

THE

JEWES OF BARNOW,

STORIES

BY

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Trans. M.W. Macdowell

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i.e., 1st depiction of EE Jewry



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double source

Polish whip = without
Haxidic superstition = within

→ cemetery as locus of longing

NAMELESS GRAVES. (1873)

THE last time that I went there was on a beautiful, still autumn day. The sunshine was brightening the landscape, and the only sound to be heard was the faint crackling of the withered leaves on the bushes by the wayside. I followed the winding path that ran through the fields and gardens. I was alone, but I knew the place so well that I did not need to ask my way; for I always go there when I revisit my old home, and every year I become more attached to it. Every year the number of acquaintances to whom it leads me grows more numerous; indeed, the day will soon come when none of them will be found in the little town, for all will be there. . . .

It was the "good place" to which I was going; and as this is the only place to which neither the Pole's whip nor the covetous hand of the wondering rabbi can reach, the name is a good one. Here each poor soul is freed from the double ban—and who can count its victims?—that ground him

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Natural Panorama

down, and stifled the good that was in him. He is delivered alike from outward humiliation and from the dark night of ignorance. None of these people could have been called really happy until they died. Then, it is true, they know nothing about it, but they feel that it must be so even while they are alive; so they have given their burial-ground the beautiful name of the "good place," and take care to make it as fair to look upon as they can. It never occurs to the Eastern Jews to plant trees or sow annuals there; but the fresh green grass is allowed to cover the graves, and blossoming elders grow by every headstone. Their burial-ground was the only bit of land these people were allowed to possess until a few years ago! . . .

The "good place" at Barnow is as sweet a spot as is to be found anywhere. I have already described what it was like in late spring when the elders were in blossom, filling the air with a perfume that was almost too powerful, and when the red and purple berries were beginning to show among the leaves. In autumn the bushes are shorn of much of their former beauty, but they are pleasant to look at even then in their own way. The air in September is so wonderfully clear and bright, and the autumnal tints are so vivid, that they lend the somewhat uninteresting landscape a beauty of their own. The moor is never a cheerful place, and it looks more calm and

lyrical landscape

solemn than ever in autumn; but not triste—the heather glows with too deep a red, and the foliage of the limes fades into too soft a yellow for that. Here and there a pond may be seen with its dark, clear waters. Any one going to the burial-ground through country such as this, can not fail, I think, to be impressed with its quiet beauty. But perhaps I am not a good judge of that; perhaps one must have been born in a moorland country to be able to appreciate it. . . .

The "good place" lies on a hill, from which one has an extensive view on all sides. From thence one can see ten ponds, hard by which some villages are situated, whose houses, roofed with brown thatch, resemble collections of bee-hives; and finally, at the foot of the hill is the town, which has a very respectable appearance from there, although, in reality, it is neither more nor less than a wretchedly dirty hole. One is able to breathe more freely when enjoying such an extensive view, such a wide horizon-line. For to east, north, and south the only limit is the sky, and on gray days the same is the case to the west. // But when the air is clear and bright, one can see what looks like a curiously-shaped blue-gray bank of cloud on the western horizon. On seeing it for the first time one is inclined to believe that a storm is brewing there. But the cloud neither increases nor decreases in size, and though its out-

still beautiful only from afar!

Mts.

line may seem to shift now and then, it stands fast for ever—it is the Carpathian range of mountains. . . .

But it is beautiful close to where one is standing also. It is true that the queer, twisted branches of the elders are now leafless and bare of blossom and fruit, but they are interlaced with a delicate network of spiders' webs that tremble and glow with prismatic colors in the sunlight. Their deep-red leaves cover the graves, and between the hillocks are flowering asters. The graves are well cared for; the Jewish people have a great reverence for the majesty of Death.

To the Jews, Death is a mighty and somewhat stern ruler, who is kindly disposed to poor humanity, and draws them to him in mercy. These people do not like to die, but death is easier and pleasanter to them than to others, for their belief in immortality is more absolute than that of any other nation. This belief is not merely founded on self-love, but on love to God. Is not God all-just? and where would be His justice if He did not requite them in the other world for all the misery heaped upon them while they lived on earth? And yet they cling to this earth, and regard all the blessedness of heaven as a state of transition, a preparation and foretaste of the fuller blessedness of earth after the coming of the Messiah. It is therefore serving God to bury the dead. It is therefore serving God to tend the

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excursus
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Memorial to tragic past: 400 victims of Polish nobility - historical excursus

same hour—it is an unspeakable history. Wet? no! drowned in blood and tears! And it all came from a contemporaneous desire for the exercise of the virtue of humanity! During the time that the Polish kings had power in the land, the Jagellons protected the Jews, who paid them tribute in return. But as the royal authority became of less and less account—still existent, more because it refused to die than because any remnant of power remained to it—the Waywodes, and in the flat land the Starosts, snatched at the chance of taking the Jews under their protection; they were one and all so filled to overflowing with the milk of human kindness. A large and rich Jewish community lived in Barnow, so it was regarded as doing God good service to take care of so great a number of men who were capable of paying considerable taxes with ease. Two Starosts—those of Tulste and of Old Barnow—drew up in battle array, one at each side of the town, and each sent a message to the following effect to the Jewish community: "If you do not choose me as your protector, I shall at once put you and your possessions to fire and sword." The unfortunate Jews had not much time granted them in which to deliberate; they quickly gathered together all the ready money that they could, and bought the protection of both. This conduct brought down further misfortunes upon the poor people. The Starosts were both philanthropists, and both wished to fulfill the duty they had under-

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graves of those who are gone. Even the oldest and most weather-beaten gravestone is propped up and steadied by some great-grandson, or perhaps one who was no blood relation of the deceased, and who was only moved to do it because the sleeper had once been a man like himself who had felt the joys and sorrows of humanity. He was a Jew, and he should find his resting-place in order when the trumpet should sound. (Some people may look upon this belief as ludicrous, but I could never feel it so. . . .)

apologia

One's heart and mind are full of many thoughts as one wanders up the hill between the rows of graves. I do not mean those eternal questions which one generation inherits as a legacy of torment from those that have preceded it, and to which only fools suppose they can give an adequate answer. Verily, we all hope for such an answer, for we are all fools, poor fools, with an eternal bandage covering our eyes, and an eternal thirst for knowledge filling our spirits. But why touch unnecessarily on such deep subjects? I mean questions of a different kind from these. //Whoever, for example, walks through that part of the cemetery where the hill slopes down gently to the plain below, near the river, can not help thinking of the evil consequences of two Polish nobles determining to show themselves humane at the same time. On four hundred headstones the same year is chiseled as the date of death—the same year, the same day, the

taken. Neither trusted the other with a work of such importance, and each determined to put his rival to the proof; so the Starost of Old Barnow began to murder and plunder the Jews at one end of the town, and then waited to see whether the other would do his duty and protect his protégés. But, unfortunately, his rival was equally determined to try the worth of his promises, and had been doing exactly the same at the other end. Thus neither gained his object. Good men seldom attain what they strive for! The terrible carnage lasted for three days and three nights. . . .

The mild autumn sunshine falls as softly on the graves of these murdered people as elsewhere, and the asters are larger and more perfect between these closely massed hillocks; the grasshoppers chirp merrily in the grass and moss that cover them, and the autumn threads spun by the busy spider wave to and fro in the gentle breeze. Peace and quiet reign here also—a peace as restful as in any other part of the "good place;" and yet it seems to me as though a sudden cry must arise from these graves, as though a piercing, agonized cry must break the stillness of all around; and that cry would not be one of mourning, but of accusation, and not alone of the Starosts of Tulste and Old Barnow.

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There are many other graves besides these that bear the same date . . . those, for instance, that were filled in the days when a Czartoryski hunted

the Jews because there was so little game left in the neighborhood. And then, again, in this very century, in those three terrible summers when the wrath of God—the cholera—raged throughout the great plain. Grass makes more resistance against the scythe than these people did, in their narrow pestiferous streets, against the great plague. The graves are innumerable, and the field in which they lie is a very large one; but the community now living in Barnow is much smaller than one would think on seeing the cemetery. But the very poorest creature who is given a resting-place and headstone there, has it in perpetuity; none will disturb his rest until, as they say, the last trumpet sounds. . . .

The headstone on every grave is of the same shape. No eccentric monumental tablets are to be seen, and no artistically carved figure is represented on any of the gravestones—the Jewish faith forbids all such adornments. The only difference in these stones lies in the fact that those of the poor are small, and those of the rich large; that the inscription on the poor man's headstone shows him to have been an honest man, and that on the rich man's makes him out to have been the noblest man who ever lived—that is all; for even the arrangement of the inscription is strictly ordained in the Talmudim. The insignia of the tribe is put first, then the name of the deceased, followed by those of his parents, and after that his

occupation in life. Sometimes this last is passed over in silence, for "usurer" or "informer" would not look well upon a tomb, to say nothing of worse things. In such cases the friends content themselves with putting, "He was indefatigable in the study of his religion, and loved his children"—and, as a rule, this was true.

Whoever reads these inscriptions will see that he need go no further in search of the island of the blessed, or of the garden of Eden, where angels walk about in human form—that is to say, if he believes the inscriptions. The Semitic race goes further in showing reverence for the dead than any other. The Romans contented themselves with "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*" They demanded that the dead should be spoken of with kindness and respect, maintaining that such conduct was only seemly in face of the majesty of death and the helplessness of the dead. The Semites go further than this: they exact that only good should be spoken of the dead. And if any man is so terrible a sinner that no good is to be found in him, they keep silence regarding him. . . .

They keep silence. The worst anathema known to this people is, "His name shall be blotted out." And so in such cases they do not inscribe his name upon his headstone. There is many a nameless grave in Podolian burial-grounds. This is meant as a punishment, as a requital of the evil the man had done while on earth.

And, again, it is meant in mercy: for on the day when the kingdom of God shall come, the heavenly trumpets can not alone waken the sleepers; the angel of eternal life is to do that. He will go from stone to stone, and call the dead by the name inscribed on the headstone—the righteous to unspeakable blessedness, and the wicked to unspeakable punishment. If no name is carved upon the stone, he will perhaps pass on without arousing the sleeper. Perhaps!—all hope that it may be so, in mercy to the sinner! . . .

