

thrown into the prison of Tobolk. His shnoi Sud), of Tobolsk, but I never wife wrote to me that his trial was to heard from them since, and to this day take place at the Circuit Court (Okruz- I know not what has become of him.



The translation, when it first appeared in the English Department of the Jewish Daily News, has been shortened somewhat, to fit young American readers. The Yiddish original contains a fuller and more detailed account of Zunser

—EDITOR.

KAIZMAN

נרבת
ישראל יצחק ורעיתו
בילה יהודית זואלף

DONATED BY
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A Jewish Bard.

Being the Biography of Eliakum Zunser, written by
himself and rendered into English
by Simon Hirsdansky.

I was born in Vilna, Russia, on a Wednesday night, the second day in Cheshwan, 5601 (October 28, 1840).

It will surely prove interesting to many of my readers, to those of the younger generation especially, to be acquainted with the times in which I first saw the light, in which I passed my early childhood, which have molded my development, and have left their influence on my entire life.

Those times are well known in the culture-history of the Jews of Eastern Europe, as the advent of "The New Era." The Russian, Roumanian, and Galician Jewry of those days might roughly be grouped into two classes. One class—the smaller numerically—represented our spiritual aristocracy; it included those of our people who devoted their lives to "the law and the labor." This class gave to Judaism its rabbis, dayanim, preachers, Talmudic teachers, hazzanim, and other communal leaders. The second class—by far the larger—comprising the mass of the people, the great number of laborers, artisans, small traders, merchants, inn-keepers, farmers and the like—surrounded itself with a thick enclosure of fanaticism and superstition; no ray of enlightenment could enter here. The entire Jewry of Russia, Roumania, and Galicia thus lived apart; separated and isolated from the rest of the world. Nothing foreign could have entered here. This isolation served the Jews as a protection against undesirable in-

fluences from their immediate Gentile neighbors, who were then on the very lowest level of spiritual development. Our people dreaded such influences, for they could not but be injurious, both in spiritual and material respects.

Strong and thick as was the "wall" by which the Jews isolated themselves from the rest of the world, some bright rays did steal into the Jewish Ghetto, and penetrated the darkness of ages. These bright rays of light came from the western countries, where Jewish culture and Jewish science had attained a high level. Like contraband, the works of Naftali Herz Weisel, Shalom I. Rappaport, Shalom Cohen, Naftali Keller, Mier Leteris, Samuel D. Luzzatto, Isaac Eichel, Simon Friedlander, Mendel Breslau, Zanvil Friedlander, Joseph Halpern, and David Friedlander were smuggled into Russia.

New ideas and influences crept into Jewish life and thought; and thus the first corner-stone was laid for a new era in the Jewish life and Jewish development of Russia, Roumania and Galicia. Jewish young men would hie to some chamber, and there, in secret, would pore over Hebrew magazines, such as the "Bikkuri Haitim," the "Measim," the "Kerem Hemed," and others—and a new view opened before them. They perceived that Faith and Wisdom, the Law (Torah), and culture may go hand in hand to the detriment of neither. Nay, Culture and

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Enlightenment may help to clear away from Faith those impure accretions which have accumulated in the many dark ages of the past. The parents of these young men, however, would have none of any such compromise, honest though it be. They regarded every "breath of air from without" as a poisonous ill-wind. And then began the long and bitter strife between fathers and sons—that battle known in our history as "The Struggle of Light and Darkness," which exacted so many Jewish victims.

The little group of the first pioneer "Maskilim" (adherents of the new culture), in Russia, was surrounded on all sides by a strong and mighty "foe." They were attacked with anathemas and excommunications, with ostracism from the community, and, very often, their relentless enemies had them condemned to serve in the army. The schism between parents and children became wider and deeper day by day. The Jewish youth suffered terrible persecutions, but they swerved not from the encounter. They knew that they struggled for a holy ideal, for a pure and purified faith, and for an enlightening culture. They raised aloft the banner of Jewish nationality, and bore it from town to town, from village to village. In well nigh every town and city a few of these heroes could be found; they gained an ascending influence over the youth, and because of this influence the army of "Maskilim" waxed larger and larger. Isaac Erter, Isaac B. Levenson "Adam Hacohen," or Beril Michailisliker, his son Micha J. Levenson, Matthias Strashun, Mordecai Plungian, Mordecai Nemzer, Abraham Mapu, Kalmon Shulman, Chaim S. Slonimsky, Jacob Eichenbaum, Eliezer Zweifel* and many others, were the first flowers that blossomed in the beautiful garden of Russo-Jewish "Haskoloh." Among our people they were commonly known as the "Berlinites," not that they had been born in Berlin (all were of Russian birth), but because

*For almost all of these, see Jewish Encyclopedia.

they adopted the German "Haskoloh," that is, the trend of the Jewish "Maskilim" in Germany.

In the family into which I was born, there was not a single representative of the "new idea." My family belonged to the hostile camp," and aided in the prosecution of the war against the young "enemies." My father's grand father, Reb. Elishu Zunser, of blessed memory, had been a pupil of Gaon, Reb Eliahu Vilna, of blessed memory (he rests in the old Vilna cemetery, not far from Gaon o'b'm). His son, my grandfather, Reb. Akiba Zunser, had been a clerk in the spice store of Reb Isaac Danziger, son of the "Chaiey Adom," o'b'm. My grandfather's brother had been a rabbi in Antokolie, a suburb of Vilna. . . . My grand father, Reb Akiba, o'b'm, had two sons, Reb Eliahu-Mordecai Zunser and Feive Zunser (my father, o'b'm). Reb Eliahu-Mordecai Zunser was a great scholar and a keen Talmudist. My father, Reb Feive Zunser, may he rest in peace, unlike his brother Eliahu-Mordecai, evinced no particular abilities in the Talmud, and therefore his father had him learn a handicraft. He evidently had the precept of Eliahu Vilna, o'b'm, in mind, that when a Jewish young man shows no ability in study, he should rather become an honest laborer. My father became a carpenter, and a veritable artist at his trade. Nevertheless, he always lived in poverty and want. The special preparations for necessary Sabbaths and holidays always taxed him beyond his resources, but he managed to pass over such times by some sort of "miracle." When want was greatest, and no prospect of earning anything for the Sabbath, or the approaching holidays was in sight, he would luckily be called to some manor-house, and get an order for work. Such "miracles" happened to him generally, only because he was a recognized artist at his work; the other artisans in Vilna fared much worse than we, and lived in still greater poverty.

But these years of misery and poverty were not as terrible for us as were those bitter times which came upon us

later. I was just seven years old, and a student (bahur) in the "Yeshiba" in "Mailes Clois." My father was then employed in connection with the building of the government hospital in Antokolie, where he would work through the entire day, and where he was obliged to return to spend the night. One day, it was in 5608 (1847-8), on the evening of the second "light" of Chanuka, my father returned from his work, as usual, finished his evening prayers, blessed the Chanuka lights, and ate his supper. After the final benediction at the end of his meal, he heard me read in the Talmud, and prepared, as usual, to go to spend the night in the hospital at Antokolie. He took some bread, some potatoes and went away.

Imagine our terror, when the next morning an inquiry came to us asking why Reb Feivel Zunser had not come that night as usual, to the hospital in Antokolie. We surmised at once that some accident must have happened to him. A posse immediately started out to search for him. They found him—dead—in the snow, in the court-yard of the hospital. An autopsy showed that on his way to the hospital he became sick, had not sufficient strength to return, and so he fell helpless in the snow and there perished. Our family thus remained without its sole supporter, and henceforth each day was but a new link in a long chain of terrible privations.

When my father died he was forty-five years old. He left behind my mother, a poor widow with three young orphans. I was then seven, my brother Akiba three, and our little sister one and a half years old. Our poverty was even then so great, that upon returning from the cemetery after the burial, we had nothing to eat, and we went to bed hungry. On the next day, my mother's sister arrived; she, too a poor woman, and took us all to their home. She managed to find some work for mother and also some "profit." She showed mother how to distribute milk to various homes. To do this my mother had to be up at 5 o'clock each morning. At first this work yielded her five groschen a day; later somewhat more, but never

enough to provide sufficient food for us all. Only then, when my little sister died (and we had one "mouth less"), did the rest of us have a larger share of the daily bread. . . .

MY EARLY YOUTH.

When I was five years old I began to go to cheder, as I mentioned before. Such was my diligence that I went through the "sidur" (prayer book), and the Pentateuch in one winter, and I also began to study "Gemorah." At six and a half, my father brought me into the famous Yeshiba of Vilna, known as the "Reb Mailes Clois," where several hundred bahurim, young and old, studied under the four teachers of the Yeshiba. Reb Samuel Iser, Reb Herzele, Reb Sender, and Reb Mordecai Melzer, of blessed memory; the last named later became the Rabbi of Calvaria.

The sole source of maintenance for almost all the "Yeshiba-bahurim" was the system of "day-eating," at the homes of some well-to-do, or poorer members of the community—at a different home each day. (As a rule, the bahurim are not residents of the city where the yeshiba is situated. To maintain them, each is assigned to eat one day in the week in certain houses; he thus rotates through seven houses a week. The food given to the "day-eater" is proverbially not of the choicest varieties.)

Thus each bahur was at the mercy of seven masters, seven mistresses and seven servants. And it is noteworthy that too often, these twenty-one together, could not provide sufficient food for one hungry bahur. By no means were all the bahurim fortunate enough to find board for the full seven days in the week; there were those who lacked a day, and often even two days.

But these unfortunates found a helping angel in a holy man, known in Vilna as Reb Simon. Long Robe (Reb Shimon Kaftan. Reb Simon "Long-Robe," was the most remarkable man among the Jews of Vilna. He dedicated his life-work to providing poor bahurim who were left without day-board with food and other necessities. From

early dawn to almost midnight he would stand in the "Jewish street" with a big collection box in his hand, and collect donations for "his children," as he called the yeshiba-bahurim. He drew his living from working during the night hours as a grinder of snuff-tobacco for a tobacco dealer of Vilna. None knew his birth-place, nor whence he came. He was always seen in a long robe (a "kaftan," hence his name, Reb Shimon Kaftan) of gray linen which reached to the ground, with an "arbo-kanfoth" and "zizith." He spoke to no one, and to all inquiries made no answer. Even the Christians regarded him with the deepest respect, and deemed him a holy man. The Vilna Jews were quite charitable in those days, but they gave to Reb Simon Long-Robe with a greater zeal and with more devotion than to any one else—each donor seemed to feel that he gave "to God himself," and was sure that his pittance would reach the right place. Small wonder, then, that Reb Simon Long-Robe had unlimited credit at the bakers. He would get from them large loaves of bread, and carry them off to the yeshibahs and synagogues in which he had some bahurim—hungry for lack of one or two days' boarding. Some bahurim there were, who had no board for the Sabbath; and for these he would provide in this manner: Each Saturday after dinner, he would place himself in the courtyard of the Vilna synagogue, with a great barrel near him, a large wooden spoon in his pocket, and would collect Sabbath dainties for his hungry bahurim. So well was Reb Simon known in Vilna that each household that found aught left of the best dinner courses, had these remains carried off at once to the synagogue courtyard—to "Reb Simon Kaftan," who immediately distributed them among the hungry yeshiba-youths. To this very day I can not think of this holy man without tears, and the question occurs to me, "Shall we Jews ever have such a holy man, such a "zadick-tomim" as Reb Simon Long-Robe, of blessed memory?

I belonged to the category of citizens (ba'al habatish, who were expect-

ed to provide their own meals. In general, "day-boarders" belonged to the poorest families). My mother, therefore, deemed day-boarding a disgrace for me; and she undertook to provide me with food herself, though I, with my own board, fared worse than many 'day-boarders. Each Sunday morning, as I was about to start off for the yeshiba for the week, she would give me a loaf of bread and five groschen. Twice daily throughout the week I would buy baked beans for half a groschen (about one-quarter of a cent), and, with the bread, these baked beans supplied to me the place of the choicest dishes. The poverty of my diet worried me, God-fearing lad that I was, very little. I had long since learned to regard this world as only an ante-room, where a Jew is but to prepare himself for entrance later into the very "Reception Room; and there, in that Reception Room, what, with a piece of the "Leviathan" and a goodly portion of the "shor habor," not to mention a cup of the "yain hamshum" and other dainty rarebits! (This world is only a preparation to the next. This world is only an ante-room where one prepares for entrance to the salon.—Aboth.)

Each Thursday night we always had a "mishmor," that is, we were not to sleep the entire night, but to review the Gemorah which had been studied through the entire week. Rather a difficult piece of work! but for so diligent a scholar as I was then, this was a slight matter. Each Friday morning I would make the trip afoot, to my mother at Antokolie (a suburb of Vilna), to spend the Sabbath with her.

The Sabbaths and holidays which I spent with my mother and my younger brother Akiba, afforded me but little pleasure. I saw but too clearly that in order to provide for me she denied herself sufficient food and often went hungry. I therefore decided not to burden my mother with my meals. The Rosh-Yeshiba (head of the yeshiba), under whom I studied, was loth to lose me; and he feared that hunger and poverty would compel me to leave the yeshiba. He therefore persuaded a distant rela-

tive of mine, the rich Sara Gordon, to support me. That good woman, heeding him, provided my board at ten gulden a month, on condition that I spend all my time in study. Thus two years passed.

Then came the outbreak of the Crimean War—that terrible war (1853-56), when Nicholas I. fought against Britain, France and Sardinia. Russia finally gathered her entire army around Sebastopol, which was invested by the allies. Russia taxed all her resources to defend this fortress. In those days there was not a single railroad in Russia, and almost all the contracts for transportation and supplies incidental to the campaign were let to Jews. This brought work to the laborers throughout the country; and, of course, to those in our town, Vilna. Mechanics and laborers began to earn comfortable wages, and many Jews who had heretofore despised manual labor, now began to learn skilled trades.

Young though I was, I fully realized the force of the Talmudic saying, "Love the labor, and despise the law (as a means of making a livelihood.)" I perceived that a thousand Jews had need of but one rabbi, whereas each of these thousand has use for a laborer. I decided to learn a trade. To learn some rough unskilled trade was not to my taste, and I therefore selected the trade of embroiderer—to make the lace, embroidered collars and cuffs for military and civil officers. I was then ten years old, and, as was the custom, I had to apprentice myself to a master-embroiderer for six years, with the understanding that at the end of that time he was to pay me twenty roubles. A contract was drawn up at the guild, to which I signed my name, and I began to learn the art of embroidery.

