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FROM SERFDOM
TO SELF-GOVERNMENT

Memoirs of a Polish Village Mayor
1842-1927

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CHAPTER FIVE

TRADING AND TRADERS

Business in the villages, as well as in town, was almost wholly in Jewish hands. The rural taverns were held by Jews, and along with vodka they would sell buns and dough-nuts of their own making, with cottage-cheese cakes and pickled herrings to match them. On the side they would also deal in salt, tobacco, matches, needles, ribbons, edgings used for girdles, etc.—all of which they had in small lots, and kept as a rule in a package behind the bar.

The villagers would buy that sort of thing oftenest from Jews and Jewesses, who as peddlers would go from house to house with a bundle holding them all, and of course a bottle as well. Every community would be visited constantly by several such folk from the town, so that each day every cottage would be called on. They got to know their 'beat' very well, and were always given a welcome like good acquaintances.

For goods thus bought, either in the tavern or from the peddler, few would pay with cash; oftenest with eggs, meal, pork-bones or bristles, a measure of grain or even some fowls—so that one had real barter and the Jews found it a profitable business. The peddlers too, poorly clad as they were, even ragged and grumbling at their misery, when the truth came out often had plenty of coin. Their best profit came from those who liked vodka. If it was a case of only one but not both of the householders drinking, then the woman would get the stuff without her husband's knowing: and would pay for it secretly with various things from the farm.

When things were needed for the house, such as a keg or

wash-tub or water-pail, or pots, dishes, boots, etc., people as a rule would make a trip to the weekly fair. The idea was that things could be had a little cheaper in this way. For the trip they would take along a few sacks of grain: some rye, barley, wheat, oats or buck-wheat, with this in mind, that a chance might come of a good price for them. There were times however when prices were lower, and the sacks would come home again.

From our village the trip was mostly to Maydan, three leagues distant, where every Monday the big 'market-days' were held. A large part of the 'day' was devoted to buying and selling horses, cattle, and young pigs. In the same way one could have sides of bacon, tallow, sausages of all kinds—sold 'by the eye', not from scales. All that is now sold in the shops could then be had in Maydan on market-day.

Whoever wanted to make the trip from Dzikov had to load up his wagon on Sunday night, so as to start long before daylight. One had to be on the spot in the forenoon, and the road was so bad in those days—what with sand and mud, with holes and ruts, that one had to get along step by step. How different it is now, with our macadam highway! Nowadays no farmer would travel such a road, unless he got a big sum for doing it.

With the farmer went always the farmer's wife. Even though he could have done all that was needed, such was the custom; and the woman would have been very angry if left behind. She would have said that he had no respect for her, but treated her like a hired girl. Even the neighbours would have joined in the sentiment.

Market-day and all that went with it lasted till late in the evening, so that folk would usually get home well after midnight. On the way it was the custom to stop at one roadside tavern at least, in order to feed the horses and get a 'warm-up'. With the drink would be eaten some sandwiches, mostly brought from home in the morning. This visit often would last

a couple of hours, depending on how many there were in the party, whether neighbours or relatives. Sometimes they would spend more on drink here than they had gained by their trip to Maydan, or even more than the whole day's outing was worth. All this of course was not counted; neither what they wasted on themselves nor the tiring of their teams.

One should add that such trips to more distant 'market-days' had to be made by every farmer at least twice a year—in the spring and the autumn as a rule, apart from the visits to nearer ones. It was the custom too for the parents to bring home doughnuts and buns for the children as a souvenir. The latter then would stay up late at night, waiting for their parents to get home.

In the town business was almost wholly done by the Jews. It wasn't worth much, for as late as 1860 there were not even ten shops in Tarnobrzeg, and these in wooden houses.

A couple of these kept, in addition to the things peddled, coloured goods, handkerchiefs, ribbons, linen for the house, caps, pipes—greatly loved by the peasants—combs, cheap shot-guns, and tallow candles. Everything except the linen bought from peasants was brought in on wagons from Tarnov, whither it came from the industrial centres of Austria. In a couple of other shops one could buy grain, sold for the most part on market-days in the town square. Finally there came about 1860 the first ironmonger's shop, where iron could be had by the smiths, and such things as tripods, big kettles and boilers—still unfinished inside. The stock in all these places was the meagrest—taken together not worth more than a hundred guilders.

Most numerous were the taverns or 'pubs' for vodka, and the chief of these was Joe's in the town-hall. There was another in the same building at the other end, and in addition several scattered about town. There were still more 'blind' ones, in which

the peasants would get drunk just as well as in the regular tavern.

Bread and buns were sold by the Jews under the colonnades around the town square, which projected more or less two metres over the street. In the square too they sold pots and dishes, wooden spoons, tubs, pails, sieves, troughs, and the coarse sieves called 'raytaks' that came from Maydan.

There was only one shop kept by a Catholic—that of Gizynski, and it took the place of the officers' Casino of today. One could have a drink and a sandwich there, as well as the spices that were bought by a small group of official residents. There was nothing here for the peasants, so of course they did not go near it.

The Catholic townsmen had their living either from farming or from some handicraft. Some did a business in pigs, killing them and selling the pork in the square in booths, on market and saints' days. Of the export of pigs that we see so much nowadays there was no trace, nor did it begin before 1870. Until the railway came in they used to drive the pigs in herds by road to Dembica!

