*. So she was very careful to see that her hands were dry when she took the precious fruit.

Our chief trouble was with the servant girl, who had to scrub her hands before we would trust her with the Etrog.

In the Bet Hamidrash every gentleman carried his own Etrog. Proud, indeed, was Reb Shelomoh Zalman as he strode past with the silver box containing the Etrog in his right hand, and the Lulab in his left. Only a lover who has carried a beautiful bouquet to his beloved can understand what every pious Jew felt as he walked toward the Bet Hamidrash with the Etrog and Lulab.

When the *Ana* was recited, it was inspiring to see the Lulabim moving rhythmically to the east and west, to the north and the south. The whole Bet Hamidrash seemed transformed into a green-house of the most beautiful tropical plants.

Even more inspiring was the procession at the recital of Hosha'anot. The scroll stood on the Bimah, surrounded by lovely fresh, green palm branches, the leaves whispering curiously. Here in the cold Bet Hamidrash, in mid autumn, one felt the intoxicating fragrance of fresh spring.

XXIX

HOSHA'ANA RABBAH

If one looks through the pages of the old ledgers of the various local ghetto societies, such as the Aid to the Poor Society, the Support of the Stumbling, The Visitors of the Sick, and the like, he will be sure to find under the item "income" a respectable sum under the heading of "Hosha'anot."

On the prospect of repaying out of the proceeds of the sale of Hosha'anot, every one of these societies would borrow and spend money in excess of the cash in the hands of its treasurer. The Hosha'anot were the best merchandise on which a Hebrah could make profits, and the night of Hosha'ana Rabbah was the most opportune time for it.

For the sake of the beautiful symbolic name with which these small, half-withered willows have been favored, it behooves that they should be sold not for private gain but for the benefit of Hebrahs whose object is to help and assist the needy. More effectively than thousands of homilies the Hosha'anot awakened the feeling of pity and made one realize that one must help his fellow-man in time of need.

The Jew is thoroughly aware that in order to have God help him, he himself, who pleads and implores "Hosha'ana," must first aid others. One cannot brazenly come to ask for help so long as one is unwill-

ing to help others. If we wish God to be good to us, we must be good to others. "Help us, O God!" implores the Jew on Hosha'ana Rabbah. "Help one another," replies an inner voice. And they do help one another.

To our fathers and grandfathers, Hosha'ana Rabbah meant the Day of Help. On that day particularly each felt his duties and obligations to his fellowmen and assisted them without stint or grudge.

These willow twigs, the Hosha'anot, are bound up with an important chapter of the Jewish past. Thanks to them one of the most beautiful pages in our history has been written. In the Babylonian captivity, after the destruction of the first Temple, when we had been driven out of our own land and were forced to a life of homeless wanderers in Galut, along the river-banks of our oppressors, we hung our harps upon the willows while our hearts mutely wept for the loss of our homeland, Zion. Not upon flower plants did we hang our instruments of joy; not upon tall trees did we place our hopes, but upon these poor, humble willows: "Upon the willows in the midst thereof we hanged up our harps."

These plain willows that grow on the river's edge at the foot of the hill; these willows that are so mercilessly trampled upon, bring to the aching soul of the Jew more comfort than do the tall oaks that rear their haughty heads. . . And so, when our fathers had to raise money, they would take an armful of willow-twigs and make their house-to-house rounds. The Hosha'anot made it possible to render aid on Hosha-'ana Rabbah.

On the night of Hosha'ana Rabbah the entire town was wide awake. No one went to bed, every one wanted to see the skies opening. Who would miss such an important moment, such a great occasion in one's life? The elderly male folk spent the night at the synagogue reading the *Tikkun*. The women fussed all night in their kitchens. The little urchins played tag about the synagogue yard, awaiting with the greatest impatience the moment when the Angel Michael would look down upon the earth. As for the young men, they did the most important work; they delivered the Hosha'anot on behalf of their Hebrahs.

Two o'clock in the morning. The night is chilly and refreshing. Through the clear, starry sky proudly sails the moon, fully revealing her luminous face. In some quiet nook, a man stands abstractedly watching for the moment when all his petitions shall be fulfilled. Meanwhile, he scrutinizes the moon for Joshua's features. From the brightly lit-up synagogues and houses of prayer comes a medley of voices. Within the Sukkahs, now bathed in the bright moonlight, reigns a peculiar mystery. The pine-needles allow as little light as possible to penetrate within. In the houses all lamps are burning and happy ringing female voices mingle with the clinking of silver spoons, forks and knives, and other utensils.

Even brighter than all other homes is the home of Yossel Reb Shelomoh's. His wife, Feige Reb Yossel's, is taking a short nap, while her husband is at the synagogue. Only Yossel's youngest, the betrothed Rivkah, is about in the house. She is rearranging the

house to the smallest detail. She has covered the great round table with the snow-white linen cloth that her father had brought from the city on the eve of the holidays. On this cloth she is arranging all the golden and silver vessels filled with wines, cakes and various preserves. Her hair is carefully combed and she wears her finest morning robe. She is slightly nervous; but her nervousness is not the result of any vexation but rather of joy. Her heart is beating much faster than usual. When the servant, who helps her set the table, goes into the kitchen, Rivkah runs to the mirror and hastily adjusts her hair. Without actually intending to do so, she hums snatches of a Simhat Torah melody. Her whole being vibrates and sings. Now and again, she becomes pensive and melancholy. This Hosha'ana Rabbah is the last one before her marriage. Will the Almighty grant her prayers? These doubts do not, however, last for any length of time. They are soon dissolved and lost in an ocean of happy thoughts that rise like waves in her brain.

Whom is she expecting? She is awaiting her betrothed, the student of the Volozhin Yeshibah, who has come to spend the holidays with her. The good youths and lads of the town have taken him into their circle, to deliver Hosha'anot for the benefit of the *Lehem 'Aniyim* Society.

Her betrothed, like all the other youths of good families, has dressed himself in a silk hat and the warm beaver fur cloak that he has brought along with him. He is also wearing the golden watch and chain that her father gave him as an engagement present. How

handsome, how charming her bridegroom looks.... she is thinking. Just so he will look standing under the canopy, when she with her parents and parents-in-law will march around him seven times. Then she will not be able to see him. Her face will be veiled. But that is how he will be dressed, exactly as he is now. She hears in the distance a merry "Good Yom Tob!" and her blood begins to pulse faster in her temples. Intently she listens at the window. Yes, it is they, it is he. She recognizes their voices. They are coming.

A spirited knocking at the door. Yisroel the Rav's, calls out in a voice loud enough to be heard ten squares away, in the words of the Psalmist, "Open ye gates." "And let the 'Goy' enter!" one of the group responds. A general hearty laugh accompanies this remark.

Rivkah now snatches a hasty glance in the mirror and rushes to open the door. "Good Yom Tob, bride! May you be inscribed in the Book of Life!" "Good Yom Tob; a Happy New Year to you!" Rivkah answers heartily, and her eyes meet the eyes of her betrothed, who is carrying a wooden trough full of Hosha'anot. Both feel abashed....

"Oh, drinks and dainties," Yisroel the Rav's calls out lustily, and proceeds to fill a cup. All follow suit. The bride-elect waits on them and places a piece of cake for each.

"Your health," says Yisroel—"your health, bride. May you live long!" "Drink hearty," Rivkah replies joyfully. "And the *Hossen*, have you forgotten him?"

someone asks. "Why, what do you mean? Your health, Hossen! To your happy life!"

"Have you sold Hosha'anot to the *Kalah?*" inquires Hayim Avrohom's, who keeps the red kerchief with the money.

The Hossen takes out a bunch of willow-shoots and hands it to his intended bride. The young woman accepts it with a lovely smile as though it were a most magnificent bouquet of flowers, and pledges eighteen times eighteen gulden to the Hebrah. "Eighteen times eighteen!"—Hayim calls out aloud, so that the Hossen should know what a golden heart his bride has. "May it spell life,"* they exclaim in a chorus and turn their attention once more to the refreshments on the table.

Drinks follow drinks, jolly tunes are sung, and, without being aware of it, they tuck in the skirts of their coats and draw in the betrothed couple into a round dance. The dancing rouses Rivkah's mother, Feige, from her sleep. With supreme delight she watches her daughter and the bridegroom do the "Kosher Dance." Feige, too, throws *Hai** Gulden into the red kerchief and glides into the merry round.

*In Hebrew the two letters of the word "hai" (=life) amount in their numerical value to 18.

XXX

SIMHAT TORAH

On the afternoon of *Shemini 'Azeret*, when the elderly folk, not yet rested from the sleepless Hosha-'ana Rabbah night, were snatching a few winks of sleep, so as to be wide awake at the *Hakkafot*, the streets of the town rang with the lively singing of the boys' chorus made up of hundreds of thin, discordant voices. This singing was an accompaniment to what one might by courtesy call a solo, which Zalman the Melamed sang in a hoarse, throaty voice.

Zalman was the Alef Bet teacher in the Talmud Torah. And since the treasury of this Talmud Torah was always empty, Zalman hardly ever received his pay and had to starve most of the time. "Heaven knows what would have become of me," Zalman himself used to say, "if my father, of blessed memory, had not left me the house. One can somehow manage the food problem. If one has no dinner, one can light one's pipe. A pipe is just as good as food, it deadens hunger. But to knock about as a lodger, God forbid! Praise and thanks to the Lord, for that much!", Zalman would end his little speech, raising his hands heavenward.

The house that Zalman the Melamed had inherited stood at the river's edge. About Passover time, when the thawing season began, Zalman's house was the

first victim of the overflowing river. The material of which the house was built was not much to brag about. It had been put together of planks and rotted beams, mouldered through and through. Between the window frames and the walls there were gaps that were stuffed with rags in the winter. The winds roamed freely through the house, chilling to the marrow both Zalman and his wife. "With the aid of God," the Melamed's wife perennially hoped, "we will fix up our house, so that the wind may not blow so fiercely."

The house had no ground about it, and hence no space for a Sukkah, so Zalman was obliged to take his meals in his neighbor's Sukkah. The seven days of Sukkot were the best time of his life. The wind blew with less fury in his neighbor's Sukkah than in his own home.

On Shemini 'Azeret, after prayer, Zalman, now ready to go to his own house, would empty one beaker for good measure and burst out into fervid song: "Sanctify us with Thy commandments, and grant us a share in Thy Law."

The little urchins, well aware of Zalman's habit, hung around the Sukkah and joined him on his march through the streets, seconding him in his song: "Sanctify us with Thy commandments and grant us a share in Thy Law."

While Zalman and the children were still in the midst of their singing, the house of Reb Simhah, the First Warden of the Hebrah Kadisha, began filling up with guests. First of all there arrived the Wardens, the

Elders and all other officials. Later on, they were joined by the other members of the Hebrah who settled themselves around the big, white-clothed tables, crowded with bottles of drinks and huge pans of broiled broad beans.

Just as a Siyum could not go off without rice pudding, even so every party of the Hebrah Kadisha required boiled broad beans as a sine qua non. None other than the grave diggers and the Shammashim were the waiters on this occasion. They passed the bottles to the members of the Hebrah, they filled the glasses, they handed out the ginger-cake and placed the dishes of beans.

The hardest worker among them was Zushe Capitan. Zushe Capitan had been snatched away from his widowed mother when he was not yet six years old. The old folks who remembered the whole incident could not forget to this day this heartless outrage on the part of the "Catchers," who were deaf to Hayah's weeping and wailing when her child was snatched from her arms. "Such an outrage," they said, "had never been heard of before!"

The poor Hayah clutched at the wheels of the wagon in which her little son was sitting, about to be taken away to the provincial capital. But the Catcher smote her with his whip. She fell in a swoon, while her son was whisked off. After the lapse of twenty-five years, Zushe, a bemedalled veteran, returned to look for his mother. To his deep sorrow, he found that she had long since been dead and buried.

Zushe now began frequenting his mother's grave. The cemetery became his favorite spot, where he spent the greatest portion of the day. When the townsfolk learned that Zushe Hayah's had come back a Jew, notwithstanding all the agonies he had to undergo on that account, they one and all sought to befriend him. They hired a Melamed for him, taught him how to pray, how to say the blessing when he was called up for the Reading of the Law, and bestirred themselves to find some means of livelihood for him. Of all the occupations Zushe picked that of Shammash of the Hebrah Kadisha. "This will give me a chance to go often to the cemetery to visit the grave of my mother," Zushe explained.

Because of his medals, as well as because everybody knew that he could have become a colonel had he but consented to change his faith, they named him "Zushe the Captain."

At every one of the Hebrah's celebrations, Zushe made merry more than any one present. He drank toasts one after the other to the health of the Senior Warden, the health of the Junior Warden, the health of the Elders. Zushe drank to the health of each member because he knew it was a good deed to drink at a festivity. Zushe knew every member of the Hebrah and knew how many places away from the president each was to be seated.

The man who contributed a great deal of hilarity to the occasion was Reb Nehemyah, an ex-Senior Warden. Reb Nehemyah was a jolly good fellow, and was already somewhat tipsy on reaching the chair of his

successor as Senior Warden. He was good natured and never raised his voice at the Hebrah assistants. Zushe Capitan was practically a member of the household; he ate and drank there, helped him build his Sukkah and carried the Purim gifts for him. Reb Nehemyah took Zushe to his bosom.

Reb Nehemyah's appearance meant that things would begin to hum. After mutual greetings and drinking one another's health, Reb Nehemyah raised his outspread hands heavenward and began to sing:

"Whatever we are, we are
As long as Jews we stay;
And whatever we do, we do."

And the assembly chimed in:
"Provided o'er Etrogs we pray."

Reb Nehemyah:
"Whatever we are, we are
As long as Jews we stay;
And whatever we do, we do."

The assembly:
"Provided our 'Brokes' we say."

Thus he continued down the alphabet.

Before Reb Nehemyah had had time to go through the entire song, there was commotion in the house. The entire assembly arose in honor of the rabbi who had come to pay his homage to the Senior Warden and to the entire Hebrah Kadisha.

As the rabbi entered with his joyous "Good Yom Tob," Reb Nehemyah, the warden, Zushe Capitan, and all the other merry fellows went forth to greet him in a merry dance. By this time Zalman the Melamed, together with his boys' choir now grown to a couple of hundred, had marched through every street and reached the warden's home. Zalman and the youngsters were greeted by a multitude of happy faces. The rabbi himself, a man of droll disposition, called out lustily: "*Zon Kodashim!*", to which Zalman and his urchins replied: "*Boa, Boa, Me-e-e!*"

The most enthusiastic in the assembly was Zushe Capitan. He could not boast of his knowledge of Yiddish, and could not sing the songs. But when it came to the Me-me-me-me—he shouted and roared louder than anybody else.

When the time for evening prayer had finally arrived, the cloths had been pulled off the tables, the dishes of beans were upset from Reb Nehemyah's hopping, while the assembly was making preparations to lead the rabbi, the warden and the notables of the town in procession to the synagogue. The Gabbai was conducted to the synagogue by way of the market-place, under the canopy, the poles of which were held by the Shammashim. The throng danced and sang all the way.