One year later I had so well mastered my trade, that the other apprentice embroiderers of the town considered me an artist at my work. Little by little I shook off the ways and habits of the yeshiba; I looked closely into the every-day prosaic life around me, and began to understand that there are many useful things in the world which one should know; I longed to know

them. Even then the query began to perplex me—why are the young men who study the "Prophets" regarded as "Apikorsim?" (As mentioned before, the cheder in those days taught only the Hebrew of the prayer Book and the Hebrew of the Pentateuch. All other books, save the Talmud, were "forbidden fruit.") Why this persecution of young men who study Hebrew? Is it not the language of our Cohanim, Leviim, and of the Prophets?—the very language in which Moses wrote the Torah for us? ("Prophets," as here used, includes all books of the Old Testament except the Pentateuch.) I began secretly to study the "Prophets" in the hours when I was free from work, and learned them thoroughly. I devoured those sublime passages like a hungry man, and they inspired me in the highest degree. The first poetic spark in my soul was lighted by the Prophets. In those lonely and quiet hours I learned how to write, and studied arithmetic as far as algebra. To increase my knowledge, I also applied myself to the products of the new Jewish literature, which were generally known as "outside" books, or "treifposlim." The deepest impression was made upon me at that time by Reb Naitali Herz Weisel, both by his prose writings and by his "Songs of Beauty." (Shirei Tifereth. The word "song" means both "poem" and song; as used here, song is understood to mean "lyrical poem.") The first poem which I wrote was the song, "Zion M'chal Yofi," in Hebrew. I wrote it the "Ninth of Ab," in 5613 (1852). To this very day it is still sung in many Jewish homes in Lithuania.

Things went wrong with me at my master's however, and because I was tied to him by contract, I could get no work elsewhere in Vilna. I could tolerate the situation no longer. I therefore left Vilna and traveled afoot to the city of Boisk in Curland, and where I worked for two years at an embroiderer's. During the night I kept up my studies under Reb Yankele Boisker, the rabbi of the town. At the same time I read diligently the words of Abraham Mappu, M. Aaron Ginzberg,

Kalmon Shulman, and other literary men, and I acquired a fair acquaintance with the Hebrew language.

THE YOUNG VICTIMS.

The history of Jewish suffering contains many pages written in blood. These bloody passages represent the dark periods in Jewish history. The drowning of the new-born babes in Egypt—in Rome, Antioch and Titus selling thousands of Jewish children in slavery—and in Spain, the auto-de-fe, when the Inquisition burned Jews by the hundreds. But the bloodiest page in our history is the one which details that awful period in the reign of Nicholas I., when Jewish young children were forcibly torn away from the arms of their parents, and sent off into the army. Our blood freezes in our veins as we recite the details of this wild barbarism—unparalleled in the world's history. The mothers who were robbed of their children by the Egyptians, the Romans and the Spanish priests, had at least the sad comfort to know that their little ones were spared from long and great sufferings—by a quick death. The bereaved mothers in the days of Nicholas I. had not even that much "comfort." Their young were snatched away from them, scattered in the far-away snow-fields of Siberia, or in the steppes of the Caucasus. There they were given over to the brutal peasants, or to the wild Cossacks; these were to train them to be soldiers. Their mothers never saw them again. Some of the young Jewish victims were forcibly converted to Christianity, and they remained permanently in those far-off provinces. Others who would not yield to conversion, were whipped and not infrequently drowned.

To our own eternal shame, be it admitted, that this wild barbarism came in part from our own midst. Our leaders, and those whom Russian tyranny developed to become our chiefs of the communes, were the executioners of the Jewish children. And because that bloody epoch played an important part in my life, I shall describe it somewhat thoroughly.

In those days the Russian Jews enjoyed a sort of communal autonomy. Each Jewish community had its own leaders, with one Chief of Commune over them all. Usually each community had twenty-four such leaders, who were called the deputies; their leader was called the "ishborchik." These deputies, together with the "isborchik" were responsible for the community to the Government. They had to collect the poll-tax, and other taxes imposed by the Government upon Jews; and they had to supply the required number of Jewish recruits for the army. There were two taxes (that is two taxes that were imposed upon the Jews, in addition to the regular taxes imposed upon all subjects of the empire); the poll-tax and the "candle-tax," however, were used for maintaining two rabbinical seminaries in Vilna and Zhitomir. These schools supplied the Russian Jews with "educated" rabbis; their students, in addition to the purely Jewish subjects, studied also Russian, geography, history, mathematics and other sciences. These institutions were viewed with mistrust and dislike by the mass of the people, and their students were regarded as 'apikorsim.'

The "deputies" and "isborschiks" produced by such a system, were mainly cruel, heartless men, who cared little for the community, and were working solely for their own profit. In addition to the regular taxes which the Government imposed upon the Jews, they extorted from the poor additional contributions, to fill their own pockets. As is usual among coarse people, they flattered the rich and well-to-do and exploited the poor with great brutality. When the time came for collecting the taxes, a veritable reign of terror possessed the town. Accompanied by police and Cossacks, these "leaders" would swoop down upon the homes of the poor and seize all they could lay hands upon. To take away a pillow from under the languid head of some wretched invalid, or, on a Friday evening, to carry off the candlesticks, together with the "blessed lights," was a gleeful "joke" for them. (The blessing of the Sabbath lights on Friday even-

ings, one of the most touching and beautiful ceremonies in the Jewish home, is strictly observed in every orthodox Jewish household. Among the poor, the "candlesticks," usually a wedding gift, form the most valuable asset in the home.) Articles thus seized were carried off as pledges—possibly never to be redeemed—to the "commune-house" (kohl stubel), which was then the great receptacle for Jewish tears, the cemetery for the living, where old and young would come periodically to bewail their losses.

Still greater, and yet more terrible, was the cruelty of these deputies and "isborschiks," at the (military) conscriptions. These "excellent Jews," in their long coats, and the "holy" skull-caps on their piously shaven heads, were transformed into ravaging, blood-thirsty beasts. Here, too, as in the collection of taxes, they catered to the rich and well-to-do; the sons of these were not drafted as recruits, but upon the shoulders of the poor the burden was ruthlessly thrown. They, the poor, had to give their children to supply the full number of recruits.

Vilna, in those days, had about 25,000 adult Jews. The imperial "ukase" called for the conscription of ten recruits per one thousand adults. Vilna was required to furnish, by the first day of each November, 250 Jewish recruits—between 18 and 21 years of age. The "isborchik," it must be stated, had the power to declare a Jewish young man to be of any age, older or younger, as suited his particular purpose. The term of service was twenty-five years. The recruits, in groups of ten, were handed over to an "elder" ("diadko"), an experienced soldier, who was to drill them for the service. This "elder" had his pupils at his mercy; maltreat them as he might, there was no appeal and no redress. A complaint against a superior from a soldier, only meant twenty-five strokes at the whipping post, for the miserable recruit. The entire time of service was one period of hunger, need and beatings. The rolled-up heavy coat, the extra pair of clumsy boots, the heavy gun, the bullet-box, and the tin water-can—a total weight of about

three hundred pounds, had to be borne constantly, either on the drilling grounds, or at sentinel duty. Very often he was obliged, with his heavy load on him, to go through the "storm march." His limbs were always sore and covered with wounds. He was beaten and abused by all—from the lowest non-commissioned officer to the commander of the company. His food was so poor that a hungry dog might despise to touch it. A worm was of apparently more value than a recruit, especially a Jewish recruit. For the slightest offence he was punished with the dungeon or the lash. The Jewish recruit could never hope to see another Jew; he knew neither Sabbath nor holy day, for he was sent to the distant provinces, where Jews were not allowed residence. Had the Jewish mother been allowed her choice, she would sooner have buried her child alive, than sent off to such service.

When the Crimean War broke out and Russia had need to send a large army to the front, an ukase went forth that each unmarried young man must serve as a soldier. To defend their children against this terrible ukase, the Jewish parents hit upon the device of marrying off very young children. This period is known among the Russian Jews as "The Terror." Young boys of eight or ten years were "married" to girls of the same age, and in this way the children were freed from the military service. This, however, brought matters to such a pass, that the "commune" found itself unable to supply the required number of Jewish recruits, and then came the inhuman ukase of the "cantonists," which permitted children between the ages of eight and eighteen to be drafted into the army. Until the age of eighteen they were "educated" under Government supervision, and then they had to begin their term of twenty-five years actual service.

The "Cantonists," that is to say, these children of eight to eighteen, who were to be "educated" for the army, were sent off to inner Russia, to Siberia, or to the Caucasus, and were distributed among the peasants in the villages. At all times, the Cantonist was the pea-

sant's chattel. The latter used to work him as he would a horse, excepting that when a horse fell from overwork the peasant felt his loss in money; whereas, if the Jewish "Cantonist" died, whether from hunger or exposure, sickness, or blows—the peasant had no cause to feel disturbed. No one asked an account for the shedding of innocent blood—the child was buried, and there the matter ended. The poor child had no one to wash him; and, if because of his squalid surroundings he contracted some disease, he was not infrequently cast into a nearby river and drowned. Why should the peasant spare him? He could at any time get ten other Jewish children to take his place. The Russian priests of the villages considered it a special act of grace to convert these Jewish children, and woe to the unfortunate Jewish lad who would not kiss the cross or eat of the meat of the swine! He was tormented and tortured in every possible way until death came to his relief.

My consternation and despair may easily be imagined, therefore, when I suddenly received a letter from mother, with the terrible news that my younger brother Akiba had been drafted as a soldier. He was then nine years old (I had just become "barmitzvah"). This unexpected shock crushed me entirely. I lost all desire for work. My heart yearned for my unhappy mother, thus left alone in dire distress and misery; I had not a groschen for expense; so I made the long distance from Boisk to Vilna on foot.

With streaming hot tears, my poor mother pressed me to her heart. "Now you are my only one—my only one! I have no one else in the world!" she sobbed. Then she told me how it all happened. It was at night. My brother Akiba was sitting on her lap and she, as usual, was reciting his night prayer (kriath-sma) with him, before putting him to sleep. Suddenly, the "impressors" (literally, the "catchers," or seizers)—low fellows who were employed to do the dirty work of the impressment system. Their business was the seizing of young children, either on the high-road, or after breaking into a home)

burst in. She struggled like a tigress. The child was torn away from her and carried off, as she was lying, beaten half dead, on the floor. A short time later, they put the thick, heavy army coat on him, and with many other children he was sent off to Siberia. . . .

As a matter of legality, my brother could not, in accordance with the law, be impressed as a soldier. We were the only two children in the family, and the law explicitly stated that only families having three children or more, should send one to serve in the army. But who, in those days, heeded law or justice! With the poor, they did as they pleased. The rich bought their children's freedom with money, and the children of the poor were offered as vicarious sacrifices!

MISFORTUNES ACCUMULATE.

Immediate troubles cause us to forget those that are more remote. New sorrows afforded me but little time to mourn the fate of my younger brother. I soon perceived again that I must provide for myself, as my poor mother was not able to support me. I had become a good embroiderer by this time, but I could not set to work at any embroiderer's on account of the old contract which had bound me to my first master for six years. I therefore resolved to wander forth, hoping to find my fortune in some other city. I bade my mother farewell, and started off into the wide world, afoot.

On the first day of Ellul, in the year 5613 (1853), after long wanderings, I came to the city of Bobruisk, in the Government of Minsk. As might have been expected, I found no embroiderer there with whom I might work and thus earn my bread. For several days I wandered through the streets of Bobruisk, seeking I know not what. And, sure enough, I found it, in the image of the chazzan, Reb Joel I. Humener (famous in those days), who used to come to Bobruisk yearly to chant the "musafim"* during the Holy Days.

*"musof"—literally, "addition"—prayers added to the regular morning ("shachrith") prayer, on Sabbath and holidays.

(Yamim-noraim). If I can not work at an embroiderer's, why not earn something as a chorist? thought I, and off I went to Reb Joel Ihumener. He tested me, and found that I possessed a good voice and a fine "ear." He engaged me as a singer, at the price of two roubles (what a fortune!) for all the holidays. He provided me with board at the house of the president of the synagogue, with leave to sleep regularly on a bench in the synagogue.

At that time I composed my song "The Light," and immediately afterwards a second song, "Reb Tahanun." This song, "Reb Tahanun," had a great popular success. It was sung everywhere.

We spent the evening of simhath-beth-hashovah** very enjoyably in the house of the president of the synagogue, and later in the synagogue. "Reb Tahanun" was sung by the choir, and all the chassadim were delighted with me—the young author. The universal joy all around me, affected me but little, nor could the honors shown me that evening, comfort me much. Like a dark cloud, the question, "What will become of me after the holidays?" was continually before me.

After the holidays the chazan gave me the two roubles, and told me to go. Whither? Neither of us knew. But then, what matters it whence? The world is large enough, and Jews, bless the Lord, are plentiful. What matters it then, where a Jew goes?

It had become very cold, however, and here I had nothing but my thin summer clothes. Since I had plenty of money—the two roubles from Joel Ihumener—I went to the market and bought a "fur" coat. Readers with delicate nerves might be seriously shocked at the words "fur-coat;" let me hasten to reassure them that a "fur-coat" was called a "fur-coat" solely because it had a fur collar. And there were also in those days "fur-coats" which did not have even a fur collar, but a "future-collar;" that is, a collar which might

**Simhath-beth-Hashovah" — literally, "the joy of the well-supplied home."

some day, with the help of a kind Providence, hope to be covered with some cat, or fox "fur."

A few days later, as I was proudly parading the streets of Bobruisk in my "fur," I met a farmer who lived four versts' distance from the city. He was seeking a tutor of Hebrew, for his children. I offered myself for the "position," and we readily came to an understanding. My salary was to be twenty-five roubles for the term (six months), with the privilege of sleeping on the warm oven. (The Russian "oven" is a house-fixture, built as an extension of one of the walls, allowing the top to be used as a bed.)