Peasants had nothing to do with trade, holding it to be a Jewish enterprise, for which only Jews (the saying was) were fitted. They were ashamed of it, and made fun of anyone of their number who would begin it. They would bring their produce to the market—grain, potatoes, buckwheat, fowls, eggs, butter and cheese, as well as home-made articles, and dispose of it all to the Jews. These then did the business and got the profits. Often the peasant would pay dearly in the spring for grain he had sold the autumn before for a song. One must remember that we had no schools, and the peasant was not trained to do business—he couldn't reckon at all.

How hard it was for a peasant in those days to get into business, I can tell from my own experience. Of old it was not the custom to dig any of the new potatoes with a hoe, since folk

thought it a sin to take up anything that could still grow. All we did was to take out with the fingers what we needed to use. Nobody thought of selling new potatoes. Only the German colonists in Padva would bring in to Tarnobrzeg the 'early reds', and sell them by the pot—ten farthings a pot was held to be a high price for them.

Seeing for myself how well the Germans were doing from this business, I planted a quarter of an acre of early potatoes, intending to sell them in town as they did. But when they were ready I sold them on the field to a Jew for thirty guilders, getting ten guilders down as caution money. And I had to urge the sale on him, for at that time the Jews did not buy potatoes in the field, and did not know the business. They would buy only for their own use, by the pot or the peck. Just as today they will not buy cucumbers in the garden, but only picked and by sixties.

The same evening, however, my customer came to me almost in tears—he had played the fool, folk were laughing at him in the town, he had bought a cat in a bag (undug potatoes!); and he begged me to give him back the ten guilders. So far did he go with his complaints that I finally lost patience and gave him his money.

I took a closer look at the way the Germans did their selling, then hired two women to dig potatoes; and early in the morning before the Padva people could arrive, I was on the market with a couple of sacks. Scarcely was the team stopped when Jewesses made for me, climbed on the wagon, each reaching out money past the other, and all begging for potatoes. In vain did I call out that there was no need to push one another, that each would get some, that I had more at home. In a trice I had sold the lot, and when I got home I found in the yard more women, also shouting for potatoes. To my remark that they were still in the field, but that I would go for them, they all replied that they would go with me. I stopped them, saying

that I would not move an inch unless they stayed behind: for I did not want such a gang with me in the field. I went and got all that were dug, and sold them on the spot.

From that time, I would sell only at home, and mornings; and in a few days I had a whole dishful of 'dimes', eighty guilders in all. More than that, only the top potatoes were taken up, and the deeper ones were still to be dug. Every year then I planted more early potatoes, and had from them a couple of hundred guilders. I began to dig them outright, not only to gather the top ones, and then I would sow on the land a mixture of feed for the cattle. Thus did I have for the potatoes ready cash for harvest time, and in the autumn splendid feed for the cows.

Not only did the Jewesses come to me for potatoes, but also the maids from the officials' houses in Tarnobrzeg. Among them was the servant of the County Commissioner. One day I observed she did not come, but the next day she explained as follows: 'Milady thought the potatoes were too dear, and told me not to buy any; but Master was angry at not having any for dinner, and said that he didn't want to eat potatoes only when every tramp could have them.' From that time she came every day to buy for the family.

At the start, of course, other people laughed at the business, but very soon they too began to plant early potatoes—and they sold them in the field to the Jews. The latter at once saw how good the thing tasted, and today more than one Jewish family in Tarnobrzeg lives from selling potatoes. Nowadays, however, many farmers from different districts sell vegetables and fruit in the town. The smiles and sneers soon died out.

Not until the founding in 1882 of the Association of Agricultural Societies did the shops of this organisation spring up in the villages, and with them places run by Catholics. By now there is one such store in every centre, and in the larger communities there are two or three. In view of this the Jews often

cannot exist and are beginning to disappear from the villages. So, too, in the towns decent shops run by Catholics began to appear.

The turnover of money in the villages was still trifling in my early days. Rarely did one see silver or gold, and if anyone got hold of a silver 'twenty-crowner' or a gold ducat, he hoarded it at home and refused to spend it no matter what his need. Such money was kept in boxes, under kegs, behind the cross-beam, or else outside hidden in a pot in the ground or other secret place. Sometimes fire would break out suddenly and destroy it.

Paper money was commonest, and up till 1860 there were still in use 'manor-house vouchers', good for different amounts, from a few farthings up to fifty.¹ They looked like present-day railway tickets, were of different colours according to the amount, always stamped clearly on each. They had the same value as public money, no one refused to take them at their face value; and that not only in the immediate neighbourhood but even farther away, if the manor house was known. We had more of these in Dzikov, but they also were used in Machov, Chmielov and elsewhere. When they got used up, so that folk did not want to take them, they would go with them to the licensed liquor place and use them to pay for vodka. The proprietor then, knowing the manor people well, would have no trouble in changing them for new ones.

As for credit, I have heard from older people that in serfdom days very few would borrow from strangers. If one were in a tight corner and had to borrow either to pay taxes or buy some needed implement, one had the best prospect from a relative, or a neighbour—and that without interest. As yet peasants did not turn to the Jews for loans, since no Jews would have lent a penny at that time to a peasant.

But in my own memory I recall that loans could be had only

¹ That meant up to half a guilder.

from the Jews to pay for official documents, or on one's note. As yet there were no legalised Jewish money-lenders, so that each lent money privately; and they demanded high interest—often fifty per cent. or even more. When one agreed to pay a certain rate, there was no reason for not taking it! It was paid according to contract; and if the debt was not paid when due, the lenders would take, in addition for their courtesy in waiting, such things as eggs, chickens, calves, grain, etc.