There are many nameless graves in the "good place" at Barnow, and in some cases the punishment may have been well deserved. It is often the hardest that has reached the criminal. The black deed has been done, and the darkness of the Ghetto hid the crime. The Podolian Jews fear the world, and a Christian is supreme in the imperial court of justice. They do not like to deliver their sinful brother into the hands of an alien. They punish him themselves as they best can: he must spend much money on good objects, or make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, or fast every second day for years. His crime is hidden as long as he lives, and it is only after his death that it is discovered.

Some very curious things are also looked upon as crimes, and punished in the same way. Whoever hears of such can hardly help asking a very bitter question—a very ancient and grimly bitter question,

that can never die out as long as the human race continues to exist on the face of the earth. . . .

For example, an old beggar once formed part of the Jewish community at Barnow—a discharged soldier who had been crippled in the wars. No one did anything for him. The Christians would not help him because he was a Jew, and the Jews would not do it because he had eaten Christian food for so long, and because he was in the habit of swearing most blasphemously. Perhaps neither of these sins was entirely his own fault: for no army in the world has ever put its commissariat under the charge of a rabbi since the Maccabees fell asleep; and as for profane swearing, it may be as much part and parcel of an old soldier as an acorn is of an oak. But, however that may be, his co-religionists took both of these circumstances in very bad part, and provided him with nothing but daily lumps of black bread, and on Friday afternoons with seven krentzers. Even an old beggar could not live properly in Barnow on so small an allowance, and the poor old man suffered frequently from the pangs of hunger. So when the Day of Atonement came round again—the strictest fast-day in the whole year—he found no pleasure in abstaining from food, for hunger was no unusual feeling with him. He was discovered on that day behind a pillar of the bridge with a bit of sausage in his hand. He was not ill-treated, nor was his allow-

ance diminished: and yet fate would have been kind to him had he died in that hour: for were I to relate all that happened to the old man, I think that the hardest heart could not fail to be touched. But fate is seldom kind: he lived for many years. When he died, his rich relations put a headstone on his grave, but left it blank. But I think—I think, that the dead soldier is not nearly so much pained by this, as he was by much that they did to him when he was alive. . . .

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Close to the old soldier sleeps a man who met with a like fate. A very strange man he was—Chaim Lippener by name, and by trade a shoemaker. People who follow that trade have often a great liking for philosophical speculation, perhaps because of the sedentary life they lead. Our Chaim was also a philosopher after his own fashion. He never rose above the basis of all investigation—doubt; and his favorite expression was, "Who knows the truth?" As the pale little man felt himself unable to answer the question by means of speculation, he determined to try whether experience could not help him. He went from one sect to the other—from the "Chassidim," or enthusiasts, to the "Misnagdim," who were zealous for the Scriptures; then he joined the former again, and afterward went over to the "Karaites." Then he took refuge under the banner of the wonder-working rabbi of Sadagóra, after which he remained

from curiosity, for every one wanted to know what penance the rabbi and the council would impose upon the sinner. The congregation did not disperse as usual after the conclusion of the service. The council took their plans. But the culprit was not there, for the excitement and the beating he had undergone had proved too much for his feeble strength—he had fallen ill. As his presence was necessary, some men were sent to fetch him. They brought him on a mattress. A great clamor arose as he was borne up the aisle, and all those who stood near relieved their hearts by spitting upon him. Then the rabbi commanded silence, and began a long speech, in which the place where eternal darkness and eternal cold reign, the place to which the wicked are relegated after death, took a prominent part. Having thus spoken, he turned to the accused and asked him what he had to say in his own favor. But whether it was that the sick man could not speak, or that he had nothing to say, none can tell—he remained silent, and only shook his head. This conduct increased the general indignation; the rabbi made a solemn remonstrance, and the others spat upon the offender. At length the little man raised himself upon his pillows, looked at the zealots with quiet earnestness, and began to speak. The words he uttered were few, and consisted merely of his favorite question, "Who knows the truth?" The

among the "Aschkenasim"—those are in favor of German culture—for a year, and finally became a Cabalist. This he was for a long time; and as his boots and shoes were good and well-made, people troubled themselves very little about his midnight studies and his profoundly mystical talk. But one cold, white moonlight night, when some men who had remained until an unusually late hour at the wine-shop were returning home, they found a man kneeling motionlessly in the snow at the foot of the great crucifix at the Dominican monastery, his arms stretched out as though to embrace the Christ. They stood still and gazed at the unwonted sight in astonishment, but their surprise was changed into horror when they saw that the solitary worshiper was none other than Chaim. They drew nearer, but he did not hear their footsteps. Suddenly he began to speak aloud, and in a sobbing, tremulous voice uttered a prayer in the holy language: it was the blessing which is prescribed to the traveler when he sees the sun rise as he journeys along. The listeners were at once filled with pious wrath; they threw themselves upon the little man, beat him unmercifully, and chased him home. Next morning there was great excitement in the "Gasse;" even the most indifferent went up to the synagogue to pray, partly from religious motives, to entreat God not to avenge the sin of the individual upon the community—and partly

scene that followed may easily be imagined. Those men who were not carried away by fanatical zeal, protected Chaim with their own bodies: had they not done so, his offense had been washed out in his blood then and there. At last, quiet being restored, the rabbi was able to pronounce judgment. I do not remember what the fine imposed on Chaim Lippener amounted to; but so much I know, that he had to leave wife and child, and set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, from whence he was never to return. He was commanded to tell every community he passed on the way what he had done, and to request them to kick him and spit upon him.

He was never able to set out on his pilgrimage, for he fell into a decline, and faded away like snow before the sun. He prayed so much during the last months of his illness, that every one was convinced that he was converted, and had turned from the error of his ways. I am the only person who knew better; and as it can no longer injure Chaim to tell the truth, I will now do so.

When I came home for the holidays in July, his wife came and asked me to go and see him, but begged that it might be in the evening, that no one might notice it. I did so. The sick man was very weak, but he had an immense folio volume resting on his knees, in which he was reading eagerly. After making long and rather confused excuses for the

trouble he had given me, he said that he wanted to know whether it was true that the Christians had Holy Scriptures as well as the Jews. When I told him that they had, he begged me to try and get him the book. This request affected me curiously, almost painfully; but it was the wish of a dying man, and—"Who knows the truth?" I found some difficulty in fulfilling my promise, for Chaim could only read Hebrew. I sent to Vienna for a translation the English Bible Society had made for mission purposes in Palestine. The book was a fortnight in coming, and when it arrived I could not give it to the man; but it did not matter, for he probably knew more then, than he could have learned from that book and all the books in the world. . . .

Ah yes! these were strange, very strange, crimes. On that autumn day, as I stood beside the two graves, I felt inclined to stoop down and say to the dead: "Forgive your poor brothers; do not be angry with them, for they know not what they do!" . . .

What a peculiar history the Jews have had! Their strong religion, founded on a rock, was once a protection to them, and saved them from the axes and clubs of their enemies. They would have been destroyed without that protection, for the blows aimed at them were heavy and hard to parry; and for that very reason, they clung to it the more tenaciously, until at last, instead of enlightening their hearts, they

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dead are generally buried next to each other as their turn comes to die. A family seldom has a plot of ground set apart for itself—very seldom; for all who sleep here are members of the same family.

An exception had been made with regard to this grave. Not another headstone was to be seen far and wide; but to the right and left of it, as close to it as possible, were two other graves—small graves, unmarked by aught save the tiny hillocks they made. So small were they, that one could scarcely see them under their covering of juniper-bushes and red heather.

It was easy to guess who slept there: little boys who had died before they were eight days old, before they had been given a name; and she who lay between them must have been their mother, for the headstone was that of a woman—one could tell that from its shape.

Hitherto men alone had been given nameless graves, because they alone commit crimes, whether real or imaginary. The Jewish woman is good and pious. It was the first woman's grave I had ever seen with a blank headstone.

What had she done?

I puzzled long in the calm sunny stillness of that autumn day. I made up one story after another, each more extraordinary than the preceding one, to account for it; but again I was to learn that truth is often stranger than fiction.

critique
made of it a bandage for their eyes. They were not so much to be pitied for this long ago, for then all the world went about with their eyes bandaged. But now, when the light of day is shining in the West, and the dawn has at last broken in the East, they have not raised the bandage one inch. I do not want them to do it too quickly, nor do I want them to throw away their faith; I only desire that they should open their eyes to the light which is shining more and more around them. . . .

It must be so; and it will be so. Necessity is the only divinity in which one can believe without doubting or despairing.

Light will come to them; but no one can tell how long the light will last, or count the victims it will destroy.

It is only by accident one hears of them. The living are silent, and the graves are silent, especially those that are nameless. The history of those nameless graves may be shown by a mark of interrogation, hard but not impossible to decipher.

My curiosity was excited by the last of those blank headstones set up in the cemetery at Barnow. I found it the last time I went there on the beautiful September afternoon I have before described.

It was a solitary grave standing apart from the rest. It lay in the hollow near the river, and close to the broken hedge. This in itself was strange, for the

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As I sat thinking on the grave, looking from me, and hardly seeing the rainbow tints that the clouds of dancing insects took in the clear air whenever a ray of sunshine touched their wings, I suddenly heard the monotonous drawling sound of mournful voices, and looking up, saw two old men advancing toward me along the hedgerow.

They were busied in the exercise of a pious rite that I had not seen for so long, that, now that I saw it again, it struck me as it would have struck a stranger. Each of the men was carrying a short yellow wooden stick in his right hand, and round each of the sticks a thread was wound closely and thickly, uniting them to each other; for one end of the thread was wound round one stick, and the other end was wound round the other stick. Whenever the men stood still, they held the two sticks close together, and sang their strange duet in mournful unison. Then one of them ceased singing, held his stick perpendicularly, and stood as though rooted to the spot; while the other walked on slowly and gravely by the side of the hedge, singing in high nasal tones, and unwinding the thread as he went, in such a manner as to keep it straight and tight. After having gone about thirty paces, he stood still and silent. The other, meanwhile, began to advance toward him, singing in his turn, and winding up the thread, so that the ball on the one stick grew larger

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and larger, while that on the other stick grew smaller. Thus there were alternately one duet and two solos.

This is called "measuring the boundaries;" and although it is only done after this fashion in some of the Podolian cemeteries, it is yet done in some way or other wherever the Jews are to be found. On the anniversary of the day on which a near and dear relation has deceased, it is the custom to measure the borders of the burial-ground in which he rests with a thread, that is afterward used for some pious purpose, such as to form the wick of candles offered in sacrifice, or to sew a prayer-mantle. The custom is the outcome of a sad gloomy symbolism, but it would take up too much room were I to attempt to explain it.