The leader of the whole parade was Zushe Capitan. Following Zushe were Reb Nehemyah and Reb Yisroel Tsesnes, singing the merry tunes of Reb Elinke Lider. The crowd clapped their hands and kept time ejacu-

lating *bom-bom-bom*. Between one tune and another, Zushe would call out in his deep basso voice that resounded through the town: *Poi! Poi! Poi!*

This Poi was the only heritage left to Zushe from his years of service in the Russian army. He added a peculiar Jewish touch to the roar of a cannon and used it on Simhat Torah. Now and again the rabbi would interrupt the singing with the exclamation: "Zon Kodashim!" To which the entire crowd would reply with a loud and cheery: "Boa, Boa, Me-e-e!"

The entire jolly crowd now entered the synagogue, still dancing and jigging. A huge, loud wave of humanity flooded the synagogue in the wink of an eye. All were now singing, going up and down, keeping time, individually and collectively, with the incessant bom-bom-bom, until the Hazzan, assisted by his choir as well as by the entire congregation, began to chant the *Bareku* of Simhat Torah.

Hard, indeed, it was for the Jew to take leave of Sukkot week. Simhat Torah, the last day of the festival, was like the last gleam of the sun before it sets, and the impression it left behind was all the more glowing, bright and cheering.

The strong-arm men of the town, such as Nehemyah the beadle, Hershel-Leibe of the market place, and Isaac the Packer, were in their native element on Simhat Torah morning. Accompanied by others of their stripe they would sally forth to all homes indiscriminately, take the puddings out of the ovens, and have a good time with the drinks that were offered

at each home visited. The servant girls, who had worked hard making the puddings, did not like these unbidden guests and would attempt to bar the door. But the mistress of the house would frown upon such undignified means of saving the pudding. "It's Simhat Torah," Reizel Reb Hayim's would tell her maid, "and everyone drinks a little, and they need something substantial after it."

When the maid was still reluctant to part with her cherished pudding, Reizel would continue: "Well, after all, why should not Isaac the Packer enjoy a good pudding once in a while? Let him find out what a good cook you are. His son Itzke will soon return from military service. You understand?"

The heartiest tones of this eight-day festival were, however, reserved for the Minhah prayers of Simhat Torah, for the last hours of the last day of the holiday, when the sun was beginning to set and the festival was about to end. At that hour, the more reserved men of the town would gather in groups at the synagogue and discuss the critical days ahead of them. The roads were full of mud and the peasants were unable to bring their produce into town. The gayer spirits, however, refused to worry over such prosaic matters as the earning of a livelihood. They were still in the midst of celebrating. They sang and danced and refused to go to the synagogue before they had emptied the last bottle or disposed of the last bit of pudding.

When they finally did go, they did not go alone. All the urchins of the town accompanied them. Rows

upon rows of men and boys, the old and the young, would walk arm in arm, resembling a tangled forest where tall, majestic and full-grown trees were intertwined with the young and tender twigs and shoots. The sixty-year old Nehemyah the beadle leaned on the arm of Hayimke Shelomoh's, a Talmud student of twelve; Hirshe-Loeb, one of the leading householders of the town, was in brotherly embrace with Yisroelke the town simpleton, whose home was in the Public Lodging House; while the Talmud teacher, Mordke-Shemuel, the terror of all the boys of the town, was in a group of seven and eight-year old urchins of the Talmud Torah. Isaac the Packer had to be supported by two of his cronies, lest he tumble into a ditch. The caps of the marchers were turned topsy-turvy, their coats inside out, bearing traces of the various things they had consumed during the day. And in this gala array, they finally managed to struggle into the synagogue for the afternoon prayers.

The Minhah service was embellished with singing and jolly dancing. Yet, the final snatch of the service attested the coming grayness of the day after. The monotonous sadness and the plaintive melancholy of the sober evening service were already in the air. In spite of one's self they would lodge in one's brain make their unbidden appearance on one's lips, and the mystic and glowing spell would be broken. The additional soul would now forsake the Jewish home and return to heaven. The evil-doers would now return to Purgatory, and the long dreary days of perennial struggle, struggle with poverty, would begin

afresh for the Jew of the Ghetto. The Shabbat Bereshit that fell right after the holidays would considerably ease this transition from the warmth and glow of the holidays to the bleak and dreary fall, with its days of struggle and hardship.

XXXI

SHABBAT BERESHIT

Shabbat Bereshit served to the Jews of the towns of Lithuania and Samut as the transition-day between the joyfulness of the festival season and the toil of every day. It marked the descent from poetry to prose, from the spiritual to the physical.

The exalted state of mind which had reigned supreme during the season of the Rejoicing of the Waters, when the Jew would forget the sordidness of the present and live once again in the legendary charm of the past or in the fantastical glories of the yet unborn future, was not allowed to end abruptly. The every day life of the Ghetto was so monotonous and bleak that the shock would be too great indeed, were there no transition period between the festival days and the days of toil. Between the happy and joyful Simhat Torah, with its songs and dances, its Hakkafot and feasting, and the banality of everyday life there was such a deep and sad gulf that the necessity for bridging it by something that has a little of the qualities of both, was universally felt. Shabbat Bereshit furnished the necessary transitional bridge between the two.

On the one hand Shabbat Bereshit was a sort of continuation of the holidays, the days of rejoicing, during which it was considered an act of grace not to

be sober, not to be so serious-minded as on the other days of the year. On the other hand, it served as the beginning of the new humdrum worry-laden life wherein all the days looked alike, all equally colorless and cheerless.

The rich merchants of the town, whose business called them away from home for long periods at a time, did not usually leave until after Shabbat Bereshit. This meant that those who had borrowed money from them did not have to hurry with their payments, to fret and knit their brows, at least during the holidays.

"There is plenty of time left yet to worry one's head about it," said Avrohom-Itze Haye-Soreh's, the cleverest man in town at getting a loan out of these foot-loose visitors. "Shabbat Bereshit is not here yet, and no one is packing for departure. Likewise, when Leibe Hayim's, the house-owner, came to his tenants to collect rent that had been promised for after the holidays, he would be met with: "Just look at him!" Matle, one of his tenants, would exclaim: "Just see what a hurry he is in! Not a penny has been taken in and he is already here, the leech! and for a shack like that!" When Leibe complained to Benjamin, Matle's husband, who depended upon his wife for his bread, and asked him how so refined and scholarly a man could get along with such a shrew, Reb Benjamin would begin to stroke his beard with his unwashed fingers and say slowly: "Well, what of it? She may not be more than a quick-tempered woman; a fiery-tempered woman who has but scant respect for a

worthy man like yourself. But why are you in such a hurry for your rent? Wait until after Shabbat Bereshit and then we'll see."

Pesah, the money-lender, always a busy man on the holiday eve, when people came to redeem their pledges, would never be in a hurry to come home on the day following the holiday, when they came back, provided with a *Heter 'Iska*, to repledge them. He was well aware that before Shabbat Bereshit was over, no one would come to pledge candle-sticks with him.

Shabbat Bereshit meant a particular joy for Gronam the Alef Bet teacher. His reputation as a teacher was not of the best, by far, so that at the time when all the other teachers had their full quota of pupils for the new term, Gronam hardly had one. Yet, he never complained or lost faith. He was aware that He who looks after the tiny insects in the air, the fish in the waters and every weed that grows under the rock, would not forsake him. He had already spent fifty years of his life on this earth, thirty-two of these in conjugal partnership with his Shprinze, and he had never known starvation yet. Indeed, God in His mercy looked after him. True, Shprinze was suffering from a sticking pain in her side and her cough was really terrible, as terrible, in fact, as was the cough of their only daughter Gittel, peace be upon her soul, who might have been spared, perhaps, but for lack of a warm and dry room, an occasional spoonful of chicken soup, and other little comforts. However, God is our father and will not forsake us. He did not forsake Gronam up to now and will not in the future.

Shprinze, though a good and pious Jewess, was apparently not blessed with so much faith in the Almighty as was her husband. She knew full well that without money for the shoemaker one had to go about in torn shoes, even as Gittel had to do at the time she started to cough. "O, the misery of that day!" Shprinze now thinks to herself. Had she but realized how serious it was, she would have called the doctor immediately. She would have hired herself out into service, pledged her only pillow, gone out begging from door to door, to save her daughter. "But evidently it was Gittel's fate to die," she finally tries to console herself. "God takes unto Himself the souls of the innocent and leaves us sinners to our fate here below."

"Wish it were the other way about." This sinful thought has entered her mind quite suddenly, taking Shprinze by surprise. Shprinze makes a desperate attempt to drive it away, while her tear-filled eyes, inflamed with a strange unearthly flame, dilate, and she begins to cough spasmodically.

And this woman, whom poverty again stared in the face right after the passing of the holidays, immediately began to pester her husband with questions: "Well, Gronam, what will happen to us? You have made no beginning as yet. The other Melamdim's lips are already running over, while you have nothing at all. Where will we get the means to —— ——" here the cough intervenes and puts a stop to her argument.

"*Meshumedes!*" Gronam would yell at his hapless wife—"don't you believe in God, have you no faith at

all? It is not for nothing that He punishes us so!" And, pushing aside the plate of gruel that Shprinze had placed before him, he adds at the top of his voice; "Don't you know that it is still Yom Tob? It is still before Shabbat Bereshit!" Shprinze had no alternative. She had to agree that the holiday season was still on, though early on that very morning Golde the shopkeeper had intimated that the holidays being over, she expected Shprinze to pay up.

Shabbat Bereshit was appreciated even more than usual if Simhat Torah, the last day of the Sukkot festival, happened to fall on a Friday, so that Shabbat Bereshit practically extended the holidays by one more day. The Jews of the Ghetto loved their holidays because only on these days would they relieve their overburdened hearts. The joy of the holiday was in exact ratio to the grayness, the bleakness, the difficulty of the struggle of everyday life. Only on holidays the additional soul of the Jew would forsake heaven and descend to earth to find shelter in the home of the Jew. This may perhaps explain why Sukkot is referred to as *Zeman Simhatenu*. The holiness and the sublimity of this holiday are greatly enhanced by the autumn season in which it occurs. The days grow cold and cheerless, the autumn gales begin to blow, and the dampness is in the air.

XXXII

AUTUMN

Autumn is here. The skies are shedding tears, the ground is wet and soggy. Rainstorm and wind are contending mightily for the mastery of the town. They are taking turns in holding sway so that if you manage to escape the one you run into the other. A deep and brooding sadness has settled upon the town. The rows of houses look like abandoned ruins, the homes of ghosts and evil spirits. Sunk deeply in mud, covered with mildew and moisture, these houses stare at the great wide world in a sort of sickening indifference. There is no light in the dull, tear-stained window panes; all is drab, dead and sickly.

People move about listlessly, like lifeless shadows. Soaked with the moisture in the air and chilled by the cold, they move about hunched up, as if trying to find shelter from the elements in the depths of their clothes. In the homes, all is gray and colorless; the walls are wet, the floors full of pots and pans to catch the drops coming through the leaky roof and ceiling continuously and with the regularity of the ticking of the clock on the wall. The disagreeable odor of mildew and decay strikes one as he enters one of these houses. Breathing becomes difficult, and he begins to cough and gasp.

This hoarse cough is the leit-motif of Jewish life in the Lithuanian towns at this season of the year.

Monotony and drabness reign supreme, in the street, in the shops, in the homes as well as in the synagogues and schools. Wherever you go you are followed by this cough; the cough that is the symbol of the sadness that permeates the atmosphere and penetrates the heart of man.

The peculiarly Jewish poverty, more or less hidden throughout the year, now issues boldly from its hiding place and, head erect, stalks unmolested through the town. Before the townsfolk have had time to get their supply of winter clothing, the chilling autumn drizzles come. It is as cold within the house as outside. But few can afford the luxury of a cord of wood or a load of turf, at this early season; the others must wait until the roads are frozen, and the peasants demand exorbitant prices.

The bad roads spell disaster to the townsfolk. All summer long the peasant is busy in his field and cannot come to town to buy or sell. People grow sick waiting for the fall. By that time the peasant has already gathered in his crops and has some ready money to spend in the town's shops. But now the roads have spoiled it all! The peasant will neither risk his own life nor that of his horses to travel over such roads, and the result is that business is bad, there is no money in circulation—not even as a friendly loan—and everything is as bad as can be.

As though this were not enough, other troubles, public or communal troubles, come along to plague the town. A woman is lying dangerously ill with no one to provide nourishing food and medicine; Khyene the

Shohet's little sons are tramping the streets in rags and cannot attend school for lack of shoes; Yoshke the carter has broken his engagement to the superannuated daughter of Yokhe the Blind—the match that the townsfolk had worked so hard to bring about—just because Pesah Notte the Usurer refuses to return the hundred and fifty rubles Yokhe had entrusted to his care. And to cap it all, Hirshe the meat-tax farmer has heard from a thoroughly trustworthy person that Motte the butcher's son has been seen whispering into the ear of Leah'ke the washerwoman's daughter of questionable reputation, and that the two afterward went towards the Red Inn. Yes, he is ready to take an oath, he is ready to affirm it under oath—no, he does not *swear* that it is true. And after all, is it surprising that there is an epidemic of children's disease in the town or that so many young mothers die in childbirth?

And then the military examination! The examination darkened the overcast skies still more and made the brooding gloom still deeper. One's heart was pierced by the cries of mothers whose sons had to go up to these examinations. The fear of the Police Captain's raids and of Berke's dangerous tongue unnerved one so that he didn't know where he was. The Holy Ark was continuously besieged by hosts of unhappy women who came to implore the mercy of the All-Highest to perform His miracle and save their sons from falling into the Gentile's hands. They would wring their hands, shed copious tears, and wail so that everyone's sympathy was awakened. Every one

would, for the time being, forget his own many cares and think only of these women's sad plight.

All the Hebrahs of the town—such as The Redemption of Captives, Bread for the Hungry, the Visiting of the Sick, and others—would receive a new life impetus in the autumn season: the evenings were taken up with meetings and conclaves to consider ways and means for running these during the coming winter season. The meetings took place either at the house of the rabbi or in the vestry rooms of the synagogue. The people felt strangely drawn towards the synagogue during the autumn days. In that holy atmosphere they forgot their woes, the various hardships of their life, their sordid cares and miseries. The ringing tones of those studying the Talmud also contributed towards dissipating the clouds of despair.

These Talmud tunes would warm the Jewish soul and make it feel happy and gay. The heavier the burden of cares that the Jew had, the greater the sense of relief that he found in these sacred chants; the harder his battle for his daily sustenance, the happier was he in the centuries-old discussions of Abaye and Raba.