It is generally admitted the world over, that a Jew eats that he may live; whereas, it is the opposite with the Christian—he lives that he may eat. My new employer devised a novel theory of his own, to wit: neither eat nor live (nor live nor eat), but just to "pass away" the few years of our earthly existence. And, for mere "passing away" purposes, a bit of bread, baked from oats and barley, with a little "groipen," to which a few drops of oil were added—was quite ample. Throughout the week not a morsel of meat came into the house, and the week days were "passed away" with this bread-of-misery and with the "soup" in which even the Jewish "impressors" could not find one "groipen."

For the Sabbath, however, the farmer would bring from town a sheep's head, and I would often refresh myself with a bone from this same head. The self-same oil with which the hard foods were softened, was also used for lighting the house. And before such light I would sit for six hours daily and talk myself hoarse in teaching my "scholars," who mentally were not a whit superior to the children of the village peasants. Naturally, after this exhausting labor, even such foods tasted royally to me.

Meanwhile, my clothes were wearing down rapidly, and because zero weather was quite frequent, I almost fell ill of exposure to the bitter cold. I asked of my employer some part of my salary, that I might clothe myself some-

what decently. At first he gave me some empty excuses, but towards the Feast of Passover, he informed me that he would employ me for another term and then (the second term) he would give me all the money I would want. As I had no choice, I remained with him. All this time I was clad in rags, and my shoes were torn. At the end of Passover, I wrote my song, "The Eye," in which I sang of my own misery.

At Shabuoth he again put me off with some excuse, and, after that holiday, when I began to demand my money, he hit upon a "clever scheme." He went to Bobruisk, came to the leaders of the commune, and offered, if well paid, to give them a "nefesh" (soul). He received twenty-five roubles, and took along with him an "impressor" and two Cossacks, who were to bring me to the "isborchik."

Not knowing my danger, I had sought my bunk and went to sleep. Suddenly I felt a heavy hand fall upon my young body and shake me violently. I awoke and opened my eyes. Three strange men stood before me. One of them held a lantern, which he placed close to my eyes.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Nothing, sonnie—get up," the "impressor" answered.

"Get up? Why?"

"You'll go with us to town."

"Why? What business have I in town?"

"Well, you'll see! Dress yourself, boy, and be quick."

"I don't want to. I won't go!"

A blow in the face dazed me. I was wrapped in my torn clothes, thrown into a wagon, and brought to Bobruisk.

There I was locked up in the barracks.

IN THE BARRACKS.

In order to get rid of the "hidden" (neelom*), that is the Jews who were not regularly entered on the public

*Literally, a "disappearer"—by that was meant one whose birth was not registered in the public records (a device to free one from serving in the military).

records, the Czar Nicholas I., issued an ukase which permitted every "hidden" Jew to be sent off as a soldier; a "hidden" man was one who had no passport, and obviously a man whose birth was not recorded could get no passport. This gave anyone the right to seize any young man or boy who had no passport and hand him over to the commune as a soldier, in lieu of some member of his own, or some other family.

For the communal leaders of those dark days, who constantly sought to thrive on Jewish misery, this ukase opened a new traffic. Each Jewish commune sent out its "impressors" on all roads and highways; they hid in inns and villages and watched for prey. Into their hands fell all unfortunate Jewish young men and youths who could not show passports. Nor could all who had passports escape them. Passports were often torn before the very eyes of the victims, who were seized as "hidden" ones.

Those who were seized were bound like sheep, brought to town and locked up in the barracks. There they would be kept for weeks until the recruiting (priom) would begin. The authorities were not over-scrupulous with these unfortunates. Were they weak, sick, or defective? No matter—they were taken, donned in military clothes, and packed off to serve the Czar. These "bodies" were sent in place of men whose families could pay a satisfactory price; the deputies and the isborchik divided the money. Many private individuals took part in this traffic. They would seize young children and sell them to the commune "bosses." Those times are known among the Russian Jews as the dreaded days of the "impressment." (Piomanes). Hundreds of "sales of Josephs" occurred daily. The lesser rabbis of the smaller towns gave supine assent to such outrages, with the "argument" that it was "more pious" to protect the children of their own towns, than strange children from other towns. The more important rabbis wept in silence at these open outrages, but they dared not protest for three reasons. First, these proceedings were in ac-

cordance with the Czar's ukase. Secondly, they feared the izborischik and the deputies—at whose pleasure they held their positions; and thirdly, they feared denunciation to the government officials. The result of such denunciation would inevitably have been exile to Siberia. These were times when men devoured men openly and with the consent of the government.

And, at the age of fourteen, I was one of the victims.

I stayed in the barracks for five long weeks. The "Commune" (Kohol) was waiting for the Recruiting. Chances of redemption, it seemed I had none. How could I? From whence could my help come? Through what miracle? Can poor sheep, bound in the slaughter-house hope to escape the slaughterer? Legally or illegally, I would remain a soldier. I would have many years to serve among the "Cantonists." I would be sent to some peasant in a village many thousands of miles away, perhaps to far-away Siberia, there to tend swine, to chop wood, make clumsy peasant shoes, and for every trifling offense suffer cruel beatings. Should I emerge safe from this dreadful ordeal, the real Gehenna, with all its horrors, would only have just begun—the "elder" soldier, the Russian barracks, the drills, the marches under a load of three hundred pounds—the lash, the beatings, and other "diversions" of this sort. More than all else, the thought of my unhappy, widowed mother, helpless and miserable, tormented me. For twenty-one dark years she lived with her husband, and when an evil chance deprived her of her supporter, she was left with two orphans; with them she could share only her sorrows—for joys she never had. Her sole comfort were the two orphans, and now she is robbed of both. "A cruel beast hath devoured them!" Nay, no wild beast of the forest were these, but human beings with hearts of wolves!

Such thoughts occupied me the entire time that I spent, together with other Jewish victims, in the barracks. Those thoughts stirred up my emotions and then, in the barracks, I wrote my

poem "The Piomanes," of 108 stanzas. The theme for the poem I took from the prophet Haggai.

Haggai came to the priests and inquired of them: "Does a man or a garment become holy when this man or this garment touches the holy meat of the sacrifice?"

"No, he does not become holy," the priests replied.

"And does a man or a garment become unclean when either of them comes into contact with the unclean?" the prophet further inquired.

"Yes, verily, they become unclean," answered the priests.

"Such is the entire people," Haggai sorrowfully exclaimed. "No good, clean, or holy thing adheres to them; only unholy things cling to them. That is, while living among strange nations, they do not harm good deeds or fine customs, from them they learn only the bad, the impure."

The horrible ukase of the "impressment" (Piomanes) was a severe test for the Jews of that generation, and many stood that test poorly. In thus seizing and bartering their own brothers into conversion and suffering, they revealed to the world a bad element among them! Alas, that this bad element should have gained so strong an ascendancy.

The above is, in brief, the burden of my song. "Tried at the Bar of Justice and Convicted." I wrote this not with my own blood alone, but with the blood of all my unhappy people; not alone my sorrows resound through my verse, but the despairing wail of all Israel.

And how sad, how heartrending was the sight within the barracks. Eighty miserable, pale, emaciated, hungry, half-naked little beings, lying on the floor on a pile of dirty straw! The greater part were small children, who had been snatched from their mothers by tyrannical hands, and who could not realize the great misfortune awaiting them. Even here in the barracks, not comprehending the dark fate awaiting them, they laughed, frolicked, and played with one another; the older ones, regarding them, forgot their own sorrows and shed bitter tears. Twice

daily the iron doors opened, and the hideous lackey of the commune "bosses" entered and brought some loaves of bread and a few pots of soup, too dirty even for dogs. If any one dared to complain or make a request, he was seized by the hair and thrust to the wall with such a violence that his young bones cracked.

"I want to go back to my mother," some child broke out with a sob.

"You'll see her, indeed, in the other world! only be patient!" the Jewish Antiochus replied, with a leer.

"Let me go home! I want to go back home!" wailed another little one.

"Wait a few more days!" roars the human tiger. "You will then have a large home! It extends from Bobruisk to Archangel!"

Night is coming on. All lie on the floor and say the "k'riath-shma," others, the older ones, recite the "Psalms" by heart, and thus lull themselves to sleep. A flock of sheep awaiting slaughter! They lie on each other in the dirty straw. Misfortune and misery have united these strangers into one body. Here and there a heavy sigh breaks forth from the breast of some older one. The very young ones sleep peacefully, a serene smile on their wan features. Of what are they dreaming? Very likely that they are on mother's lap, and she is stroking the pretty childish curls.

Among the eighty who were in the barracks with me, there were some who possessed good voices for singing. I arranged a choir of ten and drilled them on my song, "The Poimanes." Several times each day we used to sing it, and when the sad strain of the music would resound through the barracks tears would steal into every eye and not a heart remained unmoved. Even our hideous jailers with hearts of stone and iron nerves, who watched us day and night, wept with us.

The month of "Ab" passed, and finally came the night preceding the day on which we were to be led to slaughter—to the 'Recruiting."

THE RELEASE.

But help was nearer than any of us suspected. On Purim, 5616 (1855) (that is, about a half year before I was seized and locked up in the barracks at Bobruisk), the Emperor Nicholas I. suddenly died. Alexander II. ascended the Russian throne, and the treaty of Paris was signed, and the Crimean War was at an end. One of the very first edicts issued by Alexander the II. was for the release of the "poimaniks."

At about 1 o'clock in the morning, while we were all asleep in the barracks, we were awakened by a great commotion in the street. The noise came nearer and nearer, and soon we heard vigorous knocks at the iron doors and shutters.

"Get up children! A deliverance! You are free!" some one shouted.

"An ukase from the Czar to release you!" shouted another.

"Praise God, children! Say Hallel!"* several voices called out together.

This news was to us as the sound of the Great Shofar which will awaken the dead on the day of Resurrection. With a cry of joy, we sprang up from our wretched straw heaps, washed and fell to saying "Hallel." I was the chazzan, and my choir accompanied me. After "Hallel," we all joined hands and danced a Jewish "Karehod" (folk-dance). It was a gruesome scene, making one laugh and weep in turns. After the dance, I wrote my song, "The Deliverance" (Die Yeshauh), and arranged a beautiful melody for it.

It was decided to release us from the barracks at 10 o'clock in the morning. The rich Reb Isaac Rabinovitz, of Bobruisk, donated forty roubles to the synagogue for the privilege of opening the door of the barracks. Long before the appointed hour a great crowd of men and women, young and old, had gathered about the doors of the barracks and waited impatiently for the moment when the barracks would open and we would emerge—free. Each and every one praised and blessed the good Emperor Alexander II., who had

*A special prayer of praise in the Hebrew lit.

issued this manifesto, and who had also recalled many of the cruel edicts of his father.

The happy moment came. With the benediction, "Blessed be He that releaseth them that are bound," the rich Reb Isaac Rabinovitz unlocked the door and the crowd surged into the barracks. The town chazzan recited a prayer of blessing ("mi sheberach") for the Emperor, and sang the 45th Psalm. ("I waited patiently for the Lord; He inclined unto me and heard my cry.") etc.

Then my choir and myself were placed upon a large table, and we sang my song, "Placed Before the Bar of Justice and Convicted." Many of the people wept. But the song also had another effect, the people became so enraged at the "commune bosses" that they were ready to tear them to pieces, but they were already in hiding.

Upon request of some well-known citizens ("ba'alei batim") I sang two additional songs, "The Deliverance," and "Better to Take Than to Give," which described my employer, the farmer, who sold me to the commune for twenty-five roubles, instead of paying me my hard-earned salary. This song evoked a storm of indignation and the wrath of the multitude. Many were ready to proceed to that village and wreak dire vengeance upon him, but the rich Reb Isaac Rabinovitz quitted them and promised to deal with that monster himself. Then the door was opened, and the eighty of us came forth singing from the barracks. Reb Isaac Rabinovitz took me in his carriage to his home.

In this rich man's home, I too, became somewhat of a g'vir. I decked myself out in god clothes, and had in addition a capital of one hundred roubles in cash. My "wealth," as was the case with my misery, came to me in an unusual manner. To begin with, the "g'vir," Reb Isaac Rabinovitz, sent for the farmer at whose house I slaved with my three "scholars," and slapping him soundly across the face several times, ordered him to pay me the fifty roubles he owed me for two terms, and the twenty-five roubles he had received for

my "body" from the commune. This excellent "gentleman" pleaded that he was poor, and could not pay; but this did him little good. The "g'vir" sent several Cossacks to him, and they seized all that they could find in his house. A few days later the farmer came with the seventy-five roubles and redeemed his chattels. I thus suddenly became a "wealthy man."

At that time, and in the situation that I was, I believed myself to be almost a Rothschild. I had from time to time also received, in addition, some small sums of money from the guests who would visit the "g'vir," and for whom I would sing the three songs I had composed in the barracks.

When I was first seized as a "poimanik," the news of my capture reached a Vilna woman who happened to be in Babruisk at that time; she immediately wrote of it to my mother in Vilna. One morning, when I had been living at the g'vir's house for some time, the servant informed me that a strange couple—a Jewish man and a woman—wished to see me, and that they were waiting outside. Great was my joy when I came out into the street, to find my mother and my uncle Abraham-Leb. With a cry of joy my mother threw herself weeping upon me, and for a long time held me tight-clasped in her arms. Just as soon as she had received the letter from Vilna telling her of my capture, she obtained a passport for me from the Vilna "commune," and walked the distance of fifty Russian miles to Bobruisk to free me. My good uncle Abraham-Leb, would not hear of letting her walk this long distance alone; he therefore accompanied her the entire way. We spent eight days at the g'vir's house, and then left Bobruisk.

I returned to my mother's home in Vilna, and the very first to greet me was again old Poverty, who still reigned gaunt, grim monarch there. It became once more evident that I had no one to provide for me, and that I must myself earn my daily bread. The only way to do this was again to seek work at some embroiderer's; but this I could not do in Vilna, for my contract with my first master-embroider still

hung like the sword of Damocles over me. I had no choice but to leave my mother; and I started off to seek work in Kovno, fourteen Russian miles from Vilna.

In Kovna I went to work at an embroiderer's, but at night I used to study at the "Musor-stubel" of Reb Israel Salanter, in "Yatke-Gass."

