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EDITED BY NATHAN AUSUBEL

Specially abridged and with a  
new introduction by Alan Mintz

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A Treasury of  
**JEWISH  
FOLKLORE**

STORIES, TRADITIONS, LEGENDS, HUMOR,  
WISDOM AND FOLK SONGS OF  
THE JEWISH PEOPLE

EDITED BY NATHAN AUSUBEL

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**TO MARYNN**

*who shared with me the labor as well as the  
delight of rediscovering the beauty,  
laughter and wisdom of our  
people's lore.*



## *Contents*

NOTE: All items not otherwise credited are the work of the editor.  
These are stories from Oral Tradition and adaptations from  
foreign-language sources.

### PREFACE TO THE BANTAM EDITION

xvii

### INTRODUCTION

xxiii

## Part One: JEWISH SALT

Such Odds!	2	There Are Miracles and	15
The Realist	2	Miracles	15
Higher Mathematics	3	The Expert	15
Richer than Rothschild	3	No Loan!	15
A Lesson in Talmud	3	A Quick Prayer	16
Hitting the Bull's Eye	4	Schnapps Wisdom	16
Lost and Found	5	He Should Have Taken	
So What?	5	More Time	16
Why Only One Adam?	6	It Pays to Be Ignorant	17
His Fault	7	Equally Logical	18
It Was Obvious	7	The Life of a Jew!	18
He Had Him Coming and		Nebich!	19
Going	8	The Modest Rabbi	19
The Fine Art of Fanning	9	The Secret of Power	20
For Honor	10	Circumcisional Evidence	21
No Target	10	The Sled Story	21
Pain and Pleasure	11	A Rabbi for a Day	22
The Rabbi's Nourishment	11	All Right	24
Cheap	11	Why the Hair on the Head	
He Ran for His Health	12	Turns Gray Before the	
World-Wearied	13	Beard	24
Truth in Gay Clothes	13	The Way Anti-Semites	
What Is Greatness?	14	Reason	26
The Modest Saint	14	The Relativity of Distance	26
The Poor Are Willing	14		

## Part Two: HEROES

INTRODUCTION		30
<b>I. WISE MEN</b>		
<b>WISE AND LEARNED MEN</b>		
Introduction	33	The Last Trouble Is the Worst
The Romance of Akiba	36	The Parable of the Wise Fishes
The Rabbi and the Inquisitor	40	Know Before You Criticize
Shallow Judgment	41	The Man and the Angel of Death
The Vanity of Rabbi Mar Zutra	42	Barking Dogs
Grief in Moderation	42	The Rosebush and the Apple Tree
The Virtue of the Commonplace	43	The Parable of the Old Cloak
Why God Gave No Wisdom to Fools	43	
Learning Knows No Class	44	
Learning That Leads to Action	44	
The Parable of the Two Gems	45	<b>THE ANCIENT ART OF REASONING</b>
The Best and the Worst Things	47	Introduction
God's Delicacy	47	Always Two Possibilities
An Author's Life After Forty	48	It Could Always Be Worse
An Unpredictable Life	48	Wishes Must Never Be Vague
Stale Ancestors—Stale Learning	49	Damning with Praise
The Most Valuable Merchandise	49	A Brief Sermon
Learning and Knowing	50	Mikhail Ivanovitch Makes a Discovery
Spinoza	50	The Cheapest Way
Double-Talk	51	Why Scholars Have Homely Wives
A Reason for Every Custom	51	The Arrogant Rabbi
Why Jerusalem Was Destroyed	52	Love of Perfection
Where Is Paradise?	53	
<b>PARABLES</b>		
Introduction	53	<b>WISE JUDGES</b>
Man Understands But Little	55	Introduction
The Poor Man's Miracle	56	The Old Man and the Snake and the Judgment of Solomon
The Giant and the Cripple	56	Whose Was the Blame?
		A Very Ancient Law
		The Discerning Judge
		What's in a Name?
		Equal Justice
		The Saving Voice
		He Didn't Deserve His Fee

## CONTENTS

ix

The Blessing	77	How to Replenish a Treasury	83
For Whom the Cock Crowed	78	Rabbinical Arithmetic	84
Too Clever Is Not Clever	79	The Real Son	84
		The Innkeeper's Clever Daughter	85
<b>RIDDLE SOLVERS</b>		The Farmer's Daughter	88
Introduction	80	The Story of Kunz and His Shepherd	92
Alexander's Instruction	80		
The Wisdom of the Jews	82		

**2. MIRACLES****CABALISTS, MYSTICS AND WONDER-WORKERS**

Introduction	95
Why Rabbi Israel Laughed Three Times	99
The Book of Mysteries	103
The Trial of Rabbi Gershon	109
The Poor Wayfarer	110
The Cabalists	111
The Rabbi Who Wished to Abolish Death	116
Asking for the Impossible	117
Rashi and Godfrey of Bouillon	119
Rabbi Amram's Rhine Journey	120
The Hidden Saint	122

**MESSIAH STORIES**

Introduction	123
--------------	-----

**Joseph della Rayna Storms Heaven**

The Messiah Came to Town	124
Why the Messiah Doesn't Come	136

**SKEPTICS AND SCOFFERS**

Introduction	139
Conclusive Proof	139
The Right Kind of Judge	140
Leave It to the Rabbi	140
Deduction	142
Realistic Miracles	142
A Believer's Truth	142
Miracles	142
The Farseeing Rabbi	143
Pipe-Dreams	143
The Gulden Test	144
A Fool Asks Too Many Questions	145

**Part Three: THE HUMAN COMEDY****INTRODUCTION**

148

**I. DROLL CHARACTERS****SCHNORRERS AND BEGGARS**

They Got the Itch	168
On the Minsk-Pinsk Line	169
The Schnorrer and the Farmer	

Introduction	152
The King of Schnorrers	153

169

One Blind Look Was Enough	170	The Way to Die	208
Price Is No Object	170		
A Sure Cure	170		
Every Expert to His Own Field	171	FOOLS AND SIMPLETONS	
No Credit	171	Introduction	209
He Spared No Expense	172	What Makes a Fool	211
A Local Reputation	172	Some of the Nicest People	211
The Schnorrer-in-Law	172	Why Waste Money?	212
		Philosophy with Noodles	212
		Surplus	213
		If It Were Anyone Else	213
		It's Terrible	214
		Making It Easy	214
<b>WAGS AND WITS</b>			
Introduction	173		
He Worried Fast	174		
The Choice	175	THE WISDOM OF CHELM	
Mutual Introduction	175		
Tit for Tat	175	The Mistake	215
The Jew and the Caliph	189	The Golden Shoes	215
You're as Old as You Feel	189	The Chelm Goat Mystery	216
Mazel Tov!	189	Innocence and Arithmetic	221
Wrong Order	190	By the Beard of His Mother	222
The Foresighted Traveller	190	The Great Chelm	
Dramatic Criticism	190	Controversy	222
Why Noodles are Noodles	191	Superfluous	223
The Big Blow	191	Wet Logic	224
The Sacrifice Was Too Great	192	Can This Be I?	224
		The Columbus of Chelm	224
		Food Out of the Horse's Mouth	227
		A Sage Question	228
<b>HERSHEL OSTROPOLIER</b>		Chelm Justice	228
Hershel's Conflict	192	Pure Science	228
Hershel's Revenge on the Women	194	Overcoming Messiah	229
Reciprocity	196	The Umbrella	229
How Hershel Almost Became a Bigamist	196	Excavation in Chelm	229
Hershel as Coachman	197	The Worriers of Chelm	230
The Poor Cow	199	The Safeguard	230
A Perfect Fit	199	The Discreet Shammes	231
A Tooth for a Tooth	201	A Riddle	231
What Hershel's Father Did	202	Taxes	231
Gilding the Lily	202	The Affair of the Rolling Trunk	232
When Hershel Eats—	202	The Secret of Growing	234
Hershel as Wine-Doctor	205		
The Feast	206		

SCHLEMIHLS AND SCHLIMAZLS	Vice Is Also an Art	243	
Introduction	235	IGNORAMUSES AND PRETENDERS	
The Henpecked Rabbi	237	From What Einstein Makes a Living	244
Poor Man's Luck	238	One Use for Scholarship	244
Two Possibilities	238	The Truth about Falsehood	245
To Avert Disaster	239	A Violation of Nature	245
Poor Fish	239	It Takes More than Brains	245
A Jewish Highwayman	240	The Diagnosis	246
Definition	241	What Does It Matter?	246
X Marks the Spot	242	Philosophy	246
Marriages Are Made in Heaven	242	Note to Obstetricians	246
An Absent-Minded Fellow	243	The Dachshund	247
A Prayer and a Deal	243		

## 2. ROGUES AND SINNERS

TRICKSTERS AND ROGUES	The Strategists	260
Introduction	Total Destruction	260
The Thief Who Was Too Clever	Veracity	260
You Can't Fool God	The Birds That Turned to Stone	261
The Wise Rogue	Miracles and Wonders	262
Justice in Sodom		
Sodom's Bed for Strangers	MISERS AND STINGY MEN	
Charity in Sodom	The Great Experiment	262
Example in Sodom	The Sweating Will	263
Cunning Against Greed	The Orphan	263
The Way Tailors Figure	He Got His Ruble Back	263
He Was Underpaid	The Miser	264
The Penitents	Who Counts?	264
One Shot Too Many	A Sure Sign	264
The Clever Thief		
Very Very Antique	SINNERS	
New Management	Introduction	265
The Ways of a Rogue	Saint and Sinner	265
Professional Pride	Heavenly Justice	266
Honor among Thieves	Filial Love	268
	Relativity	268
LIARS AND BRAGGARTS	When Prayer Is No Help	269
Introduction	Absent-Minded	269
	From Bad to Worse	270

**3. TRADITIONAL TYPES**

Introduction	271	A Tradesman's Revenge	283
ROTHSCHILD AND OTHER RICH MEN		A Kindness	284
		The Rich Uncle	284
		Production Worries	285
		Nickeleh-Pickeleh	285
		Too Late	286
His Bad Luck Held	273	DOCTORS AND PATIENTS	
Discovery at 7 A. M.	274	A Calculation	286
Whose Money?	274	One of the Diseases of	
Living de Luxe	274	Mankind	286
Rothschild's Poverty	274	How to Collect Dues	286
The Rights of Schnorrers	275	Insomnia	287
Montefiore's Buttons	275	WAITERS AND RESTAURANTS	
The Price of a Millionaire	275	A Fishy Conversation	289
The One to Call the Tune	276	Oysters for Atonement	289
True Grief	276	MATCHMAKERS	
Steam-Bath Soliloquy	277	Introduction	289
Rich Man's Folly	277	The Unreasonable Young Man	291
Credit Too Good	278	Happiness, Ready-to-Wear	291
A Father with Foresight	278	The Art of Exaggeration	292
TAILORS		The Aristocrat	293
Out of Style	279	The Over-Enthusiastic Shadchan	293
Both from Minsk	279	The Truth Will Out	294
Napoleon and the Jewish Tailor	279	What a Life!	295
		Speak Up	295
SCHOLARS AND SCRIPTURE TEACHERS		Only Sometimes	295
Etiquette Among Scholars	281	In Haste	295
Goal Achieved	282	MERCHANTS, SHOPKEEPERS, PEDDLERS	
Strictly Kosher	282		
Potatoes	282		
MERCHANTS, SHOPKEEPERS, PEDDLERS			
To Save Time	283		

**4. HUMOROUS ANECDOTES AND JESTS**

Züsskind the Tailor	299	The Biggest Favor	301
The Power of a Lie	300	Secret Strategy	302
The Merchant from Brisk	301	Mother-in-Law Relativity	302

All Agents Are Alike	303	RETORTS	
All About the Elephant	304	Rabbinical Limits	312
Babe Ruth and the Jewish Question	304	Montefiore and the Anti-Semite	312
The Captain	304	Animated Conversation	313
Ready for Everything	305	The Snob	313
Also a Minyan-Man	305	Pessimist and Optimist	313
When Your Life Is in Danger	305	Why Not?	314
They Misled the Gendarme	306	Proper Distinctions	314
Very Understandable Commentary	307	Evil to Him . . .	314
Comfort	307	Essential Trade	315
Cold Hospitality	308		
Conversation Piece	308	BITTER JESTS	
Stop Me If . . .	308		
A Livelihood	309	Introduction	315
A Full Accounting	309	The Independent Chicken	316
Mother Love	309	Applied Psychology	317
Initiative	310	Handicapped	317
No Admittance	310	God's Mercy	318
Whose Drawers?	311	They Shoot First	318
Shortcut	311	Sedition Saved Him	319
A Matter of Degree	312	Hitler's Circus	319
		Wasted Protection	320
		Pity	320

## Part Four: TALES AND LEGENDS

### I. BIBLICAL SIDELIGHTS

Introduction	322	Why God Forgives Man	351
The Making of Adam	326	King David Bows Before an Idol	352
The First Tear	327	Better than a Dead Lion	352
Falsehood and Wickedness	328	The Wall of the Poor	353
Abraham and the Idols	330	Gates of Beauty	355
Abraham Before Nimrod	331	The Beauty of Simple Things	355
God Protects the Heathen Too	331	King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba	356
Moses the Shepherd	333	The Origin of the Roman Empire	356
Israel Undying	334	The Downfall of King Solomon	366
The Crossing of the Red Sea	334	The Sorrow of Jeremiah	369
The Widow and the Law	341	The Trials of Jonah	374
The Angels Jealous of Moses	342		
The Death of Moses	343		

**2. THE WORLD TO COME**

Introduction	378	Tapers to Heaven	384
A Worthy Companion	380	Bontshe the Silent	384
The Piety of the Heart	381	The Fear of Death	391
What Tipped the Scales	383		

**3. FOLK TALES**

Introduction	393	Pope Elhanan	403
The Great Are Also Little	394	Caught in His Own Trap	409
The Lord Helpeth Man and Beast	395	The Three Daughters, or the Evil of Tale Bearing	411
The Acquisitive Eye	397	The Faithful Neighbor	412
The Power of Hope	398	King Ptolemy and the Seventy Wise Jews	414
The Test of a True Friend	399		
Each Man to His Paradise	402		

**4. DEMON TALES**

Introduction	419	The Golem of Prague	431
King Solomon and the Worm	421	The Miser's Transformation	439
The Witches of Ascalon	427	No Privacy Anywhere	443
Introductory Note to The Golem of Prague	428	The Man Who Married a She-Devil	445

**5. ANIMAL TALES**

Introduction	449	Know Your Enemy	456
The Fate of the Wicked (A Fable by Rabbi Meir)	451	The Wise Bird and the Foolish Man	457
The Advantage of Being a Scholar	452	The Fox and the Foolish Fishes	458
King Leviathan and the Charitable Boy	453	The Proper Place for a Tail	461
The Sly Fox	455	The Curse of the Indolent	461
The Price of Envy	455	The Fox and the Leopard	461

**Part Five: PROVERBS AND RIDDLES**

<b>1. PROVERBS AND FOLK SAYINGS</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>3. RIDDLES</b>	<b>480</b>
<b>2. FOLKQUIPS</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>4. CONUNDRUMS</b>	<b>482</b>

	CONTENTS	xv
NOTES		485
GLOSSARY		495
INDEX		501

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## *Preface to the Bantam Edition*

Nathan Ausubel's *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, which now appears for the first time in a paperback edition, has enjoyed nearly forty printings during the four decades since its first publication. The *Treasury* occupies a place in hundreds of thousands of home libraries; year in and year out it is given as a gift at moments of passage and celebration; speakers and writers continue to rely on it for the telling anecdote or the illustrative story.

Why has Ausubel's collection become a popular classic? The reason, I think, lies in the fact that this volume is much more than an anthology. Anthologies, by their nature, are usually makeshift affairs; they stand as apologies for some more comprehensive treatment of a subject that cannot yet be written or that no one has bothered to write. They arouse our expectations but quickly disappoint them, decomposing into a series of unresolved fragments that fail to amount to a real book. In contrast, generations of readers have found in Ausubel's *Treasury* an imaginative unity that is decidedly not a substitute for something more complete. Ausubel has succeeded in realizing the aim he states in the introduction to this volume: to render a collective portrait of the Jewish people. Though he has given us an epic canvas peopled by myriads of diverse figures, the image on the canvas is a cohesive one, the unmistakable likeness of a single people. And given the complexity of the Jewish people, their historical experience and symbolic creations, this is indeed a remarkable and compelling achievement.

Ausubel was able to accomplish this because of his conviction—one not very widely shared these days—that it is possible to draw a collective portrait of a people. This affirmation is based on the belief that there is a discoverable underlying unity to the historical experience not just of the Jews but of every great people. Ausubel harks back in this conviction to an older Romantic conception of the existence of a "folk mind." The word "folk" here has very little to do with notions of the primitive, the quaint, or the undeveloped.

Ausubel takes "folk" as a designation for an entire people, a historical nationality, like the French, the Finns, or in this case, the Jews. In this way of thinking each people has a folk mind, a national genius, which is a set of characteristics that especially mark that group and that remain constant throughout the flux of historical change. In Ausubel's conception of the folk mind there is nothing triumphal or chauvinist. His celebration of the passions and quirks of his own people is never at the expense of others.

Folklore is the symbolic expression of the folk mind, and since Ausubel defines the folk mind so broadly, he understands folklore in a similarly catholic sense. In contrast to the scientific, anthropological approach to folklore currently in vogue, Ausubel finds his sources across the entire life of a people. Whereas the detached ethnologist respects as authentic only material that can be gotten from the oral testimony of natives in exotic habitats, Ausubel draws on literary sources as well as oral, high culture as well as popular culture. And unlike the more analytical folklorist, Ausubel is actively and sympathetically engaged in his material, celebrating it as he records and collects, comments, and retells. This is, after all, not material from some faraway tribe but the treasures of his own people.

Ausubel's ideas about the folk mind help explain the ambitious variety of the sources for this anthology. His principal sources include the following: the legendary material from the literature of the Talmud we call *Midrash* (second to seventeenth centuries); medieval folktales; collections of Hasidic narratives (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries); retellings of folktales by modern writers; jokes and anecdotes current in a variety of forms. The nature of these sources, the cultural function they perform, and the level of society at which they operate are widely different. The tales told by the Talmudic sages to learned listeners are one thing; a joke about a schnorrer and merchant is something else. Similarly, we might find existing side by side in this volume an authentic tale told by a Hasidic master to his pious audience together with the conscious remolding of a traditional tale by a modernist writer such as Peretz, who sought to make a statement about human nature to his secular audience. Ausubel does not give us enough information about his sources to pick up such distinctions, and the critical reader might rightly wish for more citation.

This is not, it should be stressed, carelessness on Ausubel's part. He believed that the folk mind is truly timeless, so that the precise points at which we dip into it are unimportant relative to the truth of the whole that is illuminated. One does not have to accept this premise entirely to be transfixed by the panorama of Ausubel's vision and by the dazzle of the kaleidoscope of sources. The remarkable unity that emerges from Ausubel's disparate sources can perhaps be attributed not so much to the folk mind but to the great tradition of oral and literary creativity it draws from, an inheritance we may call the Agadic Tradition. In the matrix of classical Judaism the *Halakhah* is the legal element that is concerned with the theory and practice of what is required of man in his behavior in the world. The *Agada* is the complementary element, which describes the adventures of the religious imagination and whose characteristic mode is story telling. It is this second dimension that forms the principle of selection for Ausubel. For although he draws from a vast and varied array of sources, he passes over legal and philosophical literature and instead delves into the wealth of a coherent tradition of Agadic activity.

Ausubel can be seen as a recreator of a tradition. The text of *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore* is so accessible that we are hardly aware of how large a role Ausubel has played in the weaving of its fabric. However, if we stop to reflect, we have to acknowledge the prodigious industry and constant probity that must have gone into the culling of this material from hundreds of sources, as well as the scholarship and erudition involved in responsible translation from many languages. But even if we recognize Ausubel's competence in selection and translation, there remains qualities we would expect from any good anthologist. The texture of *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore* reveals something rarer and less tangible: the dimension of craft. The stories and anecdotes in this volume often are not simply translations; they are recastings and retellings of their sources. What is involved here is not a betrayal of the originals but an act of intellectual solicitude. The remolding of each tale represents a separate instance of a brokering between the foreign, antique idiom of the source and contemporary norms of intelligibility. Anyone familiar with Talmudic literature in the original knows that faithful, exact translations, no matter how elegant, still require a wealth of annotation and explication before we can digest

them smoothly. Ausubel has done that work for us. He has made thousands of decisions about shape, idiom, locutions, details, endings; and all this in such a way that the tales fall easily within our conventions of understanding as modern readers of English, while retaining an unmistakable aura of their origins.

Although the legendary and pious tales are told with charm and skill, Ausubel is actually at his best in the hundreds of comic anecdotes and jests that make *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore* more fun than its demure title would suggest. In presenting the humorous material Ausubel comes into his own as a raconteur, for here he need be less concerned with mediating cultural distance than with capturing a moment of verbal magic. His skill with timing and inflection together with his sense of economy and restraint is the raconteur's equivalent of perfect pitch.

Yet, it is not due simply to Ausubel's talent that the jokes are what work best in the *Treasury*: it is the material itself. All of the sententious wisdom of sages and saints seems insubstantial compared with the ability of the jokes to communicate the deep pathos and resilience of Jewish life. The jokes are paradoxically and profoundly *more serious*. This quality seems to epitomize something essential to the larger structure of the Jewish imagination. Take this example:

A Jew was walking on the Bismarck Platz in Berlin when unintentionally he brushed against a Prussian officer.

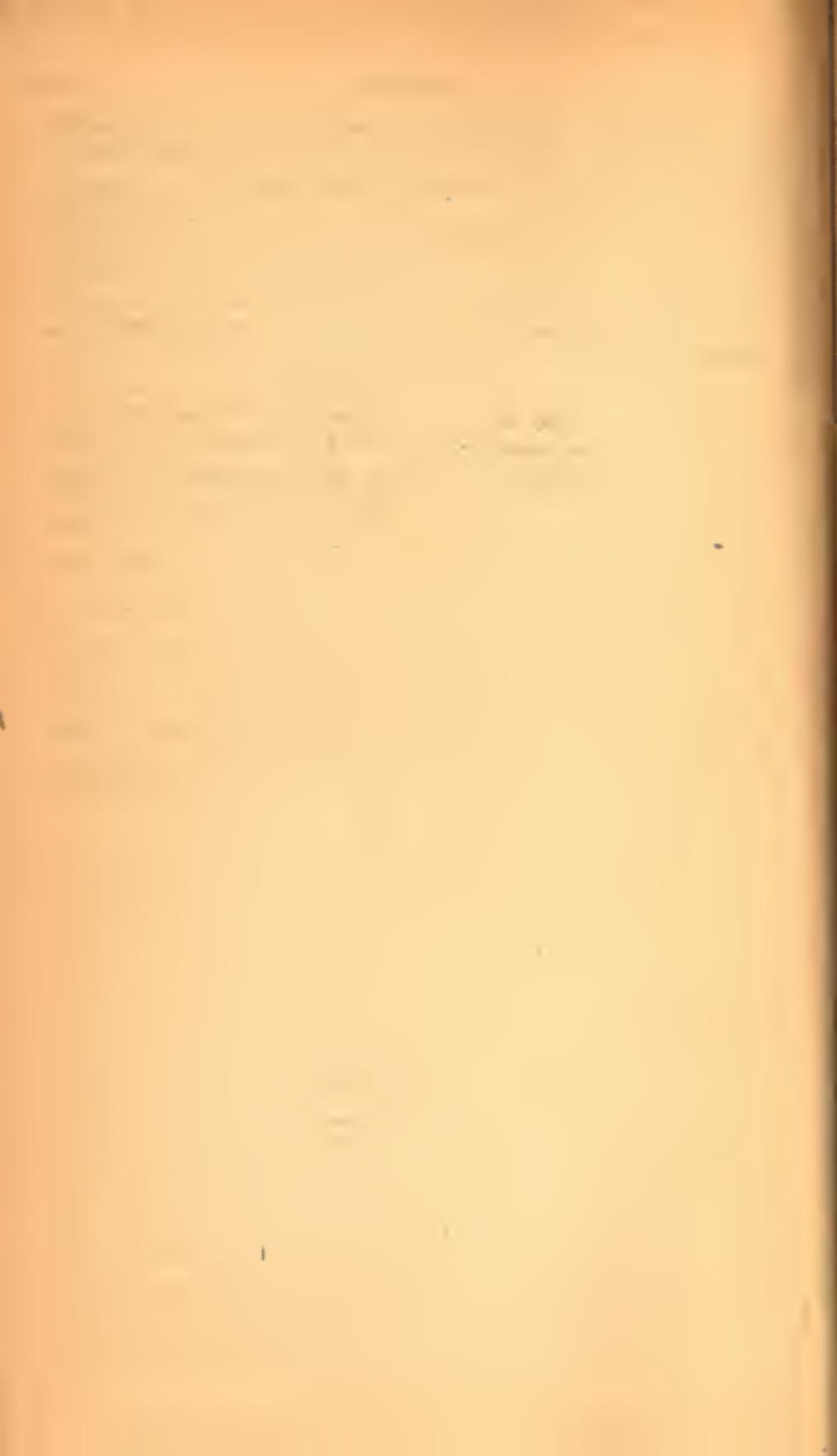
"Swine!" roared the officer.

"Cohen!" replied the Jew with a stiff bow.

Now, it would be difficult to imagine two persons between whom there existed a greater gulf of power than a Prussian officer and a Jew. Yet by means of a clever retort the Jew for a moment turns the situation around, and while we know that there has been no real diminishment of the officer's prerogatives, we delight in this moment of imagined reversal.

This, I believe, is the basic pattern for the best jokes and anecdotes in *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*. The initial situation usually involves a relationship of inequality and disadvantage between two parties—most often, actually, between two Jews—with regard to power, money, honor, or respectability. What happens in the joke is that the advantage is temporarily equalized or even reversed by a verbal sleight of

hand, usually an audacious reinterpretation or play on words. At the nub of the joke, therefore, is a shift from the reality of the given situation, which never really changes, to a plane of language in which the powerful can indeed be bested. The jump from the constricting reality of the world to a space of imaginative freedom lasts only for the moment of the telling, but at the very least it keeps alive in us the capacity to imagine that the arrangements of the world are not forever undisturbable.



## *Introduction*

Like other children brought up in an orthodox Jewish environment I was immersed in Jewish song and story as soon as I became aware of the world around me. Years later, I discovered that the lore of my people had entered into my blood stream, as it were, and had become a part of the cultural reality of my life. Who has not had this experience? Melodies sung in childhood have a tendency to linger persistently in the subconscious and the stories and sayings we heard time and again from the lips of our parents are never really erased from our memory.

While my main purpose in compiling this anthology was to present the spontaneous folk-creation of the Jewish people, I was also motivated by the desire to recapture the fading memory of the wonder and the beauty that had inspirited my childhood in the Old World. And so I began to gather all the myths and parables, stories and legends, the songs and the wise sayings upon which I, and millions of other Jewish children throughout the many centuries, had been nurtured.

But what was my delight to discover in the course of the work that a unified portrait was shaping itself in an almost sculptural sense out of all these materials. This portrait was of one I knew intimately, of some one endowed with a well-defined character, familiar psychological traits, ethical values and emotional responses. And before long I knew with certainty whose portrait it was—it was the composite portrait of the Jewish people.

How could there have emerged such a remarkable unity from all this variegated mass of folk-materials? For one thing, Jewish historic experience has been disturbingly similar in so many ways, in every age and in almost every land of the Diaspora. Jews have never been allowed to sink their roots for long anywhere; they have been forced to be everlasting wanderers on the highways of the world. They have been perpetually faced with the same kind of slanders and persecutions in almost every country and in every generation. And their folklore naturally is but a faithful chronicle of

these historic experiences. Then again, we cannot avoid the fact that for three thousand years the remnants of Israel have maintained their ethnic-cultural identity, which too is an unparalleled historical phenomenon.

Like children who had no father to give them protection, no home they could call their own, they developed a feeling of deep emotional insecurity in the world. They found comfort in devotion to their faith and their religious literature, of which much of Jewish folklore is a significant part. For sacred writings, such as the Talmud and *Midrash*, are almost inexhaustible repositories of the legends, myths, and parables of the Jewish people. In almost perpetual study of this literature as a devotional obligation, the Jew of every age and every country absorbed these elements of folklore and entered them into the cultural experiences of his life.

By the humanizing art of the legend such foremost heroes as Moses, Jeremiah and Hillel, have been transformed into well-loved ancestors—we might say members of the same family. Even God has lost his awesomeness in the folkloristic transformation. "And nowhere indeed has God been rendered so utterly human, been taken so closely to man's bosom and, in the embrace, so thoroughly changed into an elder brother, a slightly older father, as here in the *Midrash* . . . God has not merely become a man, he has become a Jew, an elderly bearded Jew."\*

There is no folklore that can claim such a long and continuous history as the Jewish, that has had such a vast range of productivity in both time and geography. It is richly varied and colorful with the imprint of the many diverse cultures that Jews have assimilated everywhere through the many centuries. Nonetheless, despite the absorption and adaptation of non-Jewish elements from without and despite the consequences of more than twenty-five centuries of wide dispersion in almost every part of the world, Jewish folklore probably possesses an over-all unity greater than that of any other. It is noteworthy, for instance, that, while American folklore has had a continuous three-hundred-year history of creativity in a unified geographic area, it nevertheless can claim a lesser integration than the folklore of the Jewish people with its

\* Professor H. Slonimsky, *On Reading the Midrash*. In *The Jewish Institute Quarterly*, January, 1928, p. 3.

several thousand years of turbulent history in so many parts of the globe.

Folklore is a vivid record of a people, palpitating with life itself, and its greatest art is its artlessness. It is a true and unguarded portrait, for where art may be selective, may conceal, gloss over defects and even prettify, folk art is always revealing, always truthful in the sense that it is a spontaneous expression. It is therefore three-dimensional with the sense of "life" and "people." It proceeds in a straight line to the significant and ignores the trivial. By juxtaposing good with evil, light with shadow, grief with laughter, and honesty with sham, it achieves the harmonious unity of opposites that resides in objective truth.

The Jewish people has fathered many talented and profound sons and daughters but no less talented and profound—in a somewhat different way perhaps—has been the people itself. Because it hides unpretentiously behind its anonymous creation like the unnamed master-sculptors of ancient Egypt, few have learned to recognize it as the creator of significant culture. Certainly, men of eminence could never have arisen in any of the arts of civilization had it not been for the molding force of the people's mass-genius which serves to them as the fertile soil to the seedling. The fundamental lore of folklore in the creation of culture is yet insufficiently recognized except by those who have succeeded in freeing themselves of the "Great Man" theory of history and culture so eulogized by Carlyle in *Hero and Hero-Worship* and in *The Aristocracy of Talent*.\*

Some writers have expressed astonishment at the marked intellectual and sophisticated character of so much of Jewish folklore. But seen within the context of its social and cultural history there is nothing at all baffling in this. Jews became an intellectual people not because of any innate mental superiority over other peoples, but because of the peculiar nature of their history. They have cherished and preserved their tradition of learning ever since the Age of Ezra the Scribe and the public teachings of the Men of the Great Assembly during the Sixth Century B.C. In large measure this tradition was

\* "With the modern trend of seeing the individual as a part of the whole social organism, folklore is becoming an auxiliary science for a social and religious history as well as an integral part of the history of literature." —Abraham Berger, *The Literature of Jewish Folklore*. In *Journal of Jewish Bibliography*, V. 1. Nos. 1-2, 1938-39.

derived from the religious obligation of every Jew to study Scripture ceaselessly, for it must always be kept in mind that Judaism was cradled in a theocracy, a priest state. In later centuries, this study also embraced the *Mishna*, the Talmud and the *Midrash*, of which folklore was an integral part.

This activity was not only unprecedented in its mass scope in the intellectual history of mankind, but, within its limited religious framework, it represented the most democratic philosophy of education in Antiquity. This universal duty to study *as a religious act* broadened the base of Jewish culture and, in consequence, elevated it.

It was this general and sustained intellectual activity among Jews that, in the process of refinement and sensitizing through many centuries, led to a razor-edged sharpening of wits, to a verbal ease of articulation, and to an unusual preoccupation with abstract ideas and philosophical speculation. In the plain Jew this differed from that of the scholar only in extent and intensity. Sometimes this virtuosity led to an intellectual sterility, defeated its own avowed ends. The scholar so often became entangled in his own complicated web of hair-splitting. This fruitless type of mental gymnastics, even in the Talmud, drew forth the ironic retort from an exasperated rabbi in debate with a casuistical opponent: "Aren't you from Pumbeditha where they draw an elephant through the eye of a needle?"

But by and large, the Rabbis of old who compiled the Talmud and the *Midrash* were neither pedants nor closet scholars. They were down-to-earth teachers of the people, robust with the life-urge and endowed with good practical sense. In their desire to make their teaching intelligible to the people, they drew with canny pedagogy upon the familiar tales, legends, witticisms and sayings current among the Jews. Being men of talent and of considerable profundity they in turn took fire from the uninhibited folk-imagination and themselves adapted innumerable folk-stories and sayings which they wove ingeniously into the fabric of their learned homilies and discussions. In their turn again the common folk, who revered as sacred these tales and their source in Talmud and *Midrash*, adopted them and, in the process of telling and retelling them, embroidered them with their inexhaustible fancy, invention and wisdom. The practice of employing the old legends, parables and the ethical exempla of the sages for didactic ends was continued by the rabbis and preachers of

later days down to our own time. Thus, like the complementary interaction between the shuttle and the loom, the Jewish people and their teachers together wove a tapestry of folklore of the most exquisite designs and colors.

What are the salient features of Jewish folklore which distinguish it from other bodies of folklore?

To begin with, it is most frequently of a poetical and introspective nature. It is philosophical and subtle, pious and moralistic, witty and ironic. But it is almost always ethical, pointing a lesson of right conduct, ceaselessly instructing, often even when it is being entertaining or humorous. To be sure, other peoples' folklore also possesses some of these characteristics, but the nature of their culture and history led them to make other emphases.

Wit and irony can be regarded as the likely attributes of a civilized mentality. In Jewish life, as reflected in its folklore, these traits have been nourished by a macerated national sensibility, by a disenchantment with a world not of its making or choosing. Jews have received their tempering from an unflinching realism learned for a high fee in the school of life; they have always felt the need of fortifying their spirits with the armor of laughter against the barbs of the world.

Despite the tragedy of their historic experiences, Jews have always been life-affirming or they could not possibly have survived the ordeals they had to go through as a people. In fact, if anything, their troubles made indestructible optimists of them. The therapy of gaiety and laughter was as necessary to them as the very air they breathed. The life-force within them was far too vital to be dissolved in tears and perpetual mourning. Neither persecution, nor grief, nor the poverty of their dank ghetto-prisons could keep Jews from laughing. But their laughter had to be something more than gay frivolity, something more than mere diversion. It had to be an affirmative and defiant answer to the world's cruelties. And so within Jewish humor there is a unique type of wit that serves, not only as a trenchant commentary on life, but also as a corrective, as a mellowing agent which helps draw the sting of grief from tragedy. The mellowing humor may very well be called "Jewish Salt," an indefinable quality comparable to "Attic Salt" except for a distinctive flavor of its own which helps establish the character of Jewish folklore. For this reason the book begins with a touch of this seasoning.