Like brilliant stars planted in the firmament on a dark night, were the synagogues and schoolhouses amidst the drear autumn season. Even as the beams of the sun did they warm and cheer the bruised Jewish heart. Once within these holy places, the Jew would dismiss the burdens of his existence and become a veritable Superman; a man with a cosmic outlook and interest. The humble and uncomfortable Jewish

schools of yesterday deserve appreciation and respect. Respect for the old tattered Talmud folio! These were the perpetual lights that kept their holy vigil at the altar of the Jew's life during these many centuries of sadness in Lithuania and other lands.

XXXIII

ḤANUKKAH IN THE GHETTO

Foggy, rainy, windy autumn is past. Outside it is cold but dry. The frozen snow crunches under foot. The market place is filled with sleighs which move about smoothly and quietly without any of the creaking and rattling made by wagons. Business is pretty good. The smooth roads bring many peasants from the nearby villages. Goods are being sold, old debts settled, new ones incurred. The market place is all abustle. People are free with their money. When pockets jingle, hearts grow lighter; the clouds clear away from the faces; gloom disappears; the stooping, broken figures straighten up.

Long before they had supplied themselves with warm clothing they began wearing lined boots so that the cold was no longer unbearable. On the contrary, all drank in the exhilarating, dry, frosty air. In the houses the double windows had been put up, all holes in the walls had been plastered up and in the cracks of the doors were stuffed strips of old sheepskin which allowed no wind to get through. The stoves had already grown accustomed to the turf and no longer smoked. True, the price of wood had gone down, but then it was not so bad to use turf for heating. Brozova wood gives out a wholesome, genial warmth which refreshes and penetrates all your limbs, when you

come in from the cold into the warm room. It is so pleasant to sit at home, if the lamp does not smoke but gives out a fine bright flame. All payments have been made. The house is warm and light. What more can a Jew wish for?

You sit before an open Gemara, a copy of the Hazefirah or some other work, a pipe in your mouth, telling stories about Antiochus, the tyrant, who oppressed our forefathers and wanted to annihilate them, until the Hasmoneans arose and threw off the yoke of the stranger. You talk about the past and then again you think of the present..... "Why does not a Judah Maccabaeus arise today?" you wonder, "to free us from the enemy, from the tormentors of Israel?"

Our fathers and our rebbis were always so preoccupied around Hanukkah time that they paid no attention to the pranks played on the sliding ponds. The river was frozen and we had a jolly old time on the glassy ice. We performed all sorts of tricks. We skated on our soles and on the edges of our heels which were covered with iron plates. We were experts at fancy skating. We tumbled about and were ashamed to admit that we had been hurt.

In ordinary times we would have been severely punished by the rebbi for such goings on. But on Hanukkah he pretended not to see and winked at all our pranks. "Well, let them know what Hanukkah stands for. Let them know that there once lived a Judah, a Mattathias," the rebbi would say good-naturedly when anyone came to him with a complaint

that we were turning the river upside down and that a troop of *Shkozim* was about to pounce upon us.

The rebbi knew there was no danger; that on Hanukkah we were full of prowess, we, the descendants of the Hasmoneans, in whose veins flowed the blood of Judah the Maccabee. We would beat the Shkozim. He would therefore not pester us with the usual questions about where we had been and what we had done. Besides, the rebbi didn't think it wise to quarrel with us at this time of the year. He knew that we were to bring him Hanukkah-money.

On Hanukkah every Jew is filled with pride and energy, with lust for strife and with prowess. The ancient Hasmoneans implanted in us the hope for a good future. Since Antiochus, in his might, had not succeeded in wiping the Jews off the map, no other tyrant would succeed in doing so. The Jewish light, the true, pure, and holy light, can never be extinguished by our oppressors. One vessel of oil is always hidden in the innermost chambers of the Jewish soul. And when all other oils shall grow stale and unholy, then, by a miracle, that small vessel of oil will illumine our dark Galut path. "The race of the Maccabees need not lose hope." Such was the inner conviction of every Jew on Hanukkah. Filled with confidence and winged with hope, the Jew proudly lights the Hanukkah candles which tell such beautiful, holy stories about Jewish heroes.

The serious tenseness of Jewish life is somewhat relaxed on Hanukkah. All feel as though they had just won a victory over the enemy. The holiness of

the Jewish spirit is evident everywhere. Business and daily affairs do not cease, but it is to be noticed that besides business there is something else going on in the Jewish world. All are so good-natured and take life so lightly without the usual worries and troubles.

During the week of Hanukkah all dressed in their good clothes. The stores closed earlier, and if the keeper of the store happened to be your mother, then she would close before Ma'arib so as to see your father light the candles. Then she would stay in the house for the rest of the evening, and neighbors, friends and relatives would drop in to chat for a while. Your father would become engrossed in a game of chess. The younger people would play cards and the little ones would play other games.

About eight or nine o'clock all would gather about the table to eat the potato pudding which had to come out well in honor of Hanukkah. We sat about the table and chatted goodnaturedly. The Jew likes to talk about everything and nothing. But all year round he has no time for talk. The same Abraham Hirsh, the sexton, who even on Purim refused to stay at the house a moment after he had received his Purim-money, would on Hanukkah bend back the collar of his great coat, blow out the light of the lantern, sit down at the table, and drink and chat: "Hanukkah is long enough—I'll manage," he would answer, when asked whether he had time enough.

There was very little Gemara-studying on Hanukkah. Even the Yeshibah students would spend the Hanukkah days in jesting and fooling about. In the

evenings the Yeshibah students would climb up into the women's synagogue and play cards. The head of the Yeshibah and the rabbi knew of this, but they said not a word. And when Zelig Yekes, a cranky old Jew, would begin to shout that the "heathens" didn't look into a book but played cards all night, and that the "villains" should be driven out of the city and sent away to hard labor in Siberia, the young men would appease him by saying: "Oh, never mind. Today is Hanukkah, and even a Yeshibah student may get a little fun out of Hanukkah." This would calm the cranky old man.

The greatest day of Hanukkah was the day when the fifth candle was lit. On that day, everybody had to get Hanukkah-money. This was the last day on which this could be done and no one was allowed to put it off. Immediately after morning prayers we, youngsters, would put on our warm clothes, the servant would wrap mufflers about our necks and put warm gloves on our hands. Then we would be warned not to go off to the river and begin sliding, lest we fall and hurt ourselves. We went to our relatives for Hanukkah-money.

First of all we went to our grandfather, then to our uncle, Yankel Yoshe, then to Aunt Breine and so on, without forgetting a single relative.

At Aunt Breine's we weren't made very happy. Before giving us the money she would shower us with questions: How is mother? What is father doing? Who was at the house last night? What did mother serve? Did Yente send the goose for Friday? Was

mother going to bake a potato pudding? Did we give the sexton Hanukkah-money, and so forth. And this was not enough. She would take off our mufflers and gloves and treat us to her wonderful pancakes which melt in your mouth!

She also wanted to take off our coats, but to this we objected. We did this ourselves. Not because we wanted to spare her the trouble, but because we knew that if she took off our coats she would fold them up in such a way that the Hanukkah-money which we had received from our uncle would all roll out.

Finally we were seated at the table and began eating pancakes, impatiently waiting at the same time for the Hanukkah-money. As soon as we got the money we shot out of Aunt's house, to avoid further questioning. After leaving Aunt's house we no longer kept our hands in our gloves, but put them into the pockets of our coats, where the Hanukkah-money lay. We didn't walk. We skipped along, getting keen joy out of the jingle of the coins at each step.

For the older generation the day of the fifth candle was a great day. It was the concert day of the year. In the evening the cantor and his assistants sang the prayer for the lighting of the candles in the Bet Hamidrash, and the town band played all sorts of merry tunes for the rest of the evening. The Bet Hamidrash was crowded. The people were all in holiday spirit. All cracked jokes at the expense of Antiochus and his downfall, and talked about the present oppressions and hoped that the oppressors would meet with the same

fate as did the ancient one. The cantor said Ma'arib, singing the entire prayer.

The tune which the cantor sang on lighting the candles was a lively one—a sort of triumphal march, which was later sung at all weddings and other celebrations. When the cantor rested, the band would play songs of triumph and victory. They played the best music they knew. The concert lasted until midnight and then the people, happy, proud, triumphant, would go home filled with joy and hope. During the last three days whenever father lit the candles the children would sing the cantor's tune, just as he had sung it when lighting the fifth candle. The father and children sang. The mother set the table for the members of the family and the guests who were expected. The Hanukkah candles burned brightly and were reflected in the window panes.

The Hanukkah candles were small, but they lighted up a great part of our history. They took us back to a time two thousand years ago. And like sun rays falling on dry grass, so did the memories of that tune brighten up and illumine the sad, dark life in the long, dreary Yiddish Galut.

XXXIV

HAMISHAH 'ASAR BE-SHEBAT

Circumscribed, indeed, was the actual world in which our fathers, day in and day out, toiled in the effort of making a living; but great and boundless was the spiritual world in which they really lived. The world from which they lavishly drew their joys and happiness was a world of fancy and existed only in the mind and in the imagination. But that did not make the joys and the happiness any less real. The material world yields little joy of the higher sort. If one desires truly to enjoy life, he must cut himself loose from the earth, the drab everyday earth, and soar upon wings of fancy, high up where the skies are blue and the sun shines bright . . . The world of imagination has no limits. There are no forbidden nooks, no statutes, rules or regulations prescribing where to go and where not to go. One may build the finest castles and stroll at will in gorgeous flower gardens and beautiful by-paths.

Not everyone, however, has the capacity to cut loose from the crass, material world. Not everyone can fly. Generally people are born without wings and are doomed to creep on the earth all their lives. Creeping creatures cannot fly, and most people belong to the species of creepers. Our good and pious fathers were endowed with wings of imagination. They could wing themselves into a negation of all that exists. If the world

they were in was not to their liking, they created for themselves another world, a world that had nothing to do with material life, a world of sheer goodness, a world where one could eternally delight in the splendor of the Shekinah. If the present was dark, gray and humdrum, without lines, without colors, without hues, they would persuade themselves to dismiss it totally and build worlds with the material of the ancient past and the distant future. These worlds were vast, beautiful, sublime and yielded a greater measure of joy than the surrounding world, the world of the senses.

If the Galut deprived the Jew of field and forest, grain on stalk and fruit on tree, his imagination would begin to paint all the more vividly the land that flows with milk and honey, and he would begin to live the beauty of nature as if he were in the midst of it. If the Jew had no opportunity to love nature in flesh and blood—passionately like a normal child of nature—he would begin to love her platonically, to deify her . . . And every thought of Goddess Nature would put him into a holiday mood.

Hamishah 'Asar be-Shebat was one of these days, when the mood of a nature-loving people would reign in the town; when the Jews would imagine that they were surrounded by all sorts of trees, tall cedars and precious olive trees, and that they could once more see these lovely trees awaking from their winter sleep and beginning to bud anew.

Hamishah 'Asar be-Shebat is the New Year of the trees. Nature awakens to a new life; spring is coming.

Out in the street it is still cold. The entire town is covered with snow and ice. It is still bitter cold, but the soul of the Jew grows warm and bright from the first ray that the spring sun sends upon the cold and ice-bound earth. The Jew now perceives how in his world, in the world of his imagination, the fields are becoming verdant and the trees are bringing forth their blossoms. He smells the aroma of his vineyards and citron groves, and he grows brighter and fresher of spirit.

Hamishah 'Asar be-Shebat is the first harbinger of spring, and a strange, poetic longing begins to tug so pleasantly at the heart and wakens the senses so that one forgets the cold winter and is transported to those ever-sunny regions where "the citrons bloom."

Especially great was the happiness on that day at the Heder and the Yeshibah. At the Heder every pupil would bring along St. John's bread, raisins, almonds and other fruit, which the rebbi would pile into one great heap and then begin to hand out to the children, who sat around the long tables and waited decorously for an equal share of each kind. Rich and poor, all received an equal share. The rebbi would first button carefully his thick vest so that his sunken, hairless chest should not be seen, push his skull-cap back on his pate and place his cap over it, and then, washing his hands and pulling his cloak about his shoulders, he would settle into his usual seat and, with great unction, pronounce benedictions upon each variety. Each boy would repeat these benedictions in a ringing, childish voice, and then would taste of the fruit.

There was a great to do in the school when Freide the Bean Woman would appear with her two huge baskets. On all other days, Freide used to sell boiled beans, boiled peas, ginger candies and *mondlach*. On Hamishah 'Asar be-Shebat, however, her chief merchandise was St. John's bread. Real Palestinian stuff! "May God help me as I am telling you the truth that they are kosher, *Erez Isroel Bokser*. May I live to see the day when I'll come to the place where these grew!" Freide would repeat the same rigmarole year after year.

We would fall upon Freide's baskets like bees upon honey, and buy her St. John's bread for pennies, kopeks and half-kopeks. We would buy and eat this fruit with great unction and ecstasy; this fruit that was so plentiful in Palestine that the goats munched on it without let or hindrance. Oh, how we envied the goats of Palestine . . .

Hamishah 'Asar be-Shebat was the day on which both the closing of classes and the beginning of new ones usually took place. If a certain grade was about to commence the study of the Pentateuch, or of Talmud, in the midwinter, the formal beginning would be postponed till Hamishah 'Asar be-Shebat. Likewise the formal finishing of a chapter would be delayed till that day. When such an event took place, the parents of the pupils would come to the school. The boys' fathers would swell with delight, hearing their sons' recitations, and their mothers would weep with the joy of having lived to raise their sons to study the Torah.

Besides the St. John's bread and other Palestinian fruits, the parents would distribute to all the pupils of

the school ginger cakes and brandy. At the Yeshibah the pupils would begin to feel that the end of the term was at hand, and that the next term would be in the summer, and not in winter. Just as on *Hamishah 'Asar be-Ab* the boys began studying Gemara at night, so on Hamishah 'Asar be-Shebat, we began to spend the evenings in various ways except study. One grew restive over the Gemara, and the heart craved to be elsewhere. The soul longed for change; for some jollification, a dance or a hop, so as to give the whole body a good shaking up.

On those nights the moon, the cold proud moon, would begin to send her rays into the Yeshibah about ten or eleven o'clock and would lure and draw one from the close and stuffy Bet Hamidrash with mysterious force. On Hamishah 'Asar be-Shebat, the "Yeshibah Bahurs" would lay aside their folios and begin to rehearse for the *Purim Spiel.*

XXXV

PURIM

Of all the Jewish holidays Purim is the most appealing to the Jew of today. Purim is not, properly speaking, a holiday but a festival. A holiday is a joyous recollection of days gone by, an echo of some important event in the life of a people. The historic event that is responsible for the yearly celebration of Purim is of comparatively little importance. There is not much glory to be derived from the fact that Ahasuerus was a foolish king, a man without character and a voluptuary besides. Among the Jewish people there was a beautiful girl who gained favor in the eyes of this foolish king and bent him to her own will so that he did everything she demanded.