THE GOLDEN AGE.

At this time began the "new era" for the Russian Jews. The Emperor Alexander the Second, as soon as he ascended the Russian throne, demonstrated that he knew that his Jewish subjects possessed many inherent virtues and abilities, by which the entire country might greatly profit, if they but be given the opportunity to use them. He threw open to them all the schools, gymnasia, and academies; and in a short time Russia had a great number of Jewish physicians, engineers, jurists, technologists, chemists, mechanics, architects, etc., many of whom acquired world-wide fame, and contributed greatly to the development of Russian science. In all branches of science, art, and literature were to be found a great number of Jewish representatives. In the military and the civil service many Jewish physicians, engineers, jurists, and technologists received positions, and were advanced in rank on the same terms as Christian officials. In the great Russian newspapers and journals were many Jewish contributors and in the theatres and opera-houses Jewish actors and singers. Alexander II. gave greater privileges to the educated Jews, and even to the Jewish laborers and mechanics he granted the right to settle and reside in all parts of Russia. It is only to be regretted that he did not go beyond granting semi-citizenship to his Jewish subjects. Had he gone further and removed entirely the old disabilities (exception laws), and had he at once put them on a basis of equality with all other Russian citizens, the "Jewish question" would have been closer to solution than it is to-day.

Jewish people, bowed to earth under

the burdens of cruel edicts of former days, could now raise its head somewhat, and breathe a little more freely.

A ray of light came into the dark Ghettos, and this ray awoke the Jews to a new life. They diligently took to education; they began systematically to study various sciences, to develop innate virtues and abilities; and first of all to break down the thick walls of superstition and fanaticism which for entire centuries had hemmed in the Russian Jewry from all sides. The first pioneers who undertook to weed from the Jewish garden its thorns, and to plant therein the tree of knowledge, were the Jews of the large cities. Those of the small towns still remained fixed in their old fanaticism; and not only would they have naught of education and culture, but they regarded these as a sort of heresy, and persecuted the adherents of the new thought. The youth or young man who studied the Russian language, or read the new "books of enlightenment" (haskoloh sephorim) was immediately stamped as an agnostic ("apikoros"). Many of these young men fell victims in the cause of "enlightenment."

Young as I then was, the changes stirred me greatly. Seeing how the Jewish people blossomed forth in the sunshine of enlightenment, like a beautiful flower, and spread its tender leaves I, with truly youthful ardor, wrote my song, "Die Blum" ("The Flower"), in Yiddish and in Hebrew, which begins with the words, "Neglected, on the Mother of Highways, lies a beautiful roses," etc.

In that song, I represented the Emperor Alexander II. as an angel who found, in the dust, a flower which had been torn from the garden of Zion; and beholding how all trample her under foot, he mercifully rescues her, revives her with living waters, and places her in his garden, among his other flowers.

At that time I wrote, in Kovno, in addition to this song, many others, such as "The Clock," "The Inn," "The Ferry—Summer and Winter," "The Farmer and the City Man." They were sung everywhere. All Kovno spoke of the young fellow, the embroiderer, who

composes such pleasing songs, and almost every evening I was invited to some social gathering. Crowds of people would assemble around the houses in which I sang my songs, and would listen until they learned them by heart. I noticed very soon that the singing of my songs yielded me better returns than my embroidery, from which I could never hope to have more than three roubles a week. And I decided to abandon that trade.

I will not sing my own praises, and will not say that my success as the people's bard, came solely from the excellence of my songs themselves. Of that the people must alone be the judge; but it is certain that I owe my success to the circumstance that at that time I was the "only one" in Russia. That is, I was the first one in Russia who composed songs together with appropriate melodies. There lived at that time in Galicia, Velvil Zbarser (Ehrenkranz), and Beril Broder; but there songs had not reached Russia, and especially Lithuania. Russia had as yet not a single railway, and intercourse with Galicia was very insignificant. Michael Gordon, too, had written some Yiddish songs, but he lived in Poltava, and Poltava was to all purposes as distant from Lithuania then as America is from Europe to-day. In those days the Russian Jews had no songs outside of my own, and to this my success in great measure is due.

I spent one year in Kovno, and so great was my success that I could well get along without doing any manual labor.

I returned to Vilna, where my songs had made my name known, and I began to officiate as a badhan at weddings. This was in 1861; and I then published my first volume, "New Songs" (Shirim Chadashim). In the same year the building of a railway from St. Petersburg to Warsaw, via Vilna, was begun. I then wrote "The Railway" ("Die Eisenbahn"). Sixteen years later I wrote another song with the same title in Minsk.

At the outset my new "profession" yielded me a very small income, for two reasons. First, because only the

poor invited me to weddings, and my compensation naturally was small; and secondly, that the recital of my songs necessitated instrumental accompaniment. The musicians who furnished the accompaniment took away the greater share of my earnings. If they did not succeed in getting a very comfortable share right at the wedding, they frequently attacked me in the street on my way home, and forcibly took away the money. Later my fortunes improved. The rich began to invite me to their weddings, and then I was well paid. Each band of musicians in those days had its own badhan; and the rich families used to engage only those musicians who engaged me.

Before my songs had become known, Moses Warshaver shone alone like a bright star among the badhanim. He used to be invited to the weddings of the rich, and earned alike both glory and money. With my advent in the same "profession," I became a serious competitor. He tried to suppress me by various means, but without success, until he conceived a plan by which he trapped me.

He induced me, through several of his friends to enter into partnership with him. I let myself be persuaded, and signed a contract with him. Just what was in the contract I did not exactly know. I discovered only later that he had inserted a clause in the contract stipulating that I was to be in his employ for a term of three years at eight gulden a week. Of course I immediately left him. This was exactly what he wished me to do. He at once sued me for breach of contract, declaring that all money I should be ordered to pay as fine, he would present to the wounded soldiers. (This was during the Polish Rebellion.) Then began the most troublesome time of my early years. If I would attend a wedding, Moses Warshaver would be sure to come with the police and take me away. This reached such a stage that people ceased to invite me to weddings, because the joy of the occasion was sure to be disturbed by a descent of Moses Warshaver with an escort of police. I remained without means of a liveli-

hood; what little I did earn went to my lawyer. Each day I was dragged like a criminal to the police, and daily my troubles increased.

AFTER MY WEDDING.

It is curious how help often comes to us in life at the very time when need and despair are greatest, and when we have long abandoned hope. At the time when I struggled in Moses Warshaver's iron grip, and had not the least prospect to escape from him, something happened which led me from "slavery to freedom."

Some time previous to the above, the Polish rebellion broke out, and Count Mouravieff became Governor-General of the four governments of Vilna, Kovno, Grodno, and Minsk. He resided at Vilna, and from there all orders and ukases dealing with the Polish rebellion went forth. The war with the Poles began, and blood flowed freely.

I was so young then that I could not judge who was right in the bloody controversy; my childish instincts inclined me to the side of the stronger. I sympathized with Russia, and inspired by that sympathy, I composed a song, "The Polish Rebellion." I sang this song at the Jewish weddings to which I was invited, and my audiences enjoyed it greatly.

Now, it came to pass that I sang this song at a "rich" wedding in Vilna, at which a Russian colonel was a guest. He requested that my song be translated to him into Russian, and when the translation was given him, he found it worthy of being presented to the Governor-General, Count Mouravieff. This song pleased the Governor-General greatly, and, in recognition, he sent me a gift of twenty-five roubles through the colonel. Later, when the wealthy Reb Judah Apatov, of Vilna, came to visit the Governor-General, with whom he was on terms of friendship, Count Mouravieff praised me to him.

Immediately afterwards an opportunity came which made me acquainted with Reb Judah Apatov, of blessed memory, who through his great influence was very powerful in Vilna. He

invited me to the wedding of his daughter and Reb "Abrehmele Parness." My songs and my sermon pleased him so much that he entered into friendly converse with me. I disclosed my sad condition to him, and told him of the bitter persecutions I had to endure from Moses Warshaver because of a false contract. Reb Judah Apatov promised to help me and kept his word. A short time later the contract was declared worthless and Moses Warshaver was obliged to leave Vilna.

I now began to breathe freely and to earn comfortable returns. But, day by day, the time set for my wedding approached. My father-in-law, Reb Hillel, the Chassid, insisted that the wedding take place immediately after Yom Kippur, and invited me to spend the holy days (yomim noraim) with him in the Samachvolovitz.

On the day after Yom Kippur, 1862, my wedding took place. I was then twenty-three years old, and was regarded by the town folk as a decidedly old bachelor. After the wedding my father-in-law thought it necessary to introduce me to the Rabbi of Kaidanov, and he took me to spend one Sabbath at the Rabbi's. He probably wanted to show the "Zaddik" what a "find" he had been blessed with for a son-in-law. The impression which the Rabbi of Kaidanov made upon me I described in my humorous song, "The Rabbi's Little Key." From this song, my father-in-law became only too fully aware of the "treasures" he had gotten, and did not bring me to his "zaddik" any more. Two months after my marriage, I again returned to Vilna.

At this time I set more seriously to work to compose songs. Of the songs that I composed then, the following attracted most attention: "The Rouble," "The Iron Safe," "Childbirth," and "Yekele Bass" (in a separate volume—130 stanzas).

My name became known widely and I was called to weddings in Grodno, Warsaw, Dinanburg, Vitebsk, Kovno, Minsk, etc. The Libavo-Romayn Railway had just been built, and it became possible for me to attend weddings in distant places

and my earnings increased considerably. I must note here that the melodies to my first songs never did quite satisfy me, because I drew mainly upon the "motifs" of the chazzanim in the Vilna synagogues, and they were by no means musical. During my childhood the chazzan in the Vilna synagogues was "Ortschig the Chazzan." He was indeed brother to the famous chazzan of the Slutsk, known as the "Fiedele Chazzan" (violin chazzan), but he had not the latter's talent. Before becoming chazzan he had been a military drummer. Since I had nothing better to choose from, I adapted his melodies to my songs; hence my first songs lacked sufficient melody. Later my songs became much more melodious. For this I owe gratitude to the great chazzan, Reb Waserzweig, or Reb "Chaim Lomzer," who became the chazzan of Vilna. He was a good composer, and his book, "Shir Mikdash" ("Holy Song"), enjoyed a great success among those who loved Jewish music. The melodies to my later songs were written in his spirit.

In the meantime the Polish rebellion was spreading from day to day; and we had a time of unrest and disquiet in Lithuania and Poland. Rebels were daily hanged, shot, or exiled to the farthest governments in Siberia. But on the development of the Jewish spirit, and of the new Jewish culture (Haskoloh), the rebellion exerted no untoward influence. The Jews kept aloof and did not mix in political matters. They at that time devoted all their efforts to educating themselves, and to imbibing the spirit of European and modern civilization. Then were published the first Jewish newspapers in Russia, as the "Hamelitz," the "Hacarmel," in Hebrew. (The "Hamagid" appeared a few years earlier in Liek, Prussia), and the "Kol-Mevaser," in Yiddish. All these newspapers and a great number of "enlightenment-books" (haskoloh-sephorim) did not miss their mark. Through their influence the Russian Jews began to think, feel, and live in an atmosphere of greater refinement. On me also had they

made a deep impression, and I applied myself still more diligently to the Jewish culture!

MY INTERCOURSE WITH MASKILIM.

After my wedding I was more independent and lived according to my own tastes and inclinations. I needed to account of my doings to no one, and feared no one, since I earned my living through my own efforts. My tastes and inclinations attracted me to that great light which had already penetrated every dark corner of Russian Jewry. Vilna had come to be popularly known as the "Jerusalem of Lithuania," because there was the throne of Jewish learning and wisdom. I was strongly drawn to the Jewish intellectual giants, who labored unceasingly in all the branches of science for their people. I became acquainted with the greatest among them, and was their constant guest. They included such splendid Jewish types as Reb Z'vi Hirsch Katzenellenbogen (known as the "Kav Hayoshor"); his son, Reb Chaim L. Katzenellenbogen, Adam Hachohen (Abraham-Ber Levenson, or simply "Beril Michaelikser"), Mordecai Plungian, Matthias Strashun, Isaac Ben-Jacob, Samuel Joseph Finn, Kalmon Shulman, Isaac Meir Dick, Joshua Steinberg* and many others.

Saturday evenings we would gather for the "third meal" at the home of Reb Hirsch Katzenellenbogen, and in winter frequently spend the time together till the small hours of the morning. There was the living fount of learning and wisdom (Torah and Chochma), and there, too, were begun the greater number of the new commentaries on the Bible, and the "Agudoth" of the Talmud. At these gatherings letters would be read from foreign Jewish maskilim, from Samuel Juda Luzzati, Geiger, Rappaport, and others, who were in spiritual sympathy with the maskilim of Vilna. There was the great and deep spiritual fountain from

*For these, see Jewish Encyclopedia.

which I quenched my thirst for "enlightenment." There, too, were projected the famous monthlies and annu-als, known in our literature as the "Pirchei-zofon" ("The Flowers of the South"). Here, too, was a mine of pure Jewish humor and wit. The witticisms and anecdotes here told are found in the collection of Ben Jacob's Epigrams. The greater part of them were passed across the table.

I still remember an amusing anecdote which has never left my mind. It was on Purim, and Adam Hacohen sent his gift to Reb Chaim L. Katzenellenbogen, with a poem entitled, "Shemesh, Yoreach Velochav," that is, "Sun, Moon, and Stars," and recounted the great works of the three great men of the name of Moses. The great Moses was compared to the sun, Moses ben Maimon to the moon, and Moses Mendelssohn to a star.

Reb Chaim L. Katzenelenbogen also returned a gift with a poem, in which he pointed to the works of three others bearing the name of Moses—Moses Cordoveris, Moses de Leon and Moses Isserles. (Three great reactionary rabbis, well known for their unrelenting orthodoxy.) This poem was entitled, "Choshech, Anan, Vaarofel," that is, "Darkness, Cloud and Fog." Of course, no one dared publish that poem; its author would have been mobbed and stoned.