Many Jewish legends and folk tales are suffused with a deep sadness. Like so many of the Jewish folk songs they too are keyed in a haunting minor. But somehow this sadness rarely degenerates into despair or even self-pity. Almost always it bears within it the saving-grace of catharsis, of the ennoblement of grief in the steadfast spirit, of the moral triumph of the righteous even in defeat.

As we have already noted, Jewish folklore is knit together by a remarkable unity of both subject matter and world-view despite its vast time-place sweep. This cohesion also has been due to the fact that the most significant tales were found in the *Agada* in the Talmud and in the *Midrash*. Later Jewish folklore, to a very considerable extent, was merely poured into the traditional matrix of form and content established by the ancient Rabbinical folklorists.

Jewish folklore treats of Heaven and Earth, of Paradise and Hell, of Good and Evil, of the natural and the supernatural, of the spiritual and the material, of the sacred and the profane. A large number of legends and myths, derived from their neighbors in Persia and Babylonia among whom the Jews lived for so many centuries after the Captivity, tell of angels and demons—all mediators between God and man's destiny of which he is the architect according to the good or evil of his conduct. In hundreds of other tales, with the humanizing intimacy of the true folklore spirit, there passes through a procession of the Patriarchs and the Prophets, of the Jewish kings and heroes, sages and scholars, saints and sinners, martyrs and renegades, rationalists and mystagogues, men of faith and also men of little faith. One of the objectives of all these tales is didactic—to hold up to the view of the Jew the inspiring example of his eminent forefathers in righteousness. They have still other objectives—to offer consolation and hope to the afflicted, to reconcile for the simple Jew the unhappy destiny of his people with his own trust in God, and also to explain to him those Scriptural passages and incidents that baffle his questioning mind. About these legends Tolstoy wrote in the 1880's: "They contain something unendingly gentle and movingly great, like the rosy morning star on a quiet morning. The most precious quality in them is their agitation over the eternal mysteries of the human soul."

Folklore is a continuous and unending process and flows along with the stream of life. There has not been yet sufficient time for the recent historic experiences of the Jewish people to crystallize into folklore. It is perhaps too early for the emergence of legend out of the staggering tragedy of the six million Jews murdered in the charnel houses of Hitler. And time must elapse before the Maccabean grandeur that infuses the struggle of the Jews of Israel against the combined might of their enemies will kindle the folk imagination to give it utterance. Yet that time will surely come, for life, with the deft fingers of a weaver, tirelessly draws the crimson thread of human anguish and struggle into its magical patterns.

In conclusion, I would like to add a personal note. The years of labor which have gone into the preparation of this work will be more than rewarded if it will reveal to the Jewish reader the existence of the little known cultural treasures of his people and, in consequence, will fill him with the sense of human dignity and worth that is his birthright. To the Gentile reader Jewish folklore addresses itself with its myriad implications because it is but a colorful part of the kaleidoscope of universal culture. May it make plain the common humanity of all races and nations and thus draw them closer in the bonds of brotherhood and understanding.

#### MAJOR SOURCES OF JEWISH FOLKLORE

Most of the old legends contained in this book are naturally from the *Agada* of the Talmud and the *Midrash*. But of the character and contents of these vast repositories of folklore many people, Jews included, have but the haziest idea. For instance, the French historian Bossuet, who was a bishop as well as a famous savant, once appealed to the philosopher Leibnitz to procure for him a translation of the Talmud by "Monsieur Mishna." Therefore, to those readers who may find themselves in the predicament of Bossuet, it might be useful to explain in the barest outline what the *Mishna*, the Talmud and the *Midrash* actually are.

As is well known, the Pentateuch (the Five Books of Moses) contains the Jewish written Law, or Torah. In time, beginning with the era of the Scribes (*Soferim*) who succeeded Ezra, it was found necessary to add to the written Law a second body of Law consisting of traditional doctrine

that had been orally transmitted through the centuries. The *Mishna* (repetition or doctrine) constituted this Second Law. It was compiled in Palestine and composed in Hebrew by one hundred and forty-eight teacher-scribes called *Tannaim* (*Mishna* teachers). It was a Code that developed but slowly, taking almost five and a half centuries, from the era of the Scribes to its final redaction by Judah ha-Nasi in the Third Century A.D.

However, the oral traditions contained in the *Mishna* were found urgently in need of interpretation. In answer to this need emerged the *Gemara* (doctrine) or, as it is more often called, the Talmud (explanation), as a commentary on the text of the *Mishna*.

The Talmud, which constitutes the *Corpus Juris* of the Jews, was created by several hundred rabbis who went under the collective name of *Amoraim* (expounders); they regarded themselves as the continuators of the *Tannaim*, the architects of the *Mishna*. The Talmud is not just one book but a great collection of many books; it is not the product of one age but of several centuries. With the meticulous care of practiced legal scholars the *Amoraim* examined the *Mishna* sentence by sentence, carefully traced every source and tried in cool objective discussion with one another to reconcile the contradictions they encountered in the *Mishna* text. It was a rare instance indeed when they attempted to lay down the law dogmatically—they merely gave their reasoned opinions, presented their views in the course of discussion, the dissenting one side by side with those of the majority. The laws that they discussed and interpreted touched on a vast number of subjects concerning every minute circumstance or problem arising in contemporary experience. Not just religion, but philosophy, hygiene, ethics and other matters of a civil and secular nature came under their purview.

There are actually two Talmuds—one which was developed by the *Amoraim* in the Rabbinical academies of Babylonia where a great settlement of Jews had been established during the Captivity, the other which was created by the *Amoraim* of Palestine. The Babylonian Talmud received its final redaction in the Fifth Century A.D. by the Rabbinic editors, the *Saboraim* (ponderers), who were the successors to the *Amoraim*.—The Jerusalem Talmud was closed by the Palestinian *Saboraim* a hundred years before, in A.D. 370. Of the two the Babylonian Talmud, which is about three times

the size of the Jerusalem Talmud, is by far the more important, although both are commentaries of the same *Mishna* text. However, the Jerusalem Talmud is incomplete. Out of the sixty-three treatises contained in the *Mishna*, it deals with only thirty-nine; it is assumed that the rest were lost.

Both Talmuds consist of two elements. One is called *Halacha*, which is the juridical exposition and interpretation of the Law; the other is called *Agada*, the ethical and poetical interpretation of Scripture by means of the story-telling art. The sages of old described the complementary relationship between these two methods: "Bread—that is *Halacha*; wine—that is *Agada*. By bread alone we cannot live." It is from the *Agada* that so many stories with profound ethical meanings have been culled for inclusion in this collection.

Finally, we come to the *Midrash*. This is a body of interpretative literature which was begun by the *Tannaim* simultaneously with their work on the *Mishna*, and was continued for many centuries by their Rabbinic continuators until the closing of the great Jewish schools in Babylonia in A.D. 1040. A perceptive scholar has given an accurate description of its contents and the spirit that animates it: "The *Midrash* is art in the interest of religion; but above all it is art. It is the flowering of the art creative instinct, snubbed and repressed elsewhere, which here finds full freedom and scope. The amazingly fecund and vital principle which shoots forth and blossoms in this endless garden is a repressed instinct. The Jews were forbidden the plastic arts, because the Deity was not to be modelled or drawn; and the mytho-plastic urge generally was frowned upon. But the myth-creating phantasy, the mytho-poetic urge, banished and forbidden in the official halls of the religion, finds its outlet here. And so we find this starved power driven underground, emerging here in the endless plenitude, from mere story-telling and parable and play of fancy to images of tragic beauty and to supreme flights of the creative imagination."\*

During the Middle Ages it was the Jews who served in Christian Europe as the most important intermediaries for the diffusion of the tales and fables of the East, such as the Bidpai and Barlaam cycles. (For more on this subject see the introduction to ANIMAL TALES.) Nonetheless, Jews remained

\* Professor H. Slonimsky, *On Reading the Midrash*. In *The Jewish Institute Quarterly*, January, 1928, p. 2.

skilful originators of tales in their own right. There was, for instance, the notable collection by Rabbi Nissim of Kairwan (11th Century). While many of his stories were adaptations from *Agada* and *Midrash*, quite a number were from other Jewish sources. Another celebrated compilation, *Sefer Hasidim* (Book of the Pious), adapted for the most part by Rabbi Judah Hasid of Regensburg (c. 1200), consisted of legends into which were patterned the cabalistic beliefs and fancies of medieval German Jewry.

The invention of the printing press by Gutenberg marked a great advance in the democratization of learning in Europe; it stimulated a broader diffusion of culture even in the ghetto. Yiddish compilations of folk tales, and also moralistic works in which folk tales played an illustrative function, came off the printing presses in considerable numbers during the second half of the Sixteenth Century. The most widely read of these were the *Teitsch-Chumesh*, *Brantspiegel* and *Leb-Tov*. However, the most popular of all Yiddish folk tale collections was the *Ma'aseh Buch*. More than half of its two hundred and fifty-four tales were adaptations of *Agada* and *Midrash* originals; many were of medieval Jewish vintage; and some were even variants of Christian stories.

With the upsurge of the *Cabala* during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries it was but natural that there should have originated a great number of cabalistic legends in which the drama of the miraculous and the demonological was fully exploited. Finally, with the advent of the mystical *Hasidic* movement during the Eighteenth Century, a unique body of legendary literature appeared in Yiddish concerning the continuators of the cabalists—the wonder-working Rabbi Israel Baal-Shem, the founder of *Hasidim*, and his principal rabbinic disciples. (For more on this subject see the introduction to CABALISTS, MYSTICS AND WONDER-WORKERS.)

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N.A.



PART ONE



Jewish Salt

## *Jewish Salt*

### *Such Odds!*

Two Jews sat in a coffee house, discussing the fate of their people.

"How miserable is our lot," said one. "Pogroms, plagues, quotas, discrimination, Hitler, and the Ku Klux Klan . . . Sometimes I think we'd be better off if we'd never been born!"

"Of course!" said the other. "But who has that much luck? Not one in 50,000 . . ."

### *The Realist*

AFTER the smoke and thunder of the battle had died down at Austerlitz, Napoleon wished to reward a number of men of various nationalities who had fought like heroes that day.

"Name your wish and I will grant it to you, my gallant heroes!" cried the Emperor.

"Restore Poland!" cried a Pole.

"It shall be done!" answered the Emperor.

"I'm a farmer—give me land!" cried a poor Slovak.

"Land it will be, my lad."

"I want a brewery," said a German.

"Give him a brewery!" ordered Napoleon.

Next it was the turn of a Jewish soldier.

"Well, my lad, what shall it be?" asked the Emperor, encouraging him with a smile.

"If you please, Sire, I would like to have a nice *schmaltz herring*," murmured the Jew, bashfully.

"*Ma foi!*" exclaimed the Emperor, shrugging his shoulders. "Give this man a herring!"

When the Emperor had left, the other heroes gathered around the Jew.

"What a fool you are!" they chided him. "Imagine a man can choose whatever he wants and all he asks for is a herring! Is that the way to treat an Emperor?"

"We'll see who's the fool!" retorted the Jew. "You've asked

for the independence of Poland, for a farm, for a brewery—things you'll never get from the Emperor. But you see, I'm a realist. If I ask for a herring—*maybe* I'll get it."

### *Higher Mathematics*

Two wise men of Chelm lay sweating in the steam bath one day. To drive away the boredom of doing nothing they began to discuss deep mathematical problems.

The first one said, "If, for instance, it takes four hours to drive to Dvinsk with one horse—wouldn't it be right to say that if I drove with two horses it would only take me two hours?"

"Correct as gold," answered the other sage, filled with admiration.

"Now, why couldn't I drive to Dvinsk with four horses so I'd get there in no time?" continued the mathematician.

"Why trouble to go to Dvinsk at all?" exclaimed the other. "Just harness your four horses and stay right here."

### *Richer than Rothschild*

"If I were Rothschild," said the *melamed* of Chelm, "I'd be richer than Rothschild."

"How is it possible?" asked a fellow-citizen.

"Naturally," answered the *melamed*, "I'd do a little teaching on the side."

### *A Lesson in Talmud*

ONE day a country-fellow came to his rabbi. "Rabbi," he said, in the tongue-tied fashion of the unlettered in the presence of the learned, "for a long time I have been hearing of Talmud. It puzzles me not to know what Talmud is. Please teach me what is Talmud."

"Talmud?" The rabbi smiled tolerantly, as one does to a child. "You'll never understand Talmud; you're a peasant."

"Oh, Rabbi, you must teach me," the fellow insisted. "I've never asked you for a favor. This time I ask. Please teach me, what is Talmud."

"Very well," said the rabbi, "listen carefully. If two burglars enter a house by way of the chimney, and find themselves in the living room, one with a dirty face and one with a clean face, which one will wash?"

The peasant thought awhile and said, "Naturally, the one with the dirty face."

"You see," said the rabbi, "I told you a farmer couldn't master Talmud. The one with the clean face looked at the one with the dirty face and, assuming his own face was also dirty, of course he washed it, while the one with the dirty face, observing the clean face of his colleague, naturally assumed his own was clean, and did not wash it."

Again the peasant reflected. Then, his face brightening, said, "Thank you, Rabbi, thank you. Now I understand Talmud."

"See," said the rabbi wearily. "It is just as I said. You are a peasant! And who but a peasant would think for a moment that when two burglars enter a house by way of the chimney, only one will have a dirty face?"

### *Hitting the Bull's Eye*

ONCE Rabbi Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna, said to his friend, the Preacher of Dubno, "Tell me, Jacob, how in the world do you happen to find the right parable to every subject?"

The Preacher of Dubno answered, "I will explain to you my parabolic method by means of a parable. Once there was a nobleman who entered his son in a military academy to learn the art of musketry. After five years the son learned all there was to be learned about shooting and, in proof of his excellence, was awarded a diploma and a gold medal.

"Upon his way home after graduation he halted at a village to rest his horses. In the courtyard he noticed on the wall of a stable a number of chalk circles and right in the center of each was a bullet hole.

"The young nobleman regarded the circles with astonishment. Who in the world could have been the wonderful marksman whose aim was so unerringly true? In what military academy could he have studied and what kind of medals had he received for his marksmanship!

"After considerable inquiry he found the sharpshooter. To his amazement it was a small Jewish boy, barefoot and in tatters.

"Who taught you to shoot so well?" the young nobleman asked him.

"The boy explained, 'First I shoot at the wall. Then I take a piece of chalk and draw circles around the holes.'

"I do the same thing," concluded the Preacher of Dubno with a smile. "I don't look for an appropriate parable to fit any particular subject but, on the contrary, whenever I hear a good parable or a witty story I store it in my mind. Sooner or later, I find for it the right subject for pointing a moral."

### *Lost and Found*

THE old rabbi had left the room for a moment, then returned to his studies, only to find his eye-glasses missing. Perhaps they were between the leaves of his book? No. . . . Maybe they were somewhere on the desk? No. . . . Surely they were in the room. No. . . .

So, in the ancient sing-song, with many a gesture appropriate to Talmudic disputation, he began:

"Where are my glasses? . . .

"Let us assume they were taken by someone. They were taken either by someone who needs glasses, or by someone who doesn't need glasses. If it was someone who needs glasses, he has glasses; and if it was someone who doesn't need glasses, then why should he take them?

"Very well. Suppose we assume they were taken by someone who planned to sell them for gain. Either he sells them to one who needs glasses, or to one who doesn't need glasses. But one who needs glasses has glasses, and one who doesn't need them, surely doesn't want to buy them. . . . So much for that.

"Therefore . . . this is a problem involving one who needs glasses *and* has glasses, one who either took someone else's because he lost his own, or who absentmindedly pushed his own up from his nose to his forehead, and promptly forgot all about them!

"For instance . . . *me!*" And, with a triumphant sweep of thumb to forehead, signalizing the end of his analysis, the rabbi recovered his property.

"Praised be the Lord, I am trained in our ancient manner of reasoning," he murmured. "Otherwise I would never have found them!"

### *So What?*

A YOUNG boy approached his father, saying, "Please, father, may I have an increase in my allowance?"

The old man stroked his beard reflectively. "And if you have an increase in your allowance, so what?"

"Then I'd be able to go to night school."

"And suppose you go to night school. So what?"

"Then I could get a better job."

"Suppose you get a better job. So what?"

"Then I could dress better and go places."

"And suppose you dress better and go places. So what?"

"Why, I might meet a beautiful girl."

"All right. You might meet a beautiful girl. So what?"

"I'd get married."

"So, you'd get married. So what?"

"Why, papa, then I'd be *happy!*"

"So, you're happy. So what? . . ."

### *Why Only One Adam?*<sup>1\*</sup>

WHY did God create only one Adam and not many at a time?

He did this to demonstrate that one man in himself is an entire universe. Also He wished to teach mankind that he who kills one human being is as guilty as if he had destroyed the entire world. Similarly, he who saves the life of one single human being is as worthy as if he had saved all of humanity.

God created only one man so that people should not try to feel superior to one another and boast of their lineage in this wise: "I am descended from a more distinguished Adam than you."

He also did this so that the heathen should not be able to say that, since many men had been created at the same time, it was conclusive proof that there was more than one God.

Lastly, He did this in order to establish His own power and glory. When a maker of coins does his work he uses only one mould and all the coins emerge alike. But the King of Kings, blessed be His name, has created all mankind in the mould of Adam, and even so no man is identical to another. For this reason each person must respect himself and say with dignity:

"God created the world on my account. Therefore let me not lose eternal life because of some vain passion!"

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\* Numbered reference notes begin on page 485.

*His Fault<sup>2</sup>*

I ONCE saw a man with a long beard who was riding upon an ass which he was beating. He said to him, "Oh cursed beast! If you did not wish to be ridden why did you become an ass?"

*It Was Obvious<sup>3</sup>*

A TALMUDIC scholar from Marmaresch was on his way home from a visit to Budapest. Opposite him in the railway carriage sat another Jew, dressed in modern fashion and smoking a cigar. When the conductor came around to collect the tickets the scholar noticed that his neighbor opposite was also on his way to Marmaresch.

This seemed very odd to him.

"Who can it be, and why is he going to Marmaresch?" he wondered.

As it would not be polite to ask outright he tried to figure it out for himself.

"Now, let me see," he mused. "He is a modern Jew, well dressed, and he smokes a cigar. Whom could a man of this type be visiting in Marmaresch? Possibly he's on his way to our town doctor's wedding. But no, that can't be! That's two weeks off. Certainly this kind of man wouldn't twiddle his thumbs in our town for two weeks!"

"Why then is he on his way to Marmaresch? Perhaps he's courting a woman there? But who could it be? Now let me see. Moses Goldman's daughter Esther? Yes, definitely, it's she and nobody else . . . ! But now that I think of it—that couldn't be! She's too old—he wouldn't have her, under any circumstances! Maybe it's Haikeh Wasservogel? Phooey! She's so ugly! Who then? Could it be Leah, the money-lender's daughter? N—no! What a match for such a nice man! Who then? There aren't any more marriageable girls in Marmaresch. That's settled then, he's not going courting.

"What then brings him?

"Wait, I've got it! It's about Mottel Kohn's bankruptcy case! But what connection can he have with that? Could it be that he is one of his creditors? Hardly! Just look at him sitting there so calmly, reading his newspaper and smiling to himself. Anybody can see nothing worries him! No, he's not a creditor. But I'll bet he has something to do with the bankruptcy! Now what could it be?"

"Wait a minute, I think I've got it. Mottel Kohn must have corresponded with a lawyer from Budapest about his bankruptcy. But that swindler Mottel certainly wouldn't confide his business secrets to a stranger! So it stands to reason that the lawyer must be a member of the family.

"Now who could it be? Could it be his sister Shprinzah's son? No, that's impossible. She got married twenty-six years ago—I remember it very well because the wedding took place in the green synagogue. And this man here looks at least thirty-five.

"A funny thing! Who could it be, after all . . . ? Wait a minute! It's as clear as day! This is his nephew, his brother Hayyim's son, because Hayyim Kohn got married thirty-seven years and two months ago in the stone synagogue near the market place. Yes, that's who he is!

"In a nutshell—he is Lawyer Kohn from Budapest. But a lawyer from Budapest surely must have the title 'Doctor'! So, he is Doctor Kohn from Budapest, no? But wait a minute! A lawyer from Budapest who calls himself 'Doctor' won't call himself 'Kohn'! Anybody knows that. It's certain that he has changed his name into Hungarian. Now, what kind of a name could he have made out of Kohn? Kovacs! Yes, that's it—Kovacs! In short, this is Doctor Kovacs from Budapest!"

Eager to start a conversation the scholar turned to his travelling companion and asked, "Doctor Kovacs, do you mind if I open the window?"

"Not at all," answered the other. "But tell me, how do you know that I am Doctor Kovacs?"

"It was obvious," replied the scholar.

### *He Had Him Coming and Going*

A POOR shopkeeper listened raptly to the rabbi's sermon on that Sabbath day in the synagogue. The rabbi preached, "He who is poor in this life will be rich in the world to come; he who is rich here, by God's decree, will be poor in the next world, for all men are equally God's children and he is just to them all."

Several days later the poor shopkeeper went to see the rabbi.

"Rabbi," he asked anxiously, "do you really believe that those who are poor in this world will be rich in the next?"

"No doubt about it!" emphatically answered the rabbi.

"You know I'm a poor shopkeeper—do you mean to say I'll be rich in the world to come?"

"Of course!"

Overjoyed, the poor shopkeeper cried, "In that case, Rabbi, lend me a hundred rubles. When I collect my riches in the next world I'll give them back to you."

Without a word, the rabbi counted out one hundred shiny silver rubles. The poor merchant could not believe his own eyes. As he stretched out his hand to gather in the money, the rabbi stopped him and asked, "What do you plan to do with your money, my friend?"

"Buy a new stock of merchandise."

"Do you expect to make money on it?"

"It'll sell like *Channukah* pancakes!"

"In that case," said the rabbi, gathering up the money himself, "I can't give you the hundred rubles. If you get rich here you'll be poor over there. So how in the world do you expect to return the loan?"

### *The Fine Art of Fanning*

FOR a full hour Mrs. Gutman from Suffolk Street handled every fan on the pushcart, feeling them, smelling them, weighing them, trying to decide which one to buy.

"I'll take this penny fan," she finally said, giving the disgusted peddler her coin.

She then went home with her purchase.

The following morning, bright and early, the peddler saw her standing big as life before him.

"What is it now?" he asked.

Mutely she held up the broken remnants of the fan she had purchased the day before.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I want my money back!" she demanded.

"How much did you pay?"

"A penny."

"And how did you use it?"

"What kind of a foolish question is that? Naturally I waved it in front of my face from side to side."

"Is that what you do with a penny fan, Mrs. Gutman, eh?" cried the peddler, outraged. "That's what you do with a five cents fan! With a penny fan you hold the fan still and wave your head!"

### For Honor

A STRANGER came to town. He stopped the first Jew in the market-place and asked him, "Can you please tell me where *Reb Yankel*, the warden of the synagogue, lives?"

"Oh," said the man, "you probably mean *Reb Yankel*, the Stutterer, whose father is *Reb Avremel 'Eczema'*. He lives further down near the church."

When the stranger reached the church he asked a passerby, "Can you please tell me where *Reb Yankel* lives?"

"Oh, you mean *Reb Yankel* with the hernia, the wife beater?" answered the passerby. "He's buried three wives already. You'll find him over there."

The stranger went on to where he was directed, but, to make sure, he asked a shopkeeper.

"Can you please tell me where *Reb Yankel* lives?"

"Oh, *Reb Yankel!*" answered the shopkeeper. "You mean *Reb Yankel-Goniff*, who goes into bankruptcy every other year! There he stands—over there!"

The stranger approached *Reb Yankel* and, after introducing himself, asked him, "Tell me, *Reb Yankel*, what on earth do you get out of being warden in this town?"

"Nothing! Not even a groschen!"

"Then why do you do it?"

"What a question to ask! I do it for the honor!"

### No Target

TO A rabbinical school in Old Russia the military came in search of recruits. The entire student body was drafted.

In camp, the students amazed their new masters by their marksmanship on the rifle range. Accordingly, when war broke out, the *Yeshiva* youths were ordered en masse into the front lines.

Shortly after the contingent arrived an attack began. Far in the distance, in No Man's Land, an advancing horde of Germans appeared. The Czarist officers called out, "Ready . . . aim . . . fire!"

But no fire was forthcoming.

"Fire!" yelled the officers. "Didn't you hear? Fire, you idiots, fire!"

Still nothing happened.

Beside himself with rage, the commanding officer demanded, "Why don't you fire?"

One of the youths mildly answered, "Can't you see . . . there are people in the way. Somebody might get hurt!"

### *Pain and Pleasure*

A JEWISH father took his little boy to the bath for the first time. When they jumped into the pool the little boy began to shiver with cold and cried, "*Oy, papa, oy!*"

His father then led him out of the pool, rubbed him down with a towel and dressed him.

"Ah-h, papa, ah-h!" purred the little fellow, tingling with pleasant warmth.

"Isaac," said the father thoughtfully, "do you want to know the difference between a cold bath and a sin? When you jump into a cold pool you first yell '*Oy!*' and then you say '*Ah-h.*' But when you commit a sin you first say '*Ah-h,*' and then you yell '*oy!*' "

### *The Rabbi's Nourishment*

A VILLAGE Jew was asked, "How can your rabbi survive on the small salary you're paying him?"

"Our rabbi would have died of hunger a long time ago. It's just his luck that on account of piety he has decided to fast every Monday and Thursday. That sustains him."

### *Cheap*

YOSSEL and Mendel were partners in a small village inn. One day, having scraped together a few rubles, they drove to town to buy a keg of whiskey.

On the way back the weather became cold and blustering and the two partners were teased by the desire to take a drink of whiskey. But to do so became a serious problem. Had they not solemnly promised each other when they had placed the keg on the wagon not to touch a drop of it? Their entire livelihood for the week depended upon it.

Now Yossel was a resourceful man. He looked into his pockets and found a five-kopek piece, so he said to Mendel, "Here is a five-kopek piece. Sell me a drink of whiskey from your half of the keg."

Mendel, being a businessman, answered, "Since you have cash I have to sell you a drink."

So he poured him a little glassful. . . .

No sooner had Yossel downed the drink than he became warm and cheerful. Mendel's nose, on the other hand, got bluer from the cold. How he envied that rascal Yossel for his luck in having the five-kopek piece!

But suddenly he felt the coin in his pocket. After all, the coin is mine now, he said to himself. Why can't I buy a drink from him now? So he said to his partner, "Yossel, here is a five-kopek piece. Pour me a drink from your share of the keg!"

Yossel, being a businessman, said, "Cash is cash!"

And he poured Mendel a drink and took back his five-kopek piece.

In this fashion Mendel and Yossel kept on buying a drink from each other with the same five-kopek piece. By the time they reached the inn they were thoroughly drunk.

"What a miracle!" cried Yossel. "Imagine, an entire keg of whiskey sold for one five-kopek piece!"

### *He Ran for His Health*

IT WAS in the days of Czar Nicholas II. Two Jews were walking along a boulevard in Moscow. One had a residence permit, the other didn't. Suddenly a policeman appeared.

"Quick—run!" whispered the one without the permit. "When the policeman sees you run he will think you have no permit, so he will run after you. This will give me a chance to get away, and it won't hurt you any because you can show him your permit."

So the Jew with the permit started to run. As soon as the policeman saw him do so he went in hot pursuit. After a few moments he caught up with him.

"Ahah!" gloated the policeman. "So you have no permit!"

"No permit! What makes you think I have no permit?" asked the Jew, showing it to him.

The policeman looked bewildered.

"Why then did you run away when you saw me?"

"My doctor told me always to run after taking a physic."

"But didn't you see me running after you?"

"Sure, I did. But I thought your doctor had given you the same advice!"

### *World-Weary<sup>4</sup>*

FOR two and a half years the rival Talmudic schools of Shammai and of Hillel debated the question but they could not resolve it.

The adherents of Shammai argued that it would have been far better for man had he never been created. The followers of Hillel maintained that it was good that man had been created.

Finally, both schools concluded their controversy on a compromise: that it would have been far better for man had he never been created, but, since he is already here on earth, it is his obligation to make the best of it and live uprightly.

### *Truth in Gay Clothes*

THE Preacher of Dubno, Jacob Krantz, was once asked why the parable has such persuasive power over people. The Preacher replied, "I will explain this by means of a parable.

"It happened once that Truth walked about the streets as naked as his mother bore him. Naturally, people were scandalized and wouldn't let him into their houses. Whoever saw him got frightened and ran away.

"And so as Truth wandered through the streets brooding over his troubles he met Parable. Parable was gaily decked out in fine clothes and was a sight to see. He asked, 'Tell me, what is the meaning of all this? Why do you walk about naked and looking so woebegone?'

"Truth shook his head sadly and replied, 'Everything is going downhill with me, brother. I've gotten so old and decrepit that everybody avoids me.'

"'What you're saying makes no sense,' said Parable. 'People are not giving you a wide berth because you are old. Take me, for instance, I am no younger than you. Nonetheless, the older I get the more attractive people find me. Just let me confide a secret to you about people. They don't like things plain and bare but dressed up prettily and a little artificial. I'll tell you what. I will lend you some fine clothes like mine and you'll soon see how people will take to you.'

"Truth followed this advice and decked himself out in Parable's gay clothes. And lo and behold! People no longer shunned him but welcomed him heartily. Since that time Truth and Parable are to be seen as inseparable companions, esteemed and loved by all."

*What Is Greatness?*<sup>6</sup>

ONCE there was a man of great learning, versed in every branch of knowledge. In addition, he had a beautiful voice and played on the violin like a master. One day he fell sick and the doctors advised him to move to a warm climate. This he did, and settled in a small town among ordinary people of little education.

As is customary, they asked him, "What is your calling?"  
"I do cupping."

Afterwards, when they were alone, his wife said to him, "I can't understand how a great scholar like you, with so many accomplishments, should have mentioned cupping as the one thing you know how to do! What kind of honor or profit do you expect from it?"

"The people of this town," explained her husband, "are poor people with simple needs. Were I to recite to them my important accomplishments they simply wouldn't know how to value them, nor would they know what to do with them. They would only look upon me as a superfluous man who could be of no earthly use to them. But, ah, how different with a man who can do cupping! To them he is a very important and useful person. They will have great respect for me, I assure you."

*The Modest Saint*

A DISCIPLE once was boasting rapturously before strangers about his rabbi:

"My rabbi, long life to him! He fasts every single day except, of course, on the Sabbath day and on holidays."

"What a lie!" mocked a cynic. "I myself have seen your rabbi eating on weekdays!"

"What do you know about my rabbi?" the faithful disciple snorted disdainfully. "My rabbi is a saint and very modest in his piety. If he eats it is only to hide from others the fact that he is fasting!"

*The Poor Are Willing*

THE rabbi had prayed long and fervently.

"And what have you prayed for today?" asked his wife.

"My prayer is that the rich should give bigger alms to the poor," answered the rabbi.

"Do you think God has heard your prayer?" his wife asked.

"I'm sure He has heard at least half of it," replied the rabbi. "The poor have agreed to accept."

### *There Are Miracles and Miracles*

A *Hasid* had heard so much of the sanctity of a certain rabbi that he journeyed all the way from his village to the town where the great rabbi lived.

"What miracles has your rabbi performed?" inquired the visiting *Hasid* of one of the rabbi's disciples.

"There are miracles and miracles," replied the disciple. "For instance, the people of your town would regard it as a miracle if God should do your rabbi's bidding. We, on the other hand, regard it as a miracle that our rabbi does God's bidding."

### *The Expert*

WHEN you tell a joke to a Frenchman he laughs three times: once when you tell it to him, the second time when you explain it, and the third time when he understands it—for the Frenchman loves to laugh.

When you tell a joke to an Englishman he laughs twice: once when you tell it to him and again when you explain it—but understand it he never can, for he's too stuffy.

When you tell a joke to a German he laughs only once: when you tell it to him. First of all, he won't let you explain it to him because he's so arrogant. Secondly, even if he did ask you to explain it he wouldn't understand because he has no sense of humor.

When you tell a story to a Jew—before even you've had a chance to finish he interrupts you impatiently. First of all, he has heard it before! Secondly, what business have you telling a joke when you don't know how? In the end, he decides to tell you the story himself, but in a much better version than yours.

### *No Loan!*

Two chance acquaintances, both recent arrivals from Poland, met on Delancey Street in New York's East Side.

"Hello! How's business?"

"All right."

"In that case, will you lend me five dollars?"

"Why should I lend you five dollars? I hardly know you!"

"A funny thing! In my town in the old country people wouldn't lend me any money because they knew me, and in this country they won't lend any because they don't know me."

### *A Quick Prayer*

ONCE, after prayer in the synagogue, the rabbi asked Hershel Ostropolier, "How is it you pray so fast? It's a disgrace! Why does it take me twice as long to say my prayers?"

"Who can compare with you, Rabbi?" answered Hershel. "You, Rabbi, have, may no evil eye fall on you, a lot of gold and silver, a fine house, four horses and a carriage, and money in the bank. It takes time to go over all these matters with God when you pray to him to preserve them for you. Now take me, on the other hand, what have I got? Only a shrewish wife, eight children and a flea-bitten goat. In my prayer to God, all I have to say is: 'Wife, children, goat!'—and I'm through!"

### *Schnapps Wisdom*

THE old *shammes* began to lose his hearing. The doctor, whom he consulted, told him that too much alcohol was making him deaf.

"You mustn't drink anymore!" he rebuked him.

For one interminable month the old *shammes* scrupulously avoided liquor and his hearing gradually returned. But suddenly he was tempted and took to the bitter drop again. This time he became deaf as a door-post and used an earhorn.

Once more he came to consult the doctor.

"Didn't I tell you not to drink any *schnapps*?" roared the doctor into his earhorn.

The old *shammes* shrugged his shoulders wearily.

"Sure you told me, and I did exactly as you told me," he answered. "But, believe me, doctor, nothing I heard was worth one good *schnapps*!"

### *He Should Have Taken More Time*

THE rabbi ordered a pair of new pants for the Passover holidays from the village tailor. The tailor, who was very unreli-

able, took a long time finishing the job. The rabbi was afraid that he would not have the garment ready for the holidays.

On the day before Passover the tailor came running all out of breath to deliver the pants.

The rabbi examined his new garment with a critical eye.

"Thank you for bringing my pants on time," he said. "But tell me, my friend, if it took God only six days to create our vast and complicated world, why did it have to take you six weeks to make this simple pair of pants?"

"But, Rabbi!" murmured the tailor triumphantly, "just look at the mess God made, and then look at this beautiful pair of pants!"

### *It Pays to Be Ignorant*

A POOR *luftmensch* came to New York from Kovno. He had neither trade nor calling and, when he found that the streets of America were not lined with gold as he had been told in the old country, he became a peddler of needles, pins, and hooks and eyes. Life was hard, insults were many, and the profits were small. So he kept his eyes open for something better. When he heard that a *shammes* was wanted in a synagogue on Attorney Street he hurried to apply for the post.