The entire book of Esther is based on a casual episode that is not at all in keeping with the characteristics of the Jewish soul. We find no trace here of Jewish heroism. And even the fact of Mordecai's elevation to high office is not important enough to occasion this annual celebration. The entire Purim story is a web of fortunate coincidences that could just as well have happened as not. The story itself does not show any great act of wisdom in which generations of Jews could take much pride. The recounting of the legend itself does not possess any of the necessary elements for enshrining it in the Jew's history. The story contains

neither the greatness of the Jewish prophet nor the self-sacrifice of the Jewish hero. For all that, Purim is dear to the heart of every Jew.

Purim is not a holiday, but merely a day of joy and celebration. On Purim the Jew celebrates not because he is enjoined to do so, but because he delights in doing so; because it is a pleasure to dance, eat and drink and be merry, until one reaches such a stage of befuddlement that one no longer knows whether to curse Haman or to bless Mordecai.

Haman and Mordecai are not only historical personages, but types of the present day. We meet the Hamans today even as we met them a thousand and two thousand years ago. We meet them in all lands where the Mordecais are found—Jews who worship their own God, observe their own customs and follow their own mode of life. Haman's plaint that "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from those of every people," are heard daily even at present.

The Jew, however, does not lose courage. He feels sure that in the end the obstinate Mordecai will overcome the Hamans who will meet their downfall, and the Jews will rejoice again.....And he therefore celebrates with all his heart. The Jew laughs. He makes fun of the Hamans who seek to wipe out the people of Israel. But still he does not forget his poor forlorn kinsfolk who are in need of his aid.

On Purim the Jew displays not only the greatness of his soul but also the generosity of his heart. The

miser and the skin-flint can derive no joy from Purim. It is only the man who observes the custom of sending gifts to his friends and the poor that fully rejoices in Haman's downfall.

The Jew in the small Lithuanian town observed this custom of sending gifts to the poor, not under compulsion, not as an alms-giver or a philanthropist, but as a man of feeling and a warm heart who is full of love, true warm love, towards those whom life had not treated too tenderly.

In my grandfather's home the morning of Purim resembled a veritable fair. The articles that were intended for *Shalah Monos* filled all tables. There were articles of every sort and they were suited to the needs of the relatives for whom they were designated. Grandfather and grandmother knew the lives of the poor and of their friends and relatives, and bought according to their needs. There was a bonnet for my grand-aunt, a wig for my aunt, and material for Deborah the widow to make clothes for her children. There were shoes for the children of one relative and stockings for the children of another; a bottle of wine for the rabbi; a bottle of brandy for the *Dayyan*, tea and sugar for the Melamed and a month's rent for the poor woman next door. Besides all these, my grandfather would add an orange, a lemon and some boiled beans to each receptacle, while grandma would add a *Haman-Tash* for the kiddies and Purim toys—little men, Gemaras, Megillahs, and violins made of starch.

These things were packed by our uncle Bere, who was especially skilful in tying the large kerchief around

the plate, so that even Hatze the assistant beadle, who was not particularly handy, should deliver the package without losing anything.

We, grandchildren, also sent to one another gifts in plates tied with handkerchiefs. But these handkerchiefs were meant for outsiders only; for among ourselves we knew in advance what was under the cover. On the day before Purim we agreed among ourselves what each would send the other. Indeed, it was not so easy to adjust matters about the Shalah Monos. If one of us informed his fellows on the day previous of his desire to receive a King David violin which Mende the market-man sold for one and a half kopeks, then everybody wanted exactly the same, and lots had to be drawn as to who should be the lucky fellow.

Even the day of Purim did not pass off without bickering. Some would cheat, and in place of a little fiddle one would find in his plate a half of a Haman-Tash trimmed up with boiled beans. . . . The cheated one would fly into tears and be angry with the offender until *Shushan Purim*, when he would be reconciled again.

In the house the steaming samovar, a big bowl of boiled beans, a bottle of liquor and some home-made Haman-Tashen were on the table all day long. These things were not there for the family, but for friends and acquaintances who would drop in for a few minutes. On this day the visitors did not wait to be asked to have something. On Purim, they knew,

one did not stand on ceremonies, one was to help himself and rejoice over the downfall of Haman.

About Minhah time the singing and the music of the Purim Spielers, as they went from house to house, would resound through the town. We had no particular love for Vashti, so that when Kheike the washerwoman, who looked exactly like Vashti with her healthy ruddy face, began to sing: "I, Queen Vashti, wife of Ahasuerus," she naturally did not make much of a hit with us. Yankel the carter's young wife, on the contrary, whose green-sallow complexion made her look like Queen Esther to the life, won great favor in our eyes.

The worst treatment was accorded to Sheikeh, the butcher's son. This fellow attired himself in a pair of worn out soldiers' boots with clinking spurs, a three-cornered hat, and huge turned-up mustachios—he was Haman the wicked. Sheikeh had to endure a lot for his few pennies. Each and every one of us would take it out on Haman, one with a good dig, another with a wallop; this one would pinch him, another would spit at him; everybody considered it a mizvah to inflict all kinds of torture upon Haman. The luckiest of the Purim Spielers was Borukke, Yente the Mikvah-attendant's son. He wore a long, white, flaxen beard, a skull-cap beneath his hat, and a hump —the real Mordecai. Just as Esther had to have a greenish complexion, so Mordecai had to have a hump. Mordecai would please the audience exceedingly with his singing and the *Purim-geld*, too, was usually thrust into his hand.

The real jollification began in the evening, at the Purim feast, to which all relatives, rich and poor, even the most distant and indigent kinsfolk, were invited. The table was set with our silver and golden table wear, and the lamps burned brightly. The hot pudding was steaming, while the hosts and the guests were exchanging jokes and laughed good-naturedly, uproariously, heartily. There was merriment in the house, warmth in the soul, and buoyancy in the spirit.

Even more than Haman himself, did his ten sons serve as targets for the darts of our wit. It had become a habit with us to add Jew-baiters, past and present, to the Haman family. If we imagined a certain enemy of the Jews, big, burly and stout, he would be named Parshandatha. If he was a puny, wizened sort of a shrimp, he was crowned with the name Vayzatha. For each Jew baiter a suitable name was found. Even Dalphon and Aspatha had their counterparts. If a certain land proprietress was known to be cruel, the title of Zeresh was bestowed upon her. In the Jewish home, on Purim night, the lot of an enemy of Israel was not an enviable one. They would rub it into him in a typically Jewish fashion.

After the feast everybody went to the home of the head of the Yeshibah, where the Yeshibah students would produce their "play." On Purim the Yeshibah folk were the heroes of the day. That day marked the end of the winter term. The *Rosh Yeshibah* ceased the daily recitation and the supervisor no longer had his grip on the poor youths, who were preparing to return

to their homes, with their store of learning and indigestion after eating "days."

The Yeshibah students were now in a happy mood, and when they felt happy they sang and improvised witticisms in rhyme, and the gifted ones were good at singing and bantering. These were indeed gifted all around. Some were endowed with genuine talent. All through the year they could not show it. Purim was *the* day for them; then it was that they gave utterance in word and song to whatever weighed heavily on their minds. They "roasted" the housewives who gave them meals; the Rosh Yeshibah for his interminable *Pilpuls*; the supervisor, for his "snitching"; the Rosh Yeshibah's wife for her "billy-goat," and everybody else. The Rosh Yeshibah's daughters, however, fared better at their hands. The Yeshibah fellows got along well with them—too well, evil tongues said—and if there was to be a female part in the play, the students would borrow skirts from the rabbi's daughters.

In the celebrated Yeshibahs of Telz and Volozhin, the students would elect a Purim rabbi. This rabbi was king in the Yeshibah. He would don a long silk coat, put a girdle around his waist, a fur-edged cap on his head, whiskers and sidelocks, exactly like the actual rabbi or Rosh Yeshibah of the year. At the Purim feast, the Purim rabbi would recite the lesson of the day and the real Rosh Yeshibah would sit at the table, like an ordinary Yeshibah bahur and listen to the pilpul of his pupil, who wore the Rosh Yeshibah's clothes on that day . . .

The chant and form of the Purim pilpul were like those of every day, but the substance and content was a burlesque on the daily regime of the Yeshibah. All the weaknesses of the Rosh Yeshibah and his aides were mocked in this pilpul, and the latter could clearly see in what regard his students held his erudition and what they thought of his management. Occasionally the Rosh Yeshibah had to listen to sharp caustic criticism of himself, but he would grin good-naturedly and bear it.

"What do you think, rebbi, of the Talmud lesson that the rascals read today?" Yossel Reb Zissel's, a youthful scholar with aspirations for the post of Yeshibah supervisor, asked the Rosh Yeshibah. The latter, with a sweet, good-humored smile all over his face, replied: "I am vanquished, my son, I am vanquished . . ."

The dramatis personæ of the play produced by the Yeshibah students were: a bed-ridden man, fatally ill, the Angel of Death, and the Examining Angel. Both angels wore long flaxen beards and had the faces of highwaymen. They wore tall, pasteboard hats with lit candles inside, like jack o' lanterns. Were it not for the illumined inscriptions, "Angel of Death" on the one, and "Examining Angel" on the other, it would have been very hard to tell these angels one from the other. The Angel of Death had a wooden sword which he used at the soul's exodus from the sinner's body.

While the players were dressing for the performance, the lamps were lowered. The darkened chamber served as "back-stage." When the dying man, covered with the rebbi's morning gown, lay upon the rebbezin's

sleeping bench and groaned, and the Angel of Death, together with the Examining Angel, stood ready, the light was slightly turned up and in the semi-darkness of the room where the Yeshibah folk and the guests were standing, the Angel of Death would begin to chant in angry tones: "You evil-doer, you sinner, what sins on Passover did you perpetrate?" And the poor sick man lay on his deathbed and, penitent and contrite, answered in a lachrymose voice: "On Passover, on Passover, on Passover, I created darkness all over."

The Angel of Death would continue his questioning: "Thou foul man, thou sinner, thou reprobate, what sins on Shabuot didst thou perpetrate?" And the dying man had to give an account of all the sins he had committed on holidays. The Angel of Death would finally cut short the sinner's life and make exit by pushing his way through the audience. And the Examining Angel, rapping on the imaginary grave, would ask: "Wicked man, what is thy name?"

Now that the play was at an end and the sinner had descended to Hell, the lamp would be turned on again, and that was equivalent to the curtain's coming down. After the play, the youths would amuse themselves by singing and impromptu rhyming; they danced with the Rosh Yeshibah, his spouse, and his daughters. Everybody had a good time till the small hours of the morning.

XXXVI

A TALE OF RABBI ISRAEL SALANTER

Whoever seeks to become acquainted with the customs and practices of a town should study the legends and stories of the great men in whom the town takes pride. These stories reflect the character, ideals and customs of the people. They are told for the purpose of idealizing certain personalities, presenting them in the most attractive colors, so that others may imitate them as their model heroes.

Each little town has its favorite hero or great man, around whom a cycle of stories is formed. Whether these tales are true or not; whether they are based on facts or are the creations of a fertile imagination, is unimportant and beside the point. The main thing for us lies in the fact that the soul of a people, its beliefs, its superstitions and its social practices stand out boldly in these tales. It is from these that we learn to know the likes and dislikes of a people, the things that it reverences as well as the things that it despises.

One of the greatest men of our town, a man of whom numerous tales were being told, was the renowned Rabbi Israel Salanter. He was born in our town. Here he spent the days of his boyhood and youth; here he married and lived at his father-in-law's for a time. Later, when his fame spread, he became the head of his own renowned Yeshibah and the

editor of the well known religio-philosophical periodical "Hatebunah." He often came to our town, Zager, where his parents, brothers, and all his relatives lived.

He was universally known as the "Teacher of the Diaspora"—a title bestowed only upon the greatest rabbis—and our town was exceedingly proud of him. It loved him and adorned his name with a halo of good deeds. Our little town was profoundly jealous of the town of Salant, which had the good fortune of having the great man called after it. The older folk of our town never referred to him as Rabbi Israel Salanter, but as Rabbi Ysroelke Rabbi Velvel's. Thereby our patriots wished to show that they were more intimately related to Rabbi Israel than Salant, that they knew not only him but also his father, who likewise was a native of our town.

The following is one of the tales about Rabbi Israel Salanter current in our town. This happened in the thirties of the last century, three years after the cholera epidemic, may the rest of Israel never see the like of it again. Rabbi Israel had come to town on a visit to his mother. His father, Reb Velvele, had been dead for over a year, and so his soul (this was more than a year after his demise) together with the souls of all the other *Zaddikim* was resting at the throne of the Lord. The "Teacher of the Diaspora" had arrived in town in the month of Elul with the intention of visiting his father's grave.

His mother, of blessed memory, begged Reb Ysrolinke to stay with her till after Rosh Hashanah and

Yom Kippur. As is well known, he never did anything against his mother's wishes, and so he readily agreed to stay in town till after the Day of Atonement.

Meanwhile, the rabbi of the town, Reb Zemahl, may his light shine forever, as the leader of the community, called upon Rabbi Israel and asked him to preach a sermon at the synagogue at the Kol Nidre service. The *Gaon* complied with the rabbi's request and promised to deliver a sermon. Needless to say, the prayer house was filled to overflowing at the service. People crowded into every available inch of space, to hear the great man's sermon.

Rabbi Israel was not only a man of genius, of astounding erudition and keen intellect, but also of overpowering eloquence. The words that came from his tongue were like jewels. They captivated the hearts of men; his sermons gave one a glimpse of paradise; and when he spoke one was filled with such a strange and indescribable joy that one forgot all the daily cares and responsibilities and was transported together with the speaker into another world, a world of pure spirituality.

Some time before sundown, the vast throng, clad in their white linen robes and with their prayer-shawls thrown over their heads, impatiently awaited the arrival of the Gaon. The great man was tardy.... The sun was already setting; its last beams, coming from the west, were mingling with the feeble, flickering flames of the wax candles. Twilight was here and he was still away. The assembly was restive, yet silent, for fear of expressing the feeling of apprehension

that crowded their hearts. For who indeed can tell what tricks Satan is up to on such a fateful day!

The shadows of night are beginning to fall. The time for saying the *Tefilah Zakkah* is long past, and he is still absent. And now the rabbi removed the Talit from his head, put on his fur cap and himself went to see what had happened to Rabbi Ysrolinke. At Reb Israel's mother's home the rabbi learned that the Gaon had long since received his mother's blessing and had left for the prayer-house.

Thoroughly frightened but saying nothing to anyone, the rabbi hurried back to the synagogue; perchance he may find him there. At the synagogue his terror grew. The Gaon was not there, and the teeth of the frightened worshippers were chattering.

And now the last red beam of the sun is about to go, and soon it will be too late to say Kol Nidre. And not a trace of the Gaon. The congregation can, of course, say the Kol Nidre without him, but he has accepted the honor of standing at the Hazzan's right during the service, holding the Torah, and reciting *'Al Da'at Hakahal* before the Kol Nidre. How can they possibly take this honor away from him and bestow it upon someone else?