If then any person did not like this 'courtesy', or had no way out and failed, the creditor could proceed to liquidate things: taking movable property for small debts and the whole farm for larger ones. Auction was the result. At the auction only Jews would be present, for the peasants at the start did not understand and stayed away. The Jews, however, sensing that such auctions were good business, took care to find out from the authorities where they were to be held, and then they all gathered and fixed things up among themselves.

They would also take from their debtors for a trifle both lands and house and anything else to be had, scaring them with the tale that unless they agreed to this the whole place would come under the hammer. In Tarnobrzeg several Jews were famous for these tactics, and they had a legion of smaller fry helping them. The last of them, one David, a man of big bodily frame, used to make the boast that he feared no living man, for he had broad shoulders.

By these tactics the Jews ruined as much as half of the farmers, for there were enough light-headed folk in every community who would borrow money, and do nothing with it, or even spend it for drink. Such people could get loans easier than others, for they would sooner agree to pay high interest, and the lenders were ready for them. The latter knew very well how much each owed, and what his property was worth. They would then lend up to the point where the principal, interest and legal costs were sure to be covered, but no more.

In Dzikov alone they got control of three eighteen-acre farms, all from one village; four six-acre farms, and almost wholly the property of a number of others. As an example of how they got the peasant into their claws, even for small debts, let the case of my neighbour, Michael G., serve to show.

He had six acres of good land with decent farm buildings. He was industrious—no drunkard, for if he took betimes a glass it was only on special occasions. He had no need to borrow money, for what he had from his land satisfied his needs, so that he was no man's debtor. There was only one trouble, that he and his wife could not always agree, and then he would beat her: but like a storm this would pass and they would be friends again. During such a quarrel his wife would always annoy him with the reminder that the whole property was hers, since she had brought it all with her as a bride.

The Jews took advantage of this discord. They got hold of G., plied him with liquor, and talked thus: 'See here, Michael, what's all this that your wife says about the property being hers? We're not afraid of all her talk; when you need money, you can have it from us. Let her see that the place is yours, and she will have more respect for you!'

Talking on this wise they would lend him five to ten guilders, and then take him to the notary where he would sign the necessary papers. As witnesses they had the Tarnobrzeg police, known in those times as sots. As the months went on they would report the loans to the county office, and the new loans and the interest, until they had G. signing a document amounting to 600 guilders, and with the interest reckoned at sixty per cent. yearly.

Then at last they brought a Court Commission to make an inventory of G.'s property, and assessing a mortgage for 600 guilders. The wife made a fuss. Where, when, and for what had Michael borrowed the money? While he, seeing now the ruin

that threatened him and his, began to weep and cry out: 'God in Heaven, what have they done with me!' When the Commission was gone I began to question him as to how he contracted such debts, and the truth came out. He had borrowed only fifty guilders in all, and most of this he had spent on drink with his creditors. He had no idea of reckoning, and did not know what 600 guilders meant.

I took him and his wife to the county office, made an affidavit there as to how much G. had borrowed: that for the money he had bought nothing. The registrar told me that he had told G. at the time to be careful, and that he should call his wife, but the answer was: 'To the devil with my wife—the land is mine, I had it from my father!' That was what the Jews had told him. The registrar went on that now there was nothing to be done, for a legal act like this one could not be touched. He counselled G. to sell at once part of his land and pay the debt, since otherwise the costs and interest would eat him up, and he would lose the whole place. The creditors could sell him up, and drive him from his home. G. did as he was told—the only possible thing: he sold two acres of his best land, suitable for orchards, and paid the whole debt. Thus did he save his home, but the Jews wouldn't let him off one cent.

This sort of thing went on until the laws were passed against usury, forbidding the taking of high interest (1877 and 1881). From then on the courts began to prosecute and punish usurers, and the vengeance of God came on them. They fell on evil days, not a few of them died in want, some of them managed to hold on: but their families after them are now in poverty. So, too, judgment came on the broad-shouldered David I told about. He was caught in the act of cheating, in that he inserted a far larger sum than he should have on a note signed by a woman from Zapav. The Tarnobrzeg courts got after him, he was arrested with his helpers, and there was a huge to-do in the town. From this time on the Jew-usurer was

cowed and afraid. The courts got their measure, and tamed them to better ways.

All the same it was not only the peasants who lost their properties in those days. Many a well-to-do landowner went the same way, leaving no trace: and even the townsmen and the nobility—these being worst off of all.

As I have noted, as late as 1870, a large part of the population of Tarnobrzeg was Catholic, people who had been there for generations, and were fairly well off. They were busy with various crafts—chiefly shoemaking, joinering, tailoring, and the meat business. Of course they had their homesteads, for very few of them were without from one to three acres of land. They kept pigs and cows, some of them even had oxen to do the farm work. They had too their own homes, and that on the town square, while the Jews lived on the outskirts.

But the time came when the Jews took all this, lived in the better homes, and turned the town into a Jewry so that only a fraction of the old stock remained. These lived on the outskirts, and not one of them owned a place in the Square.