"Can you read and write English?" asked the president.

"No," answered the peddler.

"Sorry, mister," replied the president. "In America a *shammes* has got to know how to read and write. New York is not Boiberik, you know."

So the poor man sighed and went sadly away.

But in the course of time he began to prosper. He turned to real estate and amassed a fortune.

One day, when he needed a quarter of a million dollars to finance a real estate venture, he went to his banker and asked for a loan. He got it instantly.

"Write your own check," said the president of the bank flatteringly, handing him his pen.

"I—I can't write at all," stammered the realtor in embarrassment. "I've only learned to sign my name."

"Tsk-tsk, how wonderful!" exclaimed the banker. "If you have accomplished so much without knowing how to read or write, imagine what you would have been today if you did know how!"

"Sure!" muttered the realtor. "I would have been the *shammes* of the Attorney Street Synagogue!"

### *Equally Logical*

A GROUP of Nazis surrounded an elderly Berlin Jew and demanded of him, "Tell us, Jew, who caused the war?"

The little Jew was no fool. "The Jews," he said, then added, "and the bicycle riders."

The Nazis were puzzled. "Why the bicycle riders?"

"Why the Jews?" answered the little old man.

### *The Life of a Jew!*

IVAN SERAFIMOVITCH, the driver, was taking his Jewish passenger, Shmul the *melamed*, from Boryslav to Drohobycz. From the other end, from Drohobycz, Mikhail Stepanovitch was driving Moishe the *shammes*, to Boryslav.

When Ivan and Mikhail met on the road, each going in the opposite direction, they drew up their carts and exchanged a pleasant good-morning.

"I see, Mikhail Stepanovitch," sneered Ivan, "that you have that horsefaced Jew Moshka for a passenger."

"What's the matter? Don't you like him?" Mikhail snapped back. "He's nicer than that scarecrow of yours, Shmul."

"I want to serve notice on you, Mikhail Stepanovitch," threatened Ivan, "that no pot-bellied sot like you can abuse my passenger and get away with it."

"Just look who's talking, you goggle-eyed pig!" snorted Mikhail. "One more word from you and I'll give it to your Shmul in the snout!"

"Just try and do it!" challenged Ivan, defiantly.

Without a word, Mikhail jumped off his cart and crossed to the other side of the road. Climbing into Ivan's cart he punched Shmul in the nose.

When Ivan saw that his passenger's face was covered with blood, he was incensed and began to tremble with rage.

"How dare you hit my Shmul! I won't let you get away with it!" he shouted. "Since you hit my Shmulka I'm going to hit your Moshka!"

He wasn't at all lazy and got out of the cart, crossed the road to Mikhail's cart and let fly with his fist into Moshka's face.

When Ivan saw Moshka's eye swell up, he was speechless with rage.

"With God and the Czar as my witnesses, I warn you, Mikhail Stepanovitch—this is the limit!"

And, so saying, he fell upon Shmul, the *melamed*, and pounded him within an inch of his life.

"Never fear," shrilled Mikhail. "I'll match you in everything anytime. I'll turn your Moshka into pulp for what you've done to my Shmulka!"

A man of his word, Mikhail fell upon Moshka and knocked him unconscious.

For a moment Ivan Serafimovitch and Mikhail Stepanovitch glared at each other with a deadly hatred. Then each spat out contemptuously, mounted his cart and rattled away.

### *Nebich!*

IT HAPPENED in a Russian town in the days of the Czar. A party of convicts was being lead to prison. It included three Jews. As they shuffled through the streets loaded with chains some Jewish women began to commiserate loudly with them.

"Why are they taking you?" they mournfully asked one Jewish convict.

"It's on account of my residence permit," he answered with a sigh.

Hearing this, the women wailed, "*Oy, nebich!* What a wrong! and just for a mere residence permit!

"And why are they punishing you?" they asked the second Jew.

"It's because I didn't want to be a soldier in the army of that Haman, Czar Nicolai!"

"*Oy, nebich!*" wailed the women even more loudly. "What a shame—what cruelty! And just because he didn't wish to serve that dog of dogs, that anti-Semite!"

Then the third Jewish convict, a muscular fellow with squint eyes and a scar on his face, passed by.

"Tell us—why are they taking you?" the women inquired.

"Who, me?" he asked piteously. "I am *nebich a goniff.*"

### *The Modest Rabbi*

THE wonder-working *tzaddik* seemed fast asleep. Nearby sat his worshipful disciples, carrying on a whispered conversation with bated breath about the holy man's unparalleled virtues.

"What piety!" exclaimed one disciple with rapture. "There isn't another like him in all Poland!"

"Who can compare with him in charity?" murmured another ecstatically. "He gives alms with an open hand."

"And what a sweet temper! Has anyone ever seen him get excited?" whispered another with shining eyes.

"Ai! What learning he's got!" chanted another. "He's a second Rashi!"

At that the disciples fell silent. Whereupon the rabbi slowly opened one eye and regarded them with an injured expression.

"And about my modesty you say nothing?" he asked reproachfully.

### *The Secret of Power<sup>8</sup>*

THE waters were rising until they almost reached the Throne of Glory. Thereupon the Almighty cried out: "Be still, O waters!"

Then the waters became vainglorious and boasted: "We are the mightiest of all creation—let us flood the earth!"

At this God grew wrathful and rebuked the waters: "Do not boast of your strength, ye vain braggarts! I will send upon you the sands and they will raise up a barrier against you!"

When the waters saw the sand and of what tiny grains it consisted they began to mock: "How can such tiny grains as you stand up against us? Our smallest wave will sweep over you!"

When the grains of sand heard this they were frightened. But their leader comforted them: "Do not fear, brothers! True enough, we are tiny and every one of us by himself is insignificant. The wind can carry us to all the ends of the earth, if we all only remain united, then the waters will see what kind of power we have!"

When the little grains of sand heard these words of comfort they came flying from all the corners of the earth and lay down one on top of the other and against each other upon the shores of the seas. They rose up in mounds, in hills, and in mountains, and formed a huge barrier against the waters. And when the waters saw how the great army of the

grains of sand stood united they became frightened and retreated.

### *Circumcisional Evidence*

A YOUNG Talmudic scholar left Minsk and went to America.

After many years he returned to the old country. His aged mother could hardly recognize him. He was dressed in the very latest fashion.

"Where is your beard?" his mother asked, aghast.

"Nobody wears a beard in America."

"But at least you keep the Sabbath?"

"In America almost everybody works on the Sabbath."

The old mother sighed.

"And how is it with the food?" she asked hopefully.

"Ah, mama," answered the son, apologetically, "it's too much trouble to be *kosher* in America."

The old mother hesitated. Then, in a confidential voice, she whispered, "Tell your old mother, son—are you still circumcised?"

### *The Sled Story*

THE snow was beautiful, but Mendel felt that each snowflake was a dagger thrust into his heart.

"Everything happens to me!" he moaned. "Just when I get my home fixed up okay, the landlord tells me the building is coming down. I gotta move! I slave and I slave and at last I find a place around the corner. How shall I move? I struggle and I struggle and I get everything arranged for moving tomorrow. And now it snows! And what a snow! Everything is upset. Woe is me!"

It was truly a dark, dark night for Mendel. Shaking his head, he undressed wearily and climbed into bed, but he couldn't get settled. "Such troubles, what'll I do?" He twisted and turned restlessly. "What is there to do?" He twisted and turned again and this time a thought struck him.

"I know! I'll borrow Goldberg's sled. It's simple. I'll pile the stuff on it and one trip—two trips—ten trips. It's done. Wonderful. Okay. Thank God." He turned and settled back comfortably. He was just about dozing off when another thought struck him.

*What if Goldberg won't lend his sled?*

"Nonsense! Why shouldn't he lend his sled? Of course he will. Forget it!"

*What if Goldberg won't lend his sled?*

"Why not? What am I going to do to it? Can you imagine that—Goldberg not willing to lend me his sled? Oh! The scoundrel! A plague on him! What a nerve! Not to lend me his sled! No! No! It can't be. Of course he'll lend it to me."

He turned around and settled himself for sleep.

*Goldberg won't lend his sled!*

"Goldberg not lend his sled? It's unthinkable. After what I did for him! Who got him his first job? Who showed him the ropes? Where did he get his meals when his wife was sick that time? I even introduced him to his wife. And wasn't I his best man? Didn't I sign the paper for him for the Morris Plan? When he had the trouble that time didn't I give him the money out of my own pocket? And now he wouldn't lend me his lousy two-dollar sled! That's too much. I won't stand for it. Why! Why——"

He scrambled out of bed, pulled on his trousers, thrust his coat around his shoulders, dashed out into the street, ran to Goldberg's house, and started jabbing crazily at Goldberg's doorbell, muttering the while, "The stinker—the low-life—the no-good—" until finally the sleepy Goldberg came to the door.

"Goldberg," shouted Mendel, "Goldberg, you no-good, you ingrate, you loafer! You know what you can do with your rattle-trap sled? You and your sled can go to hell! Good-bye!"

### *A Rabbi for a Day*

THE famous Preacher of Dubno was once journeying from one town to another delivering his learned sermons. Wherever he went he was received with enthusiasm and accorded the greatest honors. His driver, who accompanied him on this tour, was very much impressed by all this welcome.

One day, as they were on the road, the driver said, "Rabbi, I have a great favor to ask of you. Wherever we go people heap honors on you. Although I'm only an ignorant driver I'd like to know how it feels to receive so much attention. Would you mind if we were to exchange clothes for one day? Then

they'll think I am the great preacher and you the driver, so they'll honor me instead!"

Now the Preacher of Dubno was a man of the people and a merry soul, but he saw the pitfalls awaiting his driver in such an arrangement.

"Suppose I agreed—what then? You know the rabbi's clothes don't make a rabbi! What would you do for learning? If they were to ask you to explain some difficult passage in the Law you'd only make a fool of yourself, wouldn't you?"

"Don't you worry, Rabbi—I am willing to take that chance."

"In that case," said the preacher, "here are my clothes."

And the two men undressed and exchanged clothes as well as their callings.

As they entered the town all the Jewish inhabitants turned out to greet the great preacher. They conducted him into the synagogue while the assumed driver followed discreetly at a distance.

Each man came up to the "rabbi" to shake hands and to say the customary: "*Sholom Aleichem*, learned Rabbi!"

The "rabbi" was thrilled with his reception. He sat down in the seat of honor surrounded by all the scholars and dignitaries of the town. In the meantime the preacher from his corner kept his merry eyes on the driver to see what would happen.

"Learned Rabbi," suddenly asked a local scholar, "would you be good enough to explain to us this passage in the Law we don't understand?"

The preacher in his corner chuckled, for the passage was indeed a difficult one.

"Now he's sunk!" he said to himself.

With knitted brows the "rabbi" peered into the sacred book placed before him, although he could not understand one word. Then, impatiently pushing it away from him, he addressed himself sarcastically to the learned men of the town, "A fine lot of scholars you are! Is this the most difficult question you could ask me? Why, this passage is so simple even my driver could explain it to you!"

Then he called to the Preacher of Dubno: "Driver, come here for a moment and explain the Law to these 'scholars'!"

*All Right*

THERE was once a rabbi who was so open-minded that he could see every side of a question. One day a man came to him with the request that he grant him a divorce.

"What do you hold against your wife?" asked the rabbi gravely.

The man went into a lengthy recital of his complaints.

"You are right," he agreed when the man finished.

Then the rabbi turned to the woman.

"Now let us hear your story," he urged.

And the woman in her turn began to tell of the cruel mistreatment she had suffered at her husband's hands.

The rabbi listened with obvious distress.

"You are right," he said with conviction when she finished.

At this the rabbi's wife, who was present, exclaimed, "How can this be? Surely, both of them couldn't be right!"

The rabbi knitted his brows and reflected.

"You're right, too!" he agreed.

*Why the Hair on the Head Turns Gray Before the Beard?*

THE Czar once went on a journey. On the way he met a poor Jewish farmer who was cultivating his field. The Czar saw that the farmer's hair was gray while his beard was black. At this he was filled with wonder.

"Do explain this mystery to me," the Czar asked him. "Why is the hair on your head gray and your beard black?"

"My beard didn't start growing until after I was *Bar-Mitzvah*," replied the Jew. "Consequently, since the hair on my head is many years older than the hair in my beard, it turned gray long before."

"How clever of you!" cried the Czar with admiration. "Promise me, on your word of honor, never to repeat this explanation to anyone. I will allow you to reveal the secret only after you have seen me one hundred times."

The Czar then continued on his journey.

Upon his return home he assembled all his ministers, wise men and counsellors.

"I will put to you a very puzzling question," he told them. "See if you can answer it."

"Speak, O King!" cried the wise men.

"Why is it," asked the Czar, "that the hair on the head becomes gray long before the hair in the beard does?"

The wise men remained mute with astonishment. They did not know what to answer.

"Take a month's time to think it over," said the Czar. "Then come back to me with your answer."

The wise men went away and devoted themselves single-mindedly to the solution of the problem the Czar had put to them.

As the month was nearing its end and still they had not found an answer they were filled with gloom. But they found a straw of hope to clutch at when one of the ministers recalled that on the day the Czar had put the puzzling question to them he had come back from a journey outside the capital. So he undertook to track the matter down to its source.

The minister followed the route the Czar had taken and he chanced upon the same poor Jewish farmer with whom the Czar had spoken. He recognized him by the fact that the hair on his head was gray and the hair in his beard was black.

"What is the explanation for this strange fact?" he asked the Jew.

The Jewish farmer answered, "Alas, I'm not allowed to give you the answer!"

"I'll pay you well if you'll reveal your secret to me," coaxed the king's counsellor.

The poor Jew hesitated. Then he said, "I'm a poor man. I'm desperately in need of some money. If you will pay me a hundred silver rubles I'll reveal to you my secret."

After he got the hundred silver rubles, he gave him the answer he had given to the Czar.

The minister then returned to St. Petersburg and gave the Czar the answer. But the Czar understood immediately how he had gotten the answer. So he sent for the Jew.

"Do you know what punishment you deserve for breaking your promise to me?" cried the Czar, angrily. "Didn't I ask you to keep your answer a secret?"

"Indeed, you did!" replied the Jew. "But you must also recall that you gave me permission to talk about it after I had seen you a hundred times."

"Insolent fellow!" cried the Czar. "How dare you lie so brazenly to me! You very well know I only saw you once!"

"I've told you the truth!" persisted the Jew. And he drew out of a bag a hundred silver rubles.

"See for yourself," said he. "On every one of these rubles is graven your image. And, having looked upon them all, I have seen you one hundred times. Was I wrong in giving your minister the answer?"

"What a clever man!" exclaimed the Czar with rapture. "What you deserve is a reward, not punishment! Remain with me here in my palace so that I may always have the benefit of your counsel."

And so the poor Jewish farmer lived with the Czar in his palace in St. Petersburg, and was the first among his counsellors. The Czar never made a decision without consulting him first, and, wherever he went, the Jew went along with him.

### *The Way Anti-Semites Reason<sup>8</sup>*

As THE Emperor Hadrian was being carried through the streets of Rome a Jew passed by.

"Long life to you, O Emperor!" the Jew greeted him.

"Who are you?" asked the Emperor.

"I'm a Jew."

"How dare you, a Jew, greet me!" Hadrian raged. "Chop his head off!" he ordered his soldiers.

Another Jew, who chanced to pass by just then and saw what had happened to the first Jew, decided not to greet the Emperor.

"Who are you?" Hadrian demanded.

"I'm a Jew."

"How dare you, a Jew, pass me by without greeting me?" raged Hadrian. "Chop his head off!" he ordered his soldiers.

The Emperor's counsellors were filled with astonishment.

"O Emperor, we cannot grasp the meaning of your action," they said. "If you had the first Jew decapitated because he greeted you, why did you do the same thing to the second Jew because he did not greet you?"

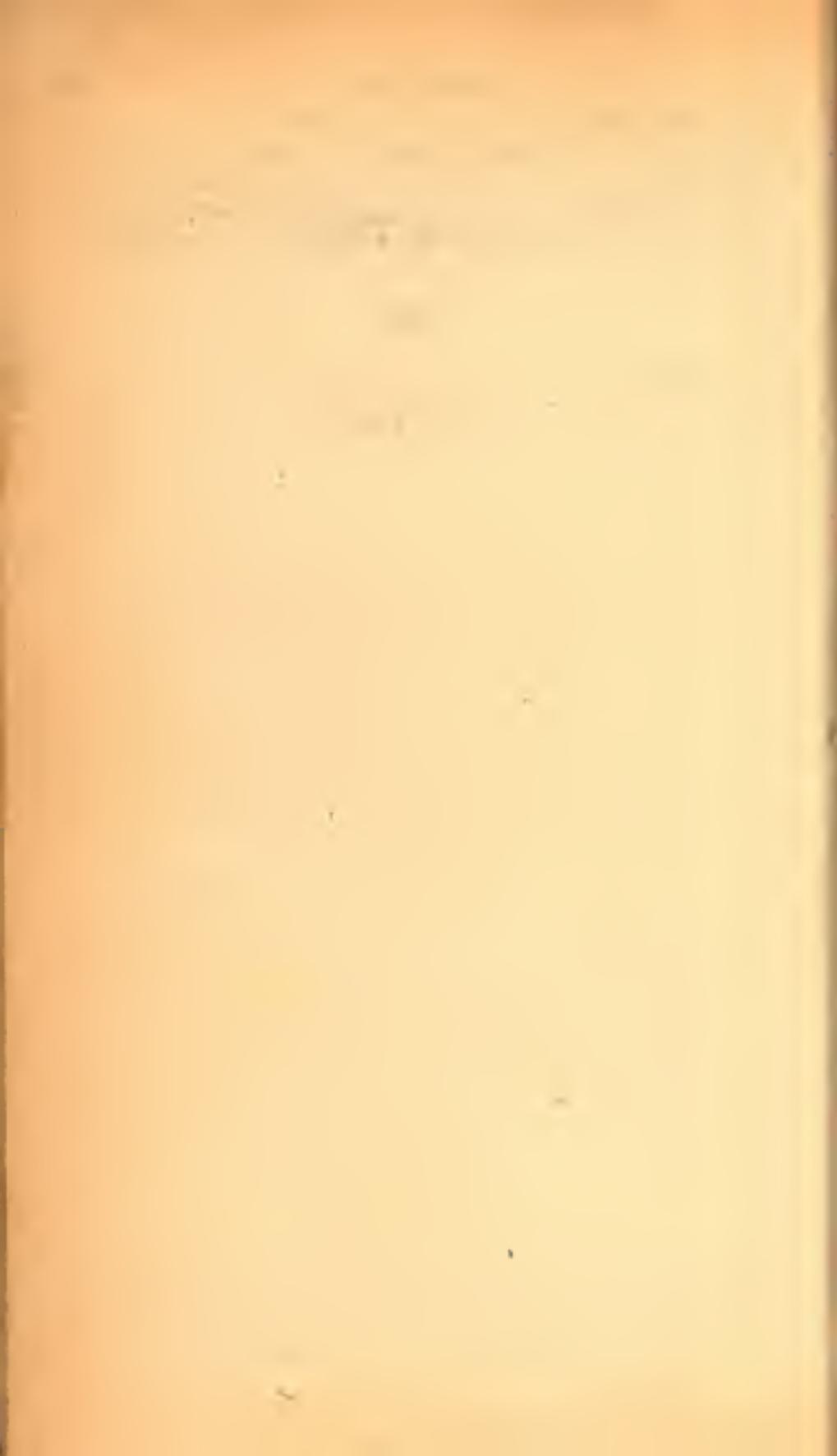
"Are you trying to teach me how to handle my enemies?" retorted the Emperor.

### *The Relativity of Distance*

THREE weary Jewish refugees stood before the Paris representative of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

"Where are you all going?" he asked them.

"I'm on my way to Rome," said the first.  
"London is my destination," said the second.  
"My plan is to go to South Africa," said the third.  
"South Africa? Why so far?" the agent asked wonderingly.  
"Far? Far from where?" wistfully countered the refugee.



## PART TWO



# Heroes

## INTRODUCTION

"Who is a hero?" rhetorically asks a sage in the Talmud. "He who becomes master over his passions" is his own answer. The pursuit of virtue as a heroic quest is a fundamental tradition in Jewish life and lore. It is the seal of the Jews' ethical individuality as a people. It is their moral justification in their own eyes. For countless generations they have been encouraged by their leaders and teachers to pattern their lives in this religious-social ideal in both thought and action. Their folklore reflects this with dazzling clarity. The righteous, the wise man, is the hero, not the warrior who sheds human blood.

This extraordinary attitude was induced by the peculiar historic experiences of the Jews and was conditioned by more than twenty-five hundred years of this mode of living, thinking and feeling. "Sons of the Compassionate"—is what Jews proverbially call themselves. In their traditional view the moral and physical powers are everlasting opposed to each other. For precisely that reason the warrior-hero, so overwhelmingly adulated by other peoples, was largely neglected by them. The folklorists of the *Midrash* almost gloss over the exploits of Samson against the Philistines. They glow with more genuine excitement over David, the sweet singer of Zion, than over David, the slayer of the giant Goliath, or David the triumphant warrior-king. To be sure there are exceptions—such as the heroic deeds of the Maccabees and Bar Kochba. But their celebration in Jewish legend does not rest on their warlike exploits or their feats of bravery alone. It is primarily because these men were the inspired leaders of their people in its struggle for liberty.

The characteristic attitude toward the warrior is quaintly described in Jewish lore by the contrast made in the characters of the Patriarch Jacob and his brother Esau. The latter, surnamed "the Wicked" in Jewish folklore, is portrayed as a fierce warrior and hunter, preoccupied with fighting and the chase. Jacob, on the other hand, is depicted as a gentle scholar, always found in the House of Study in pursuit of divine instruction. The same attitude is expressed in the amusing medieval engraving found in many editions of the *Haggadah*, the liturgy of the *Seder* which is the home service of Passover Eve. The picture presents four types of questioners: the sage, the wicked man, the fool and the idiot. The sage is lovingly portrayed as a scholar in the eloquent attitude of expounding the *Torah*. The wicked man, on the other

hand, is represented as a fierce knight in armor running with the spear in hand.

This does not by any means suggest that Jews were like the Buddhists, unalterably opposed to war. Their struggles for their national freedom, beginning with the Egyptian bondage, refutes this idea. Jews were always opposed to war and violence on moral and humanitarian grounds, except when they fought in self-defense or for the preservation of their country and faith. Then they fought as did only few other peoples in history—with valor and an utter disregard for their lives. For instance, during the two-year siege of Jerusalem by Titus, more than a million Jews perished resisting the hated enemy, an event hardly paralleled in the wars of Antiquity. But fighting as an end in itself, or to acquire ill-gotten gains, was considered wicked and anti-social beginning with the era of the canonical Prophets.

In place of the strong men and the warrior heroes of other peoples the Jews substituted *tzaddikim*, saintly and righteous men. But these were far from being insipid in their gentleness, hang-dog in their piety, or submissive because of their abhorrence of violence. They were in reality men who stood up with dignity for their beliefs, and often sacrificed their lives in defense of them. In medieval, and in later folklore as well, these *tzaddikim* took on the sublimated character of the hero-knights of chivalry. In battling against the brute violence of their enemies they let their virtue be their sword and their Torah-learning, their shield. When the rabbi-knight was obliged to defend his religion and his people in disputation with Christian theologians before great throngs who treated him with scorn and mockery, he had to endure an infinitely more hazardous ordeal than that required of the Christian knight who went jousting cap-a-pie against friendly rivals at the tournaments of chivalry. The Jew was rarely the victor in this unequal contest and the direst misfortune fell upon entire communities of his brethren because of it. And yet, strange to relate, he remained a hero in the eyes of the people, for he had fought without fear or compromise as their champion, and with the only weapons sanctioned by their morality—wisdom and truth.

Those legends and tales, dealing with cabalists and *Hasidic* rabbis, endow their *tzaddikim* with invincible wonder-working powers. Many of them, like the knights of chivalry, sallied forth into the world to pursue quests of high valor. They were not accompanied by armed esquires, but by worshipful disciples. Their aim was not to rescue beautiful maidens held captive by wicked knights or to win a king's ransom by feats of arms. They went forth to battle against the power of evil, to redress wrongs, and to protect their people against threatening dangers. By the supernatural power of their virtue, and sometimes with the magical aid of the *Shem-hamforesh*, the secret name of God (as in the case

of Joseph della Reyna), they fought and triumphed over the wicked, even over the Angel of Death and Satan and over all his hosts of darkness. It even happened that these *tzaddikim* rose up to question God himself. This they did, not out of blasphemous intent or an arrogant spirit, but with the flame of truth and compassion burning within them. We have only to turn to the *Kaddish* of Rabbi Levi-Yitzchok, the Eighteenth Century *Hasidic tzaddik*, in which he questions God's justice toward his people. Jews in all parts of the world still sing its stirring strains:

Therefore I, Levi-Yitzchok ben Sara of Berditchev say:  
*Lo azus mimkomi!* I shall not stir from here!  
An end must come to all this!  
Israel's suffering must end!  
*Isgadal v'iskadash shmay rahbo!*  
Magnified and sanctified be the name of the Lord!

N.A.

## 1

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*Wise Men*

## WISE AND LEARNED MEN

## INTRODUCTION

The *chacham*, the wise man, has always been the beau ideal of Jewish tradition, and therefore of folklore as well. To a considerable degree, the *chacham* resembles the Greek conception of the philosopher. Knowledge and reason lead him to wisdom. And what is the highest wisdom? Virtue, of course. For this reason the *chacham* is required to be not only learned but righteous! He must have a passion for truth and possess genuine piety which dwells in the pure spirit alone. Above all, he must love people and seek justice. This pattern was laid down by Moses and the Prophets and it is remarkable how many Jews have attempted to emulate them ever since.

Before one could become wise one first had to acquire knowledge. "He who lacks knowledge lacks everything," said the sages of the Talmud. By knowledge was meant, not just any kind of knowledge, but knowledge of the Torah. And yet all knowledge, regardless of the source, was revered. That is why so many rabbis studied Greek philosophy, the natural sciences, medicine, and other peoples' wisdom literature. One of the rabbis of the Second Century expressed this very directly: "The man who understands astronomy and does not pursue the study of it, of him it is written in Scripture: 'They regard not the work of the Lord, neither have they considered his handiwork.'" One over-enthusiastic writer in the Talmud even went as far as to say: "A scholar is greater than a prophet."

The Yiddish-speaking Jews of the East European ghettos, until very recently representing the great majority of the Jews of the world, took this rabbinical dictum quite seriously. They venerated the role and function of the *lamdan* (scholar) above all other callings. For generations fond mothers would put their children to sleep with the haunting lullaby:

What is the best *schoirah* (merchandise)?  
My baby will learn *Toirah* (Torah),  
*S'forim* (holy books) he will write for me,  
And a pious Jew he'll always be.

Wise and learned became synonymous concepts in Jewish thinking and the man who possessed both learning and wisdom was known as a *talmid chochem* ("a disciple of the wise"). This was a title of honor that represented the ultimate in social appreciation and recognition. Quite generally, although not always so, learning for Jews did not serve as an end in itself but as a means leading to a higher goal; it had to be endowed with the rapture of consecration. Therefore, the ancient rabbis said: "As with God, wisdom is a gift of free grace, so should man make it a free gift."

This was a conclusion that patently arose out of a profound social conscience; it was an impulse of democratic urgency in which learning and wisdom found their validity in improving men's minds as well as their way of life. Jewish tradition could see little merit in the saint who chose to prove his virtue by living alone in the wilderness. Likewise with the scholar. It was not enough that he sought knowledge and understanding for his own illumination. Possession of them imposed upon him the higher obligation to share them to the utmost with others less knowing or less fortunate than he. This exalted conception of learning led to the rabbinic opinion that it was wrong of the teacher of the Torah to accept remuneration for his instruction, for one must not traffic for gain with sacred values. With this in mind most of the *Tannaim* and the *Amoraim*, the architects of the *Mishna*, *Midrash* and *Talmud*, did not teach for gain but earned their livelihood in other ways at various trades and callings. Thus the illustrious Rabbi Hillel toiled as a common wood-cutter; Rabbi Yohanan ha-Sandler was a maker of sandals; Rabbi Isaac Nappaha had a smithy; the great Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah was a skilled maker of needles; Rabbi Resh Lakesh was a night watchman in a vineyard; Rabbi Abba Hilkiah, the famous "rain-maker," was an agricultural day-laborer and Rabbi Shammai, the rector of a famous Jerusalem academy, was a land-surveyor. Thus, the dignity of labor was given increased luster by this example of the rabbis.

The scholar, the wise man, had no obsessive need of worldly good. The pampering of the senses and a life of ease and luxury were interdicted for him by tradition. It was considered that they would only lead him into error and corrupt his moral values, and thus, without virtue, he no longer would be wise. In the great academy that Yohanan ben Zakkai founded in Jabneh after the destruction of Jerusalem, the sages taught the social creed of the scholar: "I who study Holy Lore am a man; my brother, the un-

lettered one, is also a man. I do my work in the House of Study—he is occupied as a tiller of the soil. I rise in the morning to earn my bread; he too with his toil. Even as he is not vainglorious about his work so am I humble in my own. Perhaps you will say that I do important work and he not. That is not true. Our sages have taught us that he who does much and he who does little are equal if only their intention is good."

Of course the Jews were not the only people in Antiquity who revered wisdom. The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Greeks were equally devoted to it. For instance, the Book of Proverbs owes much to the sayings of the Egyptian scribe Amenemope. Greek philosophical ideas, and even modes of expression, are found in Jewish wisdom literature. The *Book of Ecclesiastes* is full of Stoic and Epicurean doctrines. And as for *Job*, which contains a panegyric to wisdom (*chochma*) in Chapter Twenty-eight, it is soaked in the twilight skepticism of Hellenist thought. No less Greek are the sayings of Ben Sira and yet, like *Job*, they are so profoundly Hebraic. None but a Jew trained in the ethical rationalism of Judaism could have possibly written his biting social satires so graphically full of the turmoil of the age. And his wisdom is the wisdom of the lucid mind, of the critical and appraising faculty that receives its impulse from a worldliness that is not parochial, but recoils from the obscure and the mystical.

What is too wonderful for thee, do not seek.  
 What is hidden from thee, do not search.  
 Understand that which is permitted thee;  
 And have no concern with mysteries.

The Hellenist intellectuals among the Jews of the first two centuries B.C. did their best to reconcile Jewish wisdom with Greek philosophy. For instance, Aristobulus, the first Jewish philosopher in Alexandria (180–146 B.C.), claimed: "Plato followed the Laws (i.e., the laws of the Torah) given to us, and had manifestly studied all that is said in them." He also tried to show the similarity between the teachings of Moses and those of the major Greek philosophers, saying that wisdom or *chochma* was esteemed equally by the Peripatetics and King Solomon. This belief had wide currency and even became a fixed tradition among the Christian Church Fathers.

So many of the stories in this compilation, whether serious or humorous, reveal with folkloristic directness the Jewish attitude towards learning and wisdom, scholars and wise men. Of great interest is the *Midrash* parable, *The Most Valuable Merchandise*. In a world in which the homeless and driven Jew was forced by his enemies to become a despised huckster of material goods he discovered by experience that learning was the only "merchan-

dise" that had enduring value. It could neither be lost nor stolen nor snatched from him by violence as in the case of his material chattels. Therefore, the moral of the story, bitter-exalted in its flash of insight: "Learning is the best merchandise." Ever since the Talmudic era this saying has been on the lips of Jewish folk, uttered with a certainty and an intensity that has had few parallels in general lore.

Jewish learning never holds a recommendation for the wise man or scholar to become divorced from life. The rabbinic anecdote, *Learning That Leads to Action*, carries its own answer and justification for knowledge. Also the mind, by which one is able to comprehend learning and wisdom, must not be exalted above all other human faculties. Feeling and sentiment are never to be divorced from wisdom. We find this truth dwelled upon in the *Agada* piece, *The Best and the Worst Things*. What is the best thing? *A good heart*. The worst? *A bad heart*.

N.A.

### *The Romance of Akiba<sup>1</sup>*

IN JERUSALEM there once lived a very rich man whose name was Kalba Sabua. He had an only daughter, Rachel, who was beautiful and clever. The sons of the best families in the land proposed to her in marriage but she rejected them all.

"Neither riches nor good family concern me," she said. "The man I will marry must, above all, have a noble character and a good heart."

Among the shepherds who watched over her father's flocks and herds was a youth whose name was Akiba. Rachel fell in love with him and one day said to her father, "I want Akiba for my husband."

"Have you gone out of your mind?" cried her father. "How can you expect me to become the father-in-law of my servant? Never mention this to me again!"

"Father, give me Akiba for my husband!" pleaded Rachel. "I will not marry another."

"If you insist on marrying him you must leave my house!" threatened her father.

Rachel said no more but her mind was made up. She left her father's house and a life of luxury and fled with Akiba.

When Kalba Sabua heard of this he took a solemn oath: "My daughter shall not inherit even the least of my possessions."

Outside the city Akiba and his wife put up a tent. Having but little money they suffered privation and lived on dry bread alone. None the less, Rachel was happy and sustained the spirit of Akiba.

"I would rather live with you in poverty than without you in riches," she told him.

Their bed consisted only of a straw pallet. If a strong wind began to blow at night it would scatter the straw about. Rachel noticed that Akiba no longer slept but was wrapped in gloom.

"Why are you so sad, my husband?" she asked.

"It's on your account, Rachel," he replied. "You must suffer so, and all on account of me!"

At that very moment someone called from outside their tent.

"What is it you wish?" asked Rachel.

"Have pity on me!" answered the voice. "My wife has fallen sick and I have no straw to make a bed for her. Give me some, if you can."

And Rachel gave him some straw. Then she said to Akiba, "Just see—you consider us unfortunate but there are people who are even poorer than we."

"Bless you for your words! They have consoled me!" cried Akiba.

Often Akiba had expressed the wish to attend the Houses of Study in Jerusalem in order to acquire learning.

One day Rachel said to him, "You must carry out your plan to become an educated man. I know it will be very difficult for you but I will gladly remain behind and not stand in your way. I will patiently wait for your return."

Thereupon Akiba arose and made ready for his journey to Jerusalem. His wife accompanied him on the way for a distance. Then she bade him fond farewell and turned sadly back.

As he walked along the road Akiba said to himself, "I'm almost forty years old and now it may be too late for me to study the Word of God. Who knows if I will ever be able to achieve my goal!"

Suddenly he came upon several shepherds sitting near a spring. At the mouth of the spring lay a stone which had many grooves.

"What caused these grooves?" he asked the shepherds.

"They were made by drops of water that steadily trickled upon the stone."

Hearing this Akiba rejoiced. He said to himself, "If a stone may be softened how much easier will it be to soften my mind!"

And he continued on his journey until he came to a school for children. There he learned how to read and write and was not ashamed to study with children. After that he entered the Houses of Study. He became a pupil of Rabbi Nahum Ish Gamzu. Afterwards he studied with Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos and Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah.