I watched the men for a time, and then went up to them, and asked whose was the grave that had interested me.

They looked at me mistrustfully.

"Why do you ask?" one of them at length answered, with hesitation.

"Because I want to know."

"And why do you want to know?"

A direct answer would have been too long, so I made him an indirect and shorter reply.

One of the two worthy but extremely dirty old men—so dirty that one looked at them in wonder—had a very red nose—a circumstance from which one

might infer that he was subject to constant thirst, and was of a cheerful disposition. It is always easy to make one's self understood by a person of that kind.

I looked at the man smilingly, as though he were an old friend, and at the same time put my hand in my pocket. . . . "Well—who is it?" I asked.

He watched my movements with visible interest, but did not give way as yet.

"Isn't the name engraved upon the stone?" he inquired.

"I should not have asked you what it was if it had been there."

"Why isn't it there?"

My hand came out of my pocket, but the old man was not yet gained over.

"Why?" he repeated; "because it is a sin even to think of the name of her who lies there! Why should I sin by telling you what it is? why should you sin by listening to it? why should Reb Nathan here sin by listening to us both?"

"Money spent on the poor will wash out the sin," I replied calmly, pressing something into the old man's hand.

But the venerable gentleman was evidently very particular about any matter that might affect the salvation of his soul, so he counted the silver I had given him in a whisper, as if to make sure that I had

given him enough. His face now expressed satisfaction; but Reb Nathan, in his turn, began to feel uneasy. He might easily have gone away, and so escaped the sin of listening; but instead of that, he chose another course of action, although he had not a red nose.

When these preliminaries were all settled, the first said, "Whose grave is that?" and the other answered, "Lea Rendar's." Which, being interpreted, means, "Lea, the daughter of the innkeeper, lies there." But I still looked inquiringly at the two men.

"Every one knew her!" they exclaimed, in astonishment. "Lea of the yellow Karezma (inn); the wife of Long Ruben, who lives near the town-hall; Lea with the long hair."

I knew now whom they meant, and my curiosity was turned into an anxious interest.

"What! she was a sinner?" I cried, in amazement.

"Was she a sinner?" exclaimed Reb Abraham, the red-nosed man. "Could there have been a greater than she? No: there never was a greater! She trod the law under her feet! And who will be damned for it? She and her husband—Ruben of the town-hall! For had he not permitted it, the transgression had never been perpetrated."

"Another person will also be damned for her sin,"

cried Reb Nathan—"Gawriel Rendar, her father; for if he had brought her up differently, she would never have committed such a trespass against the law."

"Ah, yes, of course," assented Abraham. Then, seized with a sudden revulsion of feeling, he pitied the man in whose house his nose had gained its rosy hue, and added more gently: "Perhaps the Almighty may forgive Gawriel after all. How could the poor father ever have guessed that she would do such a horrible thing? None of Jewish birth could ever have thought it! But as for Ruben—that's different; he is certainly condemned!"

"Was the crime really so terrible?"

"Terrible, did you say?—most abominable! Didn't you hear of it? An extraordinary story!—a most remarkable and unheard-of story!"

They then told me this "remarkable and unheard-of story." And truly it deserved the adjectives they applied to it, although in a different sense from that in which they used them.

(I can hardly describe my feelings as I write down what I then heard. In the first place, the whole affair sounds so incredible. Only those few people in the West who have a slight knowledge of this ignorant fanatical Eastern Judaism, will be able to comprehend that such things can really be. All others will shake their heads. I can only say that it is a true story;

Vouches for its truthfulness

I did not invent it: it really took place. Besides that, the story is a very sad one. It fills one with sorrow when one thinks of it. . . .

Lea was a very lovely girl. She did not inherit her beauty from either of her parents; for her mother was a dumpy, little red-faced woman, and Gawriel Rendar, landlord of the large yellow inn on the way to Old Barnow, was an awkward giant with a muddy complexion, and a face much pitted with small-pox. The two sons, who hung about the house, were by no means ornamental members of society. In short, they were a rascally-looking lot, and their chief occupation was to provide bad spirits for the thirsty, and fling those who had imbibed too much of the villainous compound they sold out-of-doors in a rough-and-ready manner. It was in this house and among these people that the loveliest, merriest child grew up into a gentle modest girl. Lea Bergheimer was more like a sunbeam than any one I ever knew.

Her head was crowned with a wealth of shining golden hair. A Jewess is seldom fair; and when she happens to be so, is, as a general rule, anything but good-looking. The beautiful women of this race have either brown or black hair. But Lea was an exception. Indeed, she was not at all of the Jewish type except in her slender, upright, graceful figure.

Her face was of the highest Germanic type: small, delicate features, rosy cheeks, and deep violet eyes.

The expression of her face was bright and intelligent. There is a seventeenth-century picture in one of the side rooms of the Belvedere at Vienna of a Viennese burgher maiden painted by an Italian. The original was a German girl, but the artist has given her face the impress of the "spirit, fire, and dew" that animate so many Southern natures. That picture might have been a portrait of Lea, the resemblance to her was so strong.

The darkest place may be lighted by a sunbeam; so pretty Lea brought light and joy into the noisy inn. It is scarcely necessary to say how devoted her parents and brothers were to her, and how in their awkward way they delighted to do her honor, watching over her and anticipating her slightest wish in the most touching way. Old Gawriel was well-to-do in the world, for his spirit-shop stood in a central place, and no landlord in Podolia understood better than he the art of watering schnapps, and of doubling the chalked score of any one who went upon tick. But he spent so much upon Lea, that it was really wonderful that he was able to lay by anything. He did not have the girl educated—she learned nothing but what Jewish women in Eastern Europe are taught; but he used to dress her on week-days as rich men did not dress their daughters on New-Year's day.

Her family had unintentionally done their best to

make her vain and coquettish. And other people had done their part; the women through their jealousy, and the men through their admiration. Lea awakened feelings in the hearts of the young men of Barnow such as were seldom to be found there. For, as a general rule, the long-haired Jewish youth never even thinks of any girl until his father tells him that he has chosen a wife for him. He sometimes sees his bride for the first time at his betrothal, but in a great many cases he does not see her until his marriage-day; and then, whether she pleases him or not, he makes up his mind to get used to her, and generally succeeds. But many thought of Lea; and as she walked down the street, people would turn and look at her—a thing hitherto unknown. Even in the "Klaus," where the quiet, dreamy, and very dirty Talmudists bent over their heavy folios, her name was sometimes mentioned, followed by many a deep sigh.

Beautiful Lea knew nothing of this. But other people took care that she should not remain in doubt as to whether she pleased them or not. The school-boys who came home to Barnow for the holidays were all in love with her and Esterka Regina, another beautiful Jewish girl whose life was a sad one. Then there were the young nobles, who were in the habit of stopping at the door of Gawriel's inn for a glass of schnapps and a little conversation. But the boldest of all were the hussar officers, who got into the habit

of spending hours in the bar-room, without making any way with the girl.

Lea was vain, but she was thoroughly good and modest. Jewish women are, as a rule, kind, charitable, and sympathetic with others; but Lea was even more so than the generality—so the poor used to bless her and reverence her. The girl's great weakness was, that she was in love with her own beauty, and especially with that of her splendid hair. When she loosened her heavy plaits, her hair used to infold her like a mantle of cloth-of-gold, descending to her knees—a mantle of which any queen would have been proud. It was this that gained for her her nickname of "Lea with the long hair." . . .

The Jews of Barnow were firmly convinced that Lea would never marry. The women hoped and the men feared that it would be so. She grew up, was seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old, and yet had never deemed any of her suitors worthy of her hand. Such a thing was unheard of among the Podolian Jews, who usually marry at a very early age. But old Gawriel acted differently from most fathers—he let his daughter decide her own fate.

Lea's answer to all her suitors was a short, resolute "No." And after the day when Josef Purzelbaum was dismissed in like fashion, although he was the son of the richest man in the whole district—and also little Chaim Machmirdas, who was nearly connected

by marriage with the great rabbi of Sadagóra—no other suitor ventured to come forward. The rejection of a member of the holy family of Sadagóra filled every one with amazement, and many looked upon it as tantamount to blasphemy. But Lea was not to be moved, and continued to drive the match-makers to despair. In the end these good people scarcely dared to set foot in the inn, although there are no quieter and more considerate men in the world than the Jewish match-makers in Podolia. But one of them, Herr Itzig Türkischgelb, used to say: "I am an old man, but I have not yet given up the hope of living to see Lea's marriage and the coming of the Messiah. But, truly, I think the latter will take place first." Itzig Türkischgelb always liked his joke.

At last Lea's engagement was announced. And when the name of the fortunate suitor was made known, the astonishment of all was even greater than at the fact of the engagement. For Ruben Rosenmann—or Ruben of the town-hall, as he was called, because of the position of his shop—was neither rich nor of a pious family; and besides that he was a widower. He was a handsome man, tall and dignified, and of a grave and serious disposition. He was particular about his dress, and wore his caftan about a span shorter than any one else. He had spent two years in a large town called Brody, and had learned to read, speak, and write High German. Perhaps this

was the reason that he was looked upon as a free-thinker, which he certainly was not, for he followed all the commands, not only of religion, but also of superstition, with a slavish obedience.

When Lea was asked why she had chosen him of all people, her only answer was, "Because I like him." It was an unheard-of reason for a Podolian Jewess to give: so no one believed that it could be the real reason. Many questions were asked of the match-makers, but they could throw no light on the subject. Even Türkischgelb had to confess that this engagement was not brought about by his diplomacy. Ruben had sent him to Lea; but the girl had refused to listen to him, saying, "Let him come and speak to me himself if he has anything to say."

Ruben went to see her. The two young people had a long conversation that lasted fully two hours. No one, not even the girl's parents, knew what they had talked about during their interview. But old Gawriel heard Ruben say in a loud impressive voice: "Very well—if you have set your heart upon it, I consent. It is not a sin in the sight of God, although our people regard it as such. Keep your secret carefully; for, were it discovered, it would cause the destruction of us both." The father tried in vain to persuade Lea to tell him her secret.

The marriage took place soon afterward. Lea was lovelier than ever as she stood under the "trau-

himmel." And yet her richest ornament, her golden hair, was wanting. No married woman is allowed to wear her own hair, which is always cut short, and sometimes even shaved, before the wedding. The head is then covered with a high erection made of wool or silk, called a *scheitel*. Stern and ancient custom demands this. For a married woman to wear her own hair, would not merely be regarded as immodest, but as a terrible sin against God. Lea permitted no one to lay a finger on her hair, but locking herself into her room, cut it off with her own hands. . . .