In all the synagogues and private prayer-houses the service is half over. They have already said *Baruk Shem Kebod Malkuto* in a loud voice, while in this synagogue—the most important one in town—even Kol Nidre has not yet begun. The great man has not yet arrived, and no one is inclined to remove the Scroll from the Ark in his absence.

After a long silence, the rabbi turned his deathly white face towards the public and said with trembling voice: "Gentlemen, the great man is not yet here and God only knows what may have befallen him. Perhaps he became the atonement for our sins. We must interrupt the service and go forth to look for him!"

Immediately the assembly broke up into minyan sized groups and scattered in all the streets and yards, to discover whether anything untoward, the Lord forbid! had happened to him. At ten o'clock the emissaries returned, but of the great man there was not the least trace.

Suddenly the door of the synagogue opened and one of the last group of the emissaries rushed in breathlessly, and exclaimed with great joy: "The Gaon is coming!" The congregation crowded around the bearer of the tidings, and with tense expressions on their faces awaited to hear from him how and where they had found the great man and what had happened to him.

Without delay the messenger began: "We found the Gaon in the Gentile's garden. He was holding the widow's cow by the horns, endeavoring to drag the creature away from the Gentile's place." And before the crowd had the chance to ask questions, the man continued: "The Gaon told us that to save a poor person from an impending loss is a greater mizvah than even the saying of Kol Nidre." "Just imagine," the speaker repeated Reb Ysroelke's words, "what would have happened, had I decided not to notice it at all and the cow had remained in the Gentile's garden. The Gentile would surely have locked her up, the poor widow

would have had no milk for her customers, and her own little ones would have starved. Do you think that it would have been pleasing to the compassionate and forgiving God? God will forgive me for saying Kol Nidre a little later, but He would never forgive the man who, when it was in his power, did not shield a poor widow and wretched orphans from want and starvation."

The congregation, quite upset at first, gradually got over its fright; and only then it came to appreciate Rabbi Israel's greatness.

XXXVII

THE KELMER MAGGID

It has become a matter of course for writers of distinction in the Yiddish world to direct the keenest shafts of their irony at the old *Maggidim* who, as soon as their vogue terminated, became the target for the worst cynicisms of radical Jewry.

In the time of the Haskalah, during the "storm and stress" period, the Maggidim were regarded by the leaders of the new era with the same earnest scrutiny which the scientist directs at the vermiform appendix —something to be cut out for the salvation of the living body. Even a casual glance through the pages of Judah Leib Gordon, Peretz, Smolenskin and Mendele Mocher Sforim, the father of Yiddish Literature, reveals the unyielding vigor which went into the effort to confound forever the men who have woven about themselves one of the most beautiful traditions in Jewry.

The word Maggid became a term of reproach, so much the more offensive because it was directed not only at its legitimate bearers, but at the worst *Batlanim* and ne'er-do-wells, the upstarts of all the dust-ridden institutions of the old Yiddish world.

Certainly the Maggidim did not deserve this reproach. It is quite conceivable, nay, it is a matter of historic justice, that there should have come about a strong reaction against the atmosphere of undirected fanati-

cism which they created. But a less prejudiced perspective will allot to the Maggidim a more dignified and more respected place in the Jewish community. The Maggidim were not all *Shnorrers* and parasites as one would think if he credited everything that is said in the writings of the Maskilim. They were agitators serving an ideal, men driven by a fierce inner urge from town to town and from synagogue to synagogue with the purpose of instructing the Jewish communities of Europe how to meet the perplexing and often mortifying problems that confronted them. That there were among these men ugly characters, people who were beggars and idlers by instinct and magnified for their own small ends the coarser possibilities of the calling of the Maggid, there is no doubt. But where is the fortunate public institution to which this vice has not attached itself?

On the whole, these Maggidim were skilful, often really talented men, who were inspired with a great message which they delivered honestly and sturdily. And, mind you, the wise men of the new era, your revolutionary agitators, the men who deride the Maggidim with such vim and insolence, are themselves the direct inheritors of the tradition which the Maggidim established.

Certainly these are different times, and our ideas are different. But our own agitators, our oratorical community leaders, are the very same Maggidim, a little less naive, I grant, but really the same people, imbued with the same spirit and animated by identical enthusiasms.

In the time of their vogue the Maggidim occupied the center of the stage of Jewish life. A congregation without a Maggid would have been like a public meeting without a speaker. Especially in the period preceding the Holy Days, when young and old felt the dread of divine judgment approaching, and words of extreme censure were needed to inspire everybody, the Maggid was very popular. People hurried to the synagogue, straight from work, without eating, to listen to him.

The Maggid could say those things which everybody felt but nobody could express. He could tell stories about the old Geonim which delighted the listeners' hearts. But the Maggid's forte was in telling parables and proverbs which issued forth in a quiet sonorous voice, every parable having its own peculiar chant. And these *meshalim* and proverbs were prized far and wide. The Maggid may have been gone and out of memory, but his proverbs were remembered and repeated over and over again. Sometimes, as in the case of the Dubner Maggid, his stories spread throughout the entire Jewish world. The Dubner Maggid, it is no exaggeration to say, was the most popular as well as the most beloved man in the Ghetto during many decades. The Jew takes delight in illusions and imagery, and these parables brought the greatest measure of satisfaction to his inner longings.

During the second half of the past century the Kelmer Maggid attained to great renown in Lithuania. This man, lampooned and derided so mercilessly by the poet Gordon, certainly was one of the most talented

men produced in the Lithuanian Ghetto in the course of the nineteenth century. His singularly spiritual face is still impressed on my memory. His large black eyes burned with a prophetic flame; his forehead was so large that it overshadowed the rest of his meager face so that the long curly earlocks that crept out from under the old scull-cap seemed to hang in the air.

The Kelmer Maggid was a great moral personality. For two generations he made the rounds of all the cities and towns in Lithuania. And although the people in their enthusiasm virtually showered money on him, he was always penniless, all of his money going for the maintenance of houses of learning and orphans that he came across in the course of his wanderings. In the poorer towns he refused to take any money at all, and to these towns he came much more frequently than to the rich ones.

He embodied in his personality the entire faith of Medieval Judaism. Heaven was heaven and Gehenna was Gehenna to him. Heaven was the kingdom of God where virtuous people came for their rewards, Gehenna was a pit of fire and brimstone into which all sinners were hurled for punishment. He believed that the man who toiled painfully and did not cheat his neighbor was destined to share Heaven with the brightest of the angels, and he believed that a man who broke the Sabbath should be whipped with rods of fire in the heat of Sheol. Because of that he loved and pitied all sinners.

Nature endowed the Kelmer Maggid with the gift of oratory. He possessed a fiery temperament and a consummate skill for creating illusory figures that ap-

peared real. His congregations fluttered before his wrath like leaves under a great storm.

One of the Maggid's favorite themes was the Throne of Justice which was guarded on all sides by the brightest angels and was always lighted up by the Shekinah. He extolled it beyond everything else in the three hundred and ten spheres of the heavenly realm. To sit near the Great Throne, side by side with the angels Michael and Gabriel, to hear the voice of Moses reading the Law, and to listen to the sweet blessings invoked by Aaron the Priest—this was for the Kelmer Maggid the proudest reward for earthly virtue. What was an earthly throne compared to the Throne of Mercy? What were the crowns of earthly kings compared with the crown of the Torah? And how little were the kings of earth compared with the King of Kings in heaven?

The Kelmer Maggid loved his people with all his great heart. He prayed that they might all some day become worthy of standing before the Divine Presence. But he was sure that a usurer, a drunkard, a breaker of the Sabbath, would never reach it, and so he pitied them, and as he pitied them he poured out on them the vials of his bitter wrath, pleading that they forsake the ways of evil.

But there was a certain earthly, practical justice in the anger of the Kelmer Maggid, for he directed his mightiest anger against those rich Jews who were exploiting their own brethren. And for that reason the rich always hated him; many stories testify to repeated efforts on their part to save themselves from disgrace

by arousing against the venerable man the hounds of the Russian police force.

The rich were never overfond of the Kelmer Maggid, so that in each town one may even now meet with elderly men who still recall how this or thar rich miser denounced him to the Russian authorities for his provocative and fiery utterances, and how he was ultimately saved from the hands of the Gentiles by a sheer miracle.

XXXVIII

THE LITHUANIAN SCHOLAR

The Jewish scholar of Lithuania was not a fanatic. He was no pedant with regard to prayer, finger-nail ablutions, ritual bathing, etc. In general he was no slavish follower of the commentators who expatiate on how to worship God. These Lithuanian scholars would miss no opportunity to poke fun at the *Hasidim*. The basic principle of hasidic teaching, the worship of God with song and joy, seemed ridiculous to the Lithuanian scholar. And their dancing and ecstatic gesticulations he considered as crazy antics, a sort of idolatry, that deserved nothing but ridicule.

"Why all this joy? Why all this jumping and running about, this waving of arms, this rolling of eyes?" the Lithuanian scholar would ask. Is God an idol that one must hop about to please Him? The Lithuanians indeed hated the hasidic rabbis and their "good Jews" (miracle men). They regarded them either as lunatics or as swindlers who exploited the ignorance, stupidity and superstition of the simple folk. The scholar of Lithuania was by nature a sober man with a logical head, and he weighed in advance the pros and cons of his acts. For a man of brains with a keen intellect he had deep respect. He would ever give precedence to the man of intellect over the most God-fearing man, who runs to the *Mikvah*

every little while and imagines that he has thereby become the intimate of the Almighty.

The Lithuanian scholar derived far greater pleasure from the study of the *Hoshen Mishpat*, than from the study of the *Yoreh De'ah* and the *Shulhan 'Aruk*. He thought more of the books dealing with the laws of property than of those that prescribe the minutiae of ritual and worship. He would scarcely turn a hair when the wonders of the Baal Shem Tob and of Rabbi Lewy of Prague were related to him; but his heart would be filled with transports of joy from the many and sundry commentaries to the Talmud, for the study of which one must summon all the resources of wit, must possess a clear and calm mind as well as an acute intelligence.

To this man the essence and charm of study consisted not so much in discovering the actual prescriptions and commandments as the treading of the devious and tortuous paths towards them; the refinements of logic and the mental hair-splittings by means of which these were finally arrived at.

"We have a very deep lesson for today, and you'll have to use your brains"—the Rosh Yeshibah would gleefully announce ere he launched forth upon his daily lecture that happened to deal with one of the abstruse and extremely fine points of law in the Talmud's variegated assortment of laws and treatises.

The Lithuanian is fond of mental exercise and spiritual gymnastics. He does not take assertions for granted. He loves to reason things out for himself, and

accordingly he livens up when a difficult problem that requires effort and concentration presents itself.

The mere process of sharpening the mind, quite apart from the results attained, was of importance in the eyes of the Lithuanian scholar. A keen mind was held in higher esteem than one crammed with knowledge; subtle argumentation gave more pleasure than settled points of law. A young man did not win admiration because he knew the page on which a certain passage occurred, but because he could help himself out of a difficult and entangled problem; because he was quick-witted enough to find a ready answer to a poser.

But it is a gross error—and the adherents of Hasidism have fallen into it—to assume that the Lithuanian Jew naturally was a cold-blooded and dry individual, a man incapable of enthusiasm or exaltation. The Lithuanian Jew is as capable of ecstasy and exaltation as is the most ardent Hasid, but he grows enthusiastic over a nice point of casuistic interpretation that calls for great mental effort, and never over a "good Jew."

The scholar considers himself an intellectual aristocrat who has sifted and analyzed a statement before accepting it. To do a thing merely because others do it he considered humiliating. He would, therefore, think twice before taking action in any matter. Even the "small talk" of these Lithuanian scholars bore an intellectual character. Their greatest pleasure was dabbling in numbers. The Lithuanians had a natural bent for mathematics. They would hit upon the

solutions for the hardest problems in algebra or geometry, ignorant though they were of the method and manner of doing the computations systematically and in the prescribed manner.

Almost every one of these scholars knew by heart the "Zaphenath Paneah", which crowded the whole of algebra and geometry into the compass of twenty odd pages. For the Lithuanian scholar this was sufficient. Given but the first principles, he discovered the rest by his own reasoning faculties, plus unremitting labor.

It was indeed a pretty sight to see the manner in which the Jewish youth, the future rabbis and teachers in Israel, sought relaxation in the lonely winter nights, after the study of certain talmudic passages where the most subtle conjectures and hypotheses were involved which had kept the mind strained for many an hour. They would all sit down round the long and narrow table at which the lessons had been read during the day. Their caps were pushed back, so that their high foreheads, over which stray locks of hair fell, were fully exposed. Their faces were aglow with the light of the bright reflector-lamps standing on the table. On the open Gemara lay a package of tobacco and some cigarette paper. Every one would, deliberately, without hurry, and very deftly, roll the tobacco and paper into a neat cigarette. The conversation revolved about utterly secular matters; matters that had nothing to do with the difficult subjects over which they had racked their brains all day long. They talked now of mathematics; they propounded to each other questions in geometry and algebra, and the eyes

of the one who found an answer to a problem would flash with joy.

They would also discuss and argue at length about certain articles that they had read in the "Hameliz" or the "Hazefirah;" about the scientific articles of Hayim Zelig Slonimsky, or about the "Statics and Dynamics" of Rabinowitz which they all enjoyed so much. But they derived their greatest pleasure from mathematical exercises, because these called for mental alertness and acumen, which the scholar of Lithuania relished above everything else in life.

Without the walls of the Bet Hamidrash the scholarly youth found diversion also in chess playing. True, zealots and fanatics were very much displeased with this, citing the Talmud's prohibition of all games of chance, without specifying any by name. But the good youths paid no attention to them; and on the half-holidays of the Passover and Tabernacles, on Hanukkah nights and Christmas Eve, they would while away their time over a game of chess, which called for the exercise of the mind.

XXXIX

A LAWSUIT AGAINST THE ALMIGHTY

A pall of darkness had settled over the little town. Everyone's face looked melancholy. Men and women moved about the streets like shadows. Even the youngest children appeared to be under a strain. No one dared to look his fellow in the face, and only now and then some woman would venture to break the oppressive stillness and inquire: "Well, what news? What did the specialist say?" "Only the Almighty Himself can help us!" — her neighbor, Asne Reb Zemah's, would answer with a heart-rending sigh. "She is in the hands of God. He is the best and only healer." "Lord of the Universe, Pray send Thy help to this innocent soul!" Asne raised her eyes and hands heavenward, the tears choking her.

For a week now Rohele, Itze Avrohom's only daughter, had been in a desperate struggle with death. It was her first confinement and her sufferings were almost beyond human endurance. Rohele has long been the pet of the town because of her generosity and loving-kindness. Her donations were always among the most liberal in the town, while her loans were an unfailing source of help to those in temporary straits. No needy one had ever left Rohele's home hungry or unclothed. Moreover, hers was a genuinely modest nature that sought no appreciation of her deeds of kindness and

caused her to make friends with the humble as well as the rich and the powerful.