Each day, before he went to the House of Study, Akiba would go into the forest to chop some wood. A part of it he sold in order to nourish himself, a part he kept for his own use, and the rest he used to pillow his head at night.

When Rachel heard of his hard manner of living she wished to help him. She cut off her hair which she sold, and sent him the money.

Despite his poverty, Akiba studied night and day. Before long he outdistanced all the other students in knowledge and in wisdom. When they met with a difficult problem they asked him to solve it.

Once Akiba stood outside the House of Study. At that time his comrades were discussing a very difficult question in a matter of Law. Akiba suddenly heard one say, "The solution is outside."

By that he clearly meant Akiba, who was capable of answering the question.

Akiba heard him but he did not stir from his place.

The students then continued to discuss another passage of the Torah but soon discovered that they did not understand it.

"The Torah is outside!" called another student.

Akiba heard him but pretended he did not understand the words. And still he did not enter the House of Study.

Once again the students met with a knotty problem.

"Is Akiba outside?" one of them cried. "Do come in, Akiba!"

This time Akiba, since he had been addressed, entered and sat himself at the feet of Rabbi Eliezer and his face was filled with the radiance of illumination.

For twelve long years Akiba stayed away from his wife.

One day he said to himself, "It is high time that I return to her and give her some happiness."

As he reached her door he heard a woman's voice saying, "What has happened to you, Rachel, happens to all disobedient children. Your husband has been away twelve years. All this time you have been living in solitude and poverty. Who knows whether he'll ever come back again! Had you but listened to your father you would have been rich and happy today!"

"Were my husband here to take my advice," replied Rachel, "he'd remain away another twelve years and continue his studies, undisturbed."

When Akiba heard her speak thus he suppressed his bitter yearning for her and turned away.

For twelve more years he continued his studies, this time away from Jerusalem. His fame became so great that the number of his students grew to twenty-four thousand.

When the second twelve years were completed Akiba decided to return to Jerusalem. The multitude of his students accompanied him there.

Soon the report of his return spread throughout Jerusalem. All the inhabitants streamed into the streets to welcome him back. Among them, unknown to each other, were also Kalba Sabua and Rachel; they had not met for twenty-four years.

Rachel was so poorly dressed that her neighbors had said to her, "Let us lend you some good clothes. You cannot go forth dressed like a beggar to meet such a great man as Akiba."

"A man such as Akiba is unconcerned with the way people are dressed!" replied Rachel.

When Akiba appeared among his students Rachel elbowed her way through the throng. She fell at his feet and with streaming eyes kissed the hem of his robe. Akiba's students wished to drive the intruder away.

"Let her be, she is my wife!" cried Akiba. "Know that had it not been for her I would never have been your teacher. It was she who urged me on to devote myself to learning. She has waited for me for twenty-four long years!"

And speaking thus he raised her from the ground, kissed her and went with her into her poor hut.

In the meantime, Kalba Sabua, who did not know that Rabbi Akiba, the foremost sage in Israel, was his former shepherd and his son-in-law, was determined to see him. He

wished to ask Rabbi Akiba to release him from the solemn oath he had once taken to disinherit his daughter. So he went to Rabbi Akiba and laid the matter before him.

"And why did you reject the shepherd?" asked the sage, without making his identity known.

"He was an ignorant man!"

"And where is your daughter now, and where is her husband?"

"I do not know, Master. I haven't seen them for twenty-four years. If you will release me from my oath I will go and seek them to the ends of the earth."

All this Rachel heard from an adjoining room. Unable to restrain her feelings any longer she burst into the room, crying to her father, "I am your daughter, Rachel, and Rabbi Akiba is your son-in-law!"

Amazed and overawed, Kalba Sabua regarded his children. Then he embraced them and cried, "My good daughter, you were right when you married Akiba against my wishes. Blessed be both of you!"

### *The Rabbi and the Inquisitor*

THE CITY of Seville was seething with excitement. A Christian boy had been found dead, and the Jews were falsely accused by their enemies of having murdered him in order to use his blood ritually in the baking of *matzos* for Passover. So the rabbi was brought before the Grand Inquisitor to stand trial as head of the Jewish community.

The Grand Inquisitor hated the rabbi, but, despite all his efforts to prove that the crime had been committed by the Jews, the rabbi succeeded in disproving the charge. Seeing that he had been bested in argument, the Inquisitor turned his eyes piously to Heaven and said:

"We will leave the judgment of this matter to God. Let there be a drawing of lots. I shall deposit two pieces of paper in a box. On one I shall write the word 'guilty'—the other will have no writing on it. If the Jew draws the first, it will be a sign from Heaven that the Jews are guilty, and we'll have him burned at the stake. If he draws the second, on which there is no writing, it will be divine proof of the Jews' innocence, so we'll let him go."

Now the Grand Inquisitor was a cunning fellow. He was anxious to burn the Jew, and since he knew that no one

would ever find out about it, he decided to write the word "guilty" on both pieces of paper. The rabbi suspected he was going to do just this. Therefore, when he put his hand into the box and drew forth a piece of paper he quickly put it into his mouth and swallowed it.

"What is the meaning of this, Jew?" raged the Inquisitor. "How do you expect us to know which paper you drew now that you've swallowed it?"

"Very simple," replied the rabbi. "You have only to look at the paper in the box."

So they took out the piece of paper still in the box.

"There!" cried the rabbi triumphantly. "This paper says 'guilty,' therefore the one I swallowed must have been blank. Now, you must release me!"

And they had to let him go.

### *Shallow Judgment<sup>2</sup>*

A PRINCESS once said to Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah, "It is true that you are a sage, but why are you so ugly? Imagine God pouring wisdom into such an ugly vessel as yours!"

Rabbi Joshua answered, "Tell me, O Princess, in what sort of vessels does your father keep his wine?"

"In earthen jars, of course," answered the Princess.

Rabbi Joshua pretended to be amazed.

"How can that be?" he exclaimed. "Everybody keeps wine in earthen jars, but your father, after all, is the King! Surely he can afford finer vessels!"

"In what sort of vessels do you think my father ought to keep his wine?"

"For a King, gold and silver vessels would be more fitting."

The Princess then went to her father and said, "It is not fitting that a King like you should keep his wine in earthen jars like the commonest man."

The King agreed and ordered that all his wine should be poured into gold and silver vessels. This was done, but before long the wine turned sour.

Angered, the King asked his daughter, "From whom did you get the advice you gave me?"

"From Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah."

So the King sent for Rabbi Joshua.

"What made you give my daughter such wicked advice?" he asked angrily.

Rabbi Joshua then told him how the Princess had referred to him as "wisdom in an ugly vessel," and that he had wanted to prove to her that beauty is sometimes a handicap.

The King remonstrated: "Aren't there people who combine in themselves both beauty and great talents?"

Rabbi Joshua answered, "Rest assured—had they been ugly their talents would have been better developed."

### *The Vanity of Rabbi Mar Zutra<sup>3</sup>*

RABBI MAR ZUTRA was on his way from Sikhra to Marhuza at the same time that Rabbi Raba and Rabbi Safra were on their way from Marhuza to Sikhra. When Rabbi Mar Zutra saw them approaching he was under the impression that they had come to welcome him to Marhuza. So he said to them, "You really didn't have to go to all that trouble and come out so far to welcome me!"

"You are mistaken, Rabbi," Rabbi Safra replied. "Had we known that you were coming, rest assured we would have gone to even greater pains to greet you!"

Then they parted.

When Rabbi Mar Zutra had passed, Rabbi Raba reproached Rabbi Safra.

"Did you have to tell him the truth, that we had not come to welcome him? You offended him."

"Had I not told him the truth it would have meant that we were deceiving him," Rabbi Safra insisted.

"Not at all!" answered Rabbi Raba. "We would not have deceived him; he would have deceived himself."

### *Grief in Moderation<sup>4</sup>*

WHEN the Temple was destroyed by Titus the Wicked, there were among Jews many, particularly Pharisees, who took a vow never again to eat meat or drink wine.

"Why don't you eat meat and drink wine?" Rabbi Joshua asked them.

They lamented: "How can we eat flesh that formerly was brought as a sacrifice upon the Temple altar when now we may no longer sacrifice? How can we drink wine which the priests used to pour upon the Temple altar when now we no longer have any altar?"

"In that case," argued Rabbi Joshua, "we shouldn't eat any

bread either, because, since the destruction of the Temple, sacrifices of flour also have been abolished."

"You're right," they answered, "we can substitute fruit for bread."

"How can we eat fruit?" Rabbi Joshua asked. "The first fruits were also brought to Jerusalem for the Temple's use and now that such offerings have been abolished, we shouldn't eat them."

"Possibly we could eat fruits from which such offerings did not have to be made," ventured the Pharisees.

"Let's stop drinking water," Rabbi Joshua continued, "because the water-libation for the altar has also been abolished."

At this the Pharisees fell silent; they did not know what to answer. Seeing that he had brought them back to reason, Rabbi Joshua said to them:

"My children, pay heed to what I'm going to tell you. It would be impossible to expect us not to grieve, for indeed a bitter fate has befallen us. However, one must not indulge too much in grief. It is wrong to impose upon the Jewish people burdens that they cannot bear."

### *The Virtue of the Commonplace*

A RABBI once had a dispute with a Jew-baiting theologian. Said the latter, "You Jews brag about your world-mission and are proud of the fact that you are God's Chosen People—yet everybody tramples you underfoot! Aren't you deceiving yourselves?"

The rabbi replied, "When our Father Jacob fled before the wrath of Esau, God appeared to him in a dream and said: 'And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth.' What, may I ask, brings greater use to man than the earth? Just the same—men trample it underfoot...."

### *Why God Gave No Wisdom to Fools<sup>5</sup>*

A WOMAN of high rank once asked Rabbi Yose bar Halaftah, "Why is it written in the Book of Daniel that God bestows wisdom on the wise? Rightly, shouldn't God instead have bestowed wisdom on the fools who really need it?"

"Let me explain this matter to you with a parable," answered Rabbi Yose. "Imagine that two people wish to borrow

money from you. If one is rich and the other poor, to which of the two will you lend the money?"

"To the rich, of course," the woman answered.

"Why so?" asked Rabbi Yose.

The woman answered, "If the rich man loses the money I lend him he'll find some way to return it to me. But where will the poor man get the money to repay me?"

"May your ears hear what your lips are saying!" exclaimed Rabbi Yose. "Were the Almighty to bestow wisdom on the fools, what do you think they would do with it? They would only sprawl themselves licentiously in the theatres and at the baths and play at being clever the livelong day. That's why He gave His wisdom to the wise who seek after wisdom in the Houses of Study."

### *Learning Knows No Class<sup>6</sup>*

THERE were two families that lived in Sepphoris. One consisted of aristocrats, educated people who were wise in counsel. The other one consisted of common, undistinguished people.

Each day, when the two families proceeded to the house of the *Nasi* to pay their respects to him, the aristocrats would enter first and the common people could go in only after the others had left.

Now it happened that these insignificant people began to apply themselves to study, and in time they became great scholars. Then they demanded that they get precedence over the aristocrats when they went to pay their respects to the *Nasi*.

This incident raised a great deal of discussion everywhere. When Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish was asked for an opinion he passed the question on to Rabbi Yohanan who concluded:

"A bastard who is a scholar is superior to a High Priest who is an ignoramus."

### *Learning That Leads to Action<sup>7</sup>*

RABBI TARFON sat conversing on serious matters with other learned men in a house in Ludd. The question was raised: "Which is more important—learning or action?"

Rabbi Tarfon replied, "Action is more important. Of what earthly use are fine words and preachments unless they are put into practice?"

Rabbi Akiba upheld the contrary viewpoint.

"Learning is more important," he said.

The sages finally concluded that both were right.

"Learning is more important when it leads to action," they declared.

### *The Parable of the Two Gems<sup>8</sup>*

ONCE, after he had listened to his counsellor, Nicholas of Valencia, speaking evil against the Jews, King Don Pedro was very much perplexed in his own mind.

"There is a wise man among the Jews whose name is Ephraim Sancho," the king recalled. "Bring him to me."

So they brought Ephraim Sancho before the king.

"Which faith is superior, yours or ours?" the king sternly demanded of Ephraim.

When Ephraim heard the king's question he was thrown into confusion and said to himself: "Be wary, for the enemies of Israel have laid a trap for you in order to do you harm."

But to the king he said: "Our faith, O King, suits us better for, when we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, our God, by means of many wondrous signs and miracles, led us out of the land of bondage into freedom. For you Christians, however, your own faith is the better because, by its means, you have been able to establish your rule over most of the earth."

When King Pedro heard this he was vexed. "I did not ask you what benefits each religion brings to its believers," he said. "What I want to know is: which are superior—your or our own precepts?"

And again Ephraim Sancho was thrown into confusion. He said to himself: "If I tell the king that the precepts of his religion are superior to mine I shall have denied the God of my fathers and shall therefore deserve all the punishments of Gehenna. On the other hand, should I tell him that the precepts of my religion excel his he will be sure to have me burned at the stake."

But to the king Ephraim said: "If it please the King—let me ponder his question carefully for three days, for it requires much reflection. At the end of the third day I will come to him with my answer."

And King Pedro said: "Let it be as you say."

And for the three days that followed the spirit of Ephraim was rent within him. He neither ate nor slept but put on

sackcloth and ashes and prayed for divine guidance. But, when the time arrived for him to see the king, he put all fear aside and went to the palace with his answer.

When Ephraim Sancho came before the king he looked downcast.

"Why are you so sad?" the king asked him.

"I am sad with good reason for, without any cause whatsoever, I was humiliated today," answered Ephraim. "I will let you be my judge in this matter, O King."

"Speak!" said King Don Pedro.

Ephraim Sancho then began: "A month ago to this day a neighbor of mine, a jeweler, went on a distant journey. Before he departed in order to preserve the peace between his two bickering sons while he was away, he gave each of them a gift of a costly gem. But only today the two brothers came to me and said: 'O Ephraim, give us the value of these gems and judge which is the superior of the two!'

"I replied: 'Your father himself is a great artist and an expert on precious stones. Why don't you ask him? Surely he will give you a better judgment than I.'

"When they heard this they became enraged. They abused and beat me. Judge, O King, whether my grievance is just!"

"Those rogues have mistreated you without cause!" cried the king. "They deserve to be punished for this outrage."

When Ephraim Sancho heard the king speak thus he rejoiced. "O King!" he exclaimed. "May your ears hear the words your own mouth has spoken, for they are true and just. Know that such two brothers as these were Esau and Jacob, and each of them received for his own happiness a priceless gem. You have asked me, O King, which of the two gems is superior. How can I give you a proper answer? Send a messenger to the only expert of these gems—Our Father in Heaven. Let Him tell you which is the better."<sup>9</sup>

When King Pedro heard Ephraim Sancho speak thus he marvelled greatly. "Behold, Nicholas," he said to his counsellor. "Consider the wisdom of this Jew. Since he has spoken justly then justice shall be done to him. He deserves, not rebuke and harm, but respect and honor. You, however, deserve to be punished, for you have spoken nothing but evil slanders against the Jews."

*The Best and the Worst Things<sup>10</sup>*

ONCE Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai said to his five disciples: "What is the most desirable thing to strive for in life?"

Rabbi Eliezer said: "A good eye."

Rabbi Joshua said: "A good friend."

Rabbi Yose said: "A bad neighbor."

Rabbi Simeon said: "Wisdom to foretell the future."

Rabbi Eleazar said: "A good heart."

Rabbi Yohanan then said to his five disciples: "The words of Eleazar please me most, because his thought includes all the rest."

At another time Rabbi Yohanan asked his disciples: "What is the thing that man should avoid most in life?"

Rabbi Eliezer said: "An evil eye."

Rabbi Joshua said: "An evil friend."

Rabbi Yose said: "A bad neighbor."

Rabbi Simeon said: "One who borrows money and doesn't return it."

Rabbi Eleazar said: "A bad heart."

Rabbi Yohanan then said: "The words of Eleazar please me most because his thought includes all of yours."

*God's Delicacy<sup>11</sup>*

THE Emperor once said to Rabbi Gamaliel, "Your God is a thief! Why did he make Adam fall asleep and then steal a rib from him?"

The Emperor's daughter interrupted and said to Rabbi Gamaliel, "Let me answer my father." Then turning to the Emperor, she said, "Call a judge!"

"What do you need a judge for?" the Emperor asked in surprise.

"Thieves entered my apartment at night," the Princess replied. "They stole a silver jug, but in its place they left one made of gold."

"May such robberies occur every night!" laughed the Emperor.

"Well then," cried the Princess. "Didn't such good fortune happen to Adam? God stole from him a rib, but in its place he left him a devoted wife."

"In my opinion," rejoined the Emperor, "it was wrong of God to make Adam fall asleep. If he wanted to take his rib he shouldn't have done it stealthily."

"Father!" cried the Princess. "Order that a chunk of meat be brought."

Wonderingly, the Emperor did as she asked.

The Princess then took the raw meat and in the presence of her father, put it into the hot ashes to roast. When it was ready for serving she said to him, "There now, father, eat the meat!"

But the Emperor shuddered with disgust and refused to eat. He had first seen the meat when it was raw and after that, when it was still covered with ashes.

"It nauseates me!" he cried.

"There you see!" said the Princess triumphantly. "Had Adam been awake and seen how God cut out his rib and created a woman from it he would have forever been nauseated at the sight of her."

### *An Author's Life After Forty*

A YOUNG Talmudic scholar who had just completed a learned work came to Rabbi Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna, and begged him for a testimonial.

Rabbi Elijah regarded his visitor with gentle compassion.

"My son," he said to him, "you must face the stern realities. If you wish to be a writer of learned books you must be resigned to peddle your work from house to house like a vendor of pots and pans and suffer hunger until you're forty."

"And what will happen after I'm forty?" asked the young writer, hopefully.

Rabbi Elijah smiled encouragingly, "By the time you're forty you'll be quite used to it!"

### *An Unpredictable Life*

ONE day, centuries ago, as a rabbi was on his way to the House of Study he suddenly met the duke of the province followed by his retinue.

"Where are you going this bright morning, Rabbi?" the duke asked him sarcastically.

"I'm sure I don't know, Your Grace," replied the rabbi with a doubtful air.

"You don't know where you're going? How dare you speak so impudently to me, Jew? I'll teach you to have proper respect for a Christian prince!" cried the duke, and he ordered the rabbi thrown into a dungeon.

"What did I tell you, Your Grace?" called out the rabbi. "Now you see for yourself that I was right when I said I did not know where I was going."

"How so?" asked the duke curiously.

"You see, Your Grace, I left my home this morning in order to go to the House of Study—and where do I wind up? In a dungeon!"

### *Stale Ancestors—Stale Learning*

USUALLY the orthodox rabbis of Europe boasted distinguished rabbinical genealogies, but Rabbi Yechiel of Ostrówce was an exception. He was the son of a simple baker and he inherited some of the forthright qualities of a man of the people.

Once, when a number of rabbis had gathered at some festivity, each began to boast of his eminent rabbinical ancestors. When Rabbi Yechiel's turn came, he replied gravely, "In my family, I'm the first eminent ancestor."

His colleagues were shocked by this piece of impudence, but said nothing. Immediately after, the rabbis began to expound Torah. Each one was asked to hold forth on a test culled from the sayings of one of his distinguished rabbinical ancestors.

One after another the rabbis delivered their learned dissertations. At last it came time for Rabbi Yechiel to say something. He arose and said, "My masters, my father was a baker. He taught me that only fresh bread was appetizing and that I must avoid the stale. This can also apply to learning."

And with that Rabbi Yechiel sat down.

### *The Most Valuable Merchandise<sup>12</sup>*

A GREAT scholar went on an ocean voyage together with a number of merchants who were conveying goods to sell in distant lands.

"What kind of merchandise do you carry?" they asked him.

"My merchandise is more valuable than yours," he answered.

But what it was he would not say.

The merchants were astonished and looked high and low in every part of the ship. But there was no sign anywhere of his goods. So they laughed at the scholar.

"He is a simpleton!" they said.

After they had sailed several days pirates attacked them and robbed the passengers of all their possessions, including the very clothes on their backs.

When the ship reached port at last, the merchants found themselves without any money or clothes. Being strangers in a foreign land they were in a sorry plight and endured great hardships.

The scholar, on the other hand, had no sooner disembarked than he made his way to the House of Study and sat down to expound the Law. When the people saw what a learned man he was they showed him great honor. They gave him clothing, food and lodging. When he went into the street the dignitaries of the town escorted him with great deference. Seeing all this, his fellow passengers, the merchants, were abashed.

"Forgive us for having mocked at you," they begged him. "Help us! Intercede for us with the Elders to give us a crust of bread, for we are hungry! Now we see that it was no idle boast when you told us that your merchandise was more valuable than ours. Learning is the best merchandise!"

### *Learning and Knowing*

ONCE there was a prodigy of learning at a Talmudic College in Poland. His fame was spread far and wide and great scholars came to talk to him, and marvel over his wonderful store of knowledge.

One day an eminent Talmudic authority arrived and asked the head of the institution, "Tell me, Rabbi! Is it true that the young man knows so much?"

"To be candid with you," answered the rabbi with a smile, "the young fellow studies so much I don't see where he can find the time to know!"

### *Spinoza*

A FREETHINKER once said mockingly to Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz, "Would you like to know what the philosopher Spinoza wrote in one of his works? He wrote that man in no way stands higher than an animal and that he has the same nature."

"If that is so," remarked the rabbi, "how do you explain

the fact that up until now the animals haven't produced a Spinoza?"

### *Double-Talk*

ONCE there was a young sinner whose conscience bothered him, but because he was vain he found it hard to confess his sins to his rabbi. So he fell on a stratagem. He went to the rabbi and pretended that a friend had sent him to beg for the remission of his sins. He therefore recited all the misdoings of his "friend" who he said was too ashamed to appear and plead for himself.

Now the rabbi penetrated his pretense, so he said to him, "What a fool your friend must be! Couldn't he come himself? After all, he could have said just what you have told me—that he had come in the interest of a friend. In that way he would have spared himself any embarrassment."

### *A Reason for Every Custom<sup>18</sup>*

IT HAPPENED once that a well-to-do merchant, who was a clever and worldly man, maintained his newly married son and his wife in his household. The son had a fine character and a good heart. He devoted himself to charitable works and helped every poor man who asked for his assistance.

In time the young wife gave birth to a son; and so, in honor of the occasion, the happy grandfather arranged a great feast on the day of circumcision.

Shortly before the festivities were to begin the merchant's son asked, "Tell me, father, what arrangements have you made for the seating of the guests? If you do the conventional thing and seat the rich at the head of the table and the poor near the door, it will distress me. You know very well how I love the poor. At my own celebration, at least, let me honor them who get no honor. Therefore, father, promise me to seat the poor at the head of the table and the rich at the door."

His father listened attentively and answered, "Reflect, my son: it is difficult to change the world and its ways. There is always a good reason behind every custom. Try to see it this way: Why do poor people come to a feast? Naturally, because they are hungry and would like to eat a good meal. Why do rich men come to a feast? To get honor. They don't come to eat, because they have enough at home. Now just

imagine what would happen if you seated the poor at the head of the table. They would sit there, very self-consciously, feeling everybody's eyes on them, and, naturally, they would be ashamed to eat their fill. And what they'd eat they wouldn't enjoy. Now, don't you think it would be better for their sake that they sat unnoticed at the door where they could eat to their heart's content without being ashamed?

"Then again, suppose I were to do what you're asking and seat the rich at the foot of the table. Don't you think they'd feel insulted? They don't come for the sake of the food, but for the honor. And if you don't give them that what will they get?"

### *Why Jerusalem Was Destroyed<sup>14</sup>*

"WHY was Jerusalem destroyed?" asked the Sages of Israel.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because of the desecration of the Sabbath.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because the morning and the evening prayers were abolished.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because the children of the schools remained untaught.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because the people did not feel shame towards one another.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because no distinction was drawn between the young and the old.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because one did not warn or admonish the other.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because men of scholarship and learning were despised.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because there were no longer men of faith and hope in her midst.

Other sages of Israel said: "Jerusalem was destroyed only because her laws were founded upon the strict letter of the Torah and were not interpreted in the way of mercy and kindness."

From the day that the Temple was destroyed, men of sound judgment were cut off. Confusion of thought prevailed, and the heart did not seek after purity but decided according to appearances. The shedding of blood profanes the holy soil and is an offence against the Divine Presence; it was because of the shedding of blood that the Holy Temple was burnt.

### Where Is Paradise?

A RABBI fell asleep and dreamt that he had entered Paradise. There, to his surprise, he found the sages discussing a knotty problem in the Talmud.

"Is this the reward of Paradise?" cried the rabbi. "Why, they did the very same thing on earth!"

At this he heard a voice chiding him, "You foolish man! You think the sages are in Paradise. It's just the opposite! Paradise is in the sages."

## PARABLES

### INTRODUCTION

Of all elements in Jewish folklore the parable is probably the most distinctly Jewish. The Hebrew name for it is *mashal*, but *mashal* has a wider meaning; it also includes fables and brief allegories. In all of the Pentateuch there are only five parables, but they abound with prodigal lavishness in the *Agada* of the Talmud, in the *Midrash*, and in the books of the *Apocrypha* which are the non-canonical, extra-Biblical writings. The generous use of the parable by Jesus and the Gospel writers was but a natural consequence of their Jewish intellectual training. Jewish medieval literature abounds in a wealth of parables.

The most indefatigable collector and adapter of the parable was Rabbi Jacob Krantz, the celebrated "Dubner Maggid" (Preacher of Dubno). During the last decades of the Eighteenth Century he traveled from town to town in Poland and Lithuania, a true wandering preacher, admired and beloved in all of Eastern Europe. He drew vast throngs with his eloquence and homely wisdom, making both moral ideas and rabbinical learning painless and pleasurable with his delightful story-telling art. Some of the parables he developed from germs of ideas he found in the Talmud and *Midrash*, but the bulk of them he picked up from the plain folk as he traveled from place to place. They were the folktales of the people, only he, with his creative ingenuity, adapted them to serve didactic ends, in the manner of the sages of the *Agada* and the *Midrash*. In turn, the refined parable would go back to the people and undergo ceaseless variation and adaptation at their hands.

The attitude of the rabbis of the Talmud to the parable was one approaching reverence. Not only did it make their teachings easier for the students in the academies to understand, but it kept

their congregations from nodding. No doubt with the intellectual snobs in mind the teachers of the people wrote admonishingly in the *Agada*: "Do not despise the parable. With a penny candle one may often find a lost gold coin or a costly pearl. By means of a trifling simple parable one may sometimes penetrate into the most profound ideas."

According to the universally accepted tradition it was King Solomon who "invented" the parable. "The Torah until Solomon's time," commented Rabbi Nachman in the *Agada*, "was comparable to a labyrinth with a bewildering number of rooms. Once one entered there one lost his way and could not find the way out. Then along came Solomon and invented the parable which has served as a ball of thread. When tied at the entrance of this labyrinth it serves as a secure guide through all the winding, bewildering passages."

Taking up the thought, Rabbi Nachman's colleague, Rabbi Hanina, said: "Until the time of Solomon the Torah could have been compared to a well full of cool refreshing water, but because of its extraordinary depth no one could get to the bottom. What was necessary was to find a rope long enough to tie to the bucket in order to bring up the water. Solomon made up this rope with his parables and thus enabled everyone to reach to the profoundest depths of the well."

A characteristic of the parable is that it is not just an ingenious and entertaining story but it is wisdom instinct with spirit. It is subtle and imaginative, penetrating to the very heart of an idea or a truth. Wise in the ways of the world and of men, it is mellow in its common-sense understanding of both the heights and pitiful limitations of the human being. We find in the parable *Truth in Gay Clothes* [see JEWISH SALT, page 13] the gentle understanding of how hard it is for many people to accept the naked or obvious truth. To become agreeable to some, Truth must first be adorned in attractive clothes. And that, concludes the narrator slyly, is why Parable is always seen in the company of Truth.

Often the parable is a bitter commentary on the perverseness of man's reasoning and conduct. *The Poor Man's Miracle*, which the Preacher of Dubno used to tell, has the ironic bite concluding on the thought: "Most people would sooner help one who has fallen than help keep him from falling."

Very often the parable was told, not so much to instruct, as to offer solace to the Jewish people. And, like the method of the Yiddish literary master, Sholom Aleichem, it sparkled with the wit and laughter of courage in adversity. Such a parable is *The Last Trouble Is the Worst*, offering to the sorely beset the follow-

ing ironic moral: "New dangers can make them (i.e., the Jews) forget the old ones."

N.A.

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### *Man Understands But Little<sup>15</sup>*

ALL their lives the two young brothers had lived in the city behind great stone walls and never saw field nor meadow. But one day they decided to pay a visit to the country.

As they went walking along the road they saw a farmer at his plowing. They watched him and were puzzled.

"What on earth is he doing that for?" they wondered. "He turns up the earth and leaves deep furrows in it. Why should someone take a smooth piece of land covered with nice green grass and dig it up?"

Later they watched the farmer sowing grains of wheat along the furrows.

"That man must be crazy!" they exclaimed. "He takes good wheat and throws it into the dirt."

"I don't like the country!" said one in disgust. "Only queer people live here."

So he returned to the city.

His brother who remained in the country saw a change take place only several weeks later. The plowed field began to sprout tender green shoots, even more beautiful and fresher than before. This discovery excited him very much. So he wrote to his brother in the city to come at once and see for himself the wonderful change.

His brother came and was delighted with what he saw. As time passed they watched the sproutings grow into golden heads of wheat. Now they both understood the purpose of the farmer's work.

When the wheat became ripe the farmer brought out his scythe and began to cut it down. At this the impatient one of the two brothers exclaimed:

"The farmer is crazy! How hard he worked all these months to produce this lovely wheat, and now with his own hands he is cutting it down! I'm disgusted with such an idiot and I'm going back to the city!"

His brother, the patient one, held his peace and remained in the country. He watched the farmer gather the wheat into his granary. He saw him skillfully separate the grain from the chaff. He was filled with wonder when he found that the

farmer had harvested a hundred-fold of the seed that he had sowed. Then he understood that there was logic in everything that the farmer had done.

### MORAL

Mortals see only the beginning of any of God's works. Therefore they cannot understand the nature and the end of creation.

#### *The Poor Man's Miracle<sup>16</sup>*

No ONE showed any compassion for the poor man as he went from house to house begging for a groschen or a crust of bread. Many a door was slammed in his face and he was turned away with insults. Therefore he grew despondent.

One wintry day, as he was trudging through the slippery streets, he fell and broke his leg. Thereupon they took him to a hospital.

When the people of the town heard that a poor stranger had been taken to the hospital suffering from a broken leg, they began to feel very sorry for him. Some went to comfort him, others brought him good things to eat. When he left the hospital they furnished him with warm clothes and gave him a tidy sum of money.

Before the poor man left town he wrote to his wife, "Praise God, dear wife! A miracle happened: I broke a leg!"

### MORAL

Most people would sooner help one who has fallen than help keep him from falling.

#### *The Giant and the Cripple<sup>17</sup>*

Two paupers wandered from town to town begging for alms. One was a giant who had never been sick in his life, the other was a cripple who had never known anything but illness.

The giant used to laugh at the cripple constantly. His unfortunate companion took his mockery very much to heart and in his resentment uttered the following prayer: "Lord of the World! Punish this man who humiliates me all the time and makes sport of my deformity, for, verily, he is a wicked man!"

At last, the two paupers reached the capital city. They arrived just at the time when a great misfortune had happened to the king. Two of his most trusted servants had died suddenly. One was his personal bodyguard, the strongest man in the land; the other was the most skillful physician among all the royal healers. So the king sent couriers into all the towns and villages of his kingdom to gather into the capital all the strong men and doctors who wished to compete for the vacant court posts.

The king finally chose one strong man and one doctor from among all the applicants. He then asked them to furnish proof of their fitness for the posts they were to fill.

"My Lord the King!" said the strong man. "Let there be brought before me the strongest and biggest man in this city and I will kill him with one blow from my fist."

The doctor said, "Give me the most helpless cripple you can find and I will make him well in one week's time."

So the king sent messengers scurrying throughout the city looking for the strongest man and the most helpless cripple. Luck was with them, for on the street they chanced upon the two paupers. So they brought them before the king.

First came the strong man, and with one blow from his fist he killed the giant. Then the doctor examined the cripple, and after one week of treatment he made him well again.

### MORAL

The strength of the strong proves sometimes their misfortune, just as the weakness of the weak oftentimes brings them good fortune.

#### *The Last Trouble Is the Worst<sup>18</sup>*

ONCE, while on a long journey, a man met a wolf on the road. And when he escaped from this danger he went about telling people the story of his meeting with the wolf.

Further on the road he met with a lion, and again he escaped from certain death. After that, the man went about telling people of his escape from the lion's jaws.

Still later on he met a snake. When he escaped from its poisonous fangs he forgot altogether about the dangers he had met before. He talked only about his escape from the snake.

Similarly with the Jewish people. New dangers can make them forget the old ones.

### *The Parable of the Wise Fishes<sup>19</sup>*

THE authorities in Rome had issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study the Torah. Thereupon, Rabbi Akiba arose and, at the risk of his life, went about from town to town establishing academies. He himself held forth in learned discourse to great throngs.

One day Rabbi Akiba met Rabbi Pappus ben Yehuda, the sage and patriot.

"Aren't you afraid of the authorities?" asked Pappus.

"You speak like a fool, Pappus, even though many people think you're wise!" exclaimed Rabbi Akiba. "Let me tell you a parable that has a bearing on your question."

"A fox one day was walking along the shore of a lake. He noticed that the little fish were scurrying to and fro in the water. As he looked at them he had a great desire to eat them.

"'Foolish little fish—why do you scurry about like that?' he asked them.

"'We are fleeing from the nets of the fishermen,' the fish replied.

"'In that case,' cried the sly fox, 'why don't you come ashore and we will live like brothers just as your parents lived with mine.'

"The little fish laughed and replied, 'O you foxy one! You talk like a fool even though many think you're clever. What silly advice are you giving us, anyway? If we are in constant fear of our lives in the place where we live, how do you suppose it will be on dry land where we cannot live? Surely, death awaits us there!'"

Then Rabbi Akiba concluded: "It is with us Jews the same as it was with the little fish. We are afraid of the enemy even when we study the Torah, which is our support and life. Can you imagine what fear would fall upon us were we to abandon this study?"

### *Know Before You Criticize*

A YOUNG, half-baked Talmudic student, while talking to his rabbi, expressed a heretical view about prophets and the nature of prophecy.

The rabbi bristled with indignation.

"Shame on you!" he cried. "How can you speak that way about the Holy Prophets?"

"But that's not my own opinion, Rabbi," the student apologized. "I'm only quoting the *Rambam*. It's written in the *Guide to the Perplexed*."

The rabbi smiled wryly.

"Let me tell you a parable," he began.

"A merchant once came to buy goods in a large wholesale establishment. Quite by accident he broke the glass in a showcase. This filled him with confusion.

"I'm terribly sorry about this," he said.

"Oh, that's all right—it's only a trifle," said the proprietor minimizing the loss. "May no worse damage happen to me. Thank God none of the flying glass hurt you! Tell you what—let's have a drink of *schnapps* on it."