Contrary to expectation, the marriage was a happy one; and more wonderful still, Lea was a humble, obedient wife. The most envious could not deny that Ruben was a lucky fellow. No one knew it better than he did, and, when he heard that Lea hoped soon to be a mother, his joy knew no bounds. But, unfortunately, this hope was not fulfilled; the child was born dead, and before it was expected. The doctor said it was in consequence of a chill from which Lea had been suffering; but the rabbi of Barnow was of a different opinion. He sent for Lea, and asked if she had not broken some commandment in secret, and so brought down upon herself the judgment of God. Lea turned very pale, but answered firmly, "No, rabbi."

This happened in spring. One autumn day, a

year and a half afterward, Lea had a son; but it only lived six days. The doctor said it had died of apoplexy, like many other new-born babies. Lea wept bitterly; but when the rabbi came to her and repeated the question he had before asked her, she again answered shortly and firmly, "No, rabbi."

In the following summer Lea knew that she was to become a mother for the third time. She felt oppressed by a foreboding that the same sorrow as before would come to her. She took every precaution, and Ruben watched over her anxiously and tenderly. But when the Day of Atonement came round, she insisted on spending the whole day in the synagogue fasting, in spite of her husband's remonstrances and the doctor's having forbidden her to do so.

That was the cause of her destruction.

The old synagogue was dreadfully close that day, and worse than close; it was filled with a most disagreeable and sickening odor of candles, and of an uncleanly congregation that had spent hours within its walls praying and weeping. It was an atmosphere in which the strongest person might have been overcome with faintness; so that its effects on a delicate woman in Lea's condition may be readily imagined. Her head began to swim, and, uttering a low cry, she fell from her prayer-stool in a swoon.

The women quickly surrounded her, and tried to

bring her to herself. They loosened her dress, and thrust two or three smelling-bottles under her nose at the same time.

All at once they started back: a wild shriek from a hundred throats echoed through the building; it was followed by silence—the silence of dread. . . .

Lea's *scheitel* had become displaced, and her glorious hair, which had been confined within the *scheitel*, flowed over her shoulders, and crowned her pale beautiful face as with a golden halo.

That was Lea's secret.

The scene that followed can not be described; an idea of it can hardly be conveyed to a stranger. The stillness was broken by wild shouts of rage, curses, and struggling. Quick as lightning the news flew to the body of the synagogue, where the men were praying; and its effect was the same there as in the women's part. At first horror and astonishment produced an intense stillness; then the men seemed filled with an insane fury, and rushed into the women's "school." Had Lea just confessed that she had murdered her children—and the Jews regarded infanticide as the worst of crimes, as even more wicked than parricide—their wrath could not have been greater. But in the eyes of these ignorant, superstitious people, Lea's hair had borne silent witness that she was indeed guilty! . . .

It was the holiest day in the year, and she against

whom their wrath was raised was a weak woman, and was, moreover, in a condition that ought to have pleaded for her with the most savage of men. But who knows how far pious zeal might not have led these fanatics? It had often before carried them to incredible lengths. Ruben forced his way through the ranks of infuriated men, his anger and pain giving him strength to do so. He lifted his wife like a child, and, supporting her with his left arm, pushed a way for himself and her through the crowd by a vigorous use of his right arm. He then rushed down-stairs, and home through the streets, pursued by the curses of his co-religionists. The October wind blew his wife's hair sharply in his pale face as he ran, and almost blinded him.

Lea soon recovered from her faint; but when she looked round and saw her hair hanging about her like a cloud, she shrieked out, and fell into violent convulsions. The doctor hastened to her; but he only succeeded in saving the life of the mother, not that of the child. Next morning the Jews of Barnow told each other that the judgment of God had fallen upon the sinner for the third time.

Ruben was as though petrified with grief. And when he was summoned before the rabbi in council that very morning, he obeyed the mandate as calmly as if he had not been the culprit to be tried. He returned no answer to the curses that were heaped

upon him, and, when put upon his defense, gave short and bold replies to the questions addressed to him. He was asked whether he had known of his wife's sin. Yes, he said, he had. Why had he suffered her to commit such a wickedness? Because it was not wicked in his eyes. Did he recognize what had now befallen him as a judgment of God? No; because he believed in an all-wise, all-merciful God. Would he at least consent to cut off his wife's hair now? No, for that would be breaking the promise he had made her when they were engaged. Did he know the punishment he was bringing upon himself by continuing in his sin? He did, and would know how to bear it.

This punishment was the "great *cherem*," or excommunication—the worst punishment that the community could inflict upon one of its members. Whoever is thus excluded from the congregation is outlawed by them, and it is regarded as a good deed to do him as much harm as possible, both socially and in his business relations. Neither he nor anything that belonged to him might be touched except in enmity; his presence could only be permitted with the object of doing him an injury. *Cherem* loosens the holiest ties, and what in other cases would be a terrible sin is, under such circumstances, regarded as a sacred duty—the wife may forsake her husband, the son may raise his hand against his father.

bête noire of Mendelssohn

It is a war of all against one—a merciless war, in which all means of attack are admissible. No love, no friendship, can venture to break down the barrier of excommunication, contempt, and loathing that incloses the culprit. It is a fate too awful to contemplate, a punishment terrible enough to break the most iron will. He who falls under this ban, generally hastens to make his peace with the rabbi on any terms, however humiliating.

Ruben thought this too high a price to pay, although he felt the curse of the excommunication doubly, both in his person and his work. No customers came to his shop. But he did not give way. He turned for protection to those who were bound to help him, and appealed to the imperial court of justice in Barnow. It is a punishable offense in Austria to use the *cherem* as a means of extortion; and, in the best case, when there is real and just cause for the infliction of punishment on an offender, it is nothing but an audacious attempt of a community to arrogate to itself the functions of the state. The sympathy of Herr Julko von Negrusz, district judge of Barnow, was aroused by Ruben's tale, and he did what he could to help him; but naturally he could not do much. He summoned the rabbi before his court, and punished every injury or indignity that was put upon Ruben which could be proved against any one in particular. But in most cases

the mischief was done in the dead of night, and the prosecution of the rabbi only served to increase the fanatical rage of the people. As for the shop, Herr von Negrusz had no power to force any one to buy their sugar and coffee from Ruben if they did not wish to do so.

The war of parties lasted all winter, and well into the spring. In April the rabbi was sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment. When he was set free, the community showed their joy by illuminating the streets and breaking Ruben's windows; otherwise, nothing was changed—Ruben remained firm. He was growing visibly poorer. His father-in-law continually entreated him to give way, but in vain. More than that, Lea, who had wept away all her youth and beauty during that terrible winter, and who, now that the spring was come, knew that she was again to become a mother, entreated her husband to allow her to cut off her hair. Perhaps the poor woman had been so influenced by the superstition of her neighbors, that she had really begun to think that it might cause the death of her child were she to continue to wear it. But Ruben shook his head sternly, and answered—"No; keep your hair; and if there is a God, He will not desert us—He will give me the victory."

In most cases it is a dangerous thing to place one's belief in the existence of God on the answer to a ques-

Then he went away. Many years have passed away since then. He, probably, has also found rest, and sleeps away the dark sorrows of his life in some other corner of the world.

I have already described Lea's grave, and there is nothing more to be said.

I must add a few words in conclusion, that come from the bottom of my heart:

Forgive them, be not angry with them, for they know not what they do!

From: Abraham Cahan, Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom and other stories of Yiddish New York (NY: Dover Publications, 1970).

tion such as this. It was so here: Ruben was conquered. What remains to be told I will relate in as few words as possible. . . .

In the following November another son was born to Lea. The child was a strong, healthy little fellow, and the mother's heart was at rest about him. Six days passed; then the rabbi summoned his most faithful adherents to his presence. "The father is under the ban of *cherem*, and the mother wears her own hair; but the child is innocent. If we remain idle, the child must die as his brother died, because the mother continues to sin."

This was what the rabbi said—that is to say, it was probably he who spoke; but the originator of the horrible deed was never discovered. This was the deed of darkness perpetrated by the zealots.

About midnight of the sixth day after the baby's birth, some masked men burst into Ruben's house, overpowered both him and the nurse, dragged Lea out of bed, and cut off her hair.

Two days later Lea died in consequence of the fright she had had. The child, which had taken a fit soon after the men had broken into the house, died a few hours before its mother.

Ruben remained at Barnow until the judicial examination was over, although he hoped but little from it; for when the Jews are determined to be silent, no power on earth can make them speak.

1. Flora & Her Father

The Imported Bridegroom

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I

Flora was alone in the back parlor, which she had appropriated for a sort of boudoir. She sat in her rocker, in front of the parlor stove, absorbed in *Little Dorrit*. Her well-groomed girlish form was enveloped in a kindly warmth whose tender embrace tinged her interest in the narrative with a triumphant consciousness of the snowstorm outside.

Little by little the rigid afternoon light began to fade into a melancholy gray. Dusk was creeping into the room in almost visible waves. Flora let the book rest on her lap and fixed her gaze on the twinkling scarlet of the stove-glass. The thickening twilight, the warmth of the apartment, and the atmosphere of the novel blended together, and for some moments Flora felt far away from herself.

She was the only girl of her circle who would read Dickens, Scott, or Thackeray in addition to the *Family Story Paper* and the *Fireside Companion*, which were the exclusive literary purveyors to her former classmates at the Chrystie Street Grammar School. There were a piano and a neat little library in her room.

She was rather tall and well formed. Her oblong ivory face, accentuated by a mass of unruly hair of a lusterless black, was never deserted by a faint glimmer of a smile, at once pensive and arch. When she broke into one of her hearty, good-natured laughs, her deep, dark, appealing eyes would seem filled with grief. Her nose, a trifle too precipitous, gave an un-

props of refinement

expected tone to the extreme picturesqueness of the whole effect, and, when she walked, partook of the dignity of her gait.

A month or two before we make Flora's acquaintance she had celebrated her twentieth birthday, having been born in this little private house on Mott Street, which was her father's property.

A matchmaker had recently called, and he had launched into a eulogy of a young Jewish physician; but old Stroon had cut him short, in his blunt way: his only child was to marry a God-fearing business man, and no fellow deep in Gentile lore and shaving his beard need apply. As to Flora, she was burning to be a doctor's wife. A rising young merchant, a few years in the country, was the staple matrimonial commodity in her set. Most of her married girl friends, American-born themselves, like Flora, had husbands of this class—queer fellows, whose broken English had kept their own sweethearts chuckling. Flora hated the notion of marrying as the other Mott or Bayard Street girls did. She was accustomed to use her surroundings for a background, throwing her own personality into high relief. But apart from this, she craved a more refined atmosphere than her own, and the vague ideal she had was an educated American gentleman, like those who lived uptown.