Today there is no trace of the former Tarnobrzeg citizen families—the Zderskis, Rutyns, etc., who once owned their homes on the Square, nor of other lesser folk whom I do not name here. True, some of the names are still found in the town, but they do not come in the main line from the families we once had. In recent years the citizenry of Tarnobrzeg is beginning to lift its head again, thanks chiefly to the influx of new and energetic blood. One sees, too, how the sons of the former families are starting to take better hold of living. They are holding up their heads, ridding themselves of faults, especially of drinking, and are buying up properties. In this way the importance of the citizen element gains from year to year. Since twenty years several houses on the Square have been acquired again by Catholics.

So too the list is long of the manor estates lost by their former owners. During my day there have passed into Jewish hands a whole row of houses in Tarnobrzeg county. Even the recollection of people formerly famous has passed from among us, of people who owned estates, of barons and the like. Their houses were bought by the Jews, who either are in them today or have sold them in small parts to the peasants at a high profit.

It has not helped a bit, that the estate owners had wide areas of the best soil, and fair forests; that they had dues instead of the serf-labour, that they later had monopolies, that their land-taxes were lighter, that they paid no local taxes, that they enjoyed great political privileges, and everywhere precedence too.

More notorious than most was the dissipating of the broad Baranov lands by Countess K. She had no idea how to keep expenses under her income, but in a short time ran up debts outreaching the value of her huge estates. The creditors, unable now to get their own back, brought about—so the story went—her arrest. The Jews hung constantly on her tracks, even following her abroad, thrusting their loans on her for various excesses. These they then collected with big interest, and so got rich. They got her forests for a trifle. I visited them myself, and saw how on every fifty acres or so a Jew was stationed with a hammer for marking the trees sold. He would stand and cry: 'Hop hello! Turn in here to my plot!' The Countess sold what she could, so that even the marble tiles from the palace were taken away. It was good fortune that a Pole, Dolanski, bought the estate at the auction, together with the ancient chateau.

I knew personally better the facts about the sale of Kotova Vola by Francis Popiel. He was manager for the elder Dolanski in S., and later on he bought Kotova Vola for himself. He was known in the county as a model farmer. I got to know him when the assessment-basis of the farms in his and the neighbouring villages was made, for the Commission was for some days

guests in his home. He was most hospitable, and talked with pleasure about farm matters. On the estate he had all branches of husbandry—tillage, cattle-raising, fruit-farming, even bees. But the work became too much for him, and he wanted to sell out and retire to Cracow for good. He therefore announced his wish to sell, saying, however, that only a Catholic buyer would be considered. The peasants at once signified their wish to buy, but they could not take over the whole estate, made up as it was of arable land, meadows, forest, buildings, and all that belonged thereto—to the value of 230,000 guilders.

The richest business man in Tarnobrzeg, Leysor W., wanted to buy the place, and since the owner would not consider a Jew as buyer, Leysor came to me with the request that I put it through for him, paying something down and then turning it over to him. He would give me 15,000 guilders, and offered a good fee as a reward. All this in secret fashion, so that not even my wife should know what was going on.

When I thought it over, I saw that it would be a piece of deceit, that I should dishonour my name. So I told Leysor that I could not serve him, and gave him back the money. He always threw it up at me afterwards, that but for me he would have owned Kotova Vola.

Soon afterwards the rumour got about that the estate was sold, so while returning from Rozwadov with the commissioner of lands, I stopped at the place to say 'Goodbye' to Mr Popiel. He then told us that by selling his place he had freed himself from the burden of farming; but one thing, he said, gave him no peace—he had sold to a Jew. It would vex him, he went on, till his dying day.

As we were ready to leave the next morning, he shared with us a glass of old wine, such as I have never tasted before or since then. It was thick as honey syrup, and scarce had I emptied my tiny portion, when I felt as if electrified in my whole body. Seeing me, my companion called out: 'Jack, as I

love God, you're on fire!' It was, we were then told, wine of the 1813 vintage, and he had kept it for an occasional sick person, or for very special occasions.

Popiel soon moved to Cracow, where he died: and the great part of his fortune he left to public causes.

Little by little the manor houses in the county disappeared, so that the landowners could not even muster their twelve members for the County Council in Tarnobrzeg, but had to find others outside their own group. Of the Jews who became owners of estates only Rachmiel K. took a part in the duties and responsibilities of the community, for which too he was given due recognition. The rest, like the Jewish group as a whole, kept themselves apart, as though a separate community.

Of course both peasants and burghers, as well as the nobility, brought this ruin on themselves; the two former were brought down by usury, but also by dissipation, slackness and ignorance. As for the nobles, educated as they were, they had no idea of money, nor did they want one: and their bills for luxuries were greater than their income. No native product was to their taste, even though it was better than the imported one. They loved to travel and kept their 'managers' on high salaries. It was thought beneath the dignity of a gentleman to do otherwise—to live reasonably, inside his income. It was their pride, and for it the hand of heaven got them!

There was more contact between Jews and Catholics of old than there is today, for this reason, that the latter would spend more time in the taverns, making themselves at home, taking their drink: while the former got more out of them, exploiting their weaknesses. This was truest in the villages, and often Jewish children grew up so much with Catholic ones that they were converted. Most often the girls accepted the Catholic faith, marrying hired men or sons of farmers. This would happen in almost every place. But Jewish sentiment was against

this sternly, and baptism had to take place in secret. The neophyte was forced to keep out of sight for a while.