"So the two drank in very friendly fashion, as if nothing unpleasant had occurred.

"Now there was a simpleton who saw all this happen with his own eyes. He was very much impressed and said to himself, 'If for breaking a single pane of glass the proprietor gives this customer a glass of *schnapps*—what will he give me for breaking his big front window? He'll feel so sorry when he sees how upset I am about it that, likely as not, he'll have me drink a whole bottle of *schnapps* with him!'

"So he picked up a rock and, with all his might, threw it at the front window, smashing it. Thereupon, the clerks in the store who had seen him do this ran out and gave him a good trouncing.

"Stop, stop, you fools! Why do you hit me?" yelled the simpleton. "Your employer gave that customer a glass of *schnapps* to quiet his nerves, and me you hit?"

"*Schlemihl!*" answered the proprietor. "That man is my best customer. If he broke a pane—*nu*, so what? But you, idiot, who broke my front store-window—what profit do I get from you?"

The rabbi then concluded: "It's the same with you and the *Rambam*, my son. About Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, it has been said: 'From Moses our teacher to Moses ben Maimon, there has been no Moses like unto this Moses.' He was a Prince in Israel. He wrote wonderful books with deep meanings. It was perfectly all right for him to express a heresy, so to speak—to break a window pane. But you, ignoramus, what

have you done for the world to allow yourself the luxury of breaking the store-front window of our faith?"

### *The Man and the Angel of Death*

A MAN was carrying a heavy load of wood on his shoulders. When he grew weary he let the bundle down and cried bitterly, "O Death, come and take me!"

Immediately, the Angel of Death appeared and asked, "Why do you call me?"

Frightened, the man answered, "Please help me place the load back on my shoulders."

### MORAL

Even though life has its griefs man prefers a life of wretchedness to death.

### *Barking Dogs*

A PREACHER once came to town and entered the synagogue. When he went up to the rostrum to speak the audience began to make a terrific racket and rudely yelled, "We don't want any preachers here! We won't stand for sermons in this synagogue!"

So the preacher asked the sexton to tell the audience that he had no intention of preaching. He merely wanted to tell a short story about a Jewish merchant. The story was a good one and the audience would enjoy it.

The audience agreed and the preacher began to tell the following story:

"Once a Jew was walking along the street with bowed head, looking greatly worried. On the way he met an acquaintance, a kindhearted old man.

"What's wrong with you, Uncle? What has happened to make you look so distracted?"

"Why shouldn't I be worried? I suffer from a great misfortune and it's the more aggravating because it's on account of a trifle.

"As you know, I am a merchant. At present I'm negotiating with the local nobleman about an important business deal. I have the bright prospect of earning quite a bit of money on it. This would indeed be very welcome because it would enable me to marry off my daughter and still have a

neat sum left for myself. Unfortunately, I cannot close the deal on account of an idiotic trifle. The nobleman invited me to his house and when I entered the courtyard a pack of angry dogs fell upon me like tigers and wanted to tear me to pieces. I ran away almost leaving my soul behind.'

"'Rest easy,' the old man then told him. 'I have good advice for you. Go again to the nobleman and utter the following words of the psalmist when the savage dogs come out:

"'Cease from anger, and forsake wrath!" Then you'll see that they will stop their barking and will start licking your hands like lambs.'

"The merchant went again to the nobleman and entered his courtyard. But the dogs fell upon him as fiercely as before, and before even he had a chance to recite the words of the psalmist, they nearly tore him to bits. He barely escaped with his life.

"Thereupon he went back to the old man who asked him, 'Did the psalm help?'

"The merchant heaved a deep sigh and replied, 'Possibly it would have helped but to my misfortune they were such nasty dogs they wouldn't even give me a chance to begin.'

"This, my friends," concluded the preacher, "is the short story I wanted to tell you."

He then descended the rostrum and quickly left the synagogue.

### *The Rosebush and the Apple Tree<sup>20</sup>*

A ROSEBUSH grew near an apple tree. Everybody admired the beauty and the sweet scent of its roses. Seeing how everyone was praising it the rosebush became vainglorious.

"Who can compare to me? And who is as important as I?" it asked. "My roses are a delight to the eye and the most fragrant among all flowers. True enough, the apple tree is much larger than I, but does it afford as much pleasure to people?"

The apple tree answered: "Even were you taller than I, with all your vaunted loveliness and all your sweet fragrance—you still could not compare to me in kindheartedness."

"Let me hear!" the rosebush asked challengingly. "What are the virtues you boast of?"

The apple tree answered: "You do not give your flowers to

people unless you first prick them with your thorns. I, on the other hand, give my fruit even to those who throw stones at me!"

### *The Parable of the Old Cloak<sup>21</sup>*

A STRIP of new linen lying upon the table was very proud of its beauty and fine quality.

"What a handsome garment I will make!" it exclaimed vaingloriously.

Suddenly, the strip of linen noticed a soiled, well-worn cloak that had been thrown carelessly into a corner. Scornfully, the new linen said to the old cloak, "Woe to you, you hideous old rag! What a drab appearance you make!"

Several days passed and the owner of the new linen sewed himself a garment from it. Nonetheless, when he went out upon the street he put on his old cloak over it. When the new garment recognized the old cloak it was filled with resentment.

"How did you suddenly become so important as to be above me?" it inquired.

The old cloak answered: "First they brought me to be laundered. They dealt me heavy blows with paddles until they beat the dust, the sand and the mud out of me. When they had finished I said to myself: 'It certainly was worth all that pain to become clean again! Just look at me! Don't I look better and handsomer than before?' And, as I was thinking thus, they threw me into a kettle of hot water, and after that into a kettle of tepid water. They washed, rinsed, dried and pressed me. And, suddenly, I saw that I had been transformed into a handsome garment! I then realized that before one can be elevated one must first suffer."

## THE ANCIENT ART OF REASONING

### INTRODUCTION

The use of the Talmudic art of reasoning, tortuous and oblique in its technique as it may sometimes appear, is frequently applied in humorous tales and anecdotes for the discomfiture of the wicked, the pretentious and the designing.

Sometimes Talmudic logic by its realistic application finds common sense answers to the most perplexing of human problems. This adroit use of casuistry is found in the classic Yiddish anec-

dote: *It Could Always Be Worse*. By viewing trouble relatively and from the perspective of the totality of all troubles, it loses some of its alarming character. Such wryly humorous anecdotes have arisen in great profusion among Jews and represent a highly individual type of folklore which is social documentation in the most genuine sense.

N.A.

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### *Always Two Possibilities*

WAR was on the horizon. Two students in the *Yeshiva* were discussing the situation.

"I hope I'm not called," said one. "I'm not the type for war. I have the courage of the spirit, but nevertheless I shrink from it."

"But what is there to be frightened about?" asked the other. "Let's analyze it. After all, there are two possibilities: either war will break out, or it won't. If it doesn't, there's no cause for alarm. If it does, there are two possibilities: either they take you or they don't take you. If they don't, alarm is needless. And even if they do, there are two possibilities: either you're given combat duty, or non-combatant duty. If non-combatant, what is there to be worried about? And if combat duty, there are two possibilities: you'll be wounded, or you won't be wounded. Now, if you're not wounded, you can forget your fears. But even if you are wounded, there are two possibilities: either you're wounded gravely, or you're wounded slightly. If you're wounded slightly, your fear is nonsensical, and if you're wounded gravely, there are still two possibilities: either you succumb, and die, or you don't succumb, and you live. If you don't die, things are fine, and there's no cause for alarm; and even if you do die, there are two possibilities; either you will be buried in a Jewish cemetery, or you won't be. Now, if you are buried in a Jewish cemetery, what is there to worry about, and even if you are not . . . but why be afraid? There may not be any war at all!"

### *It Could Always Be Worse*

THE poor Jew had come to the end of his rope. So he went to his rabbi for advice.

"Holy Rabbi!" he cried. "Things are in a bad way with me,

and are getting worse all the time! We are poor, so poor, that my wife, my six children, my in-laws and I have to live in a one-room hut. We get in each other's way all the time. Our nerves are frayed and, because we have plenty of troubles, we quarrel. Believe me—my home is a hell and I'd sooner die than continue living this way!"

The rabbi pondered the matter gravely. "My son," he said, "promise to do as I tell you and your condition will improve."

"I promise, Rabbi," answered the troubled man. "I'll do anything you say."

"Tell me—what animals do you own?"

"I have a cow, a goat and some chickens."

"Very well! Go home now and take all these animals into your house to live with you."

The poor man was dumbfounded, but since he had promised the rabbi, he went home and brought all the animals into his house.

The following day the poor man returned to the rabbi and cried, "Rabbi, what misfortune have you brought upon me! I did as you told me and brought the animals into the house. And now what have I got? Things are worse than ever! My life is a perfect hell—the house is turned into a barn! Save me, Rabbi—help me!"

"My son," replied the rabbi serenely, "go home and take the chickens out of your house. God will help you!"

So the poor man went home and took the chickens out of his house. But it was not long before he again came running to the rabbi.

"Holy Rabbi!" he wailed. "Help me, save me! The goat is smashing everything in the house—she's turning my life into a nightmare."

"Go home," said the rabbi gently, "and take the goat out of the house. God will help you!"

The poor man returned to his house and removed the goat. But it wasn't long before he again came running to the rabbi, lamenting loudly, "What a misfortune you've brought upon my head, Rabbi! The cow has turned my house into a stable! How can you expect a human being to live side by side with an animal?"

"You're right—a hundred times right!" agreed the rabbi. "Go straight home and take the cow out of your house!"

And the poor unfortunate hastened home and took the cow out of his house.

Not a day had passed before he came running again to the rabbi. "Rabbi!" cried the poor man, his face beaming. "You've made life sweet again for me. With all the animals out, the house is so quiet, so roomy, and so clean! What a pleasure!"

### *Wishes Must Never Be Vague<sup>22</sup>*

A JEW was once trudging along the highway. From much walking his feet began to ache. So he prayed, "O Lord! If I only had an ass to ride!"

No sooner had he uttered these words than a Roman trotted by. The ass on which he rode had given birth to a little ass.

"Here, fellow," cried the Roman. "Take this little ass on your shoulders and carry it for me!"

So the Jew did as he was ordered and he trudged behind the Roman with the little ass on his shoulders. As he staggered along, bent double under his burden, he said to himself, "Truly, my prayer has been fulfilled! To my misfortune, however, I did not express my wish clearly enough. I should have stipulated that I wished to have an ass for me to ride—not one to ride me!"

### *Damning with Praise*

THE Rabbi of Tarnow, hearing that the post of rabbi was open in Sambor, applied for it. One Sabbath afternoon he preached there in the synagogue, but the congregation didn't like him and turned him down.

Disheartened, he returned home the following day. On the way he met his old acquaintance, the Rabbi of Landshut, and he unburdened his heavy heart to him.

"Was that a nice thing to do to me, Rabbi?" he asked, boiling over.

"To be frank with you," replied the Rabbi of Landshut, "the people of Sambor are perfectly right. Furthermore, going a little deeper into the matter, I think I have more right to the Sambor post than you."

"How so?"

"It's clear as daylight. In your case, all of Tarnow would like to see you Rabbi of Sambor. In my case it's the same.

All of Landshut would like me to become Rabbi of Sambor. But because my town is bigger than yours, I believe I have a better right to the post."

Seeing that the Rabbi of Tarnow grew despondent, the Rabbi of Landshut hastened to say, "But don't take that to heart, brother. Let me assure you that if the post of Rabbi of Cracow were vacant you'd have a better right to it than I. You see, in my case only the Jews of Landshut would like me to become Rabbi of Cracow, but in your case not only the Jews of Tarnow but also the Jews of Sambor would like to see you Rabbi of Cracow. And against such a combination I couldn't beat you!"

### *A Brief Sermon*

THE Rabbi of Ropshitz was a great scholar but had eccentric habits. He would concentrate on some particular point in his studies to the utter neglect of his routine duties. One Sabbath day he mounted the rostrum to preach, but suddenly panic seized him. He faltered for only a moment. Then he plunged into his sermon.

"How should a rabbi preach?" he asked.

"He must always preach what is true," he answered himself. "His sermon must be brief and to the point and his subject must be based on the Scriptural 'portion' of the week. Since a rabbi must speak the truth, I would like to say that I have no idea what this week's 'portion' is. Now, that I have spoken briefly and to the point and have based my sermon on the subject of the Scriptural 'portion,' I wish to conclude and say, 'Amen.' "

### *Mikhail Ivanovitch Makes a Discovery*

IN A certain town there lived a rabbi who had taken on his holy calling late in life. Once, when he was asked about it, he replied:

"Let me tell you the story about Mikhail Ivanovitch.

"Now this Mikhail was a great soak. He used to roll in every gutter of the town, drunk as Lot.

"One day, the landowner's small boys decided to play a prank on him. So, while he lay in a ditch, they dressed him in an Orthodox Russian priest's black robe and high stovepipe hat.

"When Mikhail finally sobered up and rubbed his eyes, he could not believe what he saw.

"What the devil am I doing in a priest's outfit?" he wondered. "Can it be—Lord preserve me—that I've become a priest—or is it only a drunken dream?"

"Carefully, he felt his priestly garments from top to bottom.

"They're real as life!" he muttered to himself.

"There was only one conclusion: somehow, sometime, he had become a priest!

"Bewildered by his discovery he lay with closed eyes, thinking hard.

"Let's see now," he speculated. "If the priest's breviary is in my pocket, then I'm surely a priest."

"So he stuck his hand in his pocket and, sure enough, he drew out a breviary.

"So, I'm actually a priest!" he laughed.

"Still he would not believe it. He suspected something was wrong somewhere. He needed more proof.

"Let's see now if I can read," he speculated further.

"So he opened the breviary and dug his nose into it.

"No luck!" he muttered, dejected. "I can't read. It's proof, then, I'm no priest at all. On the other hand, how do I know that a priest must know how to read? I'll go to the priest and find out if he can read."

"He found the priest at home.

"I've come to find out whether you can read," Mikhail Ivanovitch said, handing him the breviary.

"The priest put on his spectacles and dug his nose into the breviary.

"I'm afraid not," he said. "I can't read."

"In that case," cried Mikhail, overjoyed, "I'm a priest!"

The old rabbi then concluded, "It was the same with me as with Mikhail Ivanovitch. At first I thought I didn't know enough to be a rabbi. So I studied night and day, year in and year out, in order to become worthy of the rabbinate. Later, however, I discovered to my amazement that other rabbis didn't know much either, so I said: 'Now I see I can be a rabbi too!'"

*The Cheapest Way*

THE wonder-working rabbi held forth learnedly before his disciples. He told them a story out of the *Midrash*:

"Once, an infant was abandoned in the forest by an unfortunate mother who was too poor to feed it. So it lay there alone among the trees and cried and cried. A woodcarrier heard it and came running to where it lay. He picked it up and hushed its cries. While he was kind and gentle he was also very poor. How could he buy milk for the infant, for he hadn't earned a kreutzer all day?"

"So what do you think God did? He caused a miracle to happen, the kind of miracle that hasn't happened since the creation: He made a mother's breasts grow on the woodcarrier! This miracle the good man understood to be a command from God. So he went home and suckled the infant without it even costing him a kreutzer!"

When the rabbi had finished his story he looked around him. Amazement was written on every face. Only one of the disciples had a troubled look on his face.

"Don't you like this story?" the rabbi asked him.

"No, not very much," muttered the man. "I just don't understand it! It seems to me that God's mercy could have been shown in other ways without having to reverse the laws of nature. Why did God have to give the man a mother's breasts? For instance, He could just as easily have dropped down from heaven a bag with a thousand gulden. Then the poor man could have engaged a wet-nurse to suckle the infant."

The rabbi mused, "It's not so, not so, my friend! You're a sensible man—say yourself: If God has the power to make breasts grow on the woodcarrier why should He lay out a thousand gulden in cold cash?"

*Why Scholars Have Homely Wives*

AN INQUISITIVE young Talmudist asked his rabbi, "Why is it that most pious men and scholars marry homely wives? Is that their just reward?"

"Let me tell you a story," answered the rabbi. "A rich man once invited some strangers to dinner. Unluckily, the cook burned the greater part of the roast so the hostess, out of courtesy, had the good portions served to the guests. The members of the family were given the burned parts to eat.

"Now, my son, this also holds true with regard to the women apportioned to pious scholars. The Almighty in His wisdom created good-looking, amiable girls as well as homely, shrewish girls. The pretty ones, out of courtesy, He allots to the strangers, the libertines—the homely ones He reserves for the pious scholars who are, after all, members of His own family."

### *The Arrogant Rabbi*

ONCE there was a rabbi whose son was also a rabbi. Whereas the father was gentle and considerate, the son was aloof and arrogant. For that reason he had no success with his congregation.

One day, when he complained about this to his father, the old man said, "My son, the difference between your ways and mine as rabbi is this: when someone puts a difficult question of Torah to me, and I give him an answer, my questioner is satisfied and I'm satisfied—my questioner with his question, and I with my answer. But, when someone asks you a question, both of you remain unsatisfied: your questioner because you tell him his question is no question, and you, because you don't give him an answer."

### *Love of Perfection<sup>23</sup>*

RABBI SIMEON BEN GAMALIEL once stood on Mount Moriah and saw a woman pass by. She was unusually beautiful.

As he looked at her Rabbi Simeon exclaimed, "Wondrous indeed is your handiwork, Almighty God!"

Did Rabbi Simeon grow enthusiastic over the woman?

No, he only admired the perfection of the Creator's handiwork.

## WISE JUDGES

### INTRODUCTION

If it was important to have wise teachers and scholars as an indispensable social necessity it was no less desirable to have wise and incorruptible judges. "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice," the proverb states. While wise judges are extolled in Jewish folktales they are invariably de-

lineated as scrupulously honest men who have both the will and the courage to cut through the underbrush of deceit and legal technicalities in order to discover the truth and to dispense justice. According to the Jewish view a corrupt judge cannot be a wise judge. "Presents and gifts blind the eyes of the wise," dourly reflects the worldly Ben Sira.

In the legendary lore of the Jews concerning wise judges, King Solomon naturally takes the foremost place. Who is not familiar with his stratagem to discover the child's true mother? However, much more profound and ethically stirring was his judgment in the litigation between the otter and the weasel in the fable: *Whose Was the Blame?* It concludes on the stern moral: "He that soweth death shall reap it." More significant yet, this fable gives devout utterance to the Jewish ideal of the sanctity of all life.

In the parable, *The Saving Voice*, we see the traditional bending backward by the rabbinic judge in order not to be the cause of possible injustice. Better to let ten guilty ones go unpunished than to unjustly condemn an innocent man! And the ethical conclusion of the story: "To do a man harm requires a decision from a high authority—to save him from harm, only a word from the most insignificant person." It vividly recalls God's promise to spare the wicked city of Sodom if only ten good men be found in it. This ethical attitude is made explicit even in the many jests and anecdotes in wide currency among Jews. It is present in the merry story, *He Didn't Deserve His Fee*. If the rabbi sitting in judgment here became a casuist and juggled deftly with legal technicalities and verbal sleight of hand it was not with the intention of confusing the issue before him or to pervert justice. On the contrary, it was to defend a poor man in adversity against a heartless and mercenary doctor.

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### *The Old Man and the Snake and the Judgment of Solomon<sup>24</sup>*

IT CAME to pass in the time of King David, when his son Solomon was still a young lad, that an old man, walking along the road in winter time, found a half frozen snake in the road. The old man, bethinking himself of the command to take pity on all creatures, put the snake into his bosom to warm it. No sooner did the snake recover than it coiled itself round the man's body and squeezed him so hard that he nearly died. And the old man said to the snake, "Why do you harm me and try to kill me when I saved your life? If not for me you would have frozen to death." Continuing, the old man said: 'Let us go before the court that they may decide

whether you are treating me justly." The snake replied: "I am willing to do so, but to whom shall we go?" The old man replied: "To the very first thing we meet." So they walked together, and first they met an ox. The old man said to the ox: "Stand still and judge between us." And he related to him how he had saved the snake from death, and now the snake was doing all in its power to kill him. The snake replied: "I am acting properly, for it is written in Holy Scripture, 'I will put enmity between the man and the snake'" (cf. Gen. 3.15). The ox replied: "The snake is right in doing you harm, though you have treated it kindly, for such is the way of the world, that if one does good to another, he returns evil for good. My own master does the same. I work all day long in the field and benefit him a great deal, and yet in the evening he eats the best and to me he gives a little oats and straw. My master lies in a bed and I must lie in the open yard on straw, where the rain comes down upon me. This is the way of the world, and therefore the snake is right in wishing to kill you, although you have saved its life." The old man was very much hurt by these words. Farther on, they met an ass. Addressing the ass, they said the same to it as they had said to the ox. And the ass replied in the same manner as the ox had done.

Then the old man came before King David and complained of the snake. King David replied: "The snake is right. Why did you not carry out the word of the Scripture, which says: 'I will put enmity between you and the snake'? Therefore I cannot help you. You did wrong in warming the snake. You should have let it die, for the snake is our enemy."

The old man left the king with tears in his eyes, and as he walked on, he met young Solomon in the field near a well. He had dropped a stick into the well and was ordering the servants who were with him to dig deeper below the source of the well, so that the water should run into the well and fill it, and thus carry the stick up, so that he could reach it. When the old man saw this, he said to himself: "He must be a clever lad, I will put my case before him, maybe he can protect me from the snake," and he told him the story of what had befallen him with the snake. Solomon replied: "Have you not been before my father?" And the old man said: "Yes, I have been there, but he said he could not help me." Young Solomon said: "Let us go to him again."

So they went together again before King David, and the old man had a stick in his hand upon which he leaned. When they appeared before King David, Solomon said: "Why do you not deliver judgment between this man and the snake?" and King David replied: "I have no judgment to declare. It serves him right. Why did he not keep what is written in the Torah?" Then Solomon said: "Dear father, give me leave to pronounce judgment between the two." King David replied: "Dear son, if you think you can do so, go ahead without hesitation." Then young Solomon, turning to the snake, said: "Why do you do evil to a man who has done you good?" And the snake replied: "The Lord, blessed be He, has commanded me to bite the heel of the man." Then Solomon said: "Do you desire to observe the Torah and what is written therein?" And the snake replied: "Yes, most willingly." Then Solomon said: "If you desire to do what is written in the Torah, then release the man and stand on the ground beside him, for it says in the Law that the two men who have a quarrel with one another must stand before the judge (cf. Deut. 19.17), therefore you must also stand alongside of him." The snake replied: "I am satisfied to do so"; and, uncoiling itself from the man, he stood next to him. Then Solomon said to the old man: "Now do to the snake as it is written in the Law, for it is written in the Torah that you should crush the snake's head (cf. Gen. 3.15). Therefore do as is written in the Torah, for the snake has promised to accept the judgment of the Law." The good old man had a stick in his hand which he used in walking, for he was a very old man. So he lifted the stick and smote the snake on the head and killed it. And so the clever Solomon saved the old man from the snake through his great wisdom.

Therefore, no one should do good to a wicked creature, as the old man did.

### *Whose Was the Blame?*<sup>25</sup>

AN OTTER came one day and complained before King Solomon, saying: "Alas! my Lord and my King! Was it not thou that didst spread good tidings of peace and truth to all dwellers upon the earth in thy time? Didst thou not likewise ordain peace between one wild creature and another?"

"And who hath broken this peace?" asked Solomon.

"I went down into the water," answered the otter, "to hunt

for food, and my whelps I had entrusted into the hand of the weasel. But it rose up against them and destroyed them. And now the blood of my innocent children crieth out to me, Death to the Slayer!"

And the King commanded that the weasel be brought before him, and he inquired of it:

"Was it thou that slew the otter's children?"

And the weasel said:

"It was I, my lord the King, but, as the King liveth, it was not with intent or evil purpose. I heard the woodpecker as he thundered with his beak, giving forth the sound of the drum, proclaiming the summons to war. And so it was that, as I sped to the battle, I trampled on the children, but it was not with evil purpose."

And the King called the woodpecker and asked:

"Didst thou sound an alarm to summon people to the fight with a thundering of the drum?"

And the woodpecker answered:

"I did so, my Lord the King. But I did so because I saw the scorpion whetting its dagger."

And the King called the scorpion and asked:

"Why wast thou whetting thy dagger?"

And the scorpion answered:

"Because I saw the tortoise furbishing its armor."

And when the tortoise was inquired of, it said in its defence:

"Because I saw the crab sharpening its sword."

And the crab answered:

"Because I saw the lobster swinging its javelin."

And the King commanded the lobster to be brought, and he reproved it, saying:

"Why didst thou swing thy javelin?"

And the lobster answered and said:

"Because I saw the otter going down into the water to devour my children."

Then the King looked towards the otter, and said:

"The weasel is not guilty. The blood of thy children is on thine own head. He that soweth death shall reap it."

### *A Very Ancient Law*

RABBI ELIJAH, the Gaon of Vilna, had a distaste for presiding over the routine affairs of the Jewish community. He was

a great Talmudic scholar, and he found that his studies suffered when he became involved in trifling disputes. Accordingly, there was a tacit understanding that under no circumstances was he to be called to communal meetings unless a new law was to be legislated.

On one occasion he was summoned by the communal leaders for an emergency meeting. When he arrived he listened with shocked amazement to the proposal that poor Jews living outside the city of Vilna should not be allowed to come into the city to collect alms.

Rabbi Elijah arose and asked, "Is it for this proposal that you have taken me away from my studies? I was under the impression that this meeting was called to legislate a new law."

"But that's exactly so, Rabbi!" explained the head of the community. "We are trying to draw up a new law against the outside poor."

"Do you call that a new law?" asked Rabbi Elijah scornfully. "Why that law was introduced more than five thousand years ago in Sodom and Gomorrah!"

### *The Discerning Judge<sup>26</sup>*

A YOUTH, who had not even reached his twentieth year, sold his father's possessions which he had inherited. Immediately afterwards, he was sorry about the sale and went to Rabbi Raba to have it nullified. The youth's relations instructed him beforehand, "When you go to Rabbi Raba be sure to eat some dates and shoot the pits right into his face."

The youth followed this advice and threw the date pits at the great rabbi.

Rabbi Raba regarded him with amazement and compassion. "Poor boy," he thought. "He is mentally deficient." So he nullified the sale.

Before they sat down to draw up the document of nullification the purchaser secretly instructed the youth to say to the rabbi, "A scribe is paid one gold piece to transcribe the entire Book of Esther. Why then does the rabbi charge one gold piece for just a few words?"

These words the youth repeated to Rabbi Raba who, when he heard them, said to himself, "In truth, this boy speaks sensibly! In that case the sale was valid."

And when the youth's relations heard how Rabbi Raba had reversed himself they protested, "The boy didn't say these words out of his own head! He must have been instructed to say them by the purchaser."

"In that case," said Rabbi Raba, closing the hearing, "since the young man has enough sense to remember and to repeat what he is instructed it's a sign that he is fully aware of what he's doing."

"But Rabbi!" protested the relatives. "Didn't he throw date pits at you?"

"As for that," answered Rabbi Raba, "that was just plain impudence!"

### *What's in a Name?*

WHEN the time came for naming their firstborn son, a husband and wife began to wrangle with each other. She wanted to name him after her father; he wanted to name him after his father. Unable to agree, they went to the rabbi to referee the dispute.

"What was your father's name?" asked the rabbi of the husband.

"Nahum."

"And what was your father's name?" the rabbi asked the wife.

"Also Nahum."

"Then what is this whole argument about?" asked the puzzled rabbi.

"You see, rabbi," said the wife, "my father was a scholar and a God-fearing man, but my husband's father was a horse-thief! How can I name my son after such a man?"

The rabbi pondered and pondered. It was indeed a ticklish matter; he didn't wish to hurt the feelings of the husband. So he said, "My decision is that you name your son Nahum and leave the rest to time. If he becomes a scholar, then you will know that he was named after his mother's father. If, on the other hand, he becomes a horse-thief, it will be clear that he was named after his father's father."

### *Equal Justice*

RABBI WOLF of Zbaraz had a stern sense of justice. Far and wide he was famed as an incorruptible judge. One day, his

own wife raised an outcry that her maid had stolen an object of great value. The servant, an orphan, tearfully denied the accusation.

"We will let the Rabbinical Court settle this!" said her mistress angrily.

When Rabbi Wolf saw his wife preparing to go to the Court he forthwith began putting on his Sabbath robe.

"Why do you do that?" she asked in surprise. "You know it is undignified for a man of your position to come to Court with me. I can very well plead my own case."

"I'm sure you can," answered the rabbi. "But who will plead the case of your maid, the poor orphan? I must see that full justice be done to her."

### *The Saving Voice*

RABBI MOSES LEIB of Sassov was a very tolerant man. Whenever he acted as judge in a dispute he would look for any possible excuse to be lenient. Upon one occasion, the lax conduct of the community *shochet* was cause for much complaint. His dismissal was demanded by all. Only one man appeared in his defense when the case was brought up before the rabbi. The good sage listened, his brow knitted, to the testimony of the witnesses. Then he announced his decision: "I absolve the *shochet* of all blame and rule that he retain his post."

Thereupon a clamor arose.

"Rabbil!" cried one. "How can you take the word of one single man against the testimony of many!"

The rabbi replied gently, "When God commanded Abraham to bring his only son Isaac as a sacrifice upon His altar, didn't Abraham listen then to a mere angel who stayed his hand? Yet God found this just, although it opposed His will. And God's reason for this is plain. To do a man harm requires a decision from high authority—to save him from harm, only a word from the most insignificant source."

### *He Didn't Deserve His Fee*

ONCE a small town doctor, who thought more of his fees than of his patients, was called in to treat the sick wife of a poor tailor. After examining the woman he turned to the hus-

band and said, "This case will take a lot of my time and I can see that you won't be able to pay me for my services."

"Please, doctor, save her life!" begged the anxious husband. "I promise to pay you even though I'll have to pawn everything I own to get the money!"

"What if I don't cure her—will you pay my fee just the same?" insisted the doctor.

"Whatever happens, whether you cure her or kill her, I promise to pay!" cried the husband.

The treatment was started, but within a few days the woman died. Shortly after, the doctor demanded 1500 rubles as his fee. The bereft husband informed him that he was unable to pay and, as was the custom among the Jews, they brought the matter to the rabbi for settlement.

The sage understood right away what had happened.

"Tell me again," he asked the physician, "what was your contract with this man?"

"I was to get paid for treating his wife regardless whether I cured or killed her."

"Did you cure her?" asked the rabbi.

"No."

"Did you kill her?"

"I certainly did not!"

"Then, since you have neither cured her nor killed her what right have you to the money?"

### *The Blessing*

A WOMAN once came to lay her complaint before the rabbi.

"Rabbi," she began bitterly, "my husband is a wastrel—he gives away all his money to the poor. Please make him see that what he's doing is a sin."

And even as she spoke a poor man came in and interrupted vehemently, "Rabbi, my wife is gravely sick and my children are hungry, but my brother, who is rich, refuses to help us."

The rabbi thereupon said to the woman, "Go and bring your husband." And to the poor man he said, "Go and bring your rich brother."

The two men came.

"Why are you so impractical?" the rabbi asked of the charitable man.

"Man's life on earth is as brief as a heart-beat," replied the

man. "Therefore, I fear that death may cut short my opportunity to do good. So I give away my money."

"And why are you so tight-fisted and cruel?" the rabbi asked of the rich brother. "Why don't you aid your own flesh and blood?"

"Rabbi," answered the miser, "what man knows the day on which he'll die? What if I live to be a hundred and twenty? Would you wish me to remain unprovided for in my old age?"

The rabbi mused awhile and then, with a faraway smile on his face, he said, "May God preserve each one of you from what he mostly fears!"

### *For Whom the Cock Crowed*

Two pious scholars lived in neighboring houses. One was poor but quarrelsome, the other was wealthy but a miser. Now the poor scholar bought himself a rooster so that its crowing at dawn might wake him for the study of the Torah. So the cock crowed and its owner arose betimes for his sacred labors. Also the miserly scholar heard the cock crow and he too got up to study at daybreak.

Once the owner of the rooster said to his neighbor, "Since you share in the benefits of the rooster's cock-a-doodle it would only be fair that you also share in its upkeep."

"Did I ask you to buy the rooster?"

"No! But I see that you profit from it."

"Does it cost you anything if its crowing wakes me too?"

"Since you won't pay, let's go to the rabbi."

"Agreed!"

So they went to the rabbi. The rabbi pondered the matter long and gravely.

"It's a difficult case—a very difficult case!" he mused, stroking his beard reflectively. "Because of this I'll have to charge each of you a gulden for the hearing."

The two scholars were taken aback but nevertheless each paid the rabbi a gulden.

"Hear my judgment then," said the rabbi. "You, the owner of the rooster, say it's your rooster and therefore it crows only for you. Your neighbor, on the other hand, says that since he isn't deaf he too can't help hearing the rooster crow. But I say: it neither crows for you nor for him but for me so that you two blockheads can pay me a gulden each!"

*Too Clever Is Not Clever*

ONCE upon a time there was a *schlimazl*. He never earned anything and he never found anything, so he cursed his luck. But one day, as he was walking with eyes downcast, he suddenly saw a little bag lying on the path before him. Out of curiosity he picked it up and, to his amazement, found a hundred gulden in it.

That very day the sexton announced from the pulpit in the synagogue that the richest man in town had lost a large sum of money and that he had promised a substantial reward to the finder.

When the poor man heard this, he began to struggle with his conscience. Should he or should he not return the money? After all, no one had seen him find it, and at home his children were crying for food. Besides, wasn't the loser of the money rich? He'd hardly miss it!

Abashed suddenly by the wicked temptation that had come to him, the poor man hurried to return the money.

The rich man accepted the money without even a "thank-you" and began to count the guldens leisurely, one by one, in the meantime saying to himself, "This man is a ninny. I won't have to give him anything."

"May I have my reward?" mumbled the poor man timidly.

"Reward!" cried the rich man. "Reward for what? Before your very eyes I've just counted one hundred gulden. Yet I had two hundred gulden in that bag. Since you have already stolen a hundred you have some nerve to ask a reward."

"Then let us go to the rabbi," demanded the poor man.

"Very well," said the rich man.

The rabbi listened attentively to both men. Then he turned to the rich man and asked, "How much money was in the bag you lost?"

"Two hundred gulden."

"And how much money was in the bag you found?" asked the rabbi of the poor man.

"One hundred gulden."

"In that case," said the rabbi to the rich man, "the bag of money he found is not yours. I order you to give back the hundred gulden to this man!"

## RIDDLE SOLVERS

### INTRODUCTION

Talmudic dialectics developed in the Jew a penetrating subtlety; and also stimulated in him a love for cerebration for the sheer pleasure of it. Complicated bits of argumentation, mathematical puzzles, conundrums, clever retorts, ingenious word-play—all were pleasant diversions to drive away tedium, especially during the long winter evenings in the ghetto-towns and villages. Hundreds of riddles and stratagems which taxed the ingenuity were thus cooked up in those idle hours by the plain folk and bequeathed from one generation to another like precious gifts. Some of these were obviously borrowed from other peoples and adapted to suit Jewish folk-taste.