Accordingly, when the word "doctor" had left the matchmaker's lips, she seized upon it as a great discovery. In those days—the early eighties—a match of this kind was an uncommon occurrence in the New York Ghetto.

Flora pictured a clean-shaven, high-hatted, spectacled gentleman jumping out of a buggy, and the image became a fixture in her mind. "I won't marry anybody except a doctor," she would declare, with conscious avoidance of bad grammar, as it behooved a doctor's wife.

But what was to be done with father's opposition? Asriel Stroon had never been the man to yield, and now that he grew more devout every day, her case seemed hopeless. But then Flora was her father's daughter, and when she took a resolve

When supper was over and Asriel and Tamara were about to say grace, Flora resumed the reading of her novel.

"Off with that lump of Gentile nastiness while holy words are being said!" the old man growled.

Flora obeyed, in amazement. Only a few months before she had seldom seen him intone grace at all. She was getting used to his new habits, but such rigor as he now displayed was unintelligible to her, and she thought it unbearable.

"You can read your book a little after. The wisdom of it will not run away," chimed in Tamara, with good-natured irony. She was a poor widow of forty. Asriel had engaged her for her piety and for the rabbinical learning of her late husband, as much as for her culinary fame in the Ghetto.

Asriel intoned grace in indistinct droning accents. By degrees, however, as he warmed up to the Hebrew prayer, whose words were a conglomeration of incomprehensible sounds to him, he fell to swaying to and fro, and his voice broke into an exalted, heart-rending singsong, Tamara accompanying him in whispers, and dolefully nodding her bewigged head all the while.

Flora was moved. The scene was novel to her, and she looked on with the sympathetic reverence of a Christian visiting a Jewish synagogue on the Day of Atonement.

At last the fervent tones died away in a solemn murmur. Silence fell over the cozy little room. Asriel sat tugging at his scanty beard as if in an effort to draw it into a more venerable growth.

"Flora!" he presently growled. "I am going to Europe."

When Asriel Stroon thought he spoke, and when he spoke he acted.

"Goin' to Europe! Are you crazy, papa? What are you talkin' about?"

"Just what you hear. After Passover I am going to Europe. I must take a look at Pravly."

"But you ain't been there over thirty-five years. You don't remember not'in' at all."

not so refined after all! ca 1847

she could not imagine herself otherwise than carrying it out, sooner or later.

Flora's thoughts were flowing in this direction when her father's gruff voice made itself heard from the dining room below. It was the anniversary of his father's death. In former years he would have contented himself with obit services, at the synagogue; this time, however, he had passed the day in fasting and chanting psalms at home, in addition to lighting his own candle in front of the cantor's desk and reciting Kaddish for the departed soul, at the house of prayer. It touched Flora's heart to think of him fasting and praying all day, and, with her book in her hand, she ran down to meet him.

"Just comin' from the synagogue, papa?" she greeted him affectionately, in English. "This settles your fast, don't it?"

"It is not so easy to settle with Him, my daughter," he returned, in Yiddish, pointing to the ceiling. "You can never be through serving the Uppermost. Hurry up, Tamara!" he added, in the direction of the adjoining kitchen.

"You ain' goin' to say more Thilim* tonight, are you, pa?"

"Why, does it cost you too much?" he snarled good humoredly.

"Yes it does—your health. I won't let you sing again. You are weak and you got enough."

"Hush! It is not potato soup; you can never have enough of it." He fell to tugging nervously at his white beard, which grew in a pair of tiny imperials. "Tamara! It's time to break the fast, isn't it?"

"You can wash your hands. Supper is ready," came the housekeeper's pleasant voice.

He took off his brown derby, and covered his steel-gray hair with a velvet skullcap; and as he carried his robust, middle-sized body into the kitchen, to perform his ablutions, his ruddy, gnarled face took on an air of piety.

*Psalms.

"I don't remember Pravly? Better than Mott Street; better than my nose. I was born there, my daughter," he added, as he drew closer to her and began to stroke her glossless black hair. This he did so seldom that the girl felt her heart swelling in her throat. She was yearning after him in advance.

Tamara stared in beaming amazement at the grandeur of the enterprise. "Are you really going?" she queried, with a touch of envy.

"What will you do there?—It's so far away!" Flora resumed, for want of a weightier argument at hand.

"Never mind, my child; I won't have to walk all the way."

"But the Russian police will arrest you for stayin' away so long. Didn't you say they would?"

"The kernel of a hollow nut!" he replied, extemporizing an equivalent of "fiddlesticks!" Flora was used to his metaphors, although they were at times rather vague, and set one wondering how they came into his head at all. "The kernel of a hollow nut! Show a *treif** gendarme a *kosher*† coin, and he will be shivering with awe. Long live the American dollar!"

She gave him a prolonged, far-away look, and said, peremptorily: "Mister, you ain' goin' nowhere."

"Tamara, hand me my Psalter, will you?" the old man grumbled.

When the girl was gone, the housekeeper inquired: "And Flora—will you take her along?"

"What for? That she might make fun of our ways there, or that the pious people should point their fingers at her and call her Gentile girl, hey? She will stay with you and collect rent. I did not have her in Pravly, and I want to be there as I used to. I feel like taking a peep at the graves of my folks. It is pulling me by the heart, Tamara," he added, in a grave undertone, as he fell to turning over the leaves of his Psalter.

*Food not prepared according to the laws of Moses; impure.

†The opposite of *treif*.

When Asriel Stroon had retired from business, he suddenly grew fearful of death. Previously he had had no time for that. What with his flour store, two bakeries, and some real estate, he had been too busy to live, much less to think of death. He had never been seen at the synagogue on weekdays; and on the Sabbath, when, enveloped in his praying-shawl, he occupied a seat at the East Wall, he would pass the time drowsing serenely and nodding unconscious approval of the cantor's florid improvisations, or struggling to keep flour out of his mind, where it clung as pertinaciously as it did to his long Sabbath coat.

The first sermon that failed to lull him to sleep was delivered by a newly landed preacher, just after Asriel had found it more profitable to convert his entire property into real estate. The newcomer dwelt, among other things, upon the fate of the wicked after death and upon their forfeited share in the World to Come. As Asriel listened to the fiery exhortation it suddenly burst upon him that he was very old and very wicked. "I am as full of sins as a watermelon is of seeds," he said to himself, on coming out of the synagogue. "You may receive notice to move at any time, Asriel. And where is your baggage? Got anything to take along to the other world, as the preacher said, hey?"

Alas! he had been so taken up with earthly title deeds that he had given but little thought to such deeds as would entitle him to a "share in the World-to-Come"; and while his valuable papers lay secure between the fireproof walls of his iron safe, his soul was left utterly exposed to the flames of Sheol.

Then it was that he grew a pair of bushy sidelocks, ceased trimming his twin goatees, and, with his heart divided between yearning after the business he had sold and worrying over his sins, spent a considerable part of his unlimited leisure reading psalms.

endless zigzag of their tops. The activity of his senses seemed suspended.

Presently a whiff of May aroma awakened his eye to a many-colored waving expanse, and his ear to the languorous whisper of birds. He recognized the plushy clover knobs in the vast array of placid magnificence, and the dandelions and the golden buttercups, although his poor mother tongue could not afford a special name for each flower, and he now addressed them collectively as tzatzkes—a word he had not used for thirty-five years. He looked at the tzatzkes, as they were swaying thoughtfully hither and thither, and it somehow seemed to him that it was not the birds but the clover blossoms which did the chirping. The whole scene appealed to his soul as a nodding, murmuring congregation engrossed in the solemnity of worship. He felt as though there were no such flowers in America, and that he had not seen any since he had left his native place.

Echoes of many, many years ago called to Asriel from amid the whispering host. His soul burst into song. He felt like shutting his eyes and trusting himself to the caressing breath of the air, that it might waft him whithersoever it chose. His senses were in confusion: he beheld a sea of fragrance; he inhaled heavenly music; he listened to a symphony of hues.

"What a treat to breathe! What a paradise!" he exclaimed in his heart. "The cholera take it, how delicious! Do you deserve it, old sinner you? Ten plagues you do! But hush! the field is praying—"

With a wistful babyish look he became absorbed in a gigantic well-sweep suspended from the clear sky, and then in the landscape it overhung. The woody mass darkling in the distance was at once racing about and standing still. Fleecy clouds crawled over a hazy hilltop. And yonder—behold! a long, broad streak of silver gleaming on the horizon! Is it a lake? Asriel's eyes are riveted and memories stir in his breast. He recalls not the place itself, but he can remember his reminiscences of it. During his first years in America, at times when he would

What a delight it was to wind off chapter after chapter! And how smoothly it now came off, in his father's (peace upon him!) singsong, of which he had not even thought for more than thirty years, but which suddenly came pouring out of his throat, together with the first verse he chanted! Not that Asriel Stroon could have told you the meaning of what he was so zestfully intoning, for in his boyhood he had scarcely gone through the Pentateuch when he was set to work by his father's side, at flax heckling. But then the very sounds of the words and the hereditary intonation, added to the consciousness that it was psalms he was reciting, "made every line melt like sugar in his mouth," as he once described it to the devout housekeeper.

He grew more pious and exalted every day, and by degrees fell prey to a feeling to which he had been a stranger for more than three decades.

Asriel Stroon grew homesick.

left home @ 23

It was thirty-five years since he had left his birthplace; thirty years or more since, in the whirl of his American successes, he had lost all interest in it. Yet now, in the fifty-eighth year of his life, he suddenly began to yearn and pine for it.

Was it the fervor of his religious awakening which resoldered the long-broken link? At all events, numerous as were the examples of piety within the range of his American acquaintance, his notion of genuine Judaism was somehow inseparably associated with Pravly. During all the years of his life in New York he had retained a vague but deep-rooted feeling that American piety was as tasteless an article as American cucumbers and American fish—the only things in which his ecstasy over the adopted country admitted its hopeless inferiority to his native town.

THE RETURN III

On a serene afternoon in May, Asriel drove up to Pravly in a peasant's wagon. He sat listlessly gazing at the unbroken line of wattle-fences and running an imaginary stick along the

surrender himself to the sweet pangs of homesickness and dwell, among other things, on the view that had seen him off to the unknown land, his mind would conjure up something like the effect now before his eyes. As a dream does it comes back to him now. The very shadows of thirty-five years ago are veiled.