Judging by what older people have told me, I believe that in serfdom days the social life of the peasants centred around the taverns. When they had nothing themselves, they would steal from the squire, carrying it to the Jewish tavern-keeper whom the squire himself had placed there—and spend it for drink.

I remember that whenever anyone paid for a Mass for a dead relative, for a good crop or some other 'intention', he would invite to the service neighbours, relatives and friends: sending his children around to do the asking. At the close of the Mass he asked them all to his house or to the tavern, to thank them for coming and praying for him and his. Here he would serve vodka and sandwiches. Sometimes, if the occasion took place at home, they would invite the priest too.

Every farmer would 'order' two or three such Masses in the year, and each time there would be a social gathering, often lasting till evening. There was a lot of drinking.

I had been farming for many years when I recall that the custom still was in our village for the tavern-keepers to make the rounds 'for presents'; each one calling on his customers—the ones who regularly sat and drank in his bar-room. The best known in Dzikov was Solomon S. from Tarnobrzeg. On entering the house he would begin: 'God give you good fortune, that success may be yours, that health may favour you, that you may have money so that nothing may be lacking to you! I have come with my Good Wishes.' He would then pour out a tiny glass of vodka—he had plenty with him—and would treat every member of the family (except the smallest children), as well as the servants. He would ask that the absent ones be called in, saying: 'My respects to the table, but also to its legs. I want to treat one and all, for I respect this house. Let all remember that I have been here with Good Wishes!' Then he would pour out another glass for each of the heads of the

family, urging them: 'Drink it, drink it, may it bring you health, I do not grudge it to you!' And if he expected a liberal gift he would leave the bottle.

For all this the farmer would give something in his turn: a sack of grain—rye, barley, wheat, oats—whatever he could spare; while the good-wife brought out eggs, buckwheat, fowls, or anything under her hand. They would dump the things into the bag the visitor always had under his cloak, and load it on the wagon waiting out in front. When he had made the rounds, all the folk were more or less befuddled with the liquor. Solomon alone was sober, and he left the village with a wagon full of good things.

The giving of these gifts was held to be a duty, and if anyone gave stingily Solomon would remind him of it in front of others. Whoever was generous would get praise, so as to encourage others in the good work. This sort of thing went on twice a year—once after Christmas, 'for the Carol', and then after Easter, 'for the Easter Gift'.

Weddings were usually celebrated in the taverns also. From the church all the guests would go straight there in great style, for in the whole district there was no other place in which to entertain. In other villages folk would gather in their own public-house; but in Dzikov we had none, so we had to gather in some place in Tarnobrzeg—just as we still do. That was no hardship, since the village is a suburb of the town. Mostly we would go to the Solomon's, whose place still can be seen, but has sunk so that the windows are almost at the ground.

When a wedding was to come, the parties would see to it, at least a week ahead, to order places in the tavern. As a matter of fact the keepers, who made a fine thing of such occasions, would themselves come to the farmer in question and make an offer; asking at the same time who was being invited, and offering advice. They knew of this or that person who ought to be there, since he likes fun, and is a good spender: 'You can't leave

him out! He's a fine farmer, has a son, and a daughter. He'll invite you next time, one must be a good neighbour!

It was also our habit, when the party arrived before the tavern, that the village mayor did not allow anyone to get down till mine host came out with a bottle. He would give his blessing to the bridal pair, wishing them luck, and then everyone got a drink. After this they all got down, the music would begin, and all made their way into the big room.

The Jews would treat only Christians. They never drank themselves, and it was the greatest rarity to see a Jew drunk. If then a drink-shop had even a few 'customers' it could eke out a living, though a modest one. One Tarnobrzeg keeper, who had ten regular customers, said that he would prefer to have his whole place burned down rather than for them to be burned out. They were his guarantors, and kept him on his feet.

The Jews lived very modestly, and if Catholics would imitate them they would have everything in their hands. The saying was that the poorer Jews never ate in the morning till they had earned something—i.e. had sold something at a profit. The same ones, who bought the estates from the nobility, being originally pretty poor, continued to live simply even on their new lands. I never saw nor did I hear of any of them arranging a fancy ball, of the sort the gentry had very often. So too, they wasted no money on management, which ate up the profits: but ran the enterprise with sometimes too much thrift.

They used to say of Hauser, who made his way till he could buy the two estates of Kaymov and Machov, that he kept only one Jew and paid him in cash only three guilders a week. This one man was manager, farmer, overseer—all in one. Everyone with any business there had to see him alone, for Hauser himself lived in Tarnobrzeg and would only drive over from time to time to watch things.

They used to say too that the wife of this overseer, desiring

to get a good name with the owner, made for him a couple of times such tasty *consommé* from beetroot that on his return home he had no appetite to eat the food his wife set before him. The latter then enquired why he didn't eat, and on hearing that he had liked the 'barszcz' in Machov 'with an egg and cream', she made a fearful fuss. How could the wife of an overseer make a better 'barszcz', and live better thereto, than the wife of the landowner himself! The upshot was that she drove the man and his family from the place. The moral of the tale is that the Jews live and manage thriftily, and only spend a dime when it is absolutely necessary.

As I have noted, Catholics would always complain about the Jews, and still do: just as they made fun of them and still laugh at their faults—even playing practical jokes on them. What does that help, when the Jew is patient no matter what happens; and Catholics kept on going to him, as they still do, permitting him to exploit them in every way? Thus he gets rich, while they do the work.