* * * * *

Here I will interrupt the narrative and revert to my boyish days. When I was a small boy, and we still lived in the Yatke Gass, in Vilna, in "Kochele's" Court, we had two neighbors, whose boys were my playmates. One of our neighbors was "Matthias the Sheinker," and his youngest boy, "Motke," became the famous sculptor Mark Antokolsky. Our second neighbor was "Yoshe the Chazzan," and his boy "Leibke" became the famous author Leon Cantor, Chief Rabbi of Libau, and the publisher and editor of the Hebrew journal "Hayom," in St. Petersburg. The three of us were rather troublesome chaps, and through our mischief-making often reaped a harvest of blows. Later, when

we had become men, we met several times in various cities.

In our youthful days, the three of us, Mark Antokolsky, Leon Cantor, and myself suffered a great deal from the dark fanaticism of the age. Between the "forties" and the "fifties" of the nineteenth century, our Jewish masses were submerged in a sea of fanaticism and superstition. The name "apikoros" could be very easily acquired in those days. To carry a handkerchief on the Sabbath, to read a pamphlet of the new "Haskoloh" or to commit some other transgression of that sort, was sufficient to stamp one an "apikoros." And to be an "apikoros" meant to be a "free man"—in the sense that any one could do as he pleased with you. These "apikorsim" were treasure troves for the commune "bosses" and their impres-sors. They were ferreted out like hares in the field, trapped and condemned to military service. The "pious" commune leaders worked on the principle: "Let an 'apikoros,' rather than an 'honest' child, serve the Czar." The pleasure of being a soldier in the days of Nicholas I. I have already described. Even the "apikorsim" who, through some lucky chance were not drafted into the soldiery, were practically in a state of ex-communication, and no "good," and "pious" Jew would have aught to do with them. Such treatment they received not alone from strangers, but in some cases even their own parents and relatives hounded them. They were beaten without mercy, deprived of food, and were often driven out of their homes. The mothers of these unfortunates mourned for them as they would for the dead.

The great "gaon" and "zaddik" Reb Israel Salanter, when he learned that his son had gone to Berlin to study medicine, removed his shoes and sat down on the ground to observe "Shivah."*

"Matthias the Sheinker" learned that

*Shivah, literally "seven."—To sit "Shivah," to mourn seven days, is required by the Jewish ritual, on the death of a member of the immediate family.

his boy, "Motke," (Mark Antokolsky), had been stealing out of the "cheder," where he studied "Gemorah" with "mefarshim" (commentaries), and had gone secretly to the garret, to carve some "toys" and "images"—he beat him with great brutality. Once, upon finding Motke in the garret, intent upon carving figures, he dragged him down, crying "Roshoh! (Wicked One) Why it is written plainly 'Thou shalt not make for thee any graven image, or any likeness!'" He then put him out in the court-yard, in a heavy frost, and compelled him to pump water for several hours. This great genius almost perished from the effects of this exposure.

My other comrade, Leioke (Leon Cantor), had to suffer similar parental oppression. When his father found some "contrabrand" (that is, some pamphlet, Hebrew, or Russian, or German) in the boy's possession, Leibke got his share with no gentle hand. As for me, my situation was a thousand times worse. I was an orphan, and a poor orphan at that. I was in constant peril, and had to be on my guard, even against my comrades. Of so poor and defenseless an "apikoros" as myself, the kohol would have made short work; they would have shaved half of my head (as the custom was) thrown me into a military coat, and sent me, like my brother Akiba, to some peasant in Kamschatka, or in Turkestan, and what could I have done? When I wished to visit the "maskilim," I had to go by stealth lest I suffer the consequences of detention.

The garb which Jewish men and women wore in those times were generally fashioned in Asiatic style. The men's coat was the "zupitze," a sort of long capote coat, which reached to the ground, and was bordered by a band of velvet which encircled the throat, and then came across the shoulders, the chest, and past the knees to the bottom. The surtout of the common and poorer people was known as the "kooba," among the rich and the scholars, this same cloak was called a "delie." It was a sort of gown, with sleeves reaching to the ground, which were really

never used by the wearer; they either wafted about like the sails of a wind-mill, or dragged behind like the wings of some sick bird. Hats were mostly made of wool or fur, but in various shapes, and known by distinctive names. There were the "ear-hats" shtreimelach, "chabadnitze," "breitlach," "half-moons" (halbe l'vanoh's), and many others. But each class of Jews wore its distinctive hat. Thus, a scholar always wore a shtreimel, a chassid—his habad-nitze. The "common people" wore other sorts of hats. Pantaloon were made of yellow nankin, very short, and fastened with strings over the stockings. Boots were not yet known; instead "pantofel" were worn (hob-nailed slippers). Regularly each Friday at the bath, heads were shaved in "honor of the Sabbath," except that the long "payas" (cork-screw curls) were left. The fastidious used to wear two "payas" on each side of the face.

The women, too, even the very young ones, had their heads shaved. They used to wear a "heibel," with a cleverly arranged veil, and above this a shawl conspicuously knotted in front. They also wore a bodice with a "zaleschke" in front. Their "pantofel" were short, with very high heels. Above all came a loose white gown, reaching to the ground and fastened in front right below the chin, by a pin. There were many other queer fashions of clothes in vogue at the time.

An ukase ordering the Jews to dress after the manner of the Europeans was received as a "terrible misfortune." Fasts were ordered, and special prayers to God offered that the obnoxious edict be recalled; but all of no avail. The police enforced the new law rigidly, and in a very short time the Russian Jews became "Europeans."....

RUSSIFICATION AND ASSIMILATION.

It is an accepted law in the science of gastronomy that the digestive system must not be overburdened at any one time by too much food; that eating must not be done hastily, and, above all,

great care taken to choose healthy, easily digested foods. These principles are still more important to one who is hungry, who has abstained from food for any length of time. He should select the healthy and light foods, and partake of little at first, until the powers of digestion are fully restored. Should he neglect to observe these simple rules, he will ruin his digestive system, the food will become poison to him, and he may contract a protracted disease which no physician will be able to cure.

This is exactly what happened to our Russian Jews from 1860 to 1880. For many long centuries they had endured an "intellectual" fast. The government had debarred them from the world's culture. They were closely packed together in the narrow and dark Ghettoes. They knew of their synagogues, yeshibas and prayer-houses (kloisen), on the one hand, and on the other hand of their little stores and inns. That there was a great world beyond and without, a world of culture, education and civilization—of this they had only heard. A great many of them strove to break through the "bounds" that confined them and to step into the world of light and life; but the Cossack, his lead-laden whip in hand, stood there ready to drive them back.

The thirst for education and civilization became daily more intense and reached the utmost limit of endurance. Five million Russian Jews raised their hands to the government and pleaded for mercy. "Release us from this Ghetto! We, too, are human beings! Give us breathing space! Give us light! We are faint and starving!" And the Cossack promptly answered "Nazad! (Back!) Here you are, and here you remain—not one step further!"

And all at once, lo! there came a light! Alexander the Second, as soon as he ascended the throne, opened wide the doors of the Ghetto, and the Russian Jews, young and old, men and women, rushed to the new culture. All crowded to the "sweet dish," and no time was lost in making up for the ages-long intellectual fast.

Here happened what usually occurs after a long fast. The wiser partook of

these foods with discretion. They selected the ingredients which were healthy and which their system could digest. All unripe, objectionable foods they rejected; their main object was to select the foods which the Jewish system could assimilate. The governing principle was to unite the Jewish learning with the new culture. They knew that among the new "foods" there were many that were injurious and unhealthy, though the defects were disguised by alluring spices; but those who had not lost the innate unerring Jewish "scent" found no difficulty in distinguishing that which was sound from the injurious, and therefore remained strong and healthy (faithful Jews) to this very day.

Others (and they formed the greater part of the Russian Jews), seized things as they came. Whether "kosher," or "treifa," wholesome or injurious—everything was acceptable. Nay, the more dangerous "foods" because of their more inviting accessories were devoured with even greater relish. And these "foods" were gorged at such a rate that "constitutional disorder" came on at once. Those who were a little wiser somehow shook off the objectionable matter, and became "healthy" again; a great number "died," and still a greater number are dangerously ill to this very day.

The "sick" among our Russian brethren, those who partook of dangerous quantities of the strange foods, believed that they would solve all difficulties by "Russification." That is, by abandoning the old Jewish culture and by adopting Russian mannerisms and customs—by ceasing to lead Jewish lives, and leading the lives of Russians. A great number of Jewish literary men of those times believed that the Russian Jew would become "Russified," and would adopt modern civilization, that they would receive full and equal rights—on the same terms as the other nationalities. These literary men were dazzled by the little liberty which Alexander the Second granted the Russian Jews, and they did not understand that he pursued the same object as his father Nicholas the First. The object was to "Russify" the Jews. Except that

Nicholas the First tried to accomplish his end through the mailed fist, and Alexander the Second with silk gloves. Nicholas tried to bring this about by the bloody "ukase;" Alexander by a mild policy. Nicholas and Alexander did not know, or had forgotten the maxim of Frederick the Great about the Jews: "Freedom makes them Christians." How far this maxim is true, I had the opportunity to see for myself. I saw that despite all the terrible decrees of Nicholas the First, the Jews remained true Jews, and Judaism remained strong. And I also saw to what great extent the "mild policy" of Alexander the Second weakened Judaism. In the days of Alexander the Second many more Jews were converted to Christianity than in the bitter days of Nicholas the First; and many who were indeed not converted remained but caricatures of real Jews.

The so-called 'Jewish aristocracy' in Russia, and especially the wealthy Jews of North Russia, of St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Charkow, "Russified" at top-speed. They removed from their homes and their home-life anything that was in the least degree Jewish. They shattered all that for thousands of years had been holy and dear to the Jew. Like apes, they imitated the manners and customs of the Christians; thus, at Christmas, they, too, would have a Christmas tree at their homes. The younger children did not even know that they descended from Jews (as was the case in the first "Pogroms," when the children asked their parents 'Why do they beat us? Are we, too, Jews?') If a mother still clung to some of the old Jewish customs, her children would sneer at her as a "Jewess;" the father was ashamed to converse with another Jew in public, or to have any intercourse with Jews. His acquaintances, or the "friends" who visited him, were all Christians. Many of them received no Jews, however able, into their service (as clerks, assistants, etc.). They would criticise Judaism more savagely than the Christian anti-Semites. These were the Russified Jews who, be it remembered, were not converted; this state of affairs was the direct re-

sult of Alexander the Second's "mild policy," and of the "freedom" he granted us.

Unfortunately, our literary men, the so-called "prophets of the generation," did not understand this, and persuaded the masses of the people that the day of redemption was at hand, and that soon equal rights would be granted them all over the world; that all nations already regretted the injustice done to the Jew through the long centuries. And to hasten this "redemption" (Geulah), a whole literature was created, the object of which was the uprooting of the old in "the Jewish Garden" and implanting therein the new, which had no relation to Judaism. If they wrote a Jewish romance "Helen" was sure to be a heavenly angel, and "Sara" a mere household drudge. In a drama, "Yosel" was ever the "villain;" whereas "Ossip" was a model of physical and mental perfection. An honest orthodox Jew was the "fanatic," but some shallow fop, rigged out in "swell" attire, was invariably the "progressive," "educated" man, and the philosopher.

In my songs there is always echoed the "tone" of the times. I have always sought to give in my songs a true picture of the period through which I passed. My aim always was to have some effect on my brethren through my pen; and this, I believe, should be the aim of every author and poet. If he does not hold the aim before him always, his literary products, his poems are hardly worth even the little ink used in writing them. In those days of "Russification," of hunting after the strange civilization, I wrote the following songs: "The Bird," "Rachel Weeping for Her Children," "Der Puster Frant" (The Dude), "The Old Father," "False Show" (Die Ferkas-kirte Welt), "The Old World and the New," "To a Ten-Ruble Bill," "The Pen," "We Are Children," "The Wise Poor Man," "Harmful Education," "Der Yiddish Erev-Yom Tov," and many others. In all of these I showed the people, pictures of their life, and drew attention to their moral foibles.

The first stage of the Jewish "Has-koloh" in Russia may be compared to

the building of the Tower of Babel (Dor Haflago). Here, as there, one did not understand the other. If one called for "mortar" the other supplied "wood." The orthodox did not understand the maskilim, and the maskilim did not understand the orthodox. The younger generation did not understand either. The young men, and the pious "sons-in-law" who adopted the European culture believed that all the orthodox adherents—of the older generation—who spent their time in "labor and the study of the law," were of little worth; that all Jewish learning had lived its day and was now a matter of the past. Neither did they understand, however, the intent of the first "maskilim" in Russia. They did not know the aim of the "Haskoloh," and could not imagine the possibility that "Torah" and "Haskoloh" were of near kin, and they could go hand in hand. By the word "education," they understood, the destruction and extermination of all that was in any way Jewish. And when Judah Leib Gordon sang to them, "O wake, my people, how long wilt thou sleep?" they interpreted him to mean that they should eradicate the old Judaism and destroy it.

In all cities and towns there blossomed forth a crop of brand-new "prophets." Fifteen, or twenty-year-old boys, the weight of whose learning might be borne by a little ant while walking up hill, regarded themselves seriously as the "great in Israel," as philosophers and thinkers. He who could write a few lines of Hebrew, Russian, and German thought himself a wonder, a prodigy of wisdom and literary excellence. Each of them believed that it was his duty to be a preacher to, and to upbraid, his people; and that to him was given the power of "curing the defects" of the Jews. Any one who wants to have a clear conception of those deluded "educated," need but to turn the leaves of the first years of the Hebrew newspapers, "Hamagid," "Hamelitz," and the "Hacarmel." He will find them, these Jewish "preachers," in all their ridiculousness, in all the poverty of their intelligence. If, for instance, a young student of the

Rabbinical seminary wanted to impress his father, some tailor, or butcher, with the magnitude and depth of his learning, he would publish in one of the above-named newspapers some article in which he poured forth the rankest abuse on the Jewish yeshiba, or the synagogues. These "articles always began with some "poetical" outbursts, with a flood of "eloquent" platitudes, and pompous verbosity, for instance:

"As the sun, the moon, and the millions of stars travel through the deep blue space; just as the flowers open their tiny mouths and sent forth their odoriferous fragrance to the clouds; just as the shepherd homeward leads his herd from the pasture, while the red cows ring the little bells about their necks; and as the mighty ocean floods half the world with its waves, etc., etc., so does the sun of culture shine, light, sparkle, dazzle, and so his waves have washed off the heap of mold which the Talmudists have brought into the camp of Judaism." etc.