In her girlhood days when her mother—may her memory be blessed—was still living, and ran her household in a fashion befitting the wife of Reb Itzel Avrohomtshik's, the most renowned rabbis and scholars would send *Shadhans*, or come themselves, to take a look at this famed beauty and gentle soul as a possible helpmate for their sons. Every one of them was anxious to add this gem to his family, to link the fortunes of his own son with the house of Reb Itzel, the house that combined both wealth and learning.

Reb Itzel was, however, an unusually finnicky person. He was not content merely to marry off his daughter to a youth of good family. He wanted him to possess personal distinction and worth as well. "My Rohele," Reb Itzel would declare calmly, with an air of finality, "fully deserves this. You don't know what a rare child she is, what a golden heart she possesses."

The fortunate youth who was selected for Rohele did really possess all those rare virtues. He had the reputation of being a great scholar, was well versed in the secular sciences, and was descended from no less a distinguished family than that of the Vilna Gaon. When Reb Itzel and Deborah, his wife, led their Rohele to the Huppah, the entire populace of the town followed them, with their blessings and best wishes in their hearts. Truly it was not Reb Itzel's daughter that was being married, but rather the only daughter of the whole town.

The wedding feast was the handsomest and the richest ever celebrated in the town. Old and young joined in the festivities. The poor folk could not remember such a pleasant week as they had at Rohele's wedding. Deborah and Reb Itzel himself personally distributed largesses right and left, the indigent Gentiles of the town included. Even the *Porez* himself, that proud nobleman, came to felicitate Reb Itzel upon the happy occasion and to pass under scrutiny the fortunate youth who was to carry off that rare prize.

Right after Rohele's wedding, however, the Evil One began to play spiteful pranks upon the household of Reb Itzel. His son, a student at the celebrated Yeshibah and a youth renowned for his scholarly attainments, fell in with a gang of libertines who taught him to neglect his talmudical studies and to read evil books instead. It was even whispered in town that the youth smoked cigarettes on the Sabbath.

Reb Itzel and his wife considered this rumor a malicious fabrication. They could not even imagine their son in the rôle of a sinner. Reb Itzel was preparing to journey to the town where the Yeshibah was, to see things for himself—when the news reached him that his son had run away to Berlin, to become a student at some school or other.

Reb Itzel rent his garments as if for one dead, and went through seven days of mourning for his still living son. From that fatal day on, Deborah began to pine and wither, and in a few months she died of heart-failure.

Upon his wife's death, Itzel handed over his household and all his business to his son-in-law, Rohele's husband, so that Rohele became the mistress of this proud home. Great indeed was Reb Itzel's joy when informed that his daughter was with child. "May it be a son, a *Kaddish* after me, after my hundred and twenty years," was Reb Itzel's silent prayer. Seeing visions of a balm to the wounds left by the loss of both his wife and his only son, Reb Itzel eagerly awaited the advent of that happy day; counting impatiently the days, the hours, the very minutes. In his mind he had already settled the name to be given to the boy.

But Rohele had no luck with her confinement; the baby, a boy, was delivered dead, while she herself fell into a fever, so that all the physicians of the town despaired of her life. Reb Itzel was a man of boundless faith. He relied but little in this extremity upon the skill and judgment of the physicians. He was aware that there was but one real Physician in the universe, of boundless pity and love for His creatures. It was up to Him alone to heal the suffering ones.

Reb Itzel sought therefore to gain the favor and the good will of this Physician. He now began to distribute alms with even greater liberality than ever before. He stretched cords across and around the graves of the virtuous dead; he engaged ten Batlanim of the town to study the Holy Books and offer unceasing prayers for his Rohele. He also called together all the Talmud Torah children and induced the innocents to pray for her. He had even changed her name to Hayah so as to elude the malicious vigilance of the Evil One. But

this was of no avail. Rohele's fever was growing, she was now delirious, uttering strange and incoherent words. Friends and relatives finally prevailed upon Reb Itzel to send to the capital of the province for a specialist. "Indeed, it is perfectly true," they argued, "that the only healer of the ailing is He whose throne is in heaven; but even He needs some messenger to perform His service for Him. Who knows but that, in some lucky hour, this specialist may be this messenger of God? Such things have happened more than once."

Such and similar arguments had to be employed ere Reb Itzel finally sanctioned sending for the specialist. But when the physician finally arrived, he merely glanced doubtfully at the dying Rohele, said he had been called too late, that it was now beyond him to render any assistance, and then departed as he had come.

The entire town now joined in the prayers for the unfortunate Rohele. But God had evidently turned a deaf ear to all their prayers and supplications. Slowly and surely the patient was sinking.

On the evening preceding the day of Rohele's death, Reb Itzel never uttered a sound to any human being. In his room, where he read his daily portion of the Talmud, he locked himself in and would admit no one to share his vigil. This was a great surprise to all his friends. They had heard that for the morrow, Reb Itzel had ordered two large wax candles to be lit in the lectern facing the Ark; also that, before his retirement, he had personally visited all the school-rooms of the town and requested the teachers to bring their pupils

early the next morning to the synagogue. He had also ordered the ten professional Batlanim of the town to be on hand at the appointed time.

All of these arrived at the synagogue early the following morning, as requested. They offered up their prayers and duly recited the Psalms of David. Reb Itzel was one of the first to enter the synagogue in his stockinged feet and attired in his Talit and Tefilin. Without a word he walked up straight to the Holy Ark, and drawing aside the curtains and opening the folding doors, he called out in imperious and commanding tones: "I, Itzik ben Avrohom, from the city of G., hereby call the God of Justice to a trial before the Law! I demand of you, Lord of the Universe, to tell me wherein I have sinned? What have I done to be punished thus? My virtuous wife, Deborah, died before her time. My only son is worse than dead. And now you send the Angel of Death to snatch from me my only daughter! I summon you now to the Court of Justice. I request you to state publicly and before this assemblage of Jews and the Tables of the Law, what my sins are!"

"Holy Torah!"—Reb Itzel turned his face toward the Scrolls within the Ark—"Holy Torah, listen to my pleas and let the Lord Himself inform me of the sins and transgressions committed by me."

"Pious and good Jews!" Reb Itzel now addressed himself to the men engaged in their prayers—"Have I ever harmed any one of you? If so, tell it now to the Holy Torah. This is the time to tell all!"

"Little children," he addressed the school boys—"did I at any time harm any one of you? Come now, say it. Be my witnesses. Why are you standing still? Come, be my witnesses—no, not mine, but my Rohele's."

The entire assemblage stood motionless and knew not what to do or say. The great wax candles continued to burn, evenly and silently. The Holy Scrolls kept standing in their places, to all appearances unmoved by Reb Itzel's prayers, while the Almighty Himself did not even deign to attend His trial.

Rohele died while her father was arguing her case with God Almighty. When Reb Itzel, on his way home, heard of his daughter's death, he retraced his steps toward the synagogue, took his place opposite the Holy Ark and with great fervor pronounced the customary benediction over the dead: "Baruk Dayyan ha-Emet!"—"Blessed be the true Judge."

XL

REB ABBA THE BET DIN SHAMMASH

Do you recall the old Reb Abba, the Bet Din Shammash of our old home town? Do you recall the way he would wake the sleepy people and call them to the synagogue to Selihot? An undersized Jew, with a long thick beard, so heavy that it bore its owner fairly down to the ground. Carrying in one hand a heavy cane and in the other a four-cornered lantern in which a tallow candle flickered faintly, Reb Abba would trudge through the dark streets of the little town in the early morning watches of Selihot night, knocking at the people's window shutters.

If one of the townspeople had an engagement party or wedding feast on hand, he felt obliged to call upon Reb Abba for assistance. He was the one to fetch the various guests. No one dared to move a finger without him at a circumcision ceremony, neither the *Sandek* nor the *Mohel*, nor the various other participants in the ceremony; not even the prophet Elijah who is supposed to be present at the initiation of every Jewish child into the Abrahamic covenant. No one would stir a finger before Reb Abba had properly called his name.

Reb Abba was the one who arranged for the wine for Kiddush and *Habdalah*. He was the first man to kindle a light on Saturday night. He was the one who gave the children of the congregation a sip of wine out

of the Kiddush-cup and a sniff at the spice-box. He was the one who supplied the congregation with the willows on the Feast of Tabernacles and on Hosha'ana Rabbah. He also supplied the urchins of the town with the choicest *Drehdels* on Hanukkah and the noisiest Haman-beaters for Purim.

For the Passover Reb Abba supplied the bitter herbs and the salads, and on the eve of Yom Kippur, when the thirty-nine lashes had to be administered to some sinner, it was again Reb Abba who did the honors of the occasion.

If some one in town was dangerously ill and the distribution of charity, as redemption, was called for, it was Reb Abba who distributed the largess among the poor students; the *Tikkun* before the prayers and the *Pidyon* after. If the patient died, Reb Abba was again to the fore, and this time among the mourners, letting the piercing sounds of his metal charity box reverberate far and wide. If someone died without leaving any children, Reb Abba faithfully recited the Kaddish after him; if one man was lacking for the ritual quorum of ten, Reb Abba could always be counted upon to fill the gap.

That Reb Abba was indispensable in communal matters goes without saying. Here no one could turn a finger without him. If one had to be summoned to the rabbi for trial, Reb Abba was, of course, the messenger. If the communal assembly decided in secret conclave surreptitiously to deposit some stolen goods at the *Moser's* home, and thus rid the town of this evil doer, Beb Abba was entrusted with the task.

Reb Abba could be depended upon to carry out this delicate mission.

At the communal elections, Reb Abba was the only one who knew all the secrets of the inner arcanum that sealed the fate of the various candidates. Reb Abba, the Bet Din Shammash, was the first one in town to know who were the lucky men to be elected to the various offices and who had drawn blanks. If one of the town's inhabitants had been caught red handed, it was Reb Abba again who knew all the circumstantial details of the evil deed. He knew to a nicety just where, when and how the misdeed had been perpetrated.

At such times the entire town became galvanized, while Reb Abba felt more than ever in his element. People were after him and he would recount over and over again the piquant details of the case, while the assembly, gray-bearded men, youths boarding with their parents-in-law, elderly bewigged women and newly-married ones, greedily swallowed every one of his words. Occasionally some practical joker would, with assumed innocence, pretend that he did not understand the tale, and without the least reluctance Reb Abba would retell the story from its very beginning, adding a spicy touch here and there.

Without Reb Abba the town seemed as strange as would an American city without its newspapers, clocks, police force and courts. For it was through Reb Abba, the Bet Din Shammash, that the people of the town learned what was going on in the world; their own as well as the greater world without.

Reb Abba was on intimate terms even with the evil spirits. Consider the ruins of our ancient synagogue on a cold and stormy night. No one dared to come near it. It had burned down and *Lilith* and her evil clique had made their abode in it. People dreaded even to pass by this ruin for fear of harm. Yet Reb Abba did not seem to mind it at all. For he knew full well how to manage the evil ones, even on such dark and dreary nights. He would rap the door with his heavy key ten times in succession, pronouncing a certain prayer that would utterly discomfit the evil ones. And it is an indisputable fact that Reb Abba never suffered any harm from the evil spirits dwelling in the old synagogue.

It is rumored, however—and Berke the water carrier has sworn to it—that Reb Abba would be called up to the reading of the Law in the old synagogue in the silent watches of the night, among the evil ones. The evil ones—Berke solemnly averred—would call Reb Abba up to read in their ghostly scroll. If it had not been Reb Abba, but an ordinary mortal, he would have suffered serious injury right there and then. His soul would have departed at the first word uttered by a ghost. But it was Reb Abba, and that spelt safety. He knew how to say the benediction and was saved from harm. As proof, Berke would point to the fact that Reb Abba was still enjoying good health and ate his three meals a day. No one, however, would speak to Reb Abba himself about his intimacy with the evil ones. People simply feared to mention the matter.

Even more important, however, than in mundane matters was Reb Abba in things supra-mundane. This

was especially proved on the morning of the first Selihot, when everyone would have shamelessly overslept but for Reb Abba's punctual care. At the Selihot season Reb Abba would consider himself the intermediary between the Almighty and His flock. He would then feel like one upon whose shoulders had been placed a great and sacred mission. His usually gently spoken words would then change into an inexorable command. "Get up to the first Selihot!" he would bawl out imperiously at each one's door. The elderly folk of the town would obey his command and start at once. Our grandfathers were well aware of the seriousness of the proceedings awaiting them, the proceedings at which God Almighty Himself is seated on His throne on high to judge each one's deeds, good or evil. They therefore went along readily, without waiting a second summons. They went forth not to prove their innocence nor to discredit the testimony of the witnesses—far from it—but rather to plead guilty to all their sins, and to beg the All High for mercy. "We are but mortals, but the Almighty is a God of mercy. Oh, Lord, forgive our sins!" was the usual plea that our fathers addressed to their God. They arose in the dark hours of the night, and went forth to plead forgiveness for their transgressions. The young folks, however, were lazy as a rule; so that they would have surely overslept had it not been for Reb Abba's persistent "Come to the first Selihot!"

XLI

JEWISH WATCHMEN

It is the hour after midnight. The town is wrapped in thick darkness. The roofs of the houses stare from beneath their dark cover, giving an air of mystery to the town. Within all is sound asleep. The artisans are tired from their long day's toil. The traders and shopkeepers have done enough worrying and figuring during the day, and are worn out. All of them are endeavoring to gather new strength and energy for the coming day when they will once more have to struggle, to hustle, to scheme, and to worry about the daily necessities. Even the gayer element, who as a rule play cards till late in the night, have long since retired.

A strange stillness reigns all about; a stillness that makes the darkness of the town the more intense and all pervading. The stars have hidden somewhere behind the shadows of the night, while the moon is evidently afraid to show her lovely face in the midst of a universe that is so full of darkness and mystery. Candles have long since been snuffed out and the lamps extinguished. Mayhap a diligent search would reveal a small lamp flickering in some room, somewhere near a sleeping baby's cradle. The windows are tightly shuttered and the feeble flame cannot penetrate outside. Even the dim light, usually shining through the windows of the Bet Hamidrash at this hour when Reb

Heikel the Melamed is wont to read the *Hazot* elegies, is absent. For Reb Heikel has been confined to bed these many weeks—may the Almighty soon restore to health this saintly man!—and there is no one else in the town so devout as to interrupt his sweet slumbers and run to the synagogue in the darkness of the night. And so, the synagogue is as dark as the rest of the town.

But hark! A plaintive, melancholy tune comes from a side street. It flows through the pall of darkness and fills the air with sweet and tender echoes. The restless babies in their cribs are among the first to hear the sounds and immediately stop whimpering. Mothers who, with drowsy faces and half-shut eyes, have put their breasts into their babes' mouths, breathe more freely as they hear this refreshing voice that comes from the distance.