As with other Eastern peoples, the riddle-story was always popular among Jews. For centuries Jews lived in large numbers in Arab countries. Arab and Jew naturally borrowed readily from each other's culture. And so Jewish folklore shows Arabic influence to a marked degree, just as it, in turn, grafted its legends, tales and wise sayings on Arabic folklore. The riddle, *Rabbinal Arithmetic*, has an Arabic analogue, but it is indeed difficult, if not impossible, in dealing with intercultural fusion to determine primary origin. Attribution is frequently arbitrary and suppositional. This also holds true for *The Story of Kunz and the Shepherd*, taken from the *Maaseh-Buch*, the Sixteenth Century Yiddish folk-tale collection produced in the Rhineland. It has points of similarity to the English story, *King John and the Abbott*, and probably was an adaptation of a German variant.

N.A.

### *Alexander's Instruction*<sup>27</sup>

AFTER HIS triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Alexander of Macedonia and his legions drew southward. When they reached the first city the wise men there came out to greet the conqueror.

"I have ten questions to put to you," he told them. "If you are able to answer them for me I will know that you are indeed wise, and will let you go in peace."

"Speak, O King!" they replied with one voice.

"What distance is greater," asked Alexander, "that between Heaven and Earth or that between East and West?"

"That between East and West, O King! The sun rises in the East, therefore it can be observed easily, without the eye

being dazzled. It is the same when the sun sets in the West. However, when the sun sits high in the center of Heaven it is impossible for the naked eye to look at it. Its splendor blinds the eyes, for at that point the sun is nearer to man than East or West."

"Which was first created—Heaven or Earth?"

"Heaven! For Scripture says: 'In the beginning God created *Heaven* and Earth.' "

"What was first created—Light or Darkness?"

At this question the wise men hesitated before giving their answer. They thought, "If we say that Darkness is mentioned first in Scripture, he will want to know more and more and ask us ever harder questions, such as—what there is above Heaven and under the Earth, and what existed before Heaven and Earth were created, and what will exist after they pass. Therefore, let us better say that the question is too difficult for us to answer." So they said, "O King, the man does not live who could answer you this question."

"In that case," answered Alexander, "I will stop asking you such difficult questions and put to you easier ones.

"Tell me," he continued, "who is wise?"

"He who can foresee the future."

"Who is a hero?"

"He who conquers himself."

"Who is rich?"

"He who rests content with what he has."

"By what means does man preserve his life?"

"When he kills himself."

They meant: when a man destroys within himself all passion.

"By what means does a man bring about his own death?"

"When he clings to life."

They meant: when he holds on to his passions and belongs to them.

"What should a man do who wants to win friends?"

"He should flee from glory and should despise dominion and kingship."

"That is a very foolish answer!" cried Alexander. "It is precisely he who wants to win friends that must strive for glory. Then he will be in a position to do good to people."

"Is it better for man to live on dry land or on the water?" Alexander continued.

"Dry land is better for man. Ask anyone who has been to

sea and he will agree with what we say. They who live on the water never find peace of mind and live in constant anxiety."

Having concluded his questioning Alexander asked the wise men, "Which one of you is wisest?"

"We are all equally wise, O King! You must have observed that all of us replied to you at the same time."

"Why then do you shun us and don't obey my laws? Have you no fear of me, the great Alexander?"

"O King, the Angel of Evil also seeks daily to command men and to force them to obey them. Glory to him who disobeys him!"

Alexander was filled with rage, hearing such words.

"How dare you speak to me in this manner!" he cried. "Don't you know that one word from me and you will all die?"

"That we know most certainly, O King," the wise men replied calmly. "But do you think it is becoming for a mighty king like you to lie? Recall that you promised to let us go in peace after we had answered all your questions."

At this Alexander quieted down and gave the wise men presents of costly garments and golden neck-chains.

"I will now leave you and sail for Africa," he told them.

"For Africal" cried the wise men in astonishment. "Why, you'll find there mountains so high that they reach the sky! They'll surely obstruct and darken your way."

"Advise me then!" asked Alexander. "How can I find the right road there?"

"Get the asses from the far-off land of Luw to ride on," replied the wise men. "They can see in the dark. Bind on them threads of flax and hold firmly to them. Then you will be able to pass safely through the mountains."

And Alexander did as they said and reached his goal safely.

### *The Wisdom of the Jews<sup>28</sup>*

Two Jews were taken prisoner on Mount Carmel by a Persian, who then made them walk before him. Suddenly he overheard one prisoner say to the other, "I can see that a camel passed along this road before us who was blind in one eye, was loaded with two kegs: one with wine, the other with oil, and that of the two drivers who led the camel one was a Jew and the other a Persian."

"O you stiff-necked race!" mocked their Persian captor. "What peculiar people you are! How do you know all that you are saying?"

Thereupon, the Jew explained how he knew. "A camel usually grazes on both sides of the road, but you can very well see that only the grass on one side of the road is nibbled. This indicates that he could see with only one eye. For proof that the camel was loaded with two kegs, one of wine and one of oil, look on the ground. You will notice tell-tale drops. Also, it is easy to tell the nationality of the camel-drivers. When a Jew eats he throws the crumbs aside, but a Persian throws his crumbs right into the middle of the road."

Curious to find out whether what the Jew said was true, the Persian hastened ahead until he overtook a camel with two drivers. Questioning them, he found out that it was exactly as his captives had told him. He then returned and, kissing both Jews on the forehead, took them home with him. He made a great feast in their honor and sang and danced before them, exclaiming, "Praised be the God of the Jews who chose the children of Israel as His people and endows them with a share of His wisdom!"

### *How to Replenish a Treasury<sup>29</sup>*

THE Emperor Antoninus once sent a messenger to Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi with the following question: "The Imperial Treasury is rapidly being depleted. Can you advise me how to increase it?"

Rabbi Judah did not answer. Without a word he led the messenger into his garden. Then he went quietly about his work. He dug up large turnips and in their place planted little turnips. He did the same thing with beets and with radishes.

Seeing that Rabbi Judah was not inclined to answer him, the imperial messenger said to him, "Give me a letter."

"You need none."

The messenger then returned to Antoninus.

"Did Rabbi Judah give you a letter for me?"

"No."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"This neither."

"Did he do anything?"

"Yes, he led me into his garden, dug up large vegetables and in their stead planted small ones."

"Now I understand what his advice is!" exclaimed the Emperor.

Immediately he dismissed all his governors and tax collectors and replaced them with less illustrious but more honest officials who, before long, replenished the Imperial Treasury.

### *Rabbinical Arithmetic*

THREE men pooled their money and for twenty-seven hundred rubles bought seventeen horses in partnership. One had paid half of the money, another a third, and the third man a ninth. But, when the time came to divide the horses, they did not know how to do it. So they went to the rabbi for advice.

"Let me sleep on the matter overnight," he told them. "Come back tomorrow morning and bring your horses with you."

At the appointed hour the following morning the three partners brought their horses to the rabbi. The rabbi then went into his stable and led out his own horse. Mounting it, he drew up alongside the seventeen horses.

"My good friends," he said, "there are now eighteen horses here. You, who paid one half, take nine horses. You, who paid a third, take six horses. You, who paid one ninth, take two horses. Altogether you, therefore, have the seventeen horses disposed of."

Then the rabbi led his own horse back to the stable and returned to his Talmud.

### *The Real Son<sup>30</sup>*

A MAN once overheard his wife admonish their daughter: "Why aren't you more careful? If you want to sin make sure that no one suspects you. Follow my example! Here am I, a mother of ten children, yet your father doesn't know that only one of our sons is his!"

Her husband never betrayed the slightest sign that he had overheard her, but on his deathbed he had a will drawn up leaving all his possessions, "to my only son."

Everybody was confounded! No one knew who "the only son" was. So all the sons went to see Rabbi Banna'ah to have him decide who was to be the heir.

Rabbi Banna'ah pondered the matter and said, "Go, all of you, to your father's grave and clamor loud and long until he

reveals which one of you he had in mind as his true son and heir."

All the sons hastened to the cemetery, except one. He was really the "only son." But, unlike his brothers, he was determined that he would rather lose the inheritance than insult the memory of his father.

Rabbi Banna'ah then gave his decision. "The inheritance belongs to the son who didn't clamor at his father's grave."

### *The Innkeeper's Clever Daughter<sup>31</sup>*

ONCE there was a nobleman and he had three Jewish tenants on his estate. One held the forest concession, another operated the mill, the third, the poorest of them, ran the inn.

One day the nobleman summoned the three and said to them, "I am going to put to you three questions: 'Which is the swiftest thing in the world? Which is the fattest? Which is the dearest?' The one who answers correctly all of these questions won't have to pay me any rent for ten years. And whoever fails to give me the correct answer, I'll send packing from my estate."

The Jew who had the forest concession and the one who operated the mill did not think very long and decided between them to give the following answers: "The swiftest thing in the world is the nobleman's horse, the fattest is the nobleman's pig, and the dearest is the nobleman's wife."

The poor innkeeper, however, went home feeling very much worried. He had only three days' time to answer the nobleman's questions. He racked his brains. What answers could he give?

Now the innkeeper had a daughter. She was pretty and clever.

"What is worrying you so, father?" she asked.

He told her about the nobleman's three questions.

"Why shouldn't I worry?" he cried. "I've thought and thought but I cannot find the answers!"

"There is nothing to worry about, father," she told him. "The questions are very easy: The swiftest thing in the world is thought, the fattest is the earth, the dearest is sleep."

When the three days were up the three Jewish tenants went to see the landowner. Pridefully the first two gave the answers they had agreed upon beforehand, thinking that the landowner would feel flattered by them.

"You're wrong!" cried the nobleman. "Now pack up and leave my estate right away and don't you dare to come back!"

But, when he heard the innkeeper's answers he was filled with wonder.

"I like your answers very much," he told him, "but I know you didn't think them up by yourself. Confess—who gave you the answers?"

"It was my daughter," the innkeeper answered.

"Your daughter!" exclaimed the nobleman in surprise. "Since she is so clever I'd very much like to see her. Bring her to me in three days' time. But listen carefully: she must come here neither walking nor riding, neither dressed nor naked. She must also bring me a gift that is not a gift."

The innkeeper returned home even more worried than the first time.

"What now, father?" his daughter asked him. "What's worrying you?"

He then told her of the nobleman's request to see her and of his instructions.

"Well, what is there to worry about?" she said. "Go to the market-place and buy me a fishing net, also a goat, a couple of pigeons and several pounds of meat."

He did as she told him and brought to her his purchases.

At the appointed time she undressed and wound herself in the fishing net, so she was neither dressed nor naked. She then mounted the goat, her feet dragging on the ground, so that she was neither riding nor walking. Then she took the two pigeons in one hand and the meat in the other. In this way she arrived at the nobleman's house.

The nobleman stood at the window watching her arrival. As soon as he saw her he turned his dogs on her, and, as they tried to attack her, she threw them the meat. So they pounced on the meat and let her pass into the house.

"I've brought you a gift that is not a gift," she said to the nobleman, stretching out her hand holding the two pigeons. But suddenly she released the birds and they flew out of the window.

The nobleman was enchanted with her.

"What a very clever girl you are!" he cried. "I want to marry you, but only on one condition, never must you interfere in my affairs!"

She gave him her promise and he made her his wife.

One day, as she stood at the window, she saw a weeping peasant pass by.

"Why do you weep?" she asked him.

"My neighbor and I own a stable in partnership," he told her. "He keeps the wagon there and I a mare. Last night the mare gave birth to a pony under my neighbor's wagon. Whereupon, my neighbor insisted that the pony rightfully belonged to him. So I haled him before the nobleman who upheld him and said the pony was his. How unjust, I say!"

"Take my advice," the nobleman's wife said. "Get a fishing-rod and station yourself before my husband's window. Nearby you'll find a sand-heap. Pretend you're catching fish there. My husband will surely be amazed and will ask you: 'How can you catch fish in a sand-heap?' So you will answer him: 'If a wagon can give birth to a pony then I can catch fish in a sand-heap.'"

The peasant did as she told him and it happened exactly as she said it would.

When the nobleman heard the peasant's answer he said to him, "You didn't think this up out of your own head. Confess, who told you?"

"It was your wife."

Angrily the nobleman went to look for his wife.

"You have broken your promise not to interfere in my affairs!" he stormed at her. "Go and choose from all my possessions that which you deem the most precious and return to your father's house!"

"Very well," she answered, "I will go, but before I do I would like to dine with you for the last time."

He consented, and during dinner she plied him with much wine. When he had drunk a great deal he became drowsy and fell asleep. Thereupon she ordered that his carriage be made ready. She then drove him, as he slept, to her father's house.

When he sobered up and discovered where he was he asked in surprise, "How did I ever get here?"

"It was I who brought you here," his wife confessed. "Don't you remember telling me to choose the most precious possession you owned and then to return to my father's house? So I looked over all your possessions, and, not finding any of them as precious as you, I carried you away with me to my father's house."

The nobleman was overjoyed.

"Since you love me so, let's go home!" he said.

So they were reconciled and lived in prosperity and in honor for the rest of their lives.

### *The Farmer's Daughter*<sup>32</sup>

ONCE there was a king who was wise and mighty. He had a large harem of many wives and concubines.

One night he had a troubling dream. He saw an ape out of the land of Yemen sitting astride the necks of his wives and concubines and then leaping from one to another.

In the morning the king awoke feeling sad and depressed. He thought to himself gloomily, "The dream can mean nothing else but that the King of Yemen will conquer my country and will take my wives away from me."

When the chamberlain entered, as was his daily custom, he heard his master sighing.

"What makes you so sad, O King?" he asked. "Reveal your secret to your servant. Maybe I will be able to help you in your trouble."

The king told him, "I had a dream last night that made me have bitter forebodings of death. Do you know of any man who can interpret dreams well?"

"I have heard that only three days' journey from here there lives a man of great wisdom who can interpret the most confusing dreams. Tell me what troubles you, O King, and I will go to ask the help of this interpreter of dreams."

The king told him his dream and then said to the chamberlain, "Go now in peace."

And so the chamberlain mounted his mule and started out in search of the wise man.

On the following morning he met a farmer riding on an ass.

"Peace be with you, you tiller of the soil," he said, "you who are of earth and who eat earth."

The farmer laughed, hearing him speak so.

"Where are you travelling?" asked the chamberlain.

"I'm on my way home."

"Will you carry me or shall I carry you?" asked the chamberlain.

The farmer laughed again, saying, "Why should I carry you when you are riding a mule and I am mounted on an ass?"

Then they rode on together for a while.

Soon they came to a field covered with ripening wheat.

"See how beautiful the field looks and how full the wheat spears are!" said the farmer.

"Indeed, it's so," answered the chamberlain, "but the wheat has already been eaten."

They rode on and came upon a tower built upon a high cliff.

"See how strong this fortress is!" cried the farmer with admiration.

"It looks well fortified but it may be destroyed from within," replied the chamberlain. Further on he exclaimed, "Just look at the snow on the summit!"

Again the farmer laughed because it was in the middle of summer and there was no sign of snow anywhere.

Soon they approached a city and saw a dead man being borne on his bier to the cemetery.

"Is this one dead or alive?" asked the chamberlain.

At this the farmer thought to himself, "This man thinks he's clever, but he's the most stupid man I've ever met!"

When the sun began to set the chamberlain asked his companion, "Is there an inn in the neighborhood?"

The farmer replied, "Ahead of us is the village where I live. Bestow on me the honor of lodging with me. I have enough straw for your bed and fodder for your mule."

"I will gladly accept your hospitality," said the chamberlain.

Thus he accompanied the farmer to his house. The farmer served him food and drink, fed his mule and showed him the place where he could lie. The farmer then went to sleep beside his wife; his two daughters also slept in the same room.

At night the farmer woke his wife and daughters and said to them, "What a simpleton is our guest!" And he repeated all the remarkable things the chamberlain had said during their journey.

Now the farmer's youngest daughter, who was fifteen years old, was very clever. She said to her father, "Why do you call this man a fool? In my opinion he's very clever and wise. What he said is full of deep meaning and of great significance. I don't think you understood what he meant."

And then she went on to explain: "When he said that he who cultivates the soil also eats earth he referred to the origin of all food which springs from the earth."

"When he told you that you were of the earth, too, he was referring to the Scriptural passage: 'From dust you spring and to dust you shall return.'

"When he asked the question which one of you shall carry the other he was merely asking which one of you should entertain the other, for he who lightens the spirit of a fellow-traveller also lightens his journey so that he feels as if he were being carried.

"When he spoke of the wheat growing in the field he could very well have been right, for if the owner of the field was poor and in debt he most likely had already sold the crop in advance.

"When he held that the tower was not strongly fortified he merely pointed to the possibilities of traitors being within its walls and of there being an insufficient stock of food and water inside.

"When he said that there was snow on the mountain he was merely referring to your grey hair and beard. You should have answered: 'Time has done that to me.'

"When he asked whether the dead man was dead or alive he merely wished to inquire whether he left children behind, and if he did he was alive, even though dead."

The farmer was under the impression that the chamberlain was fast asleep, but in fact he was very much awake and had eagerly followed the daughter in her explanation.

When the morning came the daughter said to her father, "I want you to give our guest before he leaves us whatever food I'll give you."

So she placed before her father thirty eggs, a bowl of milk and a whole loaf.

"Now go to our guest and ask him how many days are still required to complete the month, whether the moon is full and the sun is whole."

Of the food that his daughter had served him the farmer ate only two eggs and a slice of bread, and also drank a little milk. The rest he placed before the chamberlain. Then he put to him the question his daughter had instructed him to ask.

The chamberlain listened and then replied, "Tell your daughter that two days are missing to complete the month and that neither the sun nor the moon are full."

The farmer went to his daughter and reported to her what the chamberlain had answered.

"Tell me truly, isn't the man a simpleton?" he asked. "We

are right in the middle of the month and here he claims that it is only two days before its end!"

"Tell me, father," asked the daughter. "Did you taste any of the food I gave you?"

"I ate two eggs, a slice of bread and drank a little milk," answered her father.

"Now I know that the stranger is a wise man!" cried the daughter.

When the chamberlain heard of the cleverness of the girl he was filled with astonishment.

"Let me speak with your daughter," he asked the farmer.

The farmer consented and the girl was introduced to the chamberlain. He asked her some more questions and she knew the right answers. Having convinced himself of her wisdom he told her the reason for his journey and gave her all the details of the king's dream.

When he had finished the girl said, "I know well what the ape that the king saw in his dream signifies but I will not confide it to anyone but the king himself."

The chamberlain now revealed his true identity to the farmer and his wife and begged them to allow their daughter to journey with him to the palace of the king. Her parents gave their consent, so the chamberlain brought the farmer's daughter before the king and she found favor in the king's eyes.

He led her into a private chamber where he repeated to her his dream and after he had spoken, she said, "O King, banish all worry from your mind! The ape you saw had no evil significance. But I dare not tell you the meaning of the dream in order not to cause you suffering."

"I command you to speak!" cried the king, sternly.

"Very well then," the girl answered. "Make a thorough search of your harem, and among your wives and your concubines and their maid servants you will find hidden an evil man who is disguised in woman's attire. He is the ape you saw in your dream."

So the king commanded that the matter be investigated, and it was as the farmer's daughter had said: they found a youth among them masquerading in woman's clothes. To teach his wives and concubines a lesson the king ordered that the man be cut down before their eyes and his blood be sprinkled on their faces. He also ordered killed all the women who had sinned with him.

And when all this was done he made the farmer's daughter his wife, and placed the royal crown on her head. He swore to give up all of his wives and concubines and the clever girl remained his only mate.

*The Story of Kunz and His Shepherd<sup>38</sup>*

THE proverb runs: "You will be left behind as Kunz was left behind to look after the sheep." And if you ask how Kunz came to be left behind to look after the sheep, I will tell you.

Once upon a time there was a mighty king, who had a counselor called Kunz. Whenever the king needed advice, and the counselors in conference came to a decision, the clever Kunz would go to the king and say: "This is our decision." This fine gentleman always took the credit to himself, pretending that he was responsible for the advice and that the other counselors had to agree with him, for they had neither sense nor understanding. And the good king believed what Kunz told him and considered him as much wiser than the other counselors.

Now the other counselors noticed that the king loved Kunz more than he loved them and they resented it very much, for he was the least important among them. One day they took counsel together how to get the better of Kunz and humiliate him. So they went to the king and said: "Lord king, we beg of you to forgive us, for we wish to ask you how it is that you think more of Kunz and hold him in higher esteem than the rest of us, although we know that he is the least important among us?" The king replied: "I will tell you how it happens. Whenever you come to a decision on any matter, he reports it to me and says that the idea is his and that you have to acknowledge every time that he is wiser than you and that you have no sense at all. But I do not hold you in disrespect, for you are all good to me." When the counselors heard this, they were very glad and thought: "We will soon bring about his downfall." Then they said to the king: "Be assured that all which Kunz said is a lie, for he has no sense at all. Try every one of us separately and you will see that he cannot give you any advice by himself." The king said: "I will find out very soon," and sent for his beloved counselor Kunz and said to him: "My dear servant, I know that you are loyal and exceedingly wise. Now I have something in my mind that I do not wish to reveal to anyone. Therefore I

want to ask you whether you can find out the truth for me, and if you do, I will reward you liberally." The clever Kunz replied: "My beloved king, ask me and I hope I can give you an answer. Tell me your secret." The king said: "I will ask you three questions. The first is: Where does the sun rise? The second is: How far is the sky from the earth? The third, my dear Kunz, is: What am I thinking?" When Kunz heard these three questions, he said: "Lord king, these are difficult matters, which cannot be answered offhand. They require time. I beg of you, therefore, to give me three days' time, and then I hope to give you the proper answer." The king replied: "My dear Kunz, your request is granted, I will give you three days' time." Kunz went away and thought to himself: "I cannot concentrate my mind very well in the city, I will go for a walk into the country. There I am alone and can reflect better than in the city."

He went out into the country and came upon the shepherd who was tending his flock. Walking along, he talked as it were to himself, saying: "Who can tell me how far the heavens are from the earth? Who can tell me where the sun rises? Who can tell me what the king is thinking?" The shepherd, seeing his master walking about wrapt in thought, said to him: "Sir, pardon me. I can see that you are greatly troubled in your mind. If you ask me, I might be able to help you. As the proverb says: 'One can often advise another, though one cannot advise oneself.'" When Kunz heard these words from the shepherd, he thought: "I will tell him. Perhaps after all he may be able to advise me." And he said: "I will tell you why I am so troubled. The king asked me three questions, which I must answer or lose my neck. I have been thinking about them and cannot find the answer." Then the shepherd said: "What are the three questions? Perhaps I may be able to help you in your great trouble." So Kunz thought: "I will tell him, maybe he is a scholar." And he said: "My dear shepherd, these are the three questions which the king asked me. I must tell him where the sun rises, how far the heavens are from the earth, and what the king is thinking." The shepherd thought it was well to know the answers and said to Kunz: "My dear master, give me your fine clothes, and you put on my poor garments and look after the sheep. I will go to the king and he will think that I am you and will ask me the three questions. Then I shall give him the proper answers and you will be saved from your trouble. Then I shall return

here and you will not be in disgrace with your king." Kunz allowed himself to be persuaded, gave the shepherd his good clothes and fine cloak, while he put on the shepherd's rough garments and sat down to look after the sheep, as though he had done it all his life.

When the three days had passed, the shepherd went to the king and said: "Lord king, I have been thinking over the three questions that you asked me." The king said: "Now tell me, where does the sun rise?" The shepherd replied: "The sun rises in the east and sets in the west." The king asked again: "How far are the heavens from the earth?" The shepherd replied: "As far as the earth is from the heavens." Then the king said: "What am I thinking?" The shepherd replied: "My lord king, you are thinking that I am your counselor Kunz, but I am not. I am the shepherd who looks after his flock. My master Kunz was walking in the field one day and saying to himself: 'Who can tell me where the sun rises? Who can tell me how far the heavens are from the earth? Who can tell me what the king has in his mind?' He was walking about all the time and talking in such fashion. So I told him he should give me his good clothes and I would give him my rough clothes; he should look after the sheep and I would, with the help of God, guess the answers to these three questions and save him. He allowed himself to be persuaded, and so he is now out in the field, dressed in my rough clothes and tending the sheep, while I am dressed in his beautiful cloak and his best clothes." When the king heard this, he said to the shepherd: "As you succeeded in persuading Kunz, you shall remain my counselor and Kunz can look after the sheep." Hence the proverb: "You will be left behind as Kunz was left behind to look after the sheep." This is what happened to him. May it go better with us.

# 2

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## *Miracles*

### CABALISTS, MYSTICS AND WONDER-WORKERS

#### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Beginning with the Talmudic era, there crept into Jewish thought a persistently mystical and life-denying element. But mysticism never really achieved a dominant position among Jews except for relatively brief periods when, under the stress of persecution, Jewish life became constricted. Then there were those who were eager to escape into the unreal and shadowy world of Cabala.

What is the Cabala? It is not just one book but an entire body of esoteric knowledge which had been created in the course of some two thousand years by those daringly imaginative but sickly minds, the cabalists. They were men disenchanted with life who sought to construct a bridge between "this vale of tears" and God. They were "God-intoxicated" men, dominated by a single drive: "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God!" (Psalm 42.1). To find God, the cabalists renounced the world with all its snares of the senses. They substituted intuition for reason, spirit for flesh, the hidden for the visible, and the unknown for the known.

Cabala, which in Hebrew means "The Received, or Traditional Lore," loftily referred to itself as "The Hidden Wisdom." It represented that kind of knowledge which could be acquired, not by ordinary reason, but by the illumination of the spirit. Therefore, only the spiritually elect, those who were "adepts in Grace," were deemed worthy enough to explore its secret meanings. In short, it was an "aristocratic" body of knowledge like some abstruse higher mathematics; *hoi polloi* had to rest content with Scripture itself.

The history of the Cabala winds along a complicated and un-

certain course. It is a strange mystical brew of diverse ingredients, combining Jewish ethics, Zoroastrian dualism, Pythagorean numerology, Neo-Platonic emanations and medieval Christian asceticism. While numerous works collectively constitute the Cabala, the two most prized are the *Sefer Yetzira* (Book of Creation) compiled during the Talmudic era, and the far better known *Zohar* (Splendor) which people sometimes erroneously use interchangeably with Cabala. This second work, ascribed by its first editor, the Spanish mystic Moses Shem-Tob de Leon (1250-1305), to the Galilean *Mishna* writer Simon bar Yohai (Second Century A.D.), became the scriptures of the later cabalists. Next to the Bible itself it was revered above all other sacred Jewish works by its devotees and by awestruck superstitious folk. Because of this the Cabala fell into disrepute among the rationalists. This explains the popular misconception of the Cabala, usually based on inadequate knowledge, as being nothing but a silly hodge-podge of numerological and alphabetical abracadabra, childish beliefs, incantations, and various other kinds of mumbo-jumbo.

Although Jews lived in walled-in isolation in medieval times, they were exposed to the influences of the Christian and Islamic worlds about them. Monasticism, with its rejection of the life of the senses as cardinal sin, left a deep impression on the cabalists of the Middle Ages. They too mortified the flesh in order to subjugate it and, by the power of prayer, strove to break the bonds which kept their spirits earthbound. It was often a pietistic passion close to frenzy that burned like a consuming fire within them, all but destroying the frail human kernel in which the spirit dwelled. A vivid description of this kind of aberrated striving can be found in *The Cabalists*, a story by the Yiddish literary master I. L. Peretz, which is included in this section.

It is indeed a paradox of history that the Dark Ages among Jews had never really existed until the latter half of the Sixteenth Century. At the very time when the medieval darkness had sent civilization reeling backwards in Europe, the Jews were probably the most enlightened people in the world. They were the proud inheritors and disseminators not only of their own culture but of the Greek and Arabic civilizations as well. As has so often been pointed out by historians, the Jews were instrumental to a large measure in kindling the bright flame of learning and rationalism in a superstitious feudal society. However, in the twilight years of the Renaissance, while the Christian world was richly developing its sciences, its arts and the humanities, the Jews, yielding to the hammer blows of their enemies, were growing culturally weaker. Superstition, excessive piety and delirious cabalistic dreams proved excellent modes of escape from the unhappy reality of Jewish life. The legends about the Sixteenth Century Cabala mas-

ters of Safed in Palestine—Moses Cordovero, Joseph della Reyna, Alkabéz, Chayyim Vital, and Isaac Luria, better known as "The Ari"—wove their web of morbid enchantment around Jewish daily thinking and feeling. In addition to harassment from death, hunger, epidemics and persecution, the average Jew now had to endure the terror of a shadowy world haunted by unspeakable demons, specters, ghosts and *dibbukim* (transmigrating souls).

With the rise of the popular mystical sect, the *Hasidim* (The Pious), the Cabala took a new lease on life, but it went through an inner and outer transformation as well. Rabbi Israel Baal-Shem, the founder of *Hasidism*, introduced the Cabala into his mystic cult but without any of its forbidding austerities. He borrowed from it principally the ethical, the poetic and the ecstatic elements.

The legends of the *Hasidim* have a fascinating historical-religious background, unique in all folk-literature. Actually, the time span of their creation was less than two hundred years, for the sect was founded shortly before the middle of the Eighteenth Century. They are more than mere legends; they constitute a genuine body of devotional folk-literature. One of the best ways to worship God, the *Hasidim* believed, was to read and tell the wondrous tales about the *tzaddikim*. The singing of melodies, and the dance, were also considered forms of worship which could serve as substitutes for Torah-study.

The initiator of this social-religious movement, which toward the end of the Nineteenth Century embraced half of all the Jews in Europe, was Israel ben Eliezer, later known as Israel Baal-Shem, or Baal-Shem-Tov (Master of the Good Name). He was born in 1700, either in the Ukraine or in the Carpathian Mountains of Galicia, no one knows where for certain. All his life he revealed a great love for solitude and for nature. He wandered alone through field and forest and communed with God in the poetical-mystical way that was characteristic of him. It was at such times that he spun his visions of the aspiring soul and the redemption of man, which were to become the fundamental doctrines of his sect. Legend has Baal-Shem variously as a *bahelper*—a religious teacher's assistant—as a synagogue *shammes* in a Galician town, and as a drover in Volhynia. His humble calling exposed him to the ridicule of his middle-class opponents, the *misnagdim*, but it was of tremendous advantage to him in his evangelical labors among the common people, for he spoke the folk-language and articulated their spiritual hungers and hopes.

The immediate and widespread success of *Hasidism* was due to a variety of historical reasons. One hundred years before there had been the Thirty Years War in which the Jews suffered more than any others and from whose frightful ravages they never

fully recovered. In 1648 two cataclysmic events occurred. The first took place during the Cossack uprising against Polish rule, led by the Hetman Bogdan Chmielnicki. In the course of the struggle, terrible barbarities were perpetrated on the Jews. Some three hundred thousand, or about half of the Jewish population in the Ukraine, were massacred. The terrors of the time greatly resembled those initiated against the Jews by the Nazis in our days.

The effect of these mass-atrocities on the Jews of the world was prostrating. Many thought that the end of the world was already at hand, for one of the Jewish Messianic traditions is that, when the suffering of the Jewish people will have reached its most desperate point, God in His mercy will send the Messiah to redeem it.

During the year that the atrocities in the Ukraine occurred, a young Turkish Jew of arresting personality and magnetism, announced himself as the Messiah in the city of Salonika. This was the cabalist Sabbatai Zevi. Because the Jews of his day had the will to believe in a supernatural instrumentality that would save them from further disaster, he came as the answer to their prayers. Messianic hysteria swept like a conflagration over all of European Jewry. Tens of thousands liquidated their worldly affairs and readied themselves for the End of Days.

The result was the only one that could be expected under the circumstances: disillusionment. The psychologically complicated Sabbatai Zevi, after a series of exciting adventures, failed his followers in the end: he embraced Mohammedanism. The Jews of the world were split wide apart over the issue and the so-called "Sabbatian" controversy raged bitterly for more than a hundred years. But the effect of this debacle on the Jewish masses was paralyzing. They grieved and sank into a deep apathy.

However, poverty and persecution continued as usual. Confined in crowded ghettos, deprived of normal outlets for their energies, most Jews sought refuge in cabalistic superstitions and practices. To the Talmudic rationalists of the day religious worship had become ever more formalistic, suffering from a diminishing emotional content. The common folk could find no satisfaction in it, for many could barely read Hebrew and had been taught to recite their prayers parrot-fashion.

It was, therefore, as if in answer to a universal need for a comforter, that Baal-Shem appeared. He went from town to town, preaching an evangel of faith and joy. Laughter, song and the dance, he said, were the highest forms of prayer. Love of God he declared more important than formalistic religious worship. To do good among men was better than to observe the minutiae of Law and Ritual. Baal-Shem sanctified all that was humble, that was workaday. But all-fundamental was his central doctrine of

love: love of God and love of man. All life was holy, he said. The dry-as-dust, learned Talmudist or rabbi had less of a chance to taste the beatitude of the spirit and the rewards of Paradise than the pure in heart and the humble, even though they might be illiterate.

The evangel of *Hasidism* that Baal-Shem and his disciples preached was therefore as much of a socio-ethical nature as it was religious. It revitalized the Jewish spirit, revived hope, gave the people an affirmative philosophy of life that was warmly emotional, highly ethical, rich in earthiness though very mystical. It was a liveable, workable way of life, regardless of its admitted serious shortcomings.

The Rabbinic authorities, the Talmudic traditionalists, naturally condemned the new sect as heretical. They even pronounced the ban of excommunication against Baal-Shem. But all in vain. *Hasidism* was like a tidal wave sweeping over Galicia, Poland, Hungary, parts of the Ukraine and Lithuania. Nothing could stop it, for it answered an urgent need; the Jewish masses could not survive spiritually without it.

Unfortunately, *Hasidism*, like so many other religious sects, carried within itself the seed of corruption. It was inherent in the very institution of the *Tzaddik*—the Holy Man and Wonder-Worker—who became dynastic and was motivated sometimes by less than spiritual motives. As the intermediary between God's and man's desires, the *Tzaddik* was courted and adulated and offered gifts of money by his worshipping followers. It was but natural that some should have been tempted and thus flung the entire sect into disrepute. This led to a vulgarization of Baal-Shem's exalted teachings. None the less, the spirit of the movement withstood all the corrosions among the plain folk, as the numerous *Hasidic* legends and anecdotes in this collection reveal.

Although *Hasidism*, as a movement, is practically extinct at the present time, isolated circles of *Hasidim* are still to be found, even in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago. There are also *neo-Hasidim*. These are usually of a sophisticated, intellectual-mystical bent. Professor Martin Buber has been their leader, and at various times has had such influential adherents as Franz Werfel, Marc Chagall, Franz Kafka, Max Brod and Arnold Zweig.

N.A.

### *Why Rabbi Israel Laughed Three Times<sup>34</sup>*

ONE Friday night Rabbi Israel Baal-Shem, together with all his disciples, ushered in the Sabbath Bride with joyous ec-

stacy. But immediately after he had recited the benediction he leaned back in his chair and laughed uproariously.