And when one of these "literary men" had to report some such important news as the burning of some "bath-house" in his town, he would usually begin with a tirade somewhat as follows:

"Inasmuch as all the Jews had hitherto lived, like the bat in the darkness, and as now the sun of culture shines forth in all its splendor, the years of darkness having passed, fanaticism is no more, nor does the envy and hatred of people to people exist. Jew and Christian have now become brothers," etc.

Such were our "prophets" who preached to us "Russification" and assimilation in those days, but they were not the worst; we had at that time a worse, more dangerous class—the Jewish anti-Semites.

At that time there had already sprung up a large number of Jewish literary men, who wrote in various foreign languages; of Jewish physicians, Jewish

*The "bath-house," in the small Russian town, serves also as a sort of clubhouse on Fridays, and an exchange for all matters "political."

jurists, engineers, and technologists, who had succeeded almost entirely in their striving for "assimilation," and had obtained more or less lucrative Government positions. To be safe in their berths they thought it necessary to flatter the higher Christian officials, and to insinuate themselves in the good graces of the Christian public. And the very best way to win such appreciation in the eyes of the Christians was to ridicule and criticise all that was Jewish, even their own fathers and mothers, their sisters and brothers. For the honor of being invited to a ball in some club, and to dance with some Christian belle, they turned loose torrents of abuse on their own people. And that which those petty doctors, lawyers, and engineers could do only with their tongues, our "literary" men did with more power with their venomous pens. They published works in which they created hideous Jewish types and characters; they attributed to Judaism faults which it never had, and always depicted the Jew in most repulsive colors. To this category of literary men belonged Bogrov and Levanda, with their Russian writings. (Both able writers in Russia. Levanda especially had a remarkable hold on the attention of the Russian Jews. Bogrov became a convert to the Greek Orthodox Church. For both, see Jewish Encyclopedia.)

Later, when they saw the failure of "assimilation," they turned their foils against Israel's enemies, and atoned for their early errors.

There were many "assimilators," it must be stated, who did not desert the Jewish standard; and, although they believed that "assimilation" and "Russification" would improve the condition of the Russian Jews, they fought ably, nevertheless, for the old Judaism. Professor Chwolson, Orshansky, and Dr. Rabinowitch (translator of the Talmud into French), defended the old Judaism.

Against Russification and assimilation, and in general against too feverish a movement for general education among the Russian Jews, stood also the great Jewish author, Shalom Jacob Abramovich, or, as he signs himself in

pseudonym, "Mendeli Mocher Sforim." He insisted that the Jew must first receive equal civil rights with all the other Russian subjects, and then he can be trusted to take care of his education. As long, however, as all ways are closed to him, and he must continually worry about a means of livelihood, he cannot center his mind on philosophy or science. The peasants were first freed, and the schools were built for them. Why should not the government do the same for the Jew? In his great novel, "Die Kliatsche" (The Dobbin), Shalom J. Abramovich says: "No tricks, no dancing before eating! 'Give the dobbin (Israel) something to eat first, and then you may teach her how to dance.'" He did not speak to the Jews, who were helpless. He addressed himself to the Government, which could help the Jews, if it but wished to do so. Of course he could not write a book like "The Kliatsche" in Russian, because the censor would not permit it to be published. He therefore wrote it in plain, homely Yiddish, and in this way taught the common Jewish masses how to make answer to Russian anti-Semites whenever necessary.

I can testify that Shalom Jacob Abramovich had great difficulty in having the "Kliatsche" published. He went with it from censor to censor. None of them would permit its publication. Somehow or other, they seemed to feel that by "dobbin" was meant Russian Jewry, and by the driver, the Czar. He finally found a censor who either was not, or did not care to be too wise, who permitted him to publish the book.

MY COMING TO MINSK.

In 1871, the cholera broke out in Vilna and wrought havoc in my family. Four days before Tisha b'Ab, my four-year-old son, Akiba, became sick with the cholera. On the next day my elder daughter, Pessie, became ill with the same affliction, and, on the third day, my younger daughter, Leah. All three died, one after the other. My wife and I were struck with despair.

Reb Israel Salanter advised me to leave Vilna at once. I hired a coach to take us to Minsk. We chose Minsk for two reasons. First, my wife's parents lived there; and secondly, because Minsk was free from cholera. On the eve of Tisha-b'Ab, my wife, our little girl, Ite-Keile, and myself started out from Vilna. On the road a few miles from Smargon, this, our last child, became sick of the cholera. We brought her to Smargon, where she died, and where we buried her. We arrived in Minsk, but my wife's health was broken. She could not endure all these misfortunes, and contracted a lung disease. A short time later, four days in Elul, 5632 (1872), after we had been married nine years, she died. She rests in the cemetery in Minsk, and on her tomb I caused to be inscribed the following (freely translated from the Hebrew):

"Here rests a loving woman, young in years, Woe the loss!
Her ten children hath she buried in her life, and childless she descended after them."

Six weeks after my arrival in Minsk, on the eve of Rosh-Hoshanah, 5632, I wrote my song "To the Year 5632," or, "The Bell of the Mail-Wagon." From 1871-72, I wrote the best and most of my songs. The great and sudden misfortune which bereaved me of my family, opened my mouth, as happened to Job in his time. Like he, I had suffered shock after shock, and even more than he was a punished, for death took away also my wife. In that year I wrote the songs: "The Railway," "The New World," "The Sandek," and the greater part of my drama, "The Sale of Joseph."

Reb Joshua Feighelson, one of the most distinguished Talmudists and scholars of that time, who lived near me, and who was my intimate friend, arranged the shidduch (alliance) between my present wife and myself. She comes of an excellent family of scholars and distinguished men.

The two foreign growths, "Russification" and Assimilation," which the

Russian Jews planted and allowed to flourish in their midst, began to yield their bitter fruit. Jewish young men participated in the revolutionary movement, which in those days spread rapidly throughout Russia. One night, in the early part of 1872, the police arrested forty Jewish young men in Vilna, on the charge of being Nihilists. General Potapov, who was at that time the Governor-General of the Vilna District, invited some representative Jews to a conference. There came to him Reb Matthias Strashun, Reb Yankele Kovner (Jacob Baritt), Reb Samuel Pieskin, and Reb Yekele, Reb Zalmon, Reb Uriah's.* Potapov received them and turned on them in this wise:

"To all the other good qualities which you Jews possess, about the only thing you need is to become Nihilists, too."

Panic possessed the Jewish representatives.

"We! Nihilists?" one asked.

"Your children are, at any rate," Potapov replied; "they have become so through the bad education you are giving them."

"Pardon me, General," Yankele Kovner answered. "This is not quite right! As long as we educated our children there were no Nihilists among us; but as soon as you took the education of our children into your hands they became so."

This reply of Reb Yankele Kovner (Jacob Baritt), had its serious consequences for the Russian Jews. General Potapov transmitted this statement to St. Petersburg (accompanied no doubt by some voluminous insinuating commentaries), and a short time later an ukase ordering the Rabbinical seminaries in Vilna and Zhitomir closed.

At that time I composed my song, "Shulamith" in Yiddish and in Hebrew. In it are reflected the Jewish sufferings of that time. I had to write it in the form of an allegory—every thought

*This manner of popularly naming well-known people was common. Thus, if "Reb Zalmon" was very prominent, his son, his son-in-law, Samuel, was Reb Samuel Reb Zalmon's, etc.

veiled over and hidden so that the censor would allow it to be published. One year later I wrote my song, "Ma Nish-tanah" (Wherefore the Difference?), in two parts. In that song I called the attention of the young people of the new generation to the mistake which they were making, of separating from the Jewish religion (Emunoh).

In that song are found, for instance, such stanzas as these:

פונקס וויא רעדער אין א וואַגען.
וואָס דיא משא ציעהט —
ווען דער סוואַרען איז פערשלאָען.
נעהט דיא משא מיט;
נעהט איהר נאָך ארויס דעם סוואַרען.
קען שוין מעהר ניש געהן —
דיא פאַרדערדער אויף פריהער פאַהרען
דיא הינערשטע בלויבט שמעהן.
דיא נייע וועלט אויף פריהער פאַהרען
צו בילדונג באַרג ארויף;
דיא אמונה איז דער סוואַרען,
וואָס האַלט ביידען אויף.
האַלשיגע שטויפער אייער גלויבען,
ווען איהר פאַריהער נעהט!
זאָנסט לויפט איהר אַליון נאָך אויבען
דער גאַנצער וואַגען שמעהט.

Many great Jewish literary men visited me when they passed through Minsk, and spent some time with me. In 1873, I was visited by the great "Maskil," and author Reb Eliezer Hachohen Zweifel, who spent some time at my house, and the days I dearly remember still. He was then publishing his book, "Sanegor," in Hebrew, and "Tochahath Haim" and "Musar Haskel," in Yiddish.

On July 8, 1873, my oldest son, Philip, was born. After all the misery which I had suffered, his birth came like a gracious gift from Heaven. I received new courage and new hopes.

At that time I composed many songs, of which the following attracted most attention: "The Hypocrite," "The Moon," "Sacrificed for Family Pride," and "The Isborschik." What induced me to write the song, "The Isborschik," the following incident, which I have been unable to forget: I was invited to Vilna to attend a wedding. At the feast, while I was in the middle of my recital, the "impressors" suddenly came in, accompanied by Cossacks, and led away the groom. This sad occurrence affected me deeply, and I

said some harsh things about Kohol (the "commune"). Soon afterwards, some "impressors" and Cossacks came to my hotel, and they led me off, as once in Bobruisk, to the barracks. As I was 32 years old, and my brother Akiba was still a soldier. True, I was not detained long. I was set free with a warning not to criticize the commune "bosses." For a long time I maintained a discreet silence; but, in 1874, when Alexander the Second, by ukase, abolished the old system of recruiting and introduced the new system, I wrote my song, "The Isborschik," and sang it at every opportunity, to the great satisfaction of the Jewish masses, who were freed from the commune impressors and the other commune vampires.

In 1881, I opened a dry goods store in Minsk, hoping thereby to be enabled to discard my "trade," but the enterprise did not succeed. For eighteen months I labored with it, and in the end lost my little capital, and was obliged to close the store.

In March of 1881, Alexander the Second died, and all the Jews in Russia mourned sincerely. His death served as a signal for all the Russian anti-Semites to begin a series of terrible riots ("pogroms") against the Russian Jews. And only four weeks after the death of Alexander the Second, April 23, 1881, the first "pogrom" in "Elizabet grad" occurred. On May 15th, this was repeated in Kieff, and immediately afterwards riots broke out in many other cities. It seemed as if the anti-Semites only waited for Alexander the Second's death, to swoop down upon the Jews and beat them mercilessly.

A panic reigned among the five million Jews of Russia. All their courage seemed to have disappeared. No one felt safe. His belongings, even his life, seemed to be in constant peril. The pogroms came upon the Russian Jews unexpectedly, like a thunder-bolt from the clear sky. At first every one believed that the "pogroms" originated among the half-savage peasants, who suddenly took a notion to rob the Jews, but that the Government was thoroughly

opposed to this violence. A little later it became very evident that this bloody movement originated with the Government. It was noticed that the Jews were not protected against the rioters. The soldiers who were sent presumably to protect the Jews were always ordered out on the third day; that is, when everything had been stolen, demolished, and destroyed. When the soldiers finally did make their appearance, they did not allow the Jews to protect themselves against the rioters; nor did they molest the "moujiks" in their bloody work; these were allowed to destroy and to rob. The officers only bade them, "Gospoda, Po-Tische!" (A little quieter, gentlemen). In other words, "Beat, murder, destroy, only make no noise about it!"

When the "pogroms" had spread through the entire Jewish Pale, and protests against Russian brutality were raised all over Europe, the Russian Minister of the Interior ordered conferences to be held in all the turbulent districts, to ascertain the causes of the pogroms. The real purpose of these conferences was to enable Russia to put in a "disclaimer."

To these conferences Jewish delegates were also invited, but they played only a minor and sad part; the Christian delegates were well-known anti-Semites, who had already distinguished themselves by the virulent hatred of the Jews. At the meetings they gave free vent to their animosities, and made all sorts of charges against the Jews. All Jews were declared to be swindlers, thieves, parasites and vampires, who foisted themselves on the Russian people; and because the Russian people could no longer bear the "Jewish yoke," they made "pogroms." With such unfounded charges, the protests of the "foreigners" were smothered. When the Jewish delegates wished to make reply, and refute these "bilbulim," (false charges), they were not allowed to speak.

It became evident to the Russian Jews that the source of pogroms, and of all the new, harsh edicts which came in such rapid profusion, was none other than the Government itself. Official,

though not avowed, emissaries were sent into the villages and towns to incite the "moujiks" against the Jews; but to save appearances, the Government would cause the arrest of two or three out of a whole band of rioters and sentence them to two days' detention. Only then did the Russian Jews clearly perceive that they had nothing to expect from Russia—tho their property and blood was at the mercy of all.

Out of this despair came cool, calm judgment. The Jewish intelligent classes, who had believed that Russification and modern civilization would prove the Jew's true salvation, now realized their grievous error. They saw, at least, that it was in vain that they went through the "antics" of Russification.

A great many of the Jewish literary men, who had believed that only assimilation would bring the redemption of the Jew, now saw their error, and began to retreat from the path which they had laid out for the Jewish youth. Love for their people once more stirred in their breasts, when they beheld the intense hatred which the Russian Government bore toward the Jews, and that it not only closed all educational institutions to them, but even barred them from all means of earning their livelihood honorably. A great discussion began in the Jewish newspapers. What was to be done? was the question, until Dr. Pinsker published his pamphlet on "Auto-Emancipation," and pointed to emigration.

On the question of emigration, too, the Russian Jews immediately divided into two (more or less hostile) camps; the "practical" men and the "idealists." The "practicals" began to emigrate to America, to a land which received them with open arms, and gave them rights, or terms of equality with all Americans. The idealists found that for them the best home is the old Zion. At that time an English nobleman (a Christian), Sir Oliphant, argued strongly for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, and he made several trips to Constantinople, to negotiate with the Sultan on this subject. This started the first Zionist movement, and many

Jewish young men emigrated to Palestine, where they founded the first Jewish colonies, and devoted themselves to agriculture.