The Jew has up to now submitted and let others laugh at his expense or play tricks on him. He does it so long as he sees money and a chance to make it; but when that has all been sucked out, he can laugh too, and even throw the Catholic out of his house. Many an example of this could be given.

There was in Dzikov a fairly well-to-do farmer, who loved to sneer at the Jews, but would go to the tavern regularly. The innkeepers watched every chance to exploit him. One day he struck one of them in the face, when he refused to give him beer till he got the money for it. The Jew was laid up, and took the matter to the courts. Then however he withdrew the charge, for the farmer promised to spend five guilders in his shop for vodka.

He spent it along with his friends, and when he wanted more drink and the innkeeper demanded his money in advance, he hit him again in the face, and shouted: 'I hit you before on one

side, now you have it on the other. If I didn't your nose would be crooked, but now I have straightened it! There was a mighty to-do; but nothing came of it, for the Jew again let him off on the promise of his keeping on with his drinking parties.

In business the Jews were crooks and unreliable. The buyer had always to look sharp, else he would get short weight or measure, or get poor goods, or pay higher than he expected. He needed to watch his change. They would give goods on credit, and they taught many a man to run into debt. Anxious to sell something, they would tell you from the start that money was no object, that they didn't want it: but when the time to pay came, they would take the matter to law, and get their own ruthlessly with costs. If the buyer could be counted on to be forgetful, something would be added to the price, and a claim put in therefor.

It was almost always their policy to get their money, without regard to whether the goods were unspoiled, of high grade, or likely to satisfy the customer. I recall a couple of famous examples in Tarnobrzeg, that showed eloquently what sort of a record the Jews had in business. On one occasion the town watchman, while making his rounds, peered into a bakery through a window that was not well shuttered. He saw how the Jew in charge undressed and took a warm bath, and then let the helper pour the wash-water into the big trough to make the dough. This by way of getting the next baking for his customers! The thing was reported, and the case was heard in Rzeszov. It turned out that the baker had mange. He was convicted, and his bakery closed for good.

The level of intelligence among the Jews was formerly very low, mostly lower than that of Christians. In the town there were many who could not speak Polish, so that one could not converse with them at all. Others would so mutilate the language (even worse than they do now!) that they were the ob-

jects of mockery and laughter. The children learned only the Talmud, and the teaching of it went on in groups at home. It was led by their elders, who had some smattering of knowledge. The purpose was that every child should know the Commandments of Moses.

They had little desire to learn Polish; and when compulsory education came in they took an attitude more stubborn than the most ignorant peasant. They would pay penalties, but would not send their children to school. They declared that the young ones had to learn the ten commandments, and that if they learned Polish they would not do the other. Further, they held that the children knew all that was needful, for if they could 'reckon' that was enough.

In Tarnobrzeg there were regular penalties for those who did not send their children to school, and from the fines paid they would buy the needed things for the class-room. The Jews would pay, but they stayed away from school. Only later did they come to see the meaning of learning, and today the schools are full to the door. The Jewish children are in the grade and the high schools, and then come to occupy good positions.

In the first years after serfdom ended, while the country folk were still ignorant, the Jews managed to get hold of not a few people, win them by cleverness, loans, or vodka, and for the moment persuade them that they had no better friends in the world. But before the latter could think things out, in a year or two their farms were gone, and became the property of the other.

Even this did not satisfy the schemers, for as the proverb has it, 'One tramp can't make a gentleman of another tramp!' It was the gentry, lords of the big estates, who gave the Jews their proper chance to get money and lands. They put them in charge of the village inns, and gave them the licence to sell

vodka. With this chance to drown the brain of the ignorant, they began their thieving trade, and in time wormed their way into the manor houses as agents, purveyors, dealers in timber, in cattle, hay, lands, etc.—in short, before long they got the whole estate under their thumbs.

If the Jews had been willing to live and work on farms, the whole land today would belong to them, and they would be the lords of Southern Poland. Both peasant and prince would be their servants, and work for them as hired men. Instead of serfdom we should have had for the whole of our Catholicism a worse thing, viz. Jewdom. In Dzikov there isn't a bit of peasant land that has not been in Jewish hands, and been bought back with a lot of toil. Elsewhere it is no better.

But the Jews have never wanted to till the soil, they have preferred to live by their wits, to profit by trading in the lands peasants have had to pay for. They would only settle in the cities and towns, buying up property there from the Catholics: so that in a few years the town population has changed completely—as if after a big war.

I can remember how three Jews in Tarnobrzeg have become rich men.

Leysor W., as I have said before, was at first poor, keeping a little grog-shop in the town, where now stands C.'s house. He used to come to Dzikov and go about getting for his vodka, eggs, chickens, grain, etc. He would carry home a sack of grain from even Podlenza. If folk wanted drink but had no money, he would say that he was not asking for money but would give them vodka on credit. 'You can pay me, when you have it; or you can give me grain when the harvest comes in!' Many a one would get drunk in his shop who was not a habitual drinker, but had a fatal weakness for good company or entertainment: or who had no idea of the value of time and neglected their homesteads.

Leysor had friends all over the district, and he knew how

much every farmer could spend, what his crop would bring, and how much vodka he dared give him. He would then get from the new crop here a sack, there a hundredweight. From farther away it would come in in loads.