The disciples who sat around him looked on in stunned silence. They were too over-awed by his sanctity to ask him why he laughed so. There was nothing they could see that could have given him cause for such laughter.

A while later he laughed again, and shortly thereafter, he laughed for the third time.

The disciples were filled with amazement. Never before had they seen him do anything like it.

Now it was the custom of Rabbi Israel that after the *Habdalah*, the prayer service that ushered out the departing Sabbath Bride, he would light his long-stemmed pipe. Then his disciple, Rabbi Kitzes, would enter his study and put to him all the questions about matters that had puzzled the disciples.

This time Rabbi Kitzes asked him, "Do tell me, Rabbi, why did you laugh three times yesterday? It must have been for some good reason."

"Have patience, I will soon reveal to you the reason why I laughed," replied Rabbi Israel.

Another Sabbath custom of Rabbi Israel's was that every Sabbath night after the *Habdalah* he would ride out of Miedziboz into the country. This time he ordered his coachman to make ready the large carriage. He took along with him on this journey his closest disciples.

All night long they rode in utter darkness, without knowing where they were going. When morning came they suddenly found themselves in the town of Kozenitz. So they went to call on the head of the community.

The whole town was full of excitement. Everybody talked of nothing but of Rabbi Israel's arrival. Many came to stand at a respectful distance and look upon his holy, radiant face.

After Rabbi Israel had finished the morning service he said to the head of the community, "Send for Reb Shabsi, the bookbinder."

"Shabsi, the bookbinder!" cried the elder, hardly believing what he had heard. "What do you want to see that old man for? While we consider him a good man he is not very learned in the Law. It seems to me, Rabbi, that it won't be adding much dignity to a man of your greatness to talk to such a common person. After all, we do have great scholars

and cabalists in Kozenitz. Surely you have more in common with them?"

But Rabbi Israel was firm.

"I have urgent need of *Reb Shabsi*, the bookbinder!" he insisted. "I must talk with him."

So a special messenger was sent to fetch *Reb Shabsi* and his wife.

When they finally arrived Rabbi Israel said to him, "Shabsi, I want you to tell all of us here what you did last night. But you must tell the truth—conceal nothing!"

"I will tell you everything that happened, dear Rabbi," began *Reb Shabsi*. "And, if I have sinned in any way, I trust you will punish me with the right penance.

"Ever since I got married I have earned my livelihood from binding books. I did well at one time. Every Thursday I'd give my wife enough money to make the necessary Sabbath purchases of *chaleh*, fish, meat, wine and wax candles. On Friday morning I closed shop at ten o'clock and went to the synagogue. There I cantillated the Song of Songs and remained all day until after the evening services. That was my custom all along until I grew old.

"Now I no longer have the energy to toil as I did before. I can hardly earn anything. When Thursday arrives my wife can no longer afford to make the necessary Sabbath purchases. There is only one precept that I've been able to follow scrupulously in the days of my decline. At ten o'clock on Friday morning I still close my shop and go to the House of Study.

"Last Friday morning I found I did not have even a groschen to give my wife, and I knew no one from whom I could borrow money, even for *chaleh*. I could not stoop to beg. Never in my life have I asked such help from people. Only in God did I place my trust and, when I saw that God had failed to provide for me the necessities for the Sabbath, I understood that it was just that it should be so.

"I then made up my mind to fast throughout the Sabbath. I had only one fear—that my wife would not be able to contain herself and would tell the neighbors. If she did they would surely give her *chaleh* and other Sabbath foods. So I begged her not to accept any help from anyone, no matter what happened.

"Before I left for the synagogue I told my wife that I planned to come home that Friday night later than usual

from the synagogue. I was afraid that I might accidentally meet some neighbor on the way who would be likely to ask me why there were no Sabbath candles burning in my house. So I remained behind in the synagogue until all had gone home—then I left.

"While I was away in the synagogue my old woman tidied up the house in honor of the Sabbath. But, as she was putting things in order, she unexpectedly found an old jacket that she had mislaid for a long time. The jacket had silver buttons overlaid with gold, as was the fashion in olden times. So my wife went and sold the buttons and, for the money, she bought candles because I had told her that I would be late in coming. She also bought *chaleh*, fish, meat and had some money left besides.

"I returned home from the synagogue quite late. What was my surprise to see large candles burning as I approached my house! I thought: 'Alas, my old woman couldn't hold back from telling her troubles to her neighbors!' When I entered the house I found the table set. There was wine for the benediction, and *chaleh* and all good things. I did not say anything to my wife because I did not wish to mar the Sabbath peace.

"My old woman saw, however, that I was not in a good mood. So, after I had recited the benediction, she said to me, 'Do you remember, Shabsi, how long I've been looking for my old jacket with the silver buttons? Well I found it after you had left for the synagogue. I sold the buttons, and what you see here was bought with the money I got for them.'

"When I heard this my joy was indescribable. I even shed tears and thanked the heavenly Father that we could observe the Sabbath decently without anybody's help. My joy was so great that I arose from the table, took my old woman by the hand and we began to dance. After we had finished the soup we danced once more, and after the sweet *tzimmes*, the dessert, we danced for the third time.

"And so, Holy Rabbi, if you think that by doing this I have sinned, then I beg you to judge me, and what you say I'll do. God alone knows the truth that in dancing my intention was not to display levity but to praise and thank Him for the grace and loving-kindness He has shown me."

And when the old man had finished speaking Rabbi Israel turned to his disciples and said, "Believe me, when Reb Shabsi and his old woman laughed and danced with joy all

the angels in heaven could not restrain themselves and they too laughed and danced through the celestial halls. And, if the angels of heaven could not restrain themselves, how could I? So I laughed once, twice and three times, just as they did!"

Then Rabbi Israel called to the bookbinder and his wife.

"Come nearer—tell me what you wish! Tell me what your heart most desires. Do you wish to be rich, to live in luxury and honor, or would you rather have a son to comfort you in your old age?"

"Do not mock at us, Holy Rabbi," *Reb Shabbi* answered. "We are both already very old and we never had a child before. Of course, what do we want with riches? We'd rather have a son whom we can love and who will be a comfort to us in our old age."

"Go in peace, then," said Rabbi Israel. "Know that before the year is over you will have a son. I will come to his circumcision and will act as his god-father. You will give him my name, Israel."

And it happened just as Rabbi Israel said. Within a year a child was born to the old bookbinder and his wife. Rabbi Israel was his god-father and he blessed him. As the years passed the boy became the illustrious Preacher of Kozenitz with whose wisdom the whole world became full. He was a saint and a sage, and may his fragrant memory be a blessing to all of us! Amen!

### *The Book of Mysteries<sup>35</sup>*

WHEN the children of Horodenka ceased to sing, Israel was no longer content to remain in that place. He wandered again, and returned to the town of Okup, where he had been born. There he became the watcher of the synagogue.

The desire for knowledge came into him; and the joy that was given him by flowers and beasts in the forests was no longer sufficient. His mind was afire and thirsty, but his thirst could be quenched only by those waters that had cooled for ages deep in the deepest wells of mystery, and the fire within him was of the sort that burns forever, and does not consume.

The innermost secrets of the Cabbala were for him, and they were only as stars of night against the sun. For to him would be revealed the Secret of Secrets.

The boy lived in the synagogue. But since the time for the revelation of his power was yet far away, he did not show his passion for the Torah to the men of the synagogue. By day, he slept on the benches, pretending to be a clod. But as soon as the last of the scholars blew out his candle and crept on his way toward home, Israel rose, and took the candle into a corner, and lighted it, and all night long he stood and read the Torah.

In another city the Tsadik Rabbi Adam, master of all mysteries, waited the coming of his last day. For in each generation one is chosen to carry throughout his lifetime the candle that is lighted from heaven. And the candle may never be set down. And the soul of the Tsadik may not return to eternal peace in the regions above until another such soul illuminates the earth.

Rabbi Adam was even greater than the Tsadikim who had been before him. For in the possession of Rabbi Adam was the Book that contains the Word of eternal might.

Though Rabbi Adam was not one of the Innocent souls, he had led a life so pure that this Book had been given into his hands. Before him, only six human beings had possessed the knowledge that was in the Book of Adam. The Book was given to the first man, Adam, and it was given to Abraham, to Joseph, to Joshua ben Nun, and to Solomon. And the seventh to whom it was given was the Tsadik, Rabbi Adam.

This is how he came to receive the Book.

When he had learned all Torah, and all Cabbala, he had not been content, but had searched day and night for the innermost secret of power. When he knew all the learning that there was among men, he said, "Man does not know." And he had begged of the angels.

One night Rabbi Adam arose from his sleep. He walked into a wilderness. Before him stood a mountain, and in the side of the mountain was a cave. And that was one mouth of the cave, whose other mouth was in the Holy Land. It was the cave of the Machpelah, where Abraham lies buried.

Rabbi Adam went deep into the cave, and there he found the Book.

All of his life Rabbi Adam had guarded the secret of knowledge. Gazing into it, he had grown old, and he had come to see with the grave eyes of one who sees to the end of things.

And when he saw himself growing old, he began to ask, "What will become of my wisdom?"

Then he rose, and looked to the Lord and said, "To whom, Almighty God, shall I leave the Book of Wisdom? Give me a son, that I may teach him."

He was given a son. His son grew, and became learned in the Torah. The rabbi taught his son all that there was in the Torah. And he said, "My son learns well." He began to teach his son the Cabbala. His son was sharp in understanding. But when the boy had learned the secrets of the Cabbala, he asked no more. Then the old heart of Rabbi Adam was weary and yearned for death. "My son is not the one," he said.

Night after night Rabbi Adam prayed to the Almighty that he might be relieved of the burden of knowledge. And one night the word came to him, saying, "Give the Book into the hands of Rabbi Israel, son of Eleazer, who lives in Okup."

Rabbi Adam was thankful, for now he might give over his burden, and die. He said to his son, "Here is one book in which I have not read with you."

His son asked, "Was I not worthy?"

"You are not the predestined vessel," said Rabbi Adam. "You would break with the heat of the fluid."

Then he said to his son, "Seek out Rabbi Israel, in the city of Okup, for these leaves belong to him. And if he will be favourable toward you and receive you as his servant and instruct you in his Torah, then count yourself happy. For, my son, you must know that it is your fate to be the squire who gives into the hands of his knight the sword that has been tempered and sharpened by hundreds of divine spirits that now lie silent under the earth."

Soon Rabbi Adam died. His son did not think of himself, but thought only of fulfilling the mission his father had given into his charge. He deserted the city of his birth and, taking with him the leaves of the Book, went in search of that Rabbi Israel of whom his father had spoken.

The son of Rabbi Adam came to the town of Okup. He wished to keep secret the true reason of his coming, so he said, "I am seeking a bride. I would marry, and live my life here." The people of the town were delighted, and felt greatly honoured because the son of the Tsadik, Rabbi Adam, had chosen to live among them.

Every day he went to the synagogue. There he encountered scholars, and holy men, and rabbis. He asked their names of them. But he did not meet with any one called Rabbi Israel, son of Rabbi Eleazer.

Often, when all the others had gone from the synagogue, Rabbi Adam's son remained studying the Torah. Then he noticed that the boy who served in the synagogue also remained there, he saw that the eyes of the boy were bright with inner knowledge, and that his face was strained with unworldly happiness.

Rabbi Adam's son went to the elders of the house of prayer and said to them, "Let me have a separate room in which to study. Perhaps I shall want to sleep there sometimes when I study late into the night. Then give me the boy Israel as a servant."

"Why has he chosen the boy Israel, who is a clod?" the elders asked.

Then they remembered that Israel was the son of Rabbi Eleazer. "He has chosen him to honour the memory of his father, Eleazer, who was a very holy man," they said.

When the boy came to serve him, the son of Rabbi Adam asked, "What is your name?"

"Israel, son of Eleazer."

The master watched the boy, and soon came to feel certain that this was indeed the Rabbi Israel whom he sought.

One night he remained late in the synagogue. He lay down on a bench, and pretended to be asleep. He opened his eyes a little, and he saw how the boy Israel arose and took a candle and lighted it, and covered the light, standing in a corner and studying the Torah. For many hours the boy remained motionless in an intensity of study that the rabbi had known only in his father, the Tsadik Rabbi Adam.

All night long the boy studied. And when the sunrise embraced his candle flame, he slipped down upon the bench, and slept.

Then the rabbi arose and took a leaf from the holy book his father had given him, and placed the leaf on the breast of Israel.

Soon the boy stirred, and sleeping reached his hand toward the page of writing. He held the page before his eyes, and opened his eyes and read. As he read, he rose. He bent over the page of mysteries, and studied it, and his whole face was aflame, his eyes glowed as if they had pierced into the heart

of the earth, and his hands burned as if they lay against the heart of the earth.

When full day came, the boy fell powerless upon the bench, and slept.

The rabbi sat by him and watched over him until he awoke again. Then the rabbi placed his hand upon the boy's hand that held the leaf out of the book. The rabbi took the other pages of the book, and gave them to him, saying: "Know, that I place in your hands the infinite wisdom that God gave forth on Mount Sinai. The words that are in this book have been entrusted only in the hearts of the chosen of the chosen. When no soul on earth was worthy to contain its wisdom, this book lay hidden from man. For centuries it was buried in unreachable depths. But always there came the time for its uncovering, again it was brought to light, again lost. My father was the last of the great souls to whom it was entrusted. I was not found worthy of retaining it, and through my hands my father transmits this book to your hands. I beg of you, Rabbi Israel, allow me to be your servant, let me be as the air about you, absorbing your holy words, that otherwise would be lost in nothingness."

Israel answered, "Let it be so. We will go out of the city, and give ourselves over to the study of this book."

The son of Rabbi Adam went with Israel to live in a house that stood outside of the town. There, day and night, they were absorbed in the study of the pages that contained the words of all the mysteries.

Israel was as one who feeds on honey and walks on golden clouds. His soul swelled with tranquil joy, and his heart was filled with the peace of understanding. Often, he went with the leaves of the book into the forest, and there, the words of the book were as the words spoken to him by the flowers and by the beasts.

But the son of Rabbi Adam was eaten by that upon which he fed, and yet his hunger grew ever more insatiable. The grander the visions that opened before him, the greater was the cavern within himself. And he was afraid, as one who stands on a great height and looks downward.

Each day, his eyes sank deeper, and became more red.

Rabbi Israel, seeing the illness that was come into his com-

panion, said to him, "What is it that consumes you? What is it that you desire?"

Then the son of Rabbi Adam said, "Only one thing can give me rest. All that has been revealed to me has set me flaming with a single curiosity, and each new mystery that is solved before me only causes a greater chaos in my mind, and a greater hunger in my heart."

"What is the one thing that you desire?"

"Reveal the Word to me!"

"The Word is inviolate!" cried Rabbi Israel.

But the son of Rabbi Adam fell on his knees and cried, "Until I see the end of all wisdom, I cannot come to rest! Call down the highest of powers, the Giver of the Torah Himself, force Him to come down to us, otherwise I am lost!"

Then the Master shrank from him. He said, "The hour has not yet come for His descent to earth."

His companion was silent. He never pleaded with Israel again.

But each day Rabbi Israel saw his face become darker, and his body become more feeble. The hands were weak, and could hardly turn a leaf.

Rabbi Israel was torn with pity for his companion.

At last he said, "Is it still your wish that we name the Giver of the Torah, and call Him to earth once more?"

The son of Rabbi Adam remained silent. But he lifted his eyes to the eyes of Rabbi Israel. They were as the eyes of the dead come to life.

"Then we must purify our souls, that they may reach the uttermost power of will."

On Friday, the two rabbis went to the mikweh, where they bathed in the spring of holy water. From Sabbath to Sabbath they fasted, and when they reached the height of their fast they went again to the mikweh, and purified themselves in the bath.

On the second Friday night they stood in their house of prayer. They called upon their own souls and said, "Are you pure?" Their souls answered, "We have been purified."

Then Rabbi Israel raised his hands into the darkness, and cried out the terrible Name.

The son of Rabbi Adam raised his arms aloft, and his feeble lips moved as he repeated the unknowable Word.

But in the instant that the word left those lips, Israel touched him and said, "My brother, you have made an error!

Your command was wrongly uttered, it has been caught by the wind, it has been carried to the Lord of Fire! We are in the hands of death."

"I am lost," said the son of Rabbi Adam, "for I am not pure."

"Only one way is left to us," cried Rabbi Israel. "We must watch until day comes. If one of us closes an eyelid, the evil one will seize him, he is lost."

Then they began to watch. They stood guard over their souls. With their eyes open they watched. And the hours passed. They stood in prayer, and the hours passed.

But as dawn came, the son of Rabbi Adam, enfeebled by his week of purification, and by the long struggle against the darkness of night, wavered, his head nodded, and sank upon the table.

Rabbi Israel reached out his arm to raise him. But in that moment an unseen thing sped from the mouth of Rabbi Adam's son, and a flame devoured his heart, and his body sank to the ground.

### *The Trial of Rabbi Gershon<sup>56</sup>*

RABBI GERSHON of Kuth would not believe in the power of his brother-in-law. He said, "Rabbi Israel is nothing but a lime-burner come out of the mountains. He couldn't even earn a living as a tavernkeeper."

Once he went to Medzibuz to visit his sister. And he thought, "Let me see the wonder-working of this brother-in-law of mine." So he remained over the Sabbath.

On Friday afternoon he saw Rabbi Israel prepare for the Mincha prayer. "But it is still very early," said Rabbi Gershon. Nevertheless, the Master began to pray. And when Rabbi Israel came to say the benediction he remained standing motionless on his feet for four whole hours. Perspiration was upon his forehead, and his face was in an agony of labour. But at last he made an end to his prayer.

"Why did you take four hours to say the benedictions?" asked Rabbi Gershon.

"Stay until next Sabbath," said Rabbi Israel, "and I shall teach you how to say the benedictions as I say them."

Now, the truth was that when the Master said the benedictions on the eve of Sabbath, he first uttered the Word of the Will, that sundered the bonds of all dead and living souls.

Then myriads of dead souls came rushing toward him out of their eternal wandering in nothingness, and begged him to put them in his prayers, so that his prayers might at last carry them into heaven.

When he uttered the words "Quicken the Dead!" he was always surrounded by these innumerable exiled souls, and it was the labour of carrying these souls into heaven that occupied him for so many hours. But at this labour he worked unceasingly, lifting the dead souls onto the wings of his powerful prayers, and sending them into heaven, until he heard the Daughter of the Voice call "Holy! Holy!" Then he knew that no more souls could be admitted into heaven on that day, and he made an end to his prayer.

On the following Friday afternoon the Baal Shem Tov said to his brother-in-law Rabbi Gershon, "I will tell you a word to utter before you begin the Mincha prayer. Then you will understand why I remain so many hours over the benedictions." And he whispered the secret Word of the Will to Rabbi Gershon.

Rabbi Gershon repeated the Word, and began to say Mincha.

But Rabbi Israel himself did not begin to pray. He stood and toyed with his tobacco pouch, and fingered the alms-box, and waited. He waited until Rabbi Gershon came to the words "Quicken the Dead!"

And in that instant there came a terrible rush of souls, thousands upon thousands of dead souls came flying to crowd weeping and shrieking and begging around the praying Rabbi Gershon. And Rabbi Gershon fainted with fright.

When the Baal Shem Tov had taken care of his brother-in-law, he set himself to say the benedictions, and helped those thousands of souls into heaven.

### *The Poor Wayfarer<sup>37</sup>*

THE great wonder-working saint, Rabbi Meier Primishlaner, blessings on his name, once related the following story:

"When I was a young man I had an irresistible desire to see Elijah the Prophet, and so I pleaded with my father to show him to me. My father replied, 'If you study the Torah with unceasing devotion you'll become worthy of seeing him.'

"I, therefore, applied myself ardently to my studies, pored over the sacred books by night and by day for four weeks.

Then I went to my father and told him, 'I've done what you asked me to do, but, I assure you, the Prophet Elijah has failed to reveal himself.'

"So my father replied, 'Don't you be so impatient! If you deserve it he'll surely reveal himself to you.'

"One night, as I sat at my desk in my father's House of Study, a poor man came in. He was dusty from the road and dressed in tatters, one patch laid on the other. Moreover, he had a very ugly face. On his bent back he carried a heavy pack. As he began to put his pack down I restrained him. 'Don't you do this!' I rebuked him angrily. 'What do you take this holy place to be—a tavern?'

"'I'm very tired!' the wayfarer pleaded. 'Let me rest here awhile, then I'll look for lodgings.'

"'It's no use,' I told him, 'you can't rest here! My father doesn't like all kinds of tramps to come and settle themselves here with their dusty packs.'

"So the stranger sighed, lifted his pack to his shoulders, and went away.

"No sooner had he gone, than my father came in.

"'Well, have you seen the Prophet Elijah?' he asked me.

"'No, not yet,' I replied sadly.

"'Was nobody here today?' he further asked.

"'Yes,' I said. 'A poor wayfarer carrying a heavy pack was here just before.'

"'Did you say *sholom aleichem* to him?'

"'That I didn't.'

"'Why didn't you? Didn't you know it was Elijah? Now I'm afraid it's too late!'

"Ever since," said Rabbi Meier Primishlaner, concluding his story, "I've taken upon myself the sacred obligation to say *sholom aleichem* with a full heart to every man, no matter who he is, or how he looks, or what his station in life may be."

### *The Cabalists<sup>88</sup>*

IN BAD times the finest merchandise loses its value, even the *Torah*—which is the best *Schoirah*. And thus of the big *Yeshiva* of Lashtshivo, there remained only the principal, Reb Yekel, and one of his students.

The principal is an old, lean Jew, with a long unkempt beard and extinguished eyes. Lemech, his favourite pupil, is a

tall, slight, pale-faced youth, with black curly locks, sparkling, dark-rimmed eyes, dry lips, and an emaciated throat, showing the pointed Adam's apple. Both the principal and his pupil are wearing tattered garments showing their naked breasts, as they are too poor to buy shirts. With great difficulty the principal is dragging on his feet a pair of peasant's boots, whilst the student, with stockingless feet, is shuffling along in a pair of sabots much too big for him. The two alone had remained of all the inmates of the once famous *Yeshiva*.

Since the impoverished townspeople had begun to send less and less food to the *Yeshiva* and to offer fewer days to the students, the latter had made tracks for other towns. Reb Yekel, however, was resolved to die and be buried at Lashtshivo, whilst his favourite pupil was anxious to close his beloved master's eyes.

Both now very frequently suffer the pangs of hunger. And when you take insufficient nourishment your nights are often sleepless, and after a good many hungry days and sleepless nights you begin to feel an inclination to study the *Cabbala*. If you are already forced to lie awake at night and go hungry during the day, then why not at least derive some benefit from such a life? At least avail yourself of your long fasts and mortifications of the body to force open the gates of the invisible world and get a glimpse of all the mysteries it contains, of angels and spirits.

And thus the two had been studying the *Cabbala* for some time. They are now seated at a long table in the empty lecture-room. Other Jews had already finished their mid-day meal, but for these two it was still before breakfast! They are, however, quite used to it. His eyes half-shut, the principal is talking, whilst the pupil, his head leaning on both his hands, is listening.

"There are," the principal is saying, "four degrees of perfection. One man knows only a small portion, another a half, whilst a third knows an entire melody. The *Rebbe*, of blessed memory, knew, for instance, an entire melody. And I," he added sadly, "I have only been vouchsafed the grace of knowing but a small piece, a very small piece, just as big as—"

He measured a tiny portion of his lean and emaciated finger, and continued:

"There are melodies which require words. That is the lowest degree. There is also a higher degree; it is a melody

that requires no words, it is sung without words—as a pure melody. But even this melody requires a voice and lips to express itself. And the lips, you understand me, are appertaining to *matter*. The voice itself, though a nobler and higher form of matter, is still material in its essence. We may say that the voice is standing on the border-line between matter and spirit. Anyhow, the melody which is still dependent upon voice and lips is not yet pure, not yet entirely pure, not real spirit.

"The true, highest melody, however, is that which is sung without any voice. It resounds in the interior of man, is vibrating in his heart and in all his limbs.

"And that is how we are to understand the words of King David, when he says in his Psalms: 'All my bones are praising the Lord.' The melody should vibrate in the marrow of our bones, and such is the most beautiful song of praise addressed to the Lord, blessed be His name. For such a melody has not been invented by a being of flesh and blood; it is a portion of that melody with which the Lord once created the Universe: it is a part of the soul which He has breathed into His creation. It is thus that the heavenly hosts are singing—"

The sudden arrival of a ragged fellow, a carrier, his loins girt with a cord, interrupted the lecture. Entering the room, the messenger placed a dish of gruel soup and a piece of bread upon the table before the *Rosh-Yeshiva* and said in a rough voice, "Reb Tevel sends this food for the *Rosh-Yeshiva*." Turning to the door, he added: "I will come later to fetch the dish."

Torn away from the celestial harmonies by the sound of the fellow's voice, the principal slowly and painfully rose from his seat and dragged his feet in their heavy boots to the water basin near the door, where he performed the ritual ablution of his hands. He continued to talk all the time, but with less enthusiasm, whilst the pupil was following him with shining, dreamy eyes, and straining his ears.

"I have not even been found worthy," said the principal sadly, "to know the degree at which this can be attained, nor do I know through which of the celestial gates it enters. You see," he added with a smile, "I know well enough the necessary mortifications and prayers, and I will communicate them to you even to-day."

The eyes of the student are almost starting out of their

sockets, and his mouth is wide open; he is literally swallowing every word his master is uttering. But the master interrupts himself. He performs the ritual ablution of his hands, dries them, and recites the prescribed benediction; he then returns to the table and breaking off a piece of bread, recites with trembling lips the prescribed blessing. His shaking hands now seize the dish, and the moist vapour covers his emaciated face. He puts down the dish upon the table, takes the spoon into his right hand, whilst warming his left at the edge of the dish; all the time he is munching in his toothless mouth the morsel of bread over which he had said a blessing.

When his face and hands were warm enough, he wrinkled his brow and extending his thin, blue lips, began to blow. The pupil was staring at him all the time. But when the trembling lips of the old man were stretching out to meet the first spoonful of soup, something squeezed the young man's heart. Covering his face with his hands, he seemed to have shrivelled up.

A few minutes had scarcely elapsed when another man came in, also carrying a basin full of gruel soup and a piece of bread.

"Reb Yoisseyf sends the student his breakfast," he said.

The student never removed his hands from his face. Putting down his own spoon, the principal rose and went up to him. For a moment he looked down at the boy with eyes full of pride and love; then touching his shoulder, he said in a friendly and affectionate voice, "They have brought you food."

Slowly and unwillingly the student removed his hands from his face. He seemed to have grown paler still, and his dark-rimmed eyes were burning with an even more mysterious fire.

"I know, Rabbi," he said, "but I am not going to eat to-day."

"Are you going to fast the fourth day?" asked the *Rosh-Yeshiva*, greatly surprised. "And without me?" he added in a somewhat hurt tone.

"It is a particular fast-day," replied the student. "I am fasting to-day for penance."

"What are you talking about? Why must you do penance?"

"Yes, Rabbi, I must do penance, because a while ago, when you had just started to eat, I transgressed the commandment which says, 'Thou shalt not covet——'"

Late in the night the student woke up his master. The two were sleeping side by side on benches in the old lecture-hall.

"*Rebbe, Rebbe!*" called the student in a feeble voice.

"What is the matter?" The *Rosh-Yeshiva* woke with a start.

"Just now, I have been upon the highest summit."

"How's that?" asked the principal, not yet quite awake.

"There was a melody, and it has been singing in me."

The principal sat up.

"How's that? How's that?"

"I don't know it myself, *Rebbe*," answered the student in an almost inaudible voice. "As I could not find sleep I plunged myself into your lecture. I was anxious at any cost to learn that melody. Unable, however, to succeed, I was greatly grieved and began to weep. Everything in me was weeping, all my members were weeping before the Creator of the Universe. I recited the prayers and formulas you taught me; strange to say, not with my lips, but deep down in my heart. And suddenly I was dazzled by a great light. I closed my eyes, yet I could not shut out the light around me, a powerful dazzling light."

"That's it," said the old man leaning over.

"And in the midst of the strange light I felt so strong, so light-hearted. It seemed to me as if I had no weight, as if my body had lost its heaviness and that I could fly."

"That's right; that's right."

"And then I felt so merry, so happy and lively. My face remained motionless, my lips never stirred, and yet I laughed. I laughed so joyously, so heartily, so frankly and happily."

"That's it; that's it. That is right, in the intensest joy——"

"Then something began to hum in me, as if it were the beginning of a melody."

The *Rosh-Yeshiva* jumped up from his bench and stood up by his pupil's side.

"And then? And then?"

"Then I heard how it was singing in me."

"And what did you feel? What? What? Tell me!"

"I felt as if all my senses were closed and stopped; and there was something singing in me, just as it should be, without either words or tunes, only so——"

"How? How?"

"No, I can't say. At first I knew, then the song became——"

"What did the song become? What——?"

"A sort of music, as if there had been a violin in me, or as

if Yoineh, the musician, was sitting in my heart and playing one of the tunes he plays at the *Rebbe's* table. But it sounded much more beautiful, nobler and sadder, more spiritual; and all this was voiceless and tuneless, mere spirit."

"You lucky man——!"

"And now it is all gone," said the pupil, growing very sad. "My senses have again woken up, and I am so tired, so terribly tired that I . . . *Rebbe!*" the student suddenly cried, beating his breast. "*Rebbe*, recite with me the confession of the dying. They have to come to fetch me; they require a new choir-boy in the celestial choir. There is a white-winged angel—*Rebbe—Rebbe—Shmah Yisroel, Shmah—*"

Everybody in the town wished to die such a death, but the *Rosh-Yeshiva* found that it was not enough.

"Another few fast-days," he said, "and he would have died quite a different death. He would have died by a Divine Kiss."

### *The Rabbi Who Wished to Abolish Death*<sup>39</sup>

IT CHANCED once that a great calamity almost befell the Angel of Death. He came pretty near losing the knife with which he severs the life of man.

When Rabbi Joshua ben Levi was at the point of death the Angel of Death came to see him.

"Show me first my place in Paradise," pleaded Rabbi Joshua. "That will make it easier for me to depart from this life."

"Come, I will show you," answered the Angel of Death.

And so they ascended to the celestial regions.

On the way, Rabbi Joshua said to the Angel of Death, "Do give me your knife. I am afraid that you will frighten me with it while we are on the way."

The Angel of Death felt pity for him and gave him his knife.

When they at last arrived in Paradise the Angel of Death showed Rabbi Joshua the place reserved for him. A great yearning then seized Rabbi Joshua and he sprang forward within the Gates. But the Angel of Death seized hold of him by the skirts of his garment and tried to pull him back.

Having the knife in his possession Rabbi Joshua refused to budge from his place.

"I swear I will not leave Paradise!" he cried.

Thereupon, a great tumult was heard among the angels. It seemed very much as if death was about to be abolished from the world and people would be able to live forever, like the angels.

The Angel of Death stood in a great quandary. "What to do now?" he wondered.

The holy man had solemnly sworn that he would not leave Paradise, and who could violate the oath of such a man? So the Angel of Death went to complain to God Himself. And God said, "I decree that Rabbi Joshua must return to earth. His time has not come yet."

The Angel of Death came again to Rabbi Joshua and demanded in a terrible voice, "Give me back my knife!"

"I will not give it back to you!" cried Rabbi Joshua. "I want to abolish Death forever!"

Suddenly the Voice of God was heard sternly commanding, "Return the knife, Joshua! Man must continue to die!"

#### *Asking for the Impossible<sup>40</sup>*

IN THE days of Rabbi Isaac Luria, or as he was better known, *Ari Hakodesh*, "the Holy Lion," there lived in a certain country a king whose feet rested heavily on the necks of the Jews in his kingdom.

One day, he issued a royal proclamation ordering the Jews to raise for him an enormous sum of money in a very short time. Should they fail to carry out his command fully he threatened to drive them out of his kingdom.

When the Jews read the king's proclamation they rent their garments, strewed ashes upon their heads and went into mourning. Fervently they prayed to God to intercede for them and rescue them from certain disaster. For the Jews were very poor. Where could they get the money the king asked for? In their extremity they thought of "the Holy Lion." So they sent two messengers to him in Safed where he lived.

Blessed with fair winds the ship that carried the two messengers arrived safely in the Land of Israel. They journeyed by caravan to Safed without rest and reached the city late Friday, just before the holy Sabbath was ushered in.

Without loss of time they called on the Master of the Cabala. They found him attired in spotless white robes and surrounded by worshipful disciples. His face shone as radiant-

ly as the springtime sun and he had the appearance of an angel of God.

"What brings you to Safed?" he asked the two messengers.

They answered: "We have come to ask for your intercession with God in order that we may not perish from the earth."

And they told him of the mortal danger they and all their brethren in the distant kingdom were in.

When they had spoken the Seer replied, "It is a sin to desecrate the peace of the Sabbath with sad thoughts. Remain with me until tomorrow night, then you will depart. Banish all fear and be carefree, for God never abandons the righteous."

When the following evening came and Rabbi Isaac Luria had finished blessing the departing Sabbath-Bride, he turned to his disciples and to the two messengers and said:

"Take with you a long rope and follow me."

So they all did as he bade them and followed him into the fields. At last he stopped before a deep pit and commanded:

"Lower the rope into the bottom of this pit and hold fast to the end."

The disciples and the messengers did as he told them.

"Now pull with all your might!" he ordered.

Filled with wonder they pulled on the rope and felt a great weight below. When they had drawn the object to the surface they were startled to see that it was a magnificent couch. They could hardly believe their own eyes at what they saw: on it lay a king fast asleep.

Rabbi Isaac went up to the sleeper and shook him, crying, "Are you the hard-hearted ruler who so cruelly oppresses the Jews in his kingdom?"

"I am," answered the king, quaking in every limb.

"Get up, then!" sternly commanded the holy man.

The king got out of bed; his face was full of fear. Rabbi Isaac then handed him a dipper that had no bottom and said, "Empty the well with this dipper. I expect you to be through with your task before dawn."

When the king saw that this dipper had no bottom he wailed, "Even were I to live a thousand years I wouldn't be able to empty the well with this useless dipper!"

"Since you recognize that what I've asked you to do is impossible to accomplish—why then do you ask the impossible of the poor Jews in your kingdom?"

The king lowered his eyes and murmured, "You are right—I will withdraw my command. Only spare my life!"

"You must guarantee your assurance to me with your signet-ring," answered Rabbi Isaac.

And the king did as he was asked.

The following morning, when the king awoke from his sleep, he thought he had dreamt it all.

"What a frightful dream that was!" he shuddered. "Dreams are nothing but lies."

And he dismissed the matter from his mind.

When the day finally came for the Jews to bring the required sum of money the two messengers came before the king. They showed him his rescinding order with his signature. He recognized his seal and said, "It is my signature."

Then he gave them presents and let them depart in peace.

### *Rashi and Godfrey of Bouillon<sup>41</sup>*

IN THE days of the great scholar, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi), there lived in France the famous Godfrey de Bouillon. He was a brave man and a hero in battle, but he was also a destructive, cruel man. The repute of Rabbi Solomon's wisdom was spread over the land and also reached the ears of Godfrey. The prince tried his utmost to draw Rabbi Solomon into his service but to no avail; the scholar refused to leave his home.