Mingled and interwoven with this tune, words are now heard that add beauty and mellowness to it. At first faint and almost indistinguishable, they grow more and more distinct as they float athwart the midnight stillness. A voice is singing:

Guards, watchmen,
Listen to me!
Who is here?
It is only me,
A poor lonely watchman.
Flown from me
Is the peace of the night,
Sleep, benumbing sleep,

Is creeping through my bones.
Am I, like all of you, a man,
Or an image cast of stone?

It is Nosen the watchman singing as he makes his lonely midnight rounds of the town. Towards the end of the month, there being no moonlight, burglaries were on the increase. Here a shop was entered through the window and the cash-drawer rifled of its contents to the last kopek; there a door was forced and shelves emptied; somewhere else a dwelling was broken into and valuables carried off, while the family was sleeping. At Itze the Money-lender's home a burglary took place at least once a year, and pledged articles—other people's property—were regularly carried off. But Itze should thank the Lord that he had escaped with his life at least. A burglar, you know, is usually a murderer, and had Itze had the misfortune to wake up, he would have surely been killed into the bargain.

The bands of burglars that ravaged the town caused a sort of panic among the inhabitants. After each burglary, the town would be in an uproar, convulsed with rumors, fear and excitement. The menfolk would call meetings to discuss means for the safety of the town. They would talk, dispute, argue, shout themselves hoarse and then in the end resolve to call another meeting at some future time.

At these gatherings the leaders would first of all serve notice that they would surely go to the District Assessor and inform him that none other than Pesah Hirsh the tax gatherer and Simon the constable, the

paid town officials, are to blame for these burglaries. Simon the constable, secure in his friendly intimacy with the Assessor, would pay little heed to these threats. He would stamp his foot contemptuously at the leaders—and most of them had grown sons ready for military duty—and give them such a lashing with his sharp tongue that they would soon realize their proper place and address him henceforth with the humility they used in addressing a real government official. Though behind his back they would apply all sorts of epithets and curse him roundly, he was "Reb Simon" nevertheless, when they stood in his august presence.

Curbed by Simon, they would turn toward Pesah Hirsh, a mild-mannered and quiet little man, with a smattering of sacred learning. Him they did not fear at all. Pesah Hirsh would seek to prove that it was not he who was to blame, but the householders who consistently refused to take turns in night-watching. He would affirm under oath that again and again he had carried the watchman's staff from house to house but no one would accept it. "Where is Nosen, Nosen the shoemaker? Why is he so slow?"—voices were heard from all corners of the room. "Pesah Hirsh, go to Nosen and tell him the *Kahal* invites him to the meeting. Go, at once, don't dilly-dally!" Avrohom Todres the warden ordered in harsh tones. "I am going, I am going, Reb Avrohom," Pesah Hirsh meekly announced, and was off on his quest.

Nosen the shoemaker or, as he was later called, Nosen the watchman, had more than one source of

income. In the first place, he was a cobbler. Yet this, and even the fact that he regularly attended services at the shoemakers' synagogue, did not admit him to full fellowship with the real shoemakers of the town. "He is only a cobbler, a patch-maker, not a mechanic," Yoshe the bootmaker and leader of the synagogue would say with a deprecatory wave of his hand, as if to clinch the argument.

Nosen had still another occupation. He served in the town Hazzan's choir on the high holidays. Nosen had an agreeable voice, and those competent to judge frequently said that if he hadn't been so bad when a little boy, his father would not have cut short his education and he might have grown up to be a fine Hazzan himself. He possessed the necessary attributes, a sweet voice, a clear throat and a good memory. But of what good were all these when their owner was of no account and could not even read his Hebrew properly, so that he would only heap shame upon the community that would choose him as its Hazzan?

When the harvesting season arrived, Nosen would close his workshop and go out to the surrounding villages to assist the peasants in their harvesting labors. "I love this work in the field," Nosen would say. "It is a joy to be under the blue skies and breathe the fresh air. One is able to work better and also to sing better there. If God would only be merciful to me and give me wealth, I would buy a farm and never show my face in the town again."

This longing for the fields and meadows had already manifested itself in Nosen in his childhood days. The

Heder irked him terribly and, at the very first opportunity, he would run away to the green meadows where he would dreamily listen to the shepherd playing his reed pipe, and pick wild flowers on the pastures or from beneath the tangled trees in the nearby woods. Nothing in this world could avail against this longing of his, neither his mother's curses and cuffs nor the rebbi's cat-o'-nine-tails. "It must be some sort of witchcraft, an evil spirit, may Heaven preserve us! that has entered into our Noshke," his mother declared mournfully. "You can't make him stay in Heder. He runs to the woods, to the fields, to the shepherds and the gentile children." Realizing the futility of further study for Noshke, his father, with a deep pang in his heart, took him from Heder and apprenticed him to a shoemaker.

But it was soon found that he was just as much of a failure at shoemaking as he had been at his studies. He could not sit quietly at his bench, and whenever there happened to be some sort of a celebration in the town, such as a Siyum, the commencement of the writing of a Holy Scroll, a wedding or a public Hanukkah candle lighting, Noshke would always be found running either in the company of the players or the singers.

After the death of his parents, Nosen became utterly reckless. He was more frequently found in the villages than in the town, among the peasants oftener than among the Jews. He somehow managed to eke out a miserable living by following many wretched and poorly paid occupations, till finally the town officials

offered him the position of the town's night watchman. Nosen readily accepted the proffered office.

Nosen loved his new job. He enjoyed walking alone in the dark hours of the night from one street to another. He loved to dream of his kind mother and stern father who had died so early and left him an orphan, all alone in the world. He would recall his rebbi and his severity. He soon discovered that if one liked to ruminate over past events, there was no time better suited for the purpose than the midnight hours when all is quiet, calm and restful.

Nosen loved also to watch the flocks of pigeons each morning, ere the morning star grew dim, troop down from beneath the eaves of the church on the square into the market place, and pick up the stray seeds that had been scattered there on the day previous. Ever since his childhood Nosen delighted to watch the flying of the pigeons, to observe the motion of their wings, and to listen to their cooing; he loved their walking and their repose. For this habit of his the Heder boys dubbed him "Noshke the pigeon chaser."

Yet taking everything into consideration, Nosen felt himself drawn towards the watchman's job because one could sing freely and to one's heart's content whenever one felt the urge. A watchman is expected to sing. One does not look for knowledge in a watchman—not even the ability to read the Hebrew alphabet—but one does expect him to know how to sing. And Nosen would, during the long winter nights, run through all the songs and ditties that it had been his good fortune to learn.

When Nosen recalled his mother, his teacher or the Heder, he would trill forth melodiously:

Mother calls
Go to Heder,
Go, my precious one,
To study the Torah.
When the rebbi will come
And say that you know your lesson
A pretty little pigeon Mamma will buy you.
For this dove my heart yearned,
To this foolishness I pinned my faith.
With false hopes I lived,
And hoped for naught.
May my enemies live
If to me this dove they gave.
This dove, like a dream, has flown,
And indeed the rebbi's cane came,
This cane has opened my eyes
To see that there was a rebbi and a Heder in this world.

Quite often, Nosen would resent that he, the poorest of the poor, had been chosen to guard the wealth of strangers. And then he would sadly bemoan the bitterness of his lot. At such times he would seek relief in a new species of watchman's song, which was occasionally borrowed by the mothers of the town to serve them as a lullaby for their sleepless children.

I alone
Poor guard,
Flown is from me

The quiet of the night.
Sleep, benumbing sleep,
Is creeping through my bones,
Am I alone
Made of stone?

XLII

THE JEWISH BOOKSELLER

One of the best known characters in our town was Yankel the *Moker-Sefarim*. Everyone knew Reb Yankel, old and young, men, women and children. Yankel's name was known not only to the people of our own town but also, and perhaps even a shade better, to the people of the surrounding towns and villages. Everyone addressed him as "Reb" Yankel, though the young men who received free board from their parents-in-law and were preparing for the rabbinate, did not consider him a scholar. It was even whispered that he was beyond his depth when attempting to interpret a passage in the Talmud with its commentaries. It was said that he could barely find his way in a chapter of the Mishnah, and that this was the limit of his knowledge.

But the womenfolk, as well as the simple-minded villagers, entertained a more favorable opinion of Reb Yankel's scholarship. These people would, in their simplicity, consult him on their ritual problems. Yankel, however, invariably refused to accept the serious responsibility involved in such matters. "Go to the rabbi or his assistant. Let them decide it for you. I . . . I am not a rabbi. I am but a simple bookseller," Reb Yankel would reply.

Reb Yankel was a quiet and God-fearing Jew, honest and straight-forward, who never would pose as being anything but the ordinary bookseller. Indeed, Reb Yankel himself habitually paid great respect to the scholar and would invariably rise when one of them passed by his seat. He felt that the scholar bore a far closer relationship to the books than he, who merely bought and sold them.

Being by disposition a modest and patient man, Reb Yankel never sought to attract any one's attention. Nor did any one envy Yankel his comparatively comfortable position in life. On the day following the fair, when Reb Yankel would admit that business had been good and that he hoped that it might be no worse at the next annual fair, everyone was sincerely happy. The community was pleased that the public was generously buying his books.

Yankel had not distinguished himself in his student days. He was not among the pupils whom the teacher lauded before their mothers, praising their fine memory, their facility, or depth of comprehension. Yankel did not possess a "good" head, but a good heart. His teacher loved him for not being as wayward as the other boys who mishandled their books. Yankel could not look on indifferently when a fellow-student placed a careless arm or elbow upon his Pentateuch or Talmud folio. It meant actual suffering to him to see a book thrown carelessly about like some stick or piece of rag. "These are holy books," Yankel would solemnly remonstrate, "holy men wrote them. A soul, a mind lives in them; it is a sin to destroy them. A book is like

a living soul, it feels pain when it is kicked about, and it cries out as though it were bleeding from many wounds . . . One must not do it . . . it is a sin . . . God will punish you for it . . . their remains are like human remains. They must be buried. They must find their resting place in consecrated ground." When other children, at close of school, would rush breathlessly from the Heder and leave their books wherever they happened to be, Yankel would stay behind and help the rebbi gather and put them away in their proper places.

After his bar mizvah, when Yankel had gone off to study at the Yeshibah, and, still later, when already a youth of marriageable age, Yankel loved to collect books. He fondled them like little children and saw to it that they were clean and free from dust. The mere sight of books gave him a thrill; in his imagination he was in the company of saints and men of genius. He would then vow that if God would favor him and grant him a comfortable livelihood, the first thing he would do would be to provide himself with a case full of books in beautiful leather bindings. After his betrothal he kept saying to himself: "How much nicer it would be if folks had but the sense to give a young man books instead of gold and silver!"

For some time after his marriage he was much unsettled; so that his ambition to acquire a caseful of books as an ornament for his home was not realized. It did not, however, take long for him to lose the dowry his wife had brought him. In a brief space of time, he had tried sundry occupations, from flour-milling to the

teaching of little boys, but failed in all of them, so that finally he was left penniless. And it was just at this most inauspicious juncture of his life that his dream—to live among books—began to take shape. Some of his intimate friends and relatives clubbed together, raised a goodly sum of money, and bought him a book business. On that very day he had acquired the cognomen of Yankel the bookseller.

Reb Yankel never considered his books ordinary pieces of merchandise by which to earn a livelihood. To him they were sacred, permeated by the spirits of their holy creators; objects that one must not touch with uncleansed hands. The great folios of the Talmud he kept upon the topmost shelves, so that he would have to look up to them. He did not, however, know much of their content, nor cared overmuch to plunge into their depths. But he hugely enjoyed glancing into the volumes of the Mishnah, the Midrash and the En Yakob, the more popular tomes that occupied the middle shelves of his shop. He knew these books well, loved to study them even during his business hours, and to have them ever ready at hand. The Tehinot and other books of the women-folk he would, however, keep on the lowest shelves, or stuck away in some out of the way corner. The Mishnah students were his most valued patrons, not because they spent the most money at his shop, but because he felt their equal and could discuss with them knotty points or obscure passages in these beloved tomes. To the end of his days this bookseller remained a man of equable temperament, never known to grow angry and always

on good terms with everyone. As a matter of fact, every inhabitant of the town had had, at one time or another, some dealing with Reb Yankel. One may have needed a tome of the Talmud, another a volume of the Mishnah, a Pentateuch, a prayer book or the Book of Psalms. And all of them had to come to Reb Yankel the bookseller.

It is true that the costly huge Talmud sets with the one hundred and one commentaries that the wealthy men of the town used to present to their new sons-in-law were never bought of Reb Yankel but ordered directly from Vilna, where they were printed. But such purchases were rare, while phylacteries, *mezuzot*, the more ordinary books and other things that are the daily necessity of the Jewish home, were invariably purchased at Reb Yankel's shop.

Almost everyone in town had an account at Reb Yankel's shop. Yet he seldom resorted to a piece of chalk or a lump of charcoal, as other merchants did for writing down their accounts. Reb Yankel usually carried his ledger in his head. The money due Reb Yankel amounted to a tidy little sum. Hardly any one ever paid cash, and most of Yankel's business was on the weekly payment basis; ten or twenty kopeks a week.

In this manner many a caseful of books had been sold to the people of the town. Most of them would have found it hard to pay the few rubles at one time. There were always the children to look after, and they always needed so many things. But somehow a few pennies a week could always be spared, so that

in a few months one found oneself owning a respectable little library of sacred books, God be thanked! This, some thrifty housewives would explain to their neighbors, was how they could boast such fine collections of sacred books.

These weekly payments were as a rule cheerfully brought to Reb Yankel, with the feeling that the laying out of a paltry sum assured a permanent reward in the life-to-come. They were highly pleased with such little bargains with the Almighty, through the agency of Reb Yankel.

But why, after all, speak of the hereafter when there was reward aplenty right now? For it was joy merely to glance at those shelves with rows of leather-backed, red-labelled volumes, whose gold-lettered titles looked down so proudly and so temptingly. The very atmosphere of the home had become changed for the better by the bringing in of those books. They imparted a more cheerful aspect to the entire household. "A home without books resembles a ruin more than a home fit for habitation. It feels lonesome and desolate." In such terms Yahne Reb Itze's—a steady customer for whom Reb Yankel had especially ordered the best available set of the Books of Moses—never tired of speaking to the newly married housewives who as yet had not had the opportunity of tasting the joys of owning a shelf of books.

The Heder pupils were Reb Yankel's most intimate friends. They were steady visitors at his shop. A long center table was heaped with the so-called seasonal

wares: prayer books in the month of Elul, for the women, with a Yiddish translation; between the semi-yearly terms, the gigantic alphabets printed on white cardboard; and in the nine days of mourning, the elegies of Jeremiah. The school boys were Reb Yankel's best purchasers of the seasonal wares. Banners for Simhat Torah, lead drehdels for Hanukkah, and Haman rattles for Purim. They would enter Yankel's shop with the air of one entering his own home.