They would bring him grain secretly by night, and he was always in his shop whenever money could be made. One of our Dzikov farmers told me, a man who liked to muddle his head with vodka, that whenever he wanted to get Leysor out of bed, he would knock on the door and then say with a groan, as if lifting a heavy load: 'Open up, for I've a heavy bag!' Leysor would then open the door, and he would push his way in and drink, even though he had nothing with him. He would blow about the way he deceived Leysor, but the end of it was that he lost his whole farm—six acres of good land; and sank to the level of a wage earner, and a wretched one too.

The grain Leysor got in this way would fill a bin. He kept it partly in small lots behind the shop and partly in the attic. The thirsty customer not only lugged in the sack, but had to carry it upstairs wherever he was bidden. In the spring then, during the time of shortage (and with drinkers this was a yearly thing), the same folk would buy back their bread-stuffs as had sold them before. Having no money, they would mortgage the coming crop, paying two bushels for each one they got now. The same Leysor was ready to lend folks money and sell vodka on credit; and people therefore spoke well of him as a 'good and kindly Jew'.

In this way he arrived at a fair position financially; and when he got the liquor monopoly from the count and began to deal in timber, buying the standing forest and shipping the timber by raft to Dantzic, he became rich. His large family of sons and daughters were all set up with doweries of tens of thousands of guilders. He could still be banker to many a tradesman in trouble, and when he died his will was probated at 300,000 guilders, mostly in mortgages on peasant and gentry pro-

perties. His widow after him set about getting the money, not remitting a cent to anyone. She divided it all among her children and grandchildren.

David E. had a grocery store, and sold wines as well as keeping a regular grog shop for the peasants. He had a private post-office too, in the days when the carrier used to go from Tarnobrzeg to Rzeszov, and then to Maydan. Moses H., on the other hand, had the first ironmongery in the town, and did business mostly with the manors. Then in company with others he got the liquor monopoly and set up as a dealer in timber. Both E. and H. made less money than did Leysor, but H. bought two estates on the Vistula, and both of them provided their children with fine doweries.

These wealthy ones became during their lives bankers for poorer Jews, for as yet there were no other banks. They would lend for various business enterprises; but often enough they came out badly, for their creditors mostly outdid them. All three, and especially E., had a good reputation. They were alive to their dignity, did not cheat, and kept out of the law-courts. They got rich, one might say, by their cleverness, while others were stupid. Drinking was the fashion, and there were no Catholic tradesmen.

So far as I know, these big properties were scattered when they were gone. Children and grandchildren were in business as usual, but they were not a success and they lost out. Some of them are in Tarnobrzeg, and I know them. They are poor, or at least not well off. They have sunk to the common level, and mostly died out. Only one, a son-in-law of H., owns a big property; and that thanks to his having the liquor monopoly and the distillery from the count.

In general it is harder for the Jews to get rich today. They can do better in business and live better than can the peasant on his land or the lower rank of officials, but in a short time they cannot make such a fortune. The change came when schools began

to flourish and people got wiser and stopped their drinking. Folk began to waste less time, Agricultural Societies were formed, and Catholics went into business.

With the exception of H.'s son-in-law, among the richest will be Solomon K., who used to have a little shop until he became a land agent: then by buying and selling farms and getting big estates to divide up for peasants, he made a fortune. Next to him is Benjamin F., whose father used to make fancy topcoats for the peasants, and who was himself at the start a modest fellow taken seriously by no one. When he too began to deal in land, to buy and sell and exchange (a thing that got him into the courts!), he became so rich that he could boast of tens of thousands of guilders and had an apartment block on the town square.

house and did not go in, it was thought a big disgrace: since it meant that some mighty sinner lived there—a toper, a thief, an adulterer or the like. In some cottages they welcomed him with food, and in no case would he get less than a guilder, or in kind some rye, or buck-wheat, sausage or eggs, etc. In this way did the shepherds of the flock make their rounds yearly, and from these gifts they lived.

Apart from this the organist made two visits on his own—before Christmas ‘with the wafer’¹ and before Easter ‘with his register’, i.e. with a list in which he noted down every person eligible for Easter Communion. He would leave a ticket for each, which served then as a check to tell whether they all came to confession and communion or not. For this service he would get from each person about twenty to thirty farthings, or some equivalent in kind.

The clergy were held in high esteem, being thought of as God’s chosen, as people who already on this earth counted as saints. Everyone turned to them in need, with full confidence. Not until the popular movement in politics began did this relation change somewhat; but in our day things are getting back again to where they were, thanks to the zealous work of our younger clergy. These men have added social service to their ecclesiastical duties.

In other days people went on long pilgrimages—to Calvary near Cracow some twenty-five leagues, or to Czenstochova about thirty. In addition there were other famous shrines for absolution.

Big Indulgence Festivals were held in the Tarnobrzeg church, especially at Whitsuntide and on August 8—the day of Our Lady of the Sowing. On these days great throngs of people

¹The wafer (*oplatek*) is still broken by friends at Christmas meetings, when the compliments of the season are exchanged. The priest received some gift of money when he brought a packet to the household.

would come from the districts round about, and even from across the Vistula—most of them getting across in secret ‘for an outing’. The pilgrims would spend the night in the galleries of the monastery, in private cottages in Tarnobrzeg and Miechocin, but chiefly in Dzikov, where every farmer might have up to 100 people sleeping in his barns. The nearer ones would come for the day in farm wagons.