The first who became enthusiasts of the Zionist movement were the greater number of Jewish literary men, the wiser among the rabbis, and almost the entire Jewish youth. The Jewish g'virim ("rich"), a great many of the rabbis, and the chassidim, with their rabbis, were strongly opposed to the movement. From the University of Charkow, twenty Jewish students started for Palestine. When they passed through Minsk, they visited me, and I wrote for them my song "Shivas Zion" (Return to Zion), in Yiddish and Hebrew. As I write this chapter twenty years have passed since I composed that song, and I cannot cease wondering how accurately I foretold events. In that song I compared the Zionist movement to a great stream, which has its source in a tiny rill, which threads along, but grows larger and larger by the addition of tributaries, until it becomes large enough to be navigated by great vessels. So it was with the Zionist movement. At first it was very small; it was only talked about. Later something was done. The first of these were the students from Charkow. At a later time a conference was held on the subject at Druzgenick, in the government of Grodno, which was attended by the Gaon Reb Samuel Mohilever, of blessed memory, and many other rabbis. Still greater, still stronger, and more effective was the Zionist movement made by Dr. Theodor Herzl, of blessed memory, with the publication of his book, "Der Judenstadt." He was the founder of the modern political Zionism, and he succeeded in interesting the greatest Jewish men of Europe, such as Dr. Max Nordau, Israel Zangwill, Bernard Lazare, Professor Lombroso, and many others. He called together the great Jewish congresses in Basle and London, and he founded the Jewish "Colonial Bank" in London, and established the Actions Committee in Vienna.

Modern Zionism, in the short time of its existence, has already achieved so

signal success as no single Jewish effort has ever done before. It has awakened the Jewish national consciousness—which had been dormant for a thousand years. It has made the Jews Jews indeed, and assembled them under one banner. The opponents of Zionism can find fault with only its material aspect, asserting that the entire Zionist scheme is merely a Utopia; that the establishment of a Jewish autonomy in Palestine is only a dream, which could never be realized; but they must admit that it has already achieved a great deal from the moral standpoint. It has awakened almost the entire Jewish people to a new life. It has torn the Jewish young away from the vain dreams of "assimilation," with which they had deceived themselves, and restored to them the amount of self-respect such as they had not felt before. Zionism has welded the various Jewish parties and fractions, into one body. There has been, as a result, Jewish unity, and that alone, is a great victory.

The Jewish writers who had before helped with their pen to defame the Jew, the weak-minded Jews who had gone over to Christianity with the sole aim of gaining equal rights with the Christians, and all who had sought their salvation and happiness in "assimilation," saw clearly that they had erred. Having sought to blacken the character of the Jew they defiled only themselves, and had not gained a whit more respect from the Christians, the converted "meshummadim" found that the adopted "cross" did not protect them from persecution and insult, that they were still regarded and treated as "strangers," and the "assimilated" found very quickly that for the price of their Judaism they bought little more than lasting torture. They found themselves neither here nor there. They were neither Jews nor Christians; their Christian wives bore them no love, showed them less respect, and at every opportunity accorded them the foul title "Zhid."* Still greater was the chasm between

*"Zhid"—A Russian slang epithet for "Jew," similar to the English "sheeny." The word itself is Polish.

them, and their children, born of Christian wives, whom the mothers reared as Christians, and in whom they implanted a deep hatred for everything Jewish. These very children would laugh at their fathers, and ridicule them at every opportunity. All this they have fully realized within the last twenty-five years, and a great many of them have returned to Judaism.

The departure from Judaism was very easy, but not so to return. Many tragedies resulted. I will here mention only the terrible tragedies which have happened to some of our famous authors and artists. For our Jewish dramatists these may serve as excellent material for the Jewish stage.

The great Jewish author, Leo Levanda, who, in his younger day, was not a bit loth to caricature the Jews with his clever pen, had a fellow-student in the Vilna Rabbinical Seminary named Sorkin. Sorkin later went to Kiev, and made that city his permanent home. He fell in love with a Christian girl, was converted (to Christianity), and married her. They had several children. Yet he very soon began to feel unhappy. His Christian wife could not agree with him; she would quarrel with him and call him "Zhid." His very children treated him no better. His conscience troubled him greatly, and he repented his misstep, but he dared not show his regret openly, for in Russia converted Jews are scrutinized too scrupulously. Nevertheless, he translated the book, "Efes Domim," by Isaac Levensohn, from Hebrew into Russian. This book demonstrates clearly that the belief that Jews need Christian blood for the Passover is a vile falsehood. To this translation, Sorkin wrote a powerful preface, in which his pure Jewish heart and pure Jewish feelings are touchingly depicted.

When the great "pogrom" in Kiev broke out against the Jews, his sons joined the hoodlums in the Jew-robbing and the Jew-beating. Of course Sorkin did not suspect this. Towards evening his sons returned home, intoxicated and laden with articles which they had plundered in Jewish houses and Jewish stores. Their mother greeted them

with joy and praised their "heroism."

"What is this?" "What things are these?" Sorkin asked, his heart almost ceasing to beat at the flash of suspicions.

"Oh, pa," one of the sons replied, "we have performed a holy deed."

"We acted like good Christians," replied the other son. "We wreaked vengeance upon the accursed Jews who crucified our Saviour, and tortured him on the cross."

His blood almost froze at the words, but he kept his silence. He knew but too well that the slightest protest on his part would mean banishment to Siberia, and that his own children would be the ones to denounce him. But endure this longer, he could not. He quietly got together a few hundred roubles, stole out of his house and hurried off to Vilna to his old friend, Leo Levanda, to whom he confided his heart's bitter secrets.

By that time, Levanda, too, was full of remorse. And as he listened to his friend Sorkin, he fell to sobbing. Sorkin spent a few days with his friend Levanda. Each day brought news of fresh "pogroms" in various cities. Sorkin could stand this no longer. He locked himself in his room and hanged himself.

The news of Sorkin's suicide overwhelmed Levanda. He fell into despondency, then melancholia, and finally became violently insane. He broke his furniture, destroyed his books and manuscripts, and attacked the people about him. His friends took him to St. Petersburg in the hope of curing him there. But it was too late, and, after two years of pain and suffering, he died.

At his tragic death I wrote the "Levanda Elegy," which has been arranged for musical (piano) accompaniment in Yiddish and Russian.

The famous musician, composer, and bandmaster of the Vilna Theatre, Ebbon, also fell a victim on the altar of "assimilation." He never cared to come into any contact whatever with Jews, was a welcome visitor at the home of the Governor-General of Vilna and always moved in the society of the

AFTER-EFFECTS.

While only a comparatively small number of Jews suffered directly from the pogroms—namely, those whose business affairs were ruined, or who suffered loss of property or life—the after-effects fell heavily upon all the Jews of Russia. Instead of aiding the unhappy, terrified Jews, as might in all justice have been expected, the government began a series of "bloodless pogroms," which exacted heavier sacrifices from the Jews than the riots of the hoodlums. Alexander the Third threw off his mask, and stood revealed before the world as a confirmed and fanatical anti-Semite. He openly declared dislike for the Jews, and when the Jewish representatives appeared before him to plead for mercy, answered, "The frontier is open for you."* The new Minister of the Interior, Count Ignatieff, grasped the full import of this phrase; he understood at once that Alexander was not particularly anxious to have Jews in his domains, and at once set to work at schemes which would force the Jews to leave Russia. Such means were rapidly found. He began to issue ukase after ukase directed against the Jews, depriving them of civil liberties which they had heretofore enjoyed, few as they were. The most unbearable of these decrees were those which forbade the Jews to live in the villages, and which denied the privileges of the Universities to all but a very small percentage of Jews.

The Russian Jews sobered up from the orgies of assimilation, and its worshippers abandoned their idol. Those who had almost forgotten that they were from the camp of Israel, began to return to its tents. The Jewish physicians, jurists, technologists, and the entire so-called Jewish "intelligencia," who had never heretofore cared to speak a word of Yiddish to a Jew, resumed their native tongue; they began

*Zapadnaia graniza dlia vos othrita."

—This historic utterance is also attributed to Count Melchnikof, the Government attorney, at the trial of the Kiev rioters.

Russian aristocracy or the Polish magnates. As soon as Alexander the Third ascended the Russian throne, Ebbon was reminded in no uncertain terms that he was nothing more nor less than a "Zhid." He was deprived of his position as bandmaster, and the Christian aristocracy closed its doors to him. This coarse rebuff struck him deeply. He fell victim to consumption and hurried off to Yalta, in the Crimea, for treatment. No one there knew that he was a Jew, and when, as he was about to die, a priest came to him to hear his last confession, Ebbon refused to receive him, and died. The police of Yalta inquired of Vilna, by telegraph, whether Ebbon was a Christian or Jew. Two days later the reply came from the Vilna chief of police that Ebbon was a Jew. The leaders of the Jewish congregation in Yalta were called, and demand was made upon them that they take charge of the body. This they were in no hurry to do, evidently wishing to be sure that he was indeed a Jew, before they would inter the remains in consecrated ground. The body could not be kept any longer, a common wagon served as a hearse, and the remains were buried in a Christian cemetery without any ceremony.

Such was the end of the great Ebbon, the famous artist, whose fantasies are still the delight of a world, whose waltzes and exquisite compositions are still admired. Among the many things sent back to his heirs in Vilna, were some manuscripts in which he gave free vent to the sorrows which oppressed him; in which he expressed his remorse at the many wrongs he had during his life-time committed against his nation.

The great Jewish author, Bogrov, almost had about the same sort of an end as Ebbon. He, too, regretted what he had done, condemned assimilation, and died with a pure Jewish heart. In his last year he defended the Russian Jews on many occasions, with his able pen, and was always engaged in warm combat with the anti-Semites. Tragedies such as these were very numerous in those days.

to send their children to the Jewish chedorim, and adopted once more Jewish ways and customs.

As a characteristic incident, let me cite that several hundred Jewish students from St. Petersburg sent to Vilna for "tephillim." In many cities "fasts" were observed, and special prayers of grace were said; and the student-youth (notoriously irreligious), repaired to the synagogues, to pray and weep.

The Jewish millionaire, Baron Horace Ginsberg, called a conference at his home in St. Petersburg, of representative Jews, to decide upon ways and means of putting an end to the pogroms. To this assembly came also Reb Isaac Elhanan Spector, of blessed memory, Gaon and Rabbi of Kovno and most celebrated Talmudist of his time; and also a certain delegate from Mohilev. When, after the conference had opened, the awful situation of the Jews was revealed by the delegates, the representative from Mohilev was stricken with apoplexy, and died right there at the conference.

It was decided at this assembly (asifah) to bribe the Minister of the Interior, Ignatieff, so that he might cease his persecutions of the Jews. The Minister, Ignatieff, who, as a matter of fact, was always ready to earn an occasional rouble on the side (as was later proven to the Czar), made use of this opportunity to vent his hatred on the Jews. He received the bribe and hastened to his master, to whom he made complaint of the attempt to "corrupt" him. As a result Baron Ginsberg found himself in difficulties. He was obliged to leave St. Petersburg, and lost half of his wealth. Three years later, however, he found it possible to return to St. Petersburg and resume charge of his business affairs.

A great number of "supposed Jews," who had long served at the altar of assimilation, and in whom there lurked a deep resentment toward Judaism—now became converts (to Cristianity). This was far from being a misfortune for Russian Judaism; on the contrary, the Russian Jewry, thus at one stroke, was purged of a great many undesirable elements which could only injure the

others. Many, however, who had been baptized before now forsook their adopted faith, rejoined the banner of the camp of Judah. The repenting ones responded eagerly and with alacrity to every call in the Jews' hour of need, and proved that the "Jordan-water" (baptismal water) had not extinguished the Jewish spirit within them. They had remained Jews with all the fervor of their souls.

Professor Chwolson wrote many articles in the Russian newspapers in which he stormed against the pogroms. The great poet, Constantine Shapiro, of St. Petersburg, who had been converted a long time before, published a Hebrew poem in Rabinowitz's "Year Book," in which he said: "In vain have you baptized me in waters of Jordan. My heart is Jewish, and such it will remain until my last breath." He wrote this knowing the danger he would be in if the Russian Church ever discovered his spiritual communion with Judaism. Many other baptized Jews became true "repentants" ("ba'alei-t'shuvah") at that time.

In my poem, "The Pyramids," I have described that epoch when the "assimilated" Russian Jews perceived the error of their way, and returned to the old fold.

In the same year, in the month of July, 1881, my son Charles was born. Two weeks after his birth, a great fire broke out in Minsk, which devastated half the town. I was away from home at that time, to attend a wedding at Homel, at the home of the wealthy (g'vir) Levianof. My home in Minsk caught fire, and the chief of the police rescued my wife and the two-weeks-old baby. When I returned from Homel I had no home, and we stayed with our brother-in-law about five versts from Minsk. It was only after Succoth, when Minsk had been rebuilt, that we returned there.

At that time, there formed in Minsk the first society of the "Chovevi Zion," whose object it was to colonize Palestine. When this organization had gathered sufficient funds, two delegates were sent out to buy tracts of land in Palestine. Arriving in Palestine they

bought land and founded the colony "G'derah," in which four young men of Minsk (Horwitz, Zukerman, Hefetz, and Slepian) later settled.

The first pioneers in the colonization of Palestine were the students from Charkow, who called themselves "Bjlv" (pronounced "Bilu.")* They emigrated to Palestine, and suffered incredible misery. They found a desert land, where yellow fever raged at all seasons of the year. For three years they had no fresh water; they were obliged to collect the dirty, slimy water left in the ditches by the rain. They obtained the ordinary food-staples with the greatest difficulty. Very often they were attacked by the wild Bedouins and Arabs, with whom they had to wage bloody battle. And yet nothing could daunt them from their holy purpose—and they laid the first cornerstone of the colonization of Palestine. Only young men, noble, truly educated and courageous, such as these members of the "Bjlv" were, could show such superb spirit and such indomitable determination. By their devotion and courage, they prepared the way for the later colonists, and theirs will be names written in gold in the history of the new Jewish colonization of Palestine. They laid the foundation, and to-day we have as many as thirty Jewish colonies there.