Asriel gazes before him in deep reverence. The sky is letting itself down with benign solemnity, its measureless trough filled with melody, the peasant's wagon creaking an accompaniment to it all—to every speck of color, as well as to every sound of the scene.

At one moment he felt as though he had strayed into the other world; at another, he was seized with doubt as to his own identity. "Who are you?" he almost asked himself, closing and reopening his hand experimentally. "Who or what is that business which you call life? Are you alive, Asriel?" Whereupon he somehow remembered Flora's photograph, and, taking it out of his bosom pocket, fell to contemplating it.

The wagon turned into a side road, and the Polish peasant, leaning forward, cursed and whipped the animal into a peevish trot. Presently something gray hove in sight. Far away, below, hazy blotches came creeping from behind the sky. The wagon rolls downhill. Asriel is in a flurry. He feels like one on the eve of a great event, he knows not exactly what.

The wagon dashes on. Asriel's heart is all of a flutter. Suddenly—O Lord of the Universe! Why, there glistens the brook—what do you call it? "Repka?" he asks the driver.

"Repka!" the other replies, without facing about.

"Repka, a disease into her heart! Repka, dear, may she live long! Who could beat Asriel in swimming?" Over there, on the other side, it was where Asriel's father once chased him for bathing during Nine Days. He bumped his head against the angle of a rock, did the little scamp, and got up with a deep, streaming gash in his lower lip. The mark is still there, and Asriel delights to feel it with his finger now. As he does so the

faces of some of his playmates rise before him. Pshaw! he could whip every one of them! Was he not a daredevil of a loafer! But how many of those fellow truants of his will he find alive? he asks himself, and the question wrings his heart.

Asriel strains his eyes at the far distance till, behold! smoke is spinning upward against the blue sky. He can make out the chimney pots. His soul overflows. Sobs choke his breath. "Say!" he begins, addressing himself to the driver. But "say" is English. "*Sloukhai!*" he shouts, with delight in the Polish word. He utters the names of the surrounding places, and the dull peasant's nods of assent thrill him to the core. He turns this way and that, and in his paroxysm of impatience all but leaps out of the wagon.

The rambling groups of houses define their outlines. Asriel recognizes the Catholic church. His heart bounds with joy. "Hush, wicked thing! It's a church of Gentiles." But the wicked thing surreptitiously resumes its greeting. And over there, whitening at some distance from the other dwellings—what is it? "The nobleman's palace, as sure as I am a Jew!" He had forgotten all about it, as sure as he was a Jew! But what is the nobleman's name? Is he alive?—And there is the mill—the same mill! "I'll swoon away!" he says to himself audibly.

Asriel regains some composure.

Half an hour later he made his entry into his native town. Here he had expected his agitation to pass the bounds of his physical strength; but it did not. At this moment he was solemnly serene.

Amquerry here
times past
 The town had changed little, and he recognized it at once. Every spot greeted him, and his return of the salutation was a speechless devotional pathos. He found several things which had faded out of his enshrined picture of the place, and the sight of these moved his soul even more powerfully than those he had looked forward to. Only in one instance was he taken aback. Sure enough, this is Synagogue Lane, as full of puddles as ever;

somewhat different from what he felt in the case of inanimate Pravly. As he confronted them some faces lighted up with their identity at once; and there were even some younger people in whom he instantly recognized the transcribed images of their deceased parents. But many a countenance was slow to catch the reflection of the past which shone out of his eyes; and in a few instances it was not until the name was revealed to Asriel that the retrospective likeness would begin to struggle through the unfamiliar features before him.

"Shmulke!" he shrieked, the moment he caught sight of an old crony, as though they had been parted for no more than a month. Shmulke is not the blooming, sprightly young fellow of yore. He has a white beard and looks somewhat decrepit. Asriel, however, feels as if the beard were only glued to the smooth face he had known. But how Asriel's heart does shrink in his bosom! The fever of activity in which he had passed the thirty-five years had kept him deaf to the departing footsteps of Time. Not until recently had he realized that the words "old man" applied to him; but even then the fact never came home to him with such convincing, with such terrible force, as it did now that he stood face to face with Shmulke. Shmulke was his mirror.

"Shmulke, Angel of Death, an inflammation into your bones!" he shouted, as he suddenly remembered his playmate's byname and fell on his shoulder.

Shmulke feels awkward. He is ashamed of the long-forgotten nickname, and is struggling to free himself from the unwelcome embrace; but Asriel is much the stronger of the two, and he continues to squeeze him and pat him, grunting and puffing for emotion as he does so.

Aunt Sarah-Rachel, whom Asriel had left an elderly but exceedingly active and clever tradeswoman, he found a bag of bones and in her dotage.

"Don't you know me, auntie?" he implored her. She made no reply, and went on munching her lips. "Can it be that you

but what has come over him? He well remembers that little alley in the rear; and yet it runs quite the other way. Length has turned into width.

And here is Leizer Poisner's inn. "But how rickety it has become!" Asriel's heart exclaims with a pang, as though at sight of a friend prematurely aged and run to seed. He can almost smell the stable occupying the entire length of the little building, and he remembers every room—Hello! The same market place, the same church with the bailiff's office by its side! The sparse row of huts on the river bank, the raft bridge, the tannery—everything was the same as he had left it; and yet it all had an odd, mysterious, far-away air—like things seen in a cyclorama. It was Pravly and at the same time it was not; or, rather, it certainly was the same dear old Pravly, but added to it was something else, through which it now gazed at Asriel. Thirty-five years lay wrapped about the town.

Still, Stroon feels like Asrielke Thirteen Hairs, as his nickname had been here. Then he relapses into the Mott Street landlord, and for a moment he is an utter stranger in his birthplace. Why, he could buy it all up now! He could discount all the rich men in town put together; and yet there was a time when he was of the meanest hereabout. An overpowering sense of triumph surged into his breast. Hey, there! Where are your bigbugs—Zorach Latozky, Reb Lippe, Reb Nochum? Are they alive? Thirty-five years ago Asrielke considered it an honor to shake their palm branch on the Feast of Tabernacles, while now—out with your purses, you proud magnates, measure fortunes with Asrielke the heckler, if you dare! His heart swells with exultation. And yet—the black year take it!—it yearns and aches, does Asriel's heart. He looks at Pravly, and his soul is pining for Pravly—for the one of thirty-five years ago, of which this is only a reflection—for the one in which he was known as a crack-brained rowdy of a mechanic, a poor devil living on oatmeal and herring.

With the townspeople of his time Asriel's experience was

don't know Asrielke, who used to steal raisins from your grocery?"

"She does not understand anything!" Asriel whispered, in consternation.

Artificial plot device

IV

Asriel's first Sabbath in the native place he was revisiting was destined to be a memorable day in the annals of that peaceful little town.

At the synagogue, during the morning service, he was not the only object of interest. So far as the furtive glances that came through the peepholes of the women's compartment were concerned, a much younger guest, from a hamlet near by, had even greater magnetism than he. Reb* Lippe, for forty years the "finest householder" of the community, expected to marry his youngest daughter to an *Illoui* (a prodigy of Talmudic lore), and he now came to flaunt him, and the five-thousand rouble dowry he represented, before the congregation.

Only nineteen and a poor orphan, the fame of the prospective bridegroom, as a marvel of acumen and memory, reached far and wide. Few of the subtlest rabbinical minds in the district were accounted his match in debate, and he was said to have some two thousand Talmudical folios literally at his finger's ends. This means that if you had placed the tip of your finger on some word of a volume, he could have told you the word which came under your pressure on any other page you might name. As we shall have to cultivate the young man's acquaintance, let it be added that he was quite boyish of figure, and that had it not been for an excess of smiling frankness, his pale, blue-eyed face would have formed the nearest Semitic approach to the current portraits of Lord Byron. His admirers deplored his lack of staidness. While visiting at Pravly, in a

*Abbreviation of Rabbi, and used as the equivalent of Mister.

manner, as the guest of the town, he was detected giving snuff to a pig, and then participating with much younger boys in a race over the bridge.

His betrothment to Reb Lippe's daughter was still the subject of negotiation, and there were said to be serious obstacles in the way. The prodigy's relatives were pleased with Reb Lippe's pedigree and social rank, but thought that the boy could marry into a wealthier family and get a prettier girl into the bargain. Nevertheless Reb Lippe's manner at the synagogue was as though the engagement were an accomplished fact, and he kept the young man by his side, his own seat being next the rabbi's, which was by the Holy Ark.

Asriel, as a newcomer, and out of respect for his fabulous wealth, was also accorded a seat of honor on the other side of the Ark. Before he had expatriated himself his place used to be near the door—a circumstance which was fresh in the mind of Reb Lippe, who chafed to see him divert attention from the prodigy and his purchase. Now Reb Lippe was a proud old gentleman, too jealous of the memory of his rabbinical ancestry and of his own time-honored dignity to give way to a mere boor of a heckler, no matter how much American gold he had to atone for his antecedents. Accordingly, when his fellow trustee suggested that the American ought to be summoned to the reading of the Third Section in the week's portion of the Pentateuch—the highest honor connected with the reading of the Law, and one for which the visiting nabob was sure to pay a liberal donation—the venerable countenance turned crimson.

"Let the sections be auctioned off!" he jerked out.

The proceeding was seldom practiced on an ordinary Sabbath; but Reb Lippe's will was law, as peremptory and irresistible as the Law of Moses, with which it was now concerned. And so the worshippers presently found themselves converted into so many eyewitnesses of a battle of purses.

"Five gildens for the Third!" called out the weazen-faced

little sexton from the reading platform, in the traditional sing-song that became his dragging black beard so well. (As a bona-fide business transaction is not allowed on the holy day, even though the house of God be the sole gainer by it, the sexton's figures were fictitious—in so far, at least, as they were understood to represent double the actual amount to be paid to the synagogue by the purchaser of the good deed.)

"Six gildens for the Third!" he went on in interpretation of a frowning nod from Reb Lippe.

A contemptuous toss of Asriel's head threw another gilden on top of the sum. Two other members signaled to the auctioneer and, warming up to his task, he sang out with gusto, "Eight gildens for the Third!"

Then came in rapid succession: "Nine gildens for the Third! Ten gildens for the Third! Eleven gildens, twelve, thirteen, fourteen gildens for the Third!"