Reb Yankel kept on excellent terms with the youngsters, not only because they bought his wares, but also because they would help him in an emergency. If his wife was busy in the kitchen and he had to go somewhere, on urgent business, he would leave the youngsters in charge of his shop. Aside from this and similar services, the little fellows would be of considerable assistance to him in packing and unpacking his wares. So that, all things considered, he did not mind the extra trouble these youngsters gave him. For instance, if the face of Moses upon the Simhat Torah banner that an urchin had bought for a penny was not bright enough, or if Aaron the high-priest's beard was not quite distinct, Reb Yankel would cheerfully exchange them for a perfect one; or, if the piquant pictures illustrating the Book of Esther were not clear; if the drehdel was a bit awry or had some imperfection, Reb Yankel would readily exchange them for perfect ones, and not be under the cloud of having cheated the inexperienced purchasers of his wares.

On the arrival of the month of Elul, when Reb Yankel prepared for his annual pilgrimage to the

neighboring towns and villages, taking loads of holy books and other things along with him, he would become an exceedingly busy man. Reb Yankel was well aware that the folks of those towns were impatient for his arrival as if he were some great and distinguished guest. As soon as the first blasts of the Shofar were heard in the land, calling upon the people to prepare for the holy days, Reb Yankel would take up his staff and start on his great pilgrimage.

On the dusty, long village roads of Lithuania one would frequently meet at that season of the year an elderly Jew trudging painfully along, heavy stick in hand, his back bent beneath a heavy pack. Almost hidden by the cloud of dust raised by his steps, the man would amble on deliberately, head bent forward, face covered with perspiration. His heart, however, knew no fear, but on the contrary, was overflowing with faith and trust in the All-seeing, enthroned in the heavens above, who would surely shelter and protect His chosen ones.

This man was none other than our bookseller, the Jewish bookseller, who was met everywhere on his journey by brotherly embraces and hand-clasps. His meals, as a rule, were scant and dry, his bed far from comfortable. The sun scorched him by day and the cold pierced him by night. But he was not discontented with his lot. He felt happy in the fact that the Holy One, Blessed be His name, gave him the requisite strength to carry his bundle of holy books on his back, in the making of which so many holy men had spent their holy and undying souls . . .

The doors of all homes as well as of communal houses —the synagogue, the Bet Hamidrash and the town's meeting places—were wide open with a welcome to this honored guest, the itinerant bookseller on his periodic visit, bringing his sacred wares.

GLOSSARY

ABAYE: a sage of the Talmud, fl. 4th century.

AKDAMUT: a religious poem read on the Feast of Weeks in Ashkenazic Synagogues.

'AL DA'AT HA-KAHAL: Introduction to the Kol Nidre services.

'AL HET: a prayer of confession.

ALEF BET: Alphabet.

ALMEMAR: pulpit.

ANA: Beginning of Psalm 118, 25.

ASHAMNU, BAGADNU, GAZALNU: "We are guilty, we have been faithless, we have robbed," the beginning of a prayer.

'ATARAH: the embroidered part of the Talit.

BA'AL KERIAH: the person who reads from the Scroll of the Law in the Synagogue.

BA'AL MUSAF: the reader of the additional morning service on the Sabbath and holidays.

BA'AL SHAHARIT: the reader of the morning service.

BA'AL SHEM TOB: Name of the founder of the sect of Hasidim (1700–1760).

BA'AL TOKE'A: the person who blows the Shofar (q. v.).

BA'ALE BATIM: respectable householders; prominent members of the community.

BAR MIZVAH: a lad attaining his religious majority at the age of 13; the ceremony on that occasion.

BAREKU: a prayer beginning "Bless ye the Lord."

BARUK DAYYAN HA-EMET: Blessed be the true Judge.

BATLAN (pl. BATLANIM): an idler; specifically a poor person employed to say prayers and study in memory of the dead.

BET DIN: ecclesiastical court.

BET HAMIDRASH: House of Study.

BIKKUR HOLIM: Society for visiting the sick.

BIMAH: the platform in the synagogue on which the reader stands.

BROKES: benedictions.

BROKOH: benediction.

CHOVEVE ZION: an organization of lovers of Zion formed in the latter half of the 19th century.

DREHDEL: a top-shaped toy used to play games on Hanukkah.

EKAH: the Book of Lamentations.

EN YAKOB: a collection of the haggadic portions of the Talmud.

EREZ ISROEL BOKSER: Palestinian St. John's bread.

ERUB: a ritual device for the purpose of making it permissible to carry necessary objects on the street on the Sabbath. It takes the form of a string or wire stretched along the street.

ETAPE: a procession of prisoners on foot under a military patrol conveying them to the prison where they serve their term.

ETROG: citron used in the service on the Feast of Booths.

FREILACHS: a merry tune.

GABBAI (pl. GABBAIM): an official of the Synagogue.

GABBETE: an officious female.

GALUT: exile.

GAON: a talmudic genius.

GEMARA: the talmudic text exclusive of the Mishnah; the Talmud.

GOY: Gentile; stupid person.

GOYIM: pl. of Goy (q. v.).

HABDALAH: a benediction over a cup of wine at the conclusion of the Sabbath.

HADARIM: pl. of Heder, q. v.

HADAS (pl. HADASIM): Myrtle, used in the service on the Feast of Booths.

HAFTARAH: the prophetic portion read in synagogue after the portion from the Pentateuch.

HAGGADAH: The order of services at the Seder; the prayer-book containing this order of services.

HAKKAFOT: Procession on Simhat Torah, the participants carrying the scrolls of the Torah around in the Synagogue.

HALAH: Loaf of bread used for the Sabbath meal.

HAMAN-TASH: a cake prepared for Purim named after Haman.

HAMELEK: the initial word of a prayer in the morning service on Sabbath and holidays.

HAMELIZ: The Advocate, name of a Hebrew newspaper.

HAMEZ: leaven, leavened bread.

HAMISHAH 'ASAR BE-AB: the 15th of Ab.

HAMISHAH 'ASAR BE-SHEBAT: the 15th of Shebat.

HARIF: a sharp and ingenious scholar of the Talmud.

HAROSET: a condiment made of nuts, wine and other in-

gredients used at the Seder (q. v.).

HASID (pl. HASIDIM): lit. pious man; specifically an adherent of the sect of Hasidim.

HASKALAH: Enlightenment; the liberal movement among the Russian Jews in the19th century.

HAZEFIRAH: The Circuit, name of a Hebrew newspaper.

HAZOT: Prayers read at midnight.

HAZZAN: Cantor.

HEBRAH KADISHA: Society for the burial of the dead.

HEBRAH SHAS: Society for the study of the Talmud.

HEBRAH TEHILLIM: Society for reading the Psalms.

HEDER: Hebrew School (elementary).

HESE-BETT (Shortened from HESEBAH BETT): arrangement for reclining at the Seder (q. v.).

HETER 'ISKA: a form of contract making legal the taking of interest.

HINENI: an introductory prayer sung by the Cantor.

HODU: a Psalm beginning "Praise ye the Lord."

HOL HAMO'ED: The intermediate days of the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles, between the first and the last two days.

HOSHA'ANA (pl. HOSHA'ANOT): willow branch, used in the service on Hosha'ana Rabbah.

HOSHA'ANA RABBAH: the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

HOSHEN MISHPAT: Portion of the Jewish religious code dealing with civil and criminal law.

HOSSEN: bridegroom.

HUMASH: Pentateuch.

HUPPAH: marriage canopy.

HURBAN: Destruction of the Temple.

'ILUY: a prodigy.

IVRI: reading.

KADDISH: prayer for the dead.

KAHAL: Jewish community; congregation.

KALAH: Bride.

KAPPOROH: atonement.

KAPPOROS-SHLOGEN: a rite performed before the Day of Atonement to atone for one's sins.

KASHA: gruel or thick soup made from a kind of barley.

KASHER: ritually fit (of food).

KIDDUSH: the benediction over the wine cup ushering in the Sabbath and holidays.

KOHEN (pl. KOHANIM): priest.

KOL NIDRE: the service on the Eve of Yom Kippur (q. v.); the formula of absolution from vows sung on that occasion.

KOPEK: a penny in Russian money; $^1/_{100}$ of a ruble.

KOSHER: see KASHER.

LAG BA-'OMER: the 33d day of the 'Omer, a minor festival on the 18th day of Iyar.

LEHEM 'ANIYIM SOCIETY: Society to provide bread for the poor.

LILITH: a she-devil; a night demon.

LINAT HAZEDEK: Society for staying over night with a lonely invalid.

LULAB: palm branch, used in the service of the Feast of Booths.

MA'ARIB: evening service.

MAFTIR: the person reading the Haftarah (q. v.); the Haftarah.

MAGGID (pl. MAGGIDIM): an itinerant preacher.

MAHZOR (pl. MAHZORIM): Prayerbook for the holidays.

MALKOT: lashes, stripes.

MAN - OF - THE - EARTH: ignoramus.

MASHAL (pl. MESHALIM): a proverb, an allegory.

MASKIL (pl. MASKILIM): an adherent of the Haskalah (q. v.) Movement.

MAZZAH (pl. MAZZOT): unleavened bread.

MEGILLAH: lit. a roll; specifically applied to the four books of Esther, Lamentations, Ruth and Ecclesiastes, and more specially to Esther.

MEHARSHA: a commentary on the Talmud by the author of that name.

MEIR BA'AL HA-NES FUND: a charitable fund named after Rabbi Meir, a talmudic sage who lived in the 2nd century.

MELAMED: A Hebrew teacher.

MELIZ YOSHER: Advocate, defender.

MESHUMAD (pl. MESHUMADIM): an apostate; a scoundrel.

MESHUMEDES: lit. apostate woman; unbeliever.

MEZUMAN: a quorum of three at table required for a certain form of grace.

MEZUZOT (pl. of MEZUZAH): Pentateuchal inscriptions attached to the door post in accordance with Deuteronomy 6, 9.

MIKVAH: a ritual bath.

MINHAH: afternoon service.

MINYAN (pl. MINYANIM): the quorum of ten required for a communal service.

MISHNAYYOT: same as Mishnah.

MIZVAH: lit. commandment; good deed.

MOHEL: the person who performs the operation of circumcision.

MOKER SEFARIM: Bookseller.

MONDLACH: cakes filled with poppy seed.

MOSER: an informer.

MUSAF: additional morning service on Sabbath and holidays.

NE'ILAH: the closing service on the Day of Atonement.

NESHAMAH YETERAH: additional soul.

ORAH: a traveller; a guest.

OREM BOHUR: poor student.

PAROKET: the curtain before the ark in the Synagogue.

PESAH: Passover.

PIDYON: lit. redemption; charity distributed when a person is ill to bring about his recovery.

PILPUL: talmudic casuistry.

PITTUM: the protuberance of the Etrog.

POI!: Russian word meaning "Sing!"

POREZ: a Russian or Polish nobleman.

PURIM-GELD: money gifts given on Purim.

PURIM SPIEL: a play based on the book of Esther, presented during Purim.

RABA: a sage of the Talmud, fl. 4th century.

RABBOTAI: My Sirs!

RASHI: the Pentateuchal commentary by the author of that name.

REBBEZIN: the rebbi's (q. v.) wife.

REBBI: a Hebrew teacher.

ROSH HASHANAH: New Year's Day.

ROSH HODESH ELUL: the first day of Elul.

ROSH YESHIBAH: the Head of the Yeshibah, the lecturer.

SABBATH-GOY: a non-Jewish attendant who performs certain services for Jews on Sabbaths and holidays which they are forbidden to do themselves.

SANDEK: godfather at a circumcision ceremony.

SEDER: Order of Services and ceremonial at the evening meal on the Eve of Passover.

SEFIRAH: the counting of the 'Omer as prescribed in Lev. 23, 15; the seven weeks during which this counting takes place.

SELIHOT: penitential prayers recited before dawn during the week preceding New Year's.

SHABBAT BERESHIT: The Sabbath after the Feast of Tabernacles.

SHABBAT HAGADOL: the Sabbath preceding Passover.

SHABBAT HAZON: The Sabbath preceding the Fast of the ninth of Ab.

SHABBAT NAHAMU: the Sabbath following the Fast of the ninth of Ab.

SHABBAT SHUBAH: the Sabbath preceding the Day of Atonement.

SHABUOT: Pentecost; Feast of Weeks.

SHADHAN: a marriage broker.

SHALAH MONOS: gifts sent on Purim.

SHALOM 'ALEKEM: Peace be upon you! a form of greeting.

SHAMMASH: Sexton, attendant.

SHEBARIM: name of one of the bars in the Shofar tune.

SHEELAH: tree-sap.

SHELIAH ZIBBUR: the reader of the congregation.

SHEM HAMMEFORASH: the Ineffable Name of God.

SHEMINI 'AZERET: the 8th day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

SHEMURAH: unleavened bread made from specially guarded grain and flour.

SHKOZIM (pl. of SHEKEZ): a gentile lad.

SHNORRER: an idler who lives on charity.

SHOFAR: ram's horn.

SHOHET: authorized slaughterer of animals.

SHUL: synagogue.

SHULHAN ARUK: Jewish religious code.

SIMEON BEN YOHAI: rabbinic sage of the 2nd century.

SUKKAH (pl. SUKKOT): booth, tabernacle.

SUKKOT (pl. of SUKKAH): booths; Feast of Booths.

TALIT: prayer-shawl.

TALMUD TORAH: A Hebrew school supported by the community.

TANAK: Bible, especially the Prophets and Hagiographa.

TEFILAH ZAKKAH: silent prayer read before Kol Nidre.

TEFILIN: phylacteries.

TEHINOT: Supplicatory prayers recited by the women on the high holidays.

TEKI'AH: name of one of the bars in the Shofar tune.

TEREFAH: ritually unfit (of food); forbidden food.

TERU'AH: name of one of the bars in the Shofar tune.

TIKKUN: Prayers read during the night of Shabuot and Hosha'ana Rabbah; also in the house of a person dangerously ill.

TISH'AH BE-AB: the Fast of the ninth of Ab.

TOSAFOT: name of a commentary on the Talmud.

VIDUY: Confession of sin.

WALLACHIAN: a folk tune borrowed and adapted to music by cantors for the Synagogue (derived from the province of Wallachia, Bessarabia).

YEHIDE SEGULAH: the select few.

YESHIBAH: a talmudic college, a school for higher rabbinical learning.

YOM KIPPUR: Day of Atonement.

YOREH DE'AH: Portion of the Jewish religious code dealing with ritual and ceremonial law.

ZADDIK (pl. ZADDIKIM): a pious man.

ZEMAN SIMHATENU: the season of our rejoicing.

ZEMIROT: poetic compositions of praise sung at the meal on the Sabbath.

"ZION": a series of poems of Judah Halevi expressing his love of Zion.

ZUR MISHELO AKALNU: "The Rock of whose food we have eaten," initial words of one of the Zemirot (q. v.).