For these first Jewish colonies I wrote my song, "Die Soche" (The Plough), in Yiddish and Hebrew, which was later translated into Russian and German. I wrote my other Zionist poems at that time, as for instance, "The Aristocrat," "To Our Native Land," "Judaica," "Providing for the Bride," "My Longings," "Enough," and many others which spread among the people. They were sung and played in almost all Jewish homes, many of them being published with piano accompaniment.

All these songs contributed greatly to the spread of Zionism among the

*"Bjlv"—The name is formed from the first letters of "Beth Jacob L'cha Venelcha" ("Oh, House of Jacob, let us be up and going.")

people, and the awakening of the Jewish national spirit.

As much as I could I tried to influence the Jewish rabbis and scholars, with whom I was in constant communication, to adopt the Zionist idea, but in this I succeeded only when the great rabbis, such as Reb Isaac Elhonen Rabbi Naftali-Hersch, of blessed memory (Rabbi of Volozhin, the most celebrated Jewish Yeshiba in the world); his son, Reb Haim Berlin, the Rabbi of Moscow, and many others, became ardent Zionists; but their Zionism did not quite accord with the Zionism of Maskilim. The rabbis insisted upon the introduction of "shmita"* into the colonies. This the colonists would not agree to, as it would have interfered with their agriculture, and would have made their economic condition even less tolerable.

On May 3, 1882, Alexander the Third issued an ukase which forbade Jews to settle in villages; those who already lived in villages were permitted to remain. This ukase seemed as a double-edged sword in the hands of the Russian police, and the other officials; and although the ukase was apparently clear, they insisted upon "explaining" it and "interpreting" it much as they pleased. From these explanations and interpretations, the Jews suffered more than from the ukase itself. Very often it happened that when a farmer and his family went to town for the "holy days," he would not be permitted to return after Yom Kippur, on the ground that he was a new settler. When a farmer married his daughter to some young man from the city, and wanted to take his son-in-law to his own home, the police would not permit the young son-in-law to come into the village. Still worse was the edict against the Jews who had settled in Finland, after the ukase of May 3, to leave the province. Those who were thus exiled from Finland were practically compelled to live in the cities and

*"Shmita"—The system of allowing land to lie "fallow" every seventh year—required by the Mosaic law (in Palestine only).

small towns of the Pale, where the inhabitants were already overcrowded. Conditions became daily less bearable, poverty increased, competition for a mere living became more keen—it was a struggle of one with the other. A time came at last when Jews were ready to devour each other—for a morsel of bread.

MY EMIGRATION TO AMERICA.

In the course of time, I became very popular among the people who considered me their only national poet in Russia. All were anxious to hear me, and my songs were heard in all Jewish circles. A great number of my songs, arranged for the piano, were played in "aristocratic" homes. Invitations to weddings and other social affairs came to me from distant places throughout the Jewish Pale. And wherever I came, the people crowded to hear the recital of my songs.

This was the reason why the Russian police began to regard me with suspicion. The Russian police is always suspicious of the persons who have a certain influence upon the masses. They began a system of spying on me by means of the gendarmes and secret police. Wherever I went or traveled, I was watched. At the railway stations the gendarmes looked at each other and at me significantly.

I realized that I was in a dangerous situation, and that my freedom was to be but short-lived—sooner or later my arrest would follow. In Russia such things are done quickly. Some one need but denounce me that I "incite" the crowds with my songs; and my works would be commented upon, or explained, or interpreted, in a manner utterly foreign to any intention of mine, and I would at once be stamped a "political offender" in Russia, is well known to all. Many of my friends and acquaintances became uneasy, and cautioned me to be careful. But how can one be careful in a land where the humblest policeman or petty official is a sort of autocrat, and can do as he pleases? He may approach a stranger

who is quietly pursuing his way, and arrest him; and to the question, "Why?" he need not give better answer than "I do not like your appearance," or "Your looks are suspicious." The Russian prisons and fortresses, the dark dungeons of the Petropavlovsk Fortress in St. Petersburg, the wide steppes of Siberia and Sagalin are crowded with unfortunates whose looks did not please this or that police lackey. Many of these have been imprisoned for long periods in those dreary wastes, and do not to this day know what crime they are charged with.

Towards the end of my stay in Minsk, I corresponded considerably with the Chovevi Zion of New York. In their letters they described vividly how good and safe is the position of the Jews in America, and assured me that I could establish myself in quiet and safety, if I would but determine to exchange free America for Russia, where even "free" man is treated as if he were a prisoner. These letters made their impression on me. I was obliged to abandon what had been my firm intention—to emigrate to Palestine, and become a colonist in the Holy Land—for I had become too old for such an arduous task. Palestine required the strength of the young; those who go there only to die that they may rest near "the fathers," do little good for Zion; their graves cannot assist in the revival of the nation. I did not hesitate, applied for a passport, and, leaving my family in Minsk, I came to America.

Here I found a great many countrymen, friends and acquaintances who were glad at my arrival. Two weeks after my arrival, I gave my first American concert. Nine months later I brought my family from Minsk.

While on the steamer bound for America, I composed my song "Columbus and Washington." Here, in New York, I wrote later, "The Peddler," "What America Loves," "The Three Doves," "The Last Chapter," "The World-Clock," "To the Year 5650," "The Immigrant," "A Letter to Mother," "The Land of Gold," "Overlooked and Lost," "The Three Stations," "Slaves Were We," "The Jewish Alli-

ance," and many others.

Many of my songs have not yet appeared in print, although they are sung by the people. Two-thirds of my songs are "local" or "time" songs, which were of interest at a particular time, and declined and were forgotten later.

In 1890, about six months after my arrival in America, a manager arranged a series of concerts for me in several large American cities. In Cleveland, Ohio, something unusual happened to me, which I shall never forget.

I came upon the platform in Cleveland and recited some of my songs, "Nineteenth Century," and many others. I noticed unmistakable dissatisfaction among the audience. Some one had spread a rumor that the real "Eliakum Zunker" had long been dead, and that I was an imposter, using Zunker's name. After the sad concert, when the manager and I came out from the theatre, we found a crowd of people in the street, who had come there with the avowed "noble" purpose of lynching me. The crowd increased each minute, and my situation became dangerous. I stole away from the crowd unnoticed, and hurried to my lodging; but the crowd soon followed me, and began to tear away at the doors and the shutters. The wife of Reb Abraham Kutler proved my saviour at that time. She had known me from Minsk. Toward daybreak she led me out of the house, and brought me to the depot, where I took a train for Rochester.

I have well-nigh completed my career—almost lived my life. My history is the history of all Jewry—few joys; many woes!

But when I look around me, and see my Jewish brethren here in America, into what giants the hitherto Russian slaves have grown; when I see how my brethren grow, blossom and bring forth good fruit under the bright sun of free America, and when I see how they progress and advance along the road of true civilization, culture, art, and industry, my eyes fill with tears, and together with our great prophet I exclaim:

"For a little moment have I forsaken

thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee."

"In a little wrath, I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

CLOSING REMARK.

To characterize the condition of our Jewish brethren in Dark Russia, I would relate the following.

Alexander the Third became Emperor on March 2, 1881, but his coronation did not take place until July, 1883. At the Government's behest, the representatives of the various communities were ordered to present a memorial to the Czar on Coronation Day, reciting their love for their fatherland, and their fealty to the throne of Russia. Of course no community dared ignore an order of such a nature, especially upon so important an occasion as the coronation. They who disobeyed would have been deemed rebels, and what Russia does with her rebels is sufficiently well known. The members of the Vilna municipality (dumah) were of three nationalities, Russian, Polish, and Jewish. When the memorial to the emperor had been drafted, the Russian and the Polish members combined, and would, under no circumstances permit the Jewish members to affix their signatures. The memorial was, therefore, forwarded without the names of the Jewish members.

The leading Jewish citizens of Vilna were seized with terror; every one dreaded what might happen if the Government should notice that the Jewish community of Vilna had not sent an address to the coronation. They would be regarded as rebels, and treated as such. A council (asifah) was called to see what could be done. A cousin of mine, a certain Mr. Cohan, a teacher, who had at one time been a Jewish delegate at a conference with the Governor General of Vilna, proposed that a special memorial from the Jewish community of Vilna be forwarded to the coronation at Moscow. This proposal was unanimously accepted, and Mr. Cohan wrote it. When he had fin-

ished, he read it to the delegates and guests who were present. It opened thus:

"Who can recount the gracious deeds and favors of your Imperial Majesty, which you have done to us Jews since you have ascended the throne," etc.

My blood boiled at the words "gracious deeds" and "favors." How can people deny their feelings at a time when the ground is still moist with the blood shed only recently at the pogroms? How can we speak of "gracious deeds" and "favors" when almost every day we have to suffer from new edicts, new persecutions, and new oppressions? I revolted at the thought of being under the necessity to flatter a ruler who, with his cruelties and oppressions overshadowed all the Pharaohs and Hamans and Torquemados. I could not control myself and broke into a sob. One of the deputies asked the cause of my tears, and I answered him with the following parable:

"There lived in Vilna an old Jewish widow who used to go about with a basket of baked beans, which she sold to the little children. This business yielded her a profit of one or two gulden a day, which sufficed her for ordinary necessities, and even allowed her to lay something aside for a rainy day. She had a son, a cobbler by trade, who was an invalid, and blessed with half a dozen children. To him she would go daily, grumbling and complaining that it is his duty by law to support her in her old age. He could not help her, for King Poverty reigned in the house, and the poor man hardly had enough bread for the little ones. The old woman finally became angry, hurried off to the police and told the captain that she had a son who permitted her to starve. The police official, none too reluctant to flog a son of Israel, sent two constables with her, with orders to bring her son to the police station, and there flog him thoroughly until he promised to provide for his old mother.

"As she was going to her son's, accompanied by the constables, a sense

of pity awoke within her. Her own child! Why, they will beat him without mercy!

"What was she to do? She hit upon a clever scheme. She pointed out the first man they met to the constables and told them that he was her son.

"The constables seized him by the collar, hustled him off to the police station, and brought him before the all-powerful captain.

"Is this your mother?" the captain asked, pointing to the old woman.

"No, sir," replied the young man.

"Twenty-five lashes," promptly commanded the captain.

"The young man was thrown to the floor and the constable began to belabor him in earnest.

"When they reached fifteen, the captain again asked:

"Is this your mother?"

"No, sir," the young man replied again.

"Work away!" commanded the captain.

"Two Jews, strangers, hapened to be near, and one of them said to the young man:

"Well, you are a simpleton! Say that she is your mother and make an end of it! Why, they'll flog the life out of you!"

"The young man saw pretty quickly that he had no alternative, and exclaimed:

"Yes, captain, the old lady is my mother."

"In that case," replied the captain, "you must sign a statement that you will give your mother four gulden a week for her maintenance."

"The young man signed the document and he was let free."

We Jews in Russia are in about the same situation as that young man; pogroms are made against us, we are flogged, we must pay taxes, and then exclaim: "This is our mother!"

This parable made a deep impression on those present. The audience shed bitter tears. Reb Simon Strashuner, President of the Vilna Synagogue and of the Zedokoh Gedolah, was so af-

fected that he fainted, and was with difficulty revived.

However, the text of the memorial could not be altered; we had no choice; and it was forwarded as written.

I was well aware of the dangers I ran into by such parables and words so freely spoken about the Government. I knew that once it became known "higher up" what was the tenor of the words and thoughts which I dared to utter aloud, I would not be spared. But I could not restrain myself. With a bleeding heart I witnessed daily my unhappy Jewish brethren lying like lambs bound beneath the knives of the slaughterers, and with all my power I protested openly against an entire people. I was in constant excitement and uneasiness; at every moment I expected to be arrested. Such was my situation until 1889, when I left Russia.

CONCLUSION.

Many of my readers and friends are no doubt interested to know the fate of my brother Akiba, who was sent to the Cantonists when he was nine years old. I shall try to satisfy them as well as I can.

My unhappy brother Akiba was sent off from Vilna, together with other Cantonists, afoot, to Yenissei, Siberia. It took them eight weeks to get there. Once arrived in the Government of Yenissei, my brother was given over to a Siberian village farmer, who had a large family of his own. As a boy he was employed by the Siberian to feed the swine, and to perform various menial duties. As he grew older, the Siberian gave him some skins for protection against the severe cold, and required him to assist in felling trees in the forests. Thus, for eight years he slaved. When at 17, he was pronounced to be "of age," and thrown into the barracks of Tobolsk to learn the duties of a soldier. One night, as he lay asleep without fifty other recruits, a Russian priest entered and baptized him with some "holy" water. The next morning he was told that he

was a Christian. My poor brother would not hear of any such thing, but clung firmly to the religion of his fathers. He was plagued and tortured in a thousand different ways, but he bore everything patiently and adhered to the Jewish faith. I sent him "tefilim," which he openly wore at prayers in the barracks, in the presence of the other soldiers. His tormentors finally tired of their "sport," and allowed him to do as he pleased. On several occasions his colonel found him wrapped in talith and teflim at prayers, but pretended not to see him, and said nothing.

At the close of the Crimean War, when Alexander the Second became Emperor of Russia, he published an ukase to the effect that soldiers who had served fifteen years under Nicholas the First are to be released. Under this ukase my brother became free in 1877. He had been a musician in his regiment, and upon his discharge from the army he became a leader of a band and gave concerts in public gardens, and also played at entertainments. I sent him some money for expenses, and brought him to Minsk.

Great as was my love for him, I found that we could not get along together. He was a withered limb of the old tree—a Siberian in life and soul. Our customs were strange and oppressive to him; we could not live together. I gave him some money and he returned to Siberia.

From his letters I learned that he had married a Jewish daughter, and that four children were born to him. At every "b'rith-milah" he was obliged to travel sixty versts with the mother and child to reach a "mohel." He was a pious Jew, although he knew not a word of Hebrew.

In 1884, a child of his was burned, and at the interment in the Jewish cemetery it first became known that he had a Jewish wife, Jewish children, and observed the Jewish ritual. A crime of this sort is punishable in Russia by eighteen years' imprisonment at hard labor. His plea that he was baptized while asleep was of no avail. He was