The biggest festivals, however, were in Lezaysk, where is to be found the monastery of the Bernardines with their miracle-working picture of Our Lady. The days were that of St Anthony in June, that of St Francis in October, Whitsuntide, and the three Days of Our Lady—her Ascension, her Rosary in October, and her Sowing. Those who went from our community to the celebrations in Lesaysk about nine leagues away would gather on the appointed day in K. Here there was a famous guide, who took charge of the party. As many as 500-600 people would come together, for the most part women and grown-up girls.

This guide had sole charge of the pilgrimage, and took better care of them than a village mayor. He would keep order in the group, see that no one got into trouble or got lost, and in general was responsible for the good behaviour of the whole company. Each member called the rest ‘brother’ or ‘sister’, and the guide was called that to the end of time, no matter where met. In case of any bad accident, e.g. that some member of the party was killed, it was considered a grave sin. In that case they all separated and went hither and yon as mendicants for a year and six Sundays. No one dared return home before that time, not even a mother to her little ones. Such was the penalty laid down by the clergy, or taken voluntarily on themselves by the company. I remember well how during my grandmother’s life people would ask us for a night’s lodging, who told of how they were on the road for such and such a time as a result of some misfortune that befel a pilgrimage they took part in.

On the journey they would always have a vanguard of a few men, and in the same way a rearguard, who kept eager ones from getting too far ahead or sluggards from getting lost. In this way no accident was possible. The guide would lead in the singing of hymns, so he had to have a good voice. He would gather around him the best voices, men's and women's. The singing went on without a break and it made the way easier. The men and women would sing the verses turn about. Of songs there were legion, and special books were carried with the words. Starting out mornings they would sing Karpinski's hymn:

'With the morn in radiance breaking!'

and then evenings his other well-known verses:

'In Thy presence, Heavenly Father!'

On the way one could hear:

'Hail Thou Maiden Mary mine!'

or this one:

*'Forward as children we march, and we sing
Praise to Mary our Mother!'*

A favourite was the ninety-first psalm, in Kochanovski's rendering, or one of these :

'O God, whose goodness knows no end!'

or else:

'To Thee, Our Lord, we humbly turn!'

Both the day's march and the evening's quarters echoed with hymn-singing, and every time there were new ones. They would sing the Rosary also.

The pilgrimage followed the highway at a slow pace, kept

time with their singing so that the sound was fair to hear, and gave an impression of fineness and goodwill. From the villages people would go out to look at them, to listen to the hymns, and to serve the thirsty with milk or water to drink. The way to Lezaysk from our village took two days, the first night being spent in Lentovna, where sleeping quarters were offered by the farmers in their barns. Everyone had his own provisions, no one was allowed to enter a tavern, and during fast days the rules were strictly kept.

Not far from Lezaysk the guide stopped the party at a way-side cross, and made a speech to them. Standing about, they would listen as to a preacher, and would repeat the prayers he suggested, for this or that 'intention'. About a kilometre from their destination they would again make a halt, the guide went around and gathered a few cents from each one, and took it to the monastery. A priest would then appear, sprinkle the assembly with Holy Water, give an address, and then lead them all solemnly to the church.

Great throngs of people would gather in Lezaysk for the Indulgence Days, coming from our own side of the river, as also from Russia. The pilgrims would take part in all that went on, listening to the sermons that were preached out of doors, and then coming to confession and communion. They left offerings for special masses, small contributions for the church treasury, and something for beggars. The treasury box in front of St Francis, holding half a hundredweight, would be full of small change (coppers), and a lot would be heaped on the top.

In the village it was hard to get a place to sleep. A huge number of visitors spent the night in the galleries of the monastery, others slept in private houses—in the attics where there was not even straw, and all paid from five to ten farthings for the privilege.

The way home was taken no longer in companies, but in

larger or smaller crowds. Everyone wanted to get home as soon as possible, so they took shorter ways avoiding the highway, following such as knew the less frequented paths and lanes. As a youth I made this pilgrimage more than once, the first time with the guide from K.; but afterwards I took my own group a few times from Dzikov and the neighbouring villages. The rendezvous was in each case the Dominican monastery in Tarnobrzeg.

As for morals, we had in the old days such vices as drunkenness, but we had also virtues that have since, alas, disappeared! As an example of this, take the matter of being arrested. It was thought then to be a disgrace, and people feared it more than corporal punishment. For anyone to be in gaol for some transgression meant that people would not let him forget it, and at moments of dispute they would shout: 'Yes, you gaol-bird!' Whoever got punished this way more than once was excluded by honourable farmers and their wives from all intercourse. They would not speak to him or her, and would point the finger at such as did.

Dissipation was strongly condemned. Whenever it happened that a maiden or widow bore a child out of wedlock, it did not help that she was daughter or widow of a well-to-do farmer. No one would be seen with her as godfather or godmother to have the babe christened, but they would get outsiders to take it to the priest for that purpose. The mother was called 'the transgressor', for breaking the laws of God. Rarely would it happen that she got a husband, for people would point at her and she was 'soiled' until death.

Nowadays, however, the way in which dissipation creeps into our land is disturbing: the youth being the first sinners, who leave home to earn their living, and so are without any guidance or care. Smoking is commoner and drinking does not get less—that ancient destroyer of peoples that poisons the

blood from generation to generation. No wonder then that the race today is weaker than it was, that it has less powers of resistance to disease, and dies earlier than of yore. The worst of it is that the sinners have no sense of their guilt, but proceed to lay the blame on God Himself for their own shortcomings, misery and misfortunes.