The other bidders, one by one, dropped out of the race, and when the sum reached sixty gildens the field was left to Reb Lippe and Asriel.

The congregation was spellbound. Some with gaping mouths, others with absorbed simpers on their faces, but all with sportsman-like fire in their eyes, the worshippers craned their necks in the direction of the two contestants alternately.

The prodigy had edged away from his seat to a coign of vantage. He was repeatedly called back by winks from his uncle, but was too deeply interested in the progress of the auction to heed them.

"Seventy gildens for the Third! Seventy-one, seventy-two, three, four, five, seventy-six, seventy-seven, eight, nine, eighty gildens for the Third!"

The skirmish waxed so hot, shots flew so thick and so fast, that the perspiring sexton, and with him some of the spectators, was swiveling his head from right to left and from left to right with the swift regularity of gymnastic exercise.

It must be owned that so far as mute partisanship was

concerned, Asriel had the advantage of his adversary, for even some of Reb Lippe's staunchest friends and admirers had a lurking relish for seeing it brought home to their leading citizen that there were wealthier people than he in the world.

The women, too, shared in the excitement of the morning. Their windows were glistening with eyes, and the reports of their lucky occupants to the anxious knots in the rear evoked hubbubs of conflicting interjections which came near involving the matronly assemblage in civil war.

The Third Section brought some twenty-eight rubles, net. Asriel was certain that the last bid had been made by him, and that the honor and the good deed were accordingly his. When it came to the reading, however, and the Third Section was reached, the reader called out Reb Lippe's name.

Asriel was stupefied.

"Hold on! That won't do!" he thundered, suddenly feeling himself an American citizen. "I have bought it and I mean to have it." His face was fire; his eyes looked havoc.

A wave of deprecation swept over the room. Dozens of reading desks were slapped for order. Reb Lippe strode up to the platform, pompous, devout, resplendent in the gold lace of his praying-shawl and the flowing silver of his beard, as though the outburst of indignation against Asriel were only an ovation to himself. He had the cunning of a fox, the vanity of a peacock, and the sentimentality of a woman during the Ten Days of Penance. There were many skeptics as to the fairness of the transaction, but these were too deeply impressed by the grandeur of his triumphal march to whisper an opinion. The prodigy alone spoke his mind.

"Why, I do think the other man was the last to nod—may I be ill if he was not," the *enfant terrible* said quite audibly, and was hushed by his uncle.

"Is he really going to get it?" Asriel resumed, drowning all opposition with his voice. "Milk a billy goat! You can't play that trick on me! Mine was the last bid. Twenty-eight scurvy

rubles! Pshaw! I am willing to pay a hundred, two hundred, five hundred. I can buy up all Pravly, Reb Lippe, his gold lace and all, and sell him at a loss, too!" He made a dash at the reading platform, as if to take the Third Section by force, but the bedlam which his sally called forth checked him.

"Is this a market place?" cried the second trustee, with conscious indignation.

"Shut the mouth of that boor!" screamed a member, in sincere disgust.

"Put him out!" yelled another, with relish in the scene.

"If he can't behave in a holy place let him go back to his America!" exclaimed a third, merely to be in the running. But his words had the best effect: they reminded Asriel that he was a stranger and that the noise might attract the police.

At the same moment he saw the peaked face of the aged rabbi by his side. Taking him by the arm, the old man begged him not to disturb the Sabbath.

Whether the mistake was on Asriel's side or on the sexton's, or whether there was any foul play in the matter, is not known; but Asriel relented and settled down at his desk to follow the remainder of the reading in his Pentateuch, although the storm of revenge which was raging in his breast soon carried off his attention, and he lost track.

The easy success of his first exhortation brought the rabbi to Asriel's side once again.

"I knew your father—peace upon him! He was a righteous Jew," he addressed him in a voice trembling and funereal with old age. "Obey me, my son, ascend the platform, and offer the congregation a public apology. The Holy One—blessed be He—will help you."

The rabbi's appeal moved Asriel to tears, and tingling with devout humility he was presently on the platform, speaking in his blunt, gruff way.

"Do not take it hard, my rabbis! I meant no offense to any one, though there was a trick—as big as a fat bull. Still, I donate

two hundred rubles, and let the cantor recite 'God full of Mercy' for the souls of my father and mother—peace upon them."

It was quite a novel way of announcing one's contribution, and the manner of his apology, too, had at once an amusing and a scandalizing effect upon the worshipers, but the sum took their breath away and silenced all hostile sentiment.

The reading over, and the scrolls restored, amid a tumultuous acclaim, to the Holy Ark, the cantor resumed his place at the Omud, chanting a hurried *Half-Kaddish*. "And say ye Amen!" he concluded abruptly, as if startled, together with his listeners, into sudden silence.

Nodding or shaking their heads, or swaying their forms to and fro, some, perhaps mechanically, others with composed reverence, still others in a convulsion of religious fervor, the two or three hundred men were joined in whispering chorus, offering the solemn prayer of *Mussaff*. Here and there a sigh made itself heard amid the monotony of speechless, gesticulating ardor; a pair of fingers snapped in an outburst of ecstasy, a sob broke from some corner, or a lugubrious murmur from the women's room. The prodigy, his eyes shut, and his countenance stern with unfeigned rapture, was violently working his lips as if to make up for the sounds of the words which they dared not utter. Asriel was shaking and tossing about. His face was distorted with the piteous, reproachful mien of a neglected child about to burst into tears, his twin imperials dancing plaintively to his whispered intonations. He knew not what his lips said, but he did know that his soul was pouring itself forth before Heaven, and that his heart might break unless he gave way to his restrained sobs.

At last the silent devotions were at an end. One after another the worshipers retreated, each three paces from his post. Only three men were still absorbed in the sanctity of the great prayer: the rabbi, for whom the cantor was respectfully waiting with the next chant, Reb Lippe, who would not "retreat" sooner

compliance with the above teachings was one of the necessary conditions of securing a place in the Garden of Eden.

All of which filled Asriel's heart with a new dread of the world to come and with a rankling grudge against Reb Lippe. He came away from the synagogue utterly crushed, and when he reached his inn the prodigy was the prevailing subject of his chat with the landlord.

V

In the evening of the same day, at the conclusion of the Sabbath, the auction of another good deed took place, and once more the purses of Reb Lippe and Asriel clashed in desperate combat.

This time the good deed assumed the form of a prodigy of Talmudic learning in the character of a prospective son-in-law.

The room (at the residence of one of the young man's uncles) was full of bearded Jews, tobacco smoke, and noise. There were Shaya, the prodigy himself, his two uncles, Reb Lippe, his eldest son, and two of his lieutenants, Asriel, his landlord, and a matchmaker. A live broad-shouldered samovar, its air-holes like so many glowing eyes, stood in the center of the table. Near it lay Flora's photograph, representing her in all the splendor of Grand Street millinery.

The youthful hero of the day eyed the portrait with undisguised, open-mouthed curiosity, till, looked out of countenance by the young lady's doleful, penetrating eyes, he turned from it, but went on viewing it with furtive interest.

His own formula of a bride was a hatless image. The notion, therefore, of this princess becoming his wife both awed him and staggered his sense of decorum. Then the smiling melancholy of the Semitic face upset his image of himself in his mind and set it afloat in a haze of phantasy. "I say you need not look at me like that," he seemed to say to the picture. "Pshaw! you are a Jewish girl after all, and I am not afraid of you a bit. But what

than the rabbi, and Asriel, who, in his frenzy of zeal, was repeating the same benediction for the fifth time.

When Asriel issued forth from the synagogue he found Pravly completely changed. It was as if, while he was praying and battling, the little town had undergone a trivializing process. All the poetry of thirty-five years' separation had fled from it, leaving a heap of beggarly squalor. He felt as though he had never been away from the place, and were tired to death of it, and at the same time his heart was contracted with homesickness for America. The only interest the town now had for him was that of a medium to be filled with the rays of his financial triumph. "I'll show them who they are and who Asriel is," he comforted himself.

The afternoon service was preceded by a sermon. The "town preacher" took his text, as usual, from the passage in the "Five Books" which had been read in the morning. But he contrived to make it the basis of an allusion to the all-absorbing topic of gossip. Citing the Talmud and the commentaries with ostentatious profuseness, he laid particular stress on the good deed of procuring a scholar of sacred lore for one's son-in-law.

"It is a well-known saying in tractate *Psohim*," he said, "that 'one should be ready to sell his all in order to marry his daughter to a scholar.' On the other hand, 'to give your daughter in marriage to a boor is like giving her to a lion.' Again, in tractate *Berochath* we learn that 'to give shelter to a scholar bent upon sacred studies, and to sustain him from your estates, is like offering sacrifices to God'; and 'to give wine to such a student is,' according to a passage in tractate *Sota*, 'tantamount to pouring it out on an altar.'"

Glances converged on Reb Lippe and the prodigy by his side.

Proceeding with his argument, the learned preacher, by an ingenious chain of quotations and arithmetical operations upon the numerical value of letters, arrived at the inference that

makes you so sad? Can I do anything for you? Why don't you answer? Do take off that hat, will you?"

Reb Lippe's daughter did not wear a hat, but she was not to his liking, and he now became aware of it. On the other hand, the word "America" had a fascinating ring, and the picture it conjured was a blend of Talmudic and modern glory.

Reb Lippe's venerable beard was rippled with a nervous smile.

"Yes, I am only a boor!" roared Asriel, with a touch of Bounderby ostentation. "But you know it is not myself I want the boy to marry. Twenty thousand rubles, spot cash, then, and when the old boor takes himself off, Shaya will inherit ten times as much. She is my only child, and when I die—may I be choked if I take any of my houses into the grave. Worms don't eat houses, you know."

The quality of his unhackneyed phrase vexed the sedate old talmudists, and one of them remarked, as he pointed a sarcastic finger at the photograph: "Your girl looks like the daughter of some titled Gentile. Shaya is a Jewish boy."

"You don't like my girl, don't you?" Asriel darted back. "And why, pray? Is it because she is not a lump of ugliness and wears a hat? The grand rabbi of Wilna is as pious as any of you, isn't he? Well, when I was there, on my way here, I saw his daughter, and she also wore a hat and was also pretty. Twenty thousand rubles!"

By this time the prodigy was so absorbed in the proceedings that he forgot the American photograph, as well as the bearing which the auction in progress had upon himself. Leaning over the table as far as the samovar would allow, and propping up his face with both arms, he watched the scene with thrilling but absolutely disinterested relish.

After a great deal of whispering and suppressed excitement in the camp of Asriel's foe, Reb Lippe's son announced: "Ten thousand rubles and five years' board." This, added to Reb Lippe's advantages over his opponent by virtue of his birth,

social station, and learning, as well as of his residing in Russia, was supposed to exceed the figure named by Asriel. In point of fact, everybody in the room knew that the old talmudist's bid was much beyond his depth; but the assemblage had no time to be surprised by his sum, for no sooner had it been uttered than Asriel yelled out, with impatient sarcasm: "Thirty thousand rubles, and life-long board, and lodging, and bath money, and stocking darning, and cigarettes, and matches, and mustard, and soap—and what else?"

The prodigy burst into a chuckle, and was forthwith pulled down to his chair. He took a liking to the rough-and-ready straightforwardness of the American.

There was a pause. Shaya and his uncles were obviously leaning toward the "boor." Asriel was clearly the master of the situation.

At last Reb Lippe and his suite rose from their seats.

"You can keep the bargain!" he said to Asriel, with a sardonic smile.

"And be choked with it!" added his son.

"What is your hurry, Reb Lippe?" said one of the uncles, rushing to the old man's side with obsequious solicitude. "Why, the thing is not settled yet. We don't know whether——"

"You don't, but I do. I won't take that boy if he brings twenty thousand rubles to his marriage portion. Good-night!"

"Good-night and good-year!" Asriel returned. "Why does the cat hate the cream? Because it is locked up."

An hour afterward the remainder of the gathering were touching glasses and interchanging *mazol-tovs* (congratulations) upon the engagement of Flora Stroon to Shaya Golub.

"And now receive my *mazol-tov*!" said Asriel, pouncing upon the prodigy and nearly crushing him in his mighty embrace. "*Mazol-tov* to you, Flora's bridegroom! *Mazol-tov* to you, Flora's predestinated one! My child's dear little bridegroom!" he went on, hiding his face on the young man's shoulder. "I am only a boor, but you sha'll be my son-in-law.

overgrown little mounds underneath, come to join them in the eternal rest of the city of death.

"Father! Father!" Asriel began, in a loud synagogue intonation, as he prostrated himself upon an old grave, immediately after the cantor had concluded his prayer and withdrawn from his side. "It is I, Asriel, your son—do you remember? I have come all the way from America to ask you to pray for me and my child. She is a good girl, father, and I am trying to lead her on the path of righteousness. She is about to marry the greatest scholar of God's Law hereabouts. Do pray that the boy may find favor in her eyes, father! You know, father dear, that I am only a boor, and woe is me! I am stuffed full of sins. But now I am trying to make up and to be a good Jew. Will you pray the Uppermost to accept my penance?" he besought, with growing pathos in his voice. "You are near Him, father, so do take pity upon your son and see to it that his sins are forgiven. Will you pray for me? Will you? But, anyhow, I care more for Flora—Bloomer, her Yiddish name is. What am I? A rusty lump of nothing. But Flora—she is a flower. Do stand forth before the High Tribunal and pray that no ill wind blow her away from me, that no evil eye injure my treasure. She lost her mother when she was a baby, poor child, and she is the only consolation I have in the world. But you are her grandfather—do pray for her!"

Asriel's face shone, his heavy voice rang in a dismal, rapturous, devotional singsong. His eyes were dry, but his soul was full of tears and poetry, and he poured it forth in passionate, heart-breaking cadences.

"What is the difference between this grass blade and myself?" he asked, a little after. "Why should you give yourself airs, Asriel? Don't kick, be good, be pious, carry God in your heart, and make no fuss! Be as quiet as this grass, for hark! the hearse is coming after you, the contribution boxes are jingling, the Angel of Death stands ready with his knife—Oh, do pray for your son, father!" he shrieked, in terror.

I'll dine you and wine you, as the preacher commanded, pearls will I strew on your righteous path, a crown will I place on your head—I am only a boor!"

Sobs rang in the old man's voice. The bystanders looked on in smiling, pathetic silence.

"A boor, but an honest man," some one whispered to the uncles.

"A heart of gold!" put in the innkeeper.

"And what will Flora say?" something whispered to Asriel, from a corner of his overflowing heart. "Do you mean to tell me that the American young lady will marry this old-fashioned, pious fellow?" "Hold your tongue, fool you!" Asriel snarled inwardly. "She will have to marry him, and that settles it, and don't you disturb my joy. It's for her good as well as for mine."

With a sudden movement he disengaged his arms, and, taking off his enormous gold watch and chain, he put it on Shaya, saying: "Wear it in good health, my child. This is your first present from your sweetheart. But wait till we come to America!"

The next morning Asriel visited the cemetery, and was overawed by its size. While living Pravly had increased by scarcely a dozen houses, the number of dwellings in silent Pravly had nearly doubled.

The headstones, mostly of humble size and weatherworn, were a solemn minority in a forest of plain wooden monuments, from which hung, for identification, all sorts of unceremonious tokens, such as old tin cans, bottomless pots, cast-off hats, shoes, and what not. But all this, far from marring the impressiveness of the place, accentuated and heightened the inarticulate tragedy of its aspect. The discarded utensils or wearing apparel seemed to be brooding upon the days of their own prime, when they had participated in the activities of the living town yonder. They had an effect of mysterious muteness, as of erstwhile animated beings—comrades of the inmates of the

He paused. A bee, droning near by, seemed to be praying like himself, and its company stirred Asriel's heart.

"Oh, father! I have not seen you for thirty-five years. Thirty-five years!" he repeated in deliberate tones and listening to his own voice.

"We are the thirty-five?" some distant tombstones responded, and Asriel could not help pausing to look about, and then he again repeated, "Thirty-five years! Can I never see you again, father? Can't I see your dear face and talk to you, as of old, and throw myself into fire or water for you? Can't I? Can't I? Do you remember how you used to keep me on your knees or say prayers with me at the synagogue, and box my ears so that the black year took me when you caught me skipping in the prayer book? Has it all flown away? Has it really?"

He paused as though for an answer, and then resumed, with a bitter, malicious laugh at his own expense: "Your father is silent, Asriel! Not a word, even if you tear yourself to pieces. All is gone, Asrielke! All, all, all is lost forever!"

His harsh voice collapsed. His speech died away in a convulsion of subdued sobbing. His soul went on beseeching his father to admit him to the restful sanctity of his company.

When Asriel rose to his feet and his eye fell upon a tombstone precisely like his father's, he frowned upon it, with a sense of jealousy. On his way to his mother's grave, in the older part of the cemetery, he ever and anon turned to look back. His father's tombstone was rapidly becoming merged in a forest of other monuments. His dead father, his poor father, was losing his individuality, till he was a mere speck in this piebald medley of mounds, stones, boards, and all sorts of waste. Asriel felt deeply hurt. He retraced his steps till his father's resting place once more became the center of the world.

Then he went to pay his respects and tears to the graves of his mother, sisters, brothers, uncles. At last, completely exhausted, he took to walking among the other headstones. As he stopped to make out their Hebrew inscriptions, he would

now hang his head, in heart-wringing reminiscence, now heave a sigh, or clap his hands, in grievous surprise.

The tombstones and tomb-boards were bathed in the reddish gold of the late afternoon sun. Asriel had not yet broken his fast, but although shattered in body and spirit he felt no hunger and was reluctant to leave the graveyard. He found here more of his contemporaries that he well remembered, more of the Pravly of his time, than in the town a verst or two away. The place asserted a stronger claim upon him and held him by the force of its unearthly fascination.

When he reached town at last, he felt newborn. Pravly was again dear to his heart, although Flora and America drew him to them with more magnetism than ever. He strove to speak in soft accents, and went about the houses of his relatives and the poor of the town, distributing various sums and begging the recipients of his gifts "to have pity and not to thank him," lest it should detract from the value of his good deed.

Then he went to make peace with Reb Lippe.

"You are going to stay here, so you can get another prodigy," he pleaded humbly. "But one cannot get such goods in America. Besides, you can read Talmud yourself, while I am only a boor, and what have I done to make sure of my share in the world to come? Here are three hundred rubles for charity. Do forgive me, Reb Lippe, will you? What will you lose by it?"

There were others in the room, and the unique pathos of the plea touched and amused them at once. Reb Lippe was moved to the point of tears. Moreover, the present situation took the venom out of his defeat.

"I forgive you with all my heart," he said impulsively, patting "the boor" as he would a child. "Be seated. May the Uppermost bring you home in peace and bless the union. There is another young man who is worthy of my daughter; and Shaya—may the Holy One—blessed be He—grant him the will and the power to spread His Law in America. The Jews there

want a young man like him, and I am glad he is going with you. You are taking a precious stone with you, Reb Asriel. Hold it dear."

"You bet I will," Asriel replied gleefully.

VI

The nearer Asriel, with the prodigy in tow, came to New York, the deeper did Pravly sink into the golden mist of romance, and the more real did the great American city grow in his mind. Every mile added detail to the picture, and every new bit of detail made it dearer to his heart.

He was going home. He felt it more keenly, more thrillingly every day, every hour, every minute.

Sandy Hook hove in sight.

Can there be anything more beautiful, more sublime, and more uplifting than the view, on a clear summer morning, of New York harbor from an approaching ship? Shaya saw in the enchanting effect of sea, verdure, and sky a new version of his visions of paradise, where, ensconced behind luxuriant foliage, the righteous—venerable old men with silvery beards—were nodding and swaying over gold-bound tomes of the Talmud. Yet, overborne with its looming grandeur, his heart grew heavy with suspense, and he clung close to Asriel.

All was bustle and expectation on board. The little deck engines never ceased rumbling, and the passengers, spruced up as if for church, were busy about their baggage, or promenading with a festive, nervous air.

Asriel twitched and bit his lip in rapture.

"Oh, how blue the water is!" said Shaya wistfully.

"America is a fine country, is it not?" the old man rejoined. "But it can't hold a candle to Flora. Wait till you see her. You just try to be a good boy," he kept murmuring; "stick to your Talmud, and don't give a *peper* for anything else, and all God has given me shall be yours. I have no son to say *Kaddish* for

my soul when I am dead. Will you be my *Kaddish*, Shaya? Will you observe the anniversary of my death?" he queried, in a beseeching tone which the young man had never heard from him.

"Of course I will," Shaya returned, like a dutiful child.

"Will you? May you live long for it. In palaces will I house you, like the eye in my head will I cherish you. I am only a boor, but she is my daughter, my only child, and my whole life in this world." †