Angered by the rabbi's stubbornness, Godfrey, accompanied by his men-at-arms, hastened to the town where the rabbi lived. He came before the House of Study and found all the doors wide open. The holy books lay open on the rabbi's desk yet he was nowhere to be seen.

"Solomon, Solomon!" Godfrey cried out in a loud voice.

The scholar replied, "What do you want of me, my lord?"

But, wondrous to relate, although Godfrey could hear his voice he could not see him.

"Where are you?" he asked him.

"I am right here," Rabbi Solomon replied.

"Why don't you reveal yourself in the flesh?"

"I am afraid of you."

"Don't fear me," Godfrey begged him. "I promise to do you no harm."

Hearing these words, Rabbi Solomon made himself visible before Godfrey.

"Now you have convinced me of your wisdom about which I have heard so much," said Godfrey. "I am going to tell you of the great plans I have made. My wish is to conquer Jerusalem from the Saracens. I have at my command two hundred large ships and one hundred thousand horsemen. There are also seven thousand horsemen in Akron who are ready to join my standard. With these forces I expect to crush the Saracens who are expert in the art of war. Therefore tell me, what do you think of my outlook for victory and don't be afraid to speak your mind."

Rabbi Solomon answered, "You will conquer Jerusalem but will rule over it only three days. On the fourth day the Saracens will rout you, and you will escape with only three horsemen."

Hearing this Godfrey of Bouillon was very angry.

"Beware, Jew!" he cried. "Should I return with four horsemen I will throw your carcass to the dogs and kill all Jews in the kingdom."

In the end it happened exactly as Rabbi Solomon foretold, but with one important exception: Godfrey of Bouillon returned, not with three but with four horsemen. He therefore gloated over the prospect of revenging himself on the scholar.

As Godfrey reached the town where Rabbi Solomon lived, a stone fell from the lintel of the gate and killed one of the four horsemen and his mount. At this Godfrey was filled with fear; he understood now, that with his great wisdom Rabbi Solomon had foreseen everything. Therefore, he went in search of him in order that he might do him homage.

But in the meantime the scholar had gone to join his forefathers and Godfrey grieved after him.

### *Rabbi Amram's Rhine Journey<sup>42</sup>*

THE teacher Rabbi Amram left his home town of Mayence for Cologne. There he opened a Talmudic college.

As the years passed and he grew old and infirm he saw that he no longer had the required strength to return to the town of his birth. Therefore, he instructed his students that, upon his death, they were to carry his body to Mayence and there bury it beside the graves of his forefathers. The students remarked that such a journey was charged with great danger for them.

To this Rabbi Amram answered, "Purify my body after I

die. Lay it in a coffin and then place the coffin in a small boat. Let the boat loose and it will drift with the tide up the River Rhine. In this way it will reach its right destination."

The time came at last when the soul departed from Rabbi Amram and his students went to fulfill their promise. They placed his coffin in a boat and set it adrift on the stream.

When the river-boatmen saw the strange bark with the coffin they understood that it carried a holy man whom they were duty-bound to lay in a grave in their town. So they stretched out their hands to pull the boat in, but, to their astonishment, the vessel glided backwards out of their reach. In this they saw the hand of God so they went to report the incident to the authorities.

When news of this got abroad multitudes came swarming to the river edge to see the extraordinary sight. Among them were also several Jews.

Once more the river-boatmen tried to lay their hands on the boat, but again the tiny craft glided away from them. It floated for a little distance until it reached the spot where the Jews stood.

Seeing this the authorities said to them, "Get into the boat and put an end to this mystery."

The Jews reached out their hands and the boat swiftly glided towards them. They climbed into it and pried open the lid of the coffin. There they saw the body of the sage and on it lay a scroll with Hebrew writing. It read: "Dear brothers and friends, members of the Holy Community of Mayence: I come to you from Cologne where I departed this life. I beg of you—bury me near where my forefathers lie."

At this the Jews went into mourning. They drew the coffin from the boat and placed it beside the bank of the Rhine. But the Christian burghers of Mayence wouldn't permit the coffin of the holy man to remain in the hands of the Jews, so they drove them away. They then tried to carry away the dead man in order to give him proper burial, but they could not lift the coffin. So they placed watchmen to guard it and on the very spot they erected a chapel which they henceforth called the Chapel of Amram.

In vain the Jews implored the authorities to return to them the body of Rabbi Amram.

Every night thereafter the spirit of Rabbi Amram appeared to his former students in Mayence in a dream.

"Bury me where my forefathers lie!" he begged them.

The students held counsel with one another in order that they might do their departed rabbi's urgent bidding.

One dark night they went and cut down the body of a criminal that hung on a tree outside the town. They drew Rabbi Amram's shroud on him and laid him in his place in the coffin. The holy man they bore to the Jewish cemetery and laid him to eternal rest according to the rites and customs of the Jews.

### *The Hidden Saint<sup>43</sup>*

IN THE holy city of Safed lived one of the *Lamed-Vav-Tzadikim*,<sup>44</sup> one of the thirty-six secret saints. He was very poor but he shared his crust with those who were even poorer than he. Yet he wished to disguise his virtue so that no one might say he was good and cause him to fall into the error of self-righteousness.

As the Passover holidays came near this meek saint fell gravely ill and was no longer able to earn his crust. His wife and children now suffered hunger. There seemed no chance at all that they would have the money to buy *matzos* and wine. And, since they were proud, no one knew of their plight. But the saint consoled his household, "Have faith in God—He raises up the fallen!"

No one in Safed knew of the holy man's trials except Rabbi Isaac Luria, "The Holy Lion," the Master of the secret wisdom of the Cabala. He took off his white garments of sanctity and put on a wayfarer's dusty clothes. With wanderer's staff in hand and a knapsack on his back he went forth to aid the hidden saint.

For a while he passed to and fro before the hidden saint's dwelling. Finally, when the good man came out, he saw standing before him a dusty traveller.

"*Sholom aleichem!*" the traveller greeted him.

"*Aleichem sholom!*" answered the saint. "Are you looking for someone?"

"No, but I'm in trouble," sighed the stranger. "I have no place to spend the holy Passover."

"I've nothing to give you, but you're welcome to stay with me," answered the saint.

The traveller was grateful and rejoiced in his good fortune.

"Here are a hundred *dinar*," he said to the saint. "Prepare the Passover feast!"

"What is your name?" asked the hidden saint in amazement.

"Rabbi Nissim they call me," the stranger replied.

On the first night of Passover the saint sat down to read the *Seder* service that tells of the liberation of the Jews from their bondage in Egypt, but he would not begin without the stranger who had not returned yet from the synagogue. He waited and waited, but in vain. Rabbi Nissim seemed to have disappeared. Suddenly, in a flash of illumination, the identity of the stranger became clear to him. No doubt the good Lord had sent an angel from Heaven to help him in his need!

Yet, neither he nor any one else knew that this Rabbi Nissim (*Miracles*) was none other than *The Holy Lion*, the *Ari* himself.

## MESSIAH STORIES

### INTRODUCTION

There is no agreement in Jewish tradition as to when and where the Messiah will come. One belief is that when men grow hopelessly bad that will be the time to expect his coming. Another belief is that he will come only when misfortune will rise up and sweep over Israel like the sea at flood-tide. Still another view is that the son of David will come to that generation which will repent of its evil ways and become thoroughly righteous.

Once, two sages of the Talmud, Rabbi Hai the Great and Rabbi Simeon ben Halafta, were travelling all night in the valley of Arbal. As the first rays of the sun shot over the rim of the horizon Rabbi Hai was filled with rapture. "Rabbi," he cried to his companion, "this will be the way the Jewish Redemption will come, like the rising sun, gradually, slowly, until it will appear in the sky in all its dazzling radiance."

The longing for the Messiah's coming was the golden dream of the Jewish people through the ages. The greater its suffering, the more unendurable its persecution—the more compelling became its escape drive to the mysticism of the Cabala. Where it could not cope with the problems of life by ordinary means its desperation led it to reach out to the supernatural, like day-dreaming children. By invoking the magical yet ever elusive powers supposed to reside in the hidden wisdom of the Cabala, they hoped to bring an end to their Exile and to their suffering. To hasten the coming of the Messiah and the Redemption of Israel became,

therefore, the single-minded objective of all cabalists, including some of the Eighteenth Century *Hasidic tzaddikim*.

The Messiah quest of the Cabalists is nowhere as strikingly projected as in the legend of Joseph della Reyna. It is the Golden Legend of the cabalists and is imbued with a lofty altruism. Considered in relation to the spirit and the culture of the times, the cabalists, by and large, were men of selfless and pure intention. To hasten the Redemption they were ready to offer every personal sacrifice, even to the extent of life itself.

Of all the legends of the cabalists that of Joseph della Reyna is the most dramatic. For many generations it has stirred the imagination and emotions of the Jewish folk-mind, for it articulates its ages-old longing for the Messiah. The Messianic tradition is the most fundamental and pervasive in Jewish religious thought. It poignantly reflects the frustration of the life-force of a whole people for many centuries. To the discerning reader it soon becomes clear that, behind all the medieval magical trappings of the legend of Joseph della Reyna, so natural to a superstitious age, there shines forth a moving ethical doctrine that is imbued with a compassion and selfless love for mankind.

N.A.

### *Joseph della Reyna Storms Heaven<sup>45</sup>*

SEEING that there were in Jerusalem so many pious men who sought God and loved truth, Rabbi Joseph della Reyna came to a firm decision:

"It is high time to force the coming of the Messiah!"

He knew full well that it would not be an easy thing to accomplish. None the less, he remained hopeful that where others had failed he would succeed.

Among his disciples there were five who were pure in heart and in intention. They were cabalists who had delved deeply into the secret truths of the *Zohar*. Night and day they sat with Rabbi Joseph over their sacred studies. It was to them that he revealed all the hidden wisdom of this world and the next. Together they would grieve and lament over the Exile of the *Shekhina*<sup>46</sup> and over the sorrows of the Jewish people in dispersion.

Once, as they sat studying the Cabala with deep inner rapture, Rabbi Joseph paused and said to the five disciples, "Know, that I have given much thought about you and have gone through great inner searching about myself. The Lord has blessed us with wisdom and knowledge. We have ac-

quired a greater mastery of the Cabala than have all those who have come before us. To us have been revealed all the innermost secrets of the Torah. By its power we are capable of performing the greatest wonders. For these reasons I have come to the conclusion that it is our duty to use these exceptional powers for great ends. We are able to accomplish something that will be sure to create a tremendous stir on earth and in heaven.

"My beloved sons, it is our sacred duty to drive all evil from the world, to hasten the coming of the Messiah, to redeem the Jewish people and to bring back the Holy Shekhina from its long Exile.

"Don't think I have arrived at my decision lightly. I have concerned myself with this matter for a long time and have drawn up my plans in detail. But because it is difficult for one individual to accomplish such a tremendous task I therefore require your help."

The five disciples answered as with one voice, "Holy Rabbi! We are eager to do everything necessary in order to help you in this great work. We know that God, blessed be His Name, is with you, and we hope that you will succeed in achieving your goal."

When Rabbi Joseph della Reyna heard this he rejoiced greatly and said to them, "We must now make ready for our holy task. Go, therefore, and bathe, put on clean raiment, and for three days and three nights thereafter you must keep your bodies and souls pure and holy. After that you will prepare food and drink to last a long time. On the third day we will go forth into the wilderness. We cannot return until we have successfully carried out our mission."

The disciples then went about making their preparations with great inner trembling. Their spirits, too, were filled with a sacred flame and longing to accomplish their task. So they bathed and made themselves clean. They put on white raiment and renounced all worldly interests. They preserved their bodies and their thoughts in purity and holiness. They also prepared ample provisions for the long journey.

On the third day they came to Rabbi Joseph della Reyna. When they arrived they found Rabbi Joseph in deep thought; a dazzling radiance streamed from his face. He was praying with such deep ecstasy that his soul seemed to have risen aloft from this world of sin. It soared upwards into the highest regions of Heaven.

When Rabbi Joseph saw his disciples he greeted them with the tenderness of a father.

"Come to me, my beloved disciples," he said. "You have done what I have asked of you. You are now worthy of helping me in my sacred task. God, blessed be He, will most assuredly show us the way. He will help us reach our goal by the power of His Holy Name."

"Amen!" the disciples answered fervently.

Their souls became intertwined with his and rose up from the sinful world, winging their way to the pure celestial regions.

Rabbi Joseph also had completed his preparations. Besides food and drink, he took along with him a writing quill and parchment.

"Let us go!" he said to his disciples.

And then they started out on their quest.

At last they came to Meron and prayed at the grave of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, the teacher of all cabalists, the author of the *Zohar*.

They spent three days and three nights there. They neither ate nor slept but delved into the mysteries of the *Zohar* and sent up flaming prayers to God.

On the third day, when dawn began to break, Rabbi Joseph suddenly ended his vigil and fell asleep. This filled his disciples with alarm. Could it be that the master's spirit was blemished with weakness? But they held their peace and did not say a word.

As Rabbi Joseph slept he dreamed that Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai and his son Eleazer came and reproved him: "How rash of you to have undertaken such a terrifying task as this! Be forewarned: you will fail miserably in your attempt! You will be beset by insuperable difficulties and dangers. You cannot emerge out of this alive and, having failed, your souls will be condemned to everlasting purgatory. However, since you are resolute in your decision, let us caution you to be discreet in your speech and in your actions, so that those evil spirits who wish to do you harm may not have any power over you."

"Almighty God, blessed be His Name, knows my pure intention," replied Rabbi Joseph. "He knows full well that what I am doing is not for my selfish ends but for the good of all the Jews and of all mankind. Therefore, He will help me

achieve my goal in order that I may sanctify His Name among all the peoples of the earth."

The souls of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai and his son Eleazer then gave their blessings to Rabbi Joseph.

"May God help and keep you wherever you may turn!" they prayed.

Rabbi Joseph awoke and told his disciples what he had dreamed. They then understood that he had fallen asleep by the Will of God, and that it was not due to weakness of spirit.

Then they arose and continued on their way.

Not far from Tiberias they came to a large forest and remained there all day. They tasted neither food nor drink for they wished to purify their bodies and spirits from earthly taint.

The beauty of the forest enveloped them. Cool green trees wafted their fragrance everywhere. The birds sat in the branches trilling their songs of joy to the Creator. But Rabbi Joseph and his disciples neither saw nor heard them out of fear that sensuous thoughts might snare them away from their sacred mission.

All day long they delved into the profoundest mysteries of Cabala, studied the sacred formulae, calculated *gematriot*<sup>47</sup> and drew mystic designs of God's ten emanations, the *Sefirot*.

This they did for two days and neither ate nor drank, all the time remaining apart from the earth and from its pleasures. Thirty-three times a day they purified their bodies in the Sea of Galilee and each time they repeated the holy formulae and incantations.

At the end of each day they broke their fast. But they tasted neither fish nor flesh. They ate only bread and water, but not too much of that, only enough to keep alive.

On the afternoon of the third day Rabbi Joseph and his disciples recited the *Mincha* prayers with great fervor and, as they stood silently pronouncing the eighteen benedictions, their thoughts dwelled with utmost concentration on the secret mysteries of the Cabala.

Rabbi Joseph della Reyna then prayed by himself. He invoked all the angels and seraphim to come to his aid. By the power of the Cabala he invoked the Prophet Elijah to make his appearance before him.

"O Elijah," he exhorted. "Come to me and teach me how I

should behave so that I may carry through the plan I have undertaken!"

No sooner had he finished praying than Elijah appeared.

"Tell me what it is you wish and I will teach it to you," he promised.

"Forgive me, Holy Prophet, for troubling you," Rabbi Joseph replied. "Believe me, it is not for my own glory and not for that of my ancestors but for the glory of God, blessed be His Name, of His people and of His Holy Torah. I believe I deserve your help. Show me the way I can triumph over Satan and his hosts. Show me how I can make holiness triumph over evil and thus bring redemption to all mankind."

Elijah the Prophet grew sad.

"I wish to warn you," he said, "that you have taken upon yourself a task that no human being can accomplish. In order to vanquish Satan and his demons you and your disciples must become holier and purer than you are. I might say that to triumph over Satan you will have to become like the very angels. Your aim, of course, is an exalted one and, should you succeed, you will be the happiest man on earth for you will have brought redemption to the whole world. Nevertheless, I warn you that you are attempting something beyond your human strength. Take my advice—abandon your plan!"

Thereupon Rabbi Joseph began to weep.

"Dear Prophet of God," he pleaded. "How can I give up what I have started? Do not abandon me now! It is too late for me to turn back. I have sworn before God that I will not rest until I have driven Satan from the earth and have brought Messiah, the Redeemer of the Jewish people and of all peoples. I will not rest until I have restored the *Shekhina* to the glory it possessed when the Temple still stood in Jerusalem. For these ends I am eager to sacrifice my life. Know that I will not let you go until you help me and show me the right path to follow and the right course to take."

As the Prophet Elijah looked upon Rabbi Joseph della Reyna he was filled with a great compassion for him.

"Dry your tears, dear son," he said. "I will help you in whatever way I can to fulfill your task. You and your disciples must continue fasting for twenty-one days, nor must you touch any impure thing. When you break your fast at night eat only a morsel of bread, just enough to keep alive. In addition, you must bathe twenty-one times in the Sea of Galilee so that you become pure and holy like the angels. And, when

the twenty-one days are up, you must enter into a fast which will last three days and three nights. At the end of the third day you must recite the *Mincha* prayers wearing *talith* and *tefillin*. After that you must recite the verse: 'Flaming angels surround the Holy One, blessed be He!' After that you must invoke the Angel Sandalfon by means of cabalistic formulae. Thereupon, he and his angel hosts will appear immediately.

"Be prepared with strong spices for the coming of these angels, so that they might revive you from the terror into which you will fall when you perceive the holy fire and the mighty whirlwind which will come in the wake of the Heavenly Host. Remember, when they appear you must fall upon your faces and recite the verse: 'Praised be His Name whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever!'

"After that the mighty Angel Sandalfon will reveal himself to you. You must then ask him what you should do in order to drive the spirit of evil from the world.

"If you do as I bid, and provided Almighty God wills it so, then you will be able to bring the Redemption for all the world."

After having blessed Rabbi Joseph and his disciples the Prophet Elijah vanished.

And Rabbi Joseph della Reyna and his five disciples did all that the Prophet Elijah had told them. When their fasting, vigils, prayers and austerities were over, a terrifying tumult arose in Heaven. The Angel Sandalfon with his host of seraphim swept down upon the earth amidst a whirlwind and with a pillar of flame before them. Seeing them, Rabbi Joseph and his disciples became faint with fear and fell upon their faces. But they smelled the strong spices and their energies returned.

Then they cried out: "Praised be His Name whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever!" Only then did they dare to look upon the angels clothed in flame and splendor.

The Angel Sandalfon now spoke and his voice sounded like the low muttering of thunder: "O sinful mortals! Where did you get the strength and the insolence to cause such a turmoil in all the Seven Heavens? How dare you trouble me and the Hosts of Heaven to descend to the sinful earth? I bid you desist from this madness!"

So great was the terror of Rabbi Joseph that he lost the power of speech. Finally he fortified his spirit and replied,

"Holy Angel Sandalfon! Believe me, I have not done this for my glory but for the glory of the Creator, blessed be His Name, for the glory of the Holy Torah, for the glory of the grandchildren of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Forgive me my insolence, for I could not help myself.

"I could no longer look on the suffering of my people in Exile. I could no longer stand by watching our enemies trampling us underfoot in the dust. My only aim is to drive away the impure demons who defile the world, who dim the holy flame of our faith. I wish to return the *Shekhina* to the ancient luster it had when the Temple still stood in Jerusalem. Let God be my witness that my intention is pure and my course upright!

"Therefore, O Holy Angel, I beg you to help me! Show me the right path, teach me the right course, so that I can bring the Messiah, the Redeemer, down on earth!"

The Angel Sandalfon was filled with compassion as he looked upon Rabbi Joseph della Reyna.

"May God be with you until you reach your goal!" he cried. "Rest assured that all angels in Heaven are in agreement that the Messiah should come and bring the Redemption for the Jewish people who suffer in Exile. Yet I must warn you that you have undertaken a very difficult task, for Satan and the demons have untold power. Even we, the angels, cannot vanquish them. Only if God Himself stands by you will you be able to achieve your aim. But how can you expect God to support you unless He believes that the right time has come for the Messiah?"

"Again I must warn you: your path is full of folly. Should you fail you might make matters even worse, you might hand the victory to Satan and he will become more arrogant and do greater evil than hitherto to mankind."

Rabbi Joseph's heart overflowed with bitterness. Alas! Even the mighty Angel Sandalfon would not help him!

In the meantime, the five disciples lay prostrate upon the ground, their faces hidden in terror.

"Rise up—rise up!" cried Rabbi Joseph. "Unite with me in prayer! Perhaps all together we will be able to soften the hearts of the angels and they will agree to help us in our great work."

Once again Rabbi Joseph della Reyna pleaded with the Angel Sandalfon, "Help me, show me the right way!"

Sadly the Angel Sandalfon replied, "If I have come to you

it is because you forced me by pronouncing the Ineffable Name, but alas, I cannot help you! I myself do not know the means by which you can triumph over Satan and the demons. My one duty is to guard the way along which the prayers of the righteous mount to Heaven and to bring them before the Throne of God. I have no power over Satan and do not know whether I can pit my strength against his.

"However, if you are so desperately determined to achieve your goal you must call upon the Angel Metatron and his hosts. They have been assigned by God to prevent Satan from growing stronger. Yet, I doubt very much whether you will be able to bring this great angel down to you. He resides in the Seventh Heaven right next to the Heavenly Throne. Therefore, not every prayer can penetrate up to him. Even should he hear you, I doubt whether you and your disciples will be able to survive the terror of his presence. Know that he appears as a pillar of fire and that his face is more dazzling than the sun. Therefore, I beg of you: abandon your plan, for it is madness!"

Still Rabbi Joseph would not submit.

"I know," said he brokenly, "that I am weak and insignificant. I know that it is impudence on my part to dare talk with angels and to contradict them. But I hope that the Ruler of the World, reading my heart, will not spurn my prayer and will aid me in the work that I have undertaken. O Angel of the World, help me! Tell me how I can bring the Angel Metatron down to earth."

"Since you insist," replied the Angel Sandalfon, "you and your disciples must do the following: You must fast forty more days and purify yourself twenty-one times each day in the Sea of Galilee. You must study Cabala and say your prayers incessantly. Both by day and by night must you purify your thoughts. You must eat still less than you have hitherto, and live on spices alone. After that you must recite the Ineffable Name formed by seventy-two letters and call upon Metatron, the Angel of this mystic name, to appear before you."

The Angel Sandalfon then gave Rabbi Joseph and his disciples his blessing, "May your spirits be strong and survive the terror of Metatron's presence!"

Then, followed by his host of Angels, he mounted to Heaven in a whirlwind.

The stubbornness of Rabbi Joseph della Reyna aroused all the angels in Heaven. Nothing was spoken of but his daring attempt to bring the Messiah down to earth. The Messiah himself was hopeful that soon he would have to descend on his white horse to the children of man.

Even his horse began to chafe and paw, eager to be let out of the Heavenly stable. Also, the Prophet Elijah took out his great *shofar* and began to practice on it, for he would be the one to announce the coming of the Messiah with a mighty blast.

When Satan got wind of the news he trembled at the danger that was threatening him. At the time when all the angels and seraphim in Heaven were rejoicing, he sat gnashing his teeth in the bottom-most regions of the lowest *Gehenna*. He then took counsel with his wife Lilith who upbraided him for doing nothing while their very existence was being threatened. Thereupon, Satan hurried off to press his complaints before God.

"The Angels are playing me a trick!" he cried. "They wish to make an end of me before my time has come! How, O Lord, can Messiah come when there are so many sinners among the Jews? As for this stubborn fool, Joseph della Reyna, give me permission to do with him what is just."

But God denied him his request, for the prayers that Rabbi Joseph and his disciples had intoned, their days and nights of fasting, their sacred reflection and austerities, stood around them like a fortified wall. Therefore, Satan had no power over them.

Yet Satan could not be silenced. God told him that, although his arguments were just, it still lay within God's power to hasten the Redemption, even before the appointed day, if He but wished it. Moreover, if the Jews possessed such a saint as Rabbi Joseph della Reyna they were indeed worthy of the Messiah's quick coming.

"However," added God, "should Joseph della Reyna stray from righteousness by even the thickness of a hair, I will give you the power to bring his plan to naught!"

When Rabbi Joseph della Reyna told his disciples what the Angel Sandalfon had counselled him to do, they answered with one voice, "We will do whatever you require of us!"

They then left Tiberias and went up to a mountain fastness. They found a cave and made their home in it. Here

they performed their austerities and vigils for forty days and forty nights, just as the Angel Sandalfon had said. Finally, they became released from all the tentacles of this sinful world and reached the highest degree of sanctity and virtue.

When the forty days were over they went farther into the wilderness and purified themselves in Lake Kishon. Then they recited the *Mincha* prayers with great fervor. After that they clasped hands and formed a mystic circle. They prayed that God might give them the necessary strength to survive the terror of the fiery presence of the Angel Metatron and of his angelic host.

Finally, Rabbi Joseph pronounced the Ineffable Name of God formed of seventy-two letters.

Thereupon, the earth became convulsed and trembled. Lightning and thunder rent the heavens and a whirlwind came.

Rabbi Joseph and his disciples stood firm, clasping hands in the mystic circle. They smelled strong spices to fortify their spirits and intoned prayers.

The Angel Metatron appeared, surrounded by his host of angels and seraphim.

"O sinful man!" cried the angels. "O puny creature of flesh and blood wretched as a worm! How dare you storm the Heavens with your prayers and oblige the angels to come to earth?"

Rabbi Joseph and his students were filled with terror. Summoning up all his courage, Rabbi Joseph spoke at last.

"Holy angels, help me! Give me the strength to talk to you!"

The Angel Metatron then drew near and touched Rabbi Joseph, whereupon he lost all fear and spoke. "Believe me, I have no evil intention. All I want is to bring the Messiah in order to end the Exile of the Jewish people. Therefore, teach me how to vanquish Satan and his evil power."

The Angel Metatron became stern.

"Foolish man!" he cried. "All your efforts are in vain! Know that Satan is all powerful. He is fortified by a great wall of the sins of the Jewish people. How can you expect to break through where others have failed? Only when God wills that the Messiah should come will He come. Therefore, abandon your plan!"

But Rabbi Joseph was stubborn.

"Almighty God has helped me thus far and I've remained among the living," he said. "Therefore, I will not turn back!"

When the Angel Metatron saw that Rabbi Joseph could not be moved in his determination he was filled with compassion for him. He then advised him what to do.

He revealed to him all the mystic formulae, all the incantations and the Ineffable Name. With their aid, he said, Rabbi Joseph would succeed in capturing Satan and Lilith and thus drive all evil from the world. With that accomplished, the Messiah would surely come!

He also had him engrave on a metal plate the Ineffable Name and taught him how to use it. He warned him especially to guard himself against the weakness of pity towards evil after he had made captive Satan and Lilith. Under no circumstance was he to give them any food or any spices to smell. If he did, all his efforts would be wasted. He would thus only expose himself to the revenge of Satan.

When the Angel Metatron and his host had departed, Rabbi Joseph and his disciples began making preparations for their battle with the Evil One.

Rabbi Joseph della Reyna and his five disciples went up on Mount Sheir. On the way they met many wild dogs. These, they very well knew, were demons that Satan had sent in order to confuse and frighten them. But Rabbi Joseph pronounced an incantation and they vanished.

As they continued on their way they came to a snow-capped mountain that seemed to pierce the very Heavens. They then pronounced mystic formulae that the angels had taught them and the mountain vanished.

On the third day they came to a turbulent sea. Here too they recited mystic formulae and the ocean dried up before their very eyes.

Further on they found their way obstructed by an iron wall which reached to the sky. Behind it stood Satan, lying in wait for them. Rabbi Joseph took a knife on which was engraved one of the mystic names of God and with it he ripped the wall asunder.

They then ascended a towering mountain from the top of which they heard the loud barking of dogs. When they finally reached the summit Rabbi Joseph saw a hut. As he tried to enter, two frightfully big dogs sprang at his throat. Rabbi Joseph recognized them to be Satan and Lilith, so he quickly

raised before them the metal plate with the Ineffable Name engraved upon it. Thereupon, they lost their evil power and slunk away.

The five disciples then bound the dogs with ropes on which were tied little metal amulets engraved with the mystic names of God. Immediately, the dogs were transformed. They took on the appearance of humans except that they had wings and fiery eyes.

"Do give us something to eat," they whined.

But Rabbi Joseph recalled the Angel Metatron's warning against falling prey to the weakness of pity towards evil. So he gave them no food.

Rabbi Joseph and his disciples were now filled with indescribable bliss. At last, at last, they had succeeded in capturing Satan and Lilith! Now they would be able to bring Messiah down to earth!

"Let us hurry!" impatiently cried Rabbi Joseph della Reyna to his disciples. "We are already nearing our goal! Soon the Gates of Heaven will open wide for us and the Holy Messiah will come forth to welcome us!"

All this time Satan and Lilith were moaning in heart-breaking voices, "Help us! Give us something to eat! We're dying of hunger!"

Still Rabbi Joseph della Reyna hardened his heart against them.

When they saw that they could not swerve him Satan and Lilith asked wheedingly, "At least give us a smell of your spices or we perish!"

Now Rabbi Joseph was a compassionate man. He could not endure the sight of suffering in man or beast. Having triumphed over Satan and Lilith he thought he could now safely show a small measure of magnanimity toward them. He therefore gave them some of the strong spices to smell.

Immediately, tongues of searing flame shot from their nostrils. All their former strength returned to them. They tore away their bonds and summoned to their aid hosts of shrieking demons and devils.

Two of the disciples instantly died of terror. Two of them went out of their minds and wandered away. Only Rabbi Joseph and one disciple remained.

A terrible wailing was now heard in Heaven and the angels went into mourning. The Messiah wept and led his white horse back into its Heavenly stall. Also the Prophet Elijah

grieved and hid the great *shofar* of the Redemption. Then the voice of the Almighty sounded:

"Pay heed, O Joseph della Reyna! No human has the power to end the Exile! I alone, God, will hasten the Redemption of the Jewish people when the right time comes!"

### *The Messiah Came to Town*

PERIODICALLY Rabbi Elijah, the Vilna Gaon, wished to do penance. So he went into "exile," wandered forth on foot disguised as a poor man. He carried a stick and wore the traditional beggar's sack so that no one knew who he was.

Once, when his period of "exile" was completed, Rabbi Elijah turned his face toward Vilna again. Footsore and weary he trudged the road back. At last a peasant, who was passing by in his wagon, gave him a lift to town. The peasant was slightly drunk and drowsy.

"Here, Jew, drive!" he said.

Rabbi Elijah took the reins and drove into Vilna while the peasant lay down to sleep in the back of the wagon.

As he drove through the streets the Jews recognized him. Everyone was filled with wonder, for they had never seen the likes of it since the day they were born. There, in the driver's seat and dressed in tatters like the commonest beggar, sat the "Crown of Israel," the greatest Jew on earth!

One Jew ran into the synagogue.

"The Messiah is coming! The Messiah is coming!" he cried jubilantly.

The people excitedly ran out of the synagogues, out of their shops and houses, and into the street in order to see the wonder of wonders.

"Where is the Messiah?" they asked the man.

"See for yourself!" he cried. "There's the Vilna Gaon! If the Vilna Gaon in beggar's rags is driving a wagon, who is worthy enough to be his passenger? It can be none other than the Messiah!"

### *Why the Messiah Doesn't Come<sup>48</sup>*

ONCE there was a poor man who, may God spare us all a like fate, did not have a groschen to his soul. Nevertheless, he sat night and day studying the Torah with pure intention, as God has bidden.

One Friday morning, when his wife discovered that they

did not have the wherewithal to buy the necessities for celebrating the Holy Sabbath, she drove him out of the house.

"Go to the marketplace!" she cried bitterly. "Look around—maybe you can earn a few kopeks so that the children and I will not have to starve on God's holy day!"

Lost in gloomy thoughts the poor man made his way to the marketplace.

"Alas!" he mused, "what a sad fate is mine! Instead of devoting my time to the study of the Torah I must now worry about groschen and kopeks!"

As he walked with downcast eyes he suddenly heard a voice near him say, "*Sholom aleichem!*"

"*Aleichem sholom!*" answered he. And, looking up, he saw an old man with a long gray beard and a wonderfully holy face.

"Who are you?" asked the poor man, overawed.

"I'm the Messiah!" answered the old man. "I see you are sad. Confide your trouble to me!"

And the poor man told him of his great need and of his grief in being diverted by base cares from his study of the Torah.

"Cease your lamentation!" said Messiah. "Let me give you this sack—it's a marvellous little sack! Whatever you desire the sack will give you. All you have to do is to put your hand into it and draw forth whatever your heart desires. The little sack has also another virtue. Should anyone wish to hurt you—all you have to do is to call out: 'Swallow him, little sack!' And, believe me, it will do exactly as you say."

Overjoyed, the poor man took the little sack, thanked Messiah in a heartfelt way, and returned home to his unhappy wife and children.

From that day on the wheel of fortune turned for him. He thrived and he prospered and was wanting for nothing of all the goods of the earth. He lived in honor and tranquility. He saw his children and his children's children grow up and marry happily, and sorrow shunned his threshold.

Unfortunately, like most men who grow rich, he forgot the manner in which his prosperity came to him, forgot to do good with it, to serve his fellowmen, to feed the poor and clothe the orphans. He even gave up his study of the Torah.

As he lay dying, he called his heirs to his bedside and said to them, "Give me my magic little sack. It will save me from the Angel of Death."

His heirs did as he had asked them.

When the Angel of Death rose up before him, he asked, "What is your name?"

"I will not tell you!" the dying man cried. "Leave me in peace!"

But the Angel of Death would not leave him. Again and again he repeated, "What is your name?"

When the dying man saw that he could not resist him any longer, he picked up his little sack and said, "Little sack, little sack! Swallow the Angel of Death!"

Immediately, the Angel of Death disappeared into the little sack.

In the meantime, on the Throne of Mercy sat the Celestial Judge impatiently waiting for the Angel of Death to arrive with his daily catch of souls.

Angered by his tardiness, God sent the angels Gabriel and Michael down to earth.

"Go," said He, "and find out what's keeping the Angel of Death."

When the angels came to the man they asked him, "Where is the Angel of Death?"

He did not answer. Again and again they asked him the question. When he saw that he could not stand up against them any longer he picked up his little sack and cried, "Little sack, little sack! Swallow the angel Michael!"

And lo and behold! Michael disappeared into the little sack.

When the angel Gabriel saw this he fled and returned to Heaven.

As Gabriel reported to God what had happened to him the Messiah suddenly recalled how he had given the little magic sack to a poor man he had once met.

"Lord," said the Messiah to God, "give me leave to go down and find this man."

So the Messiah descended to earth and went in search of the man. When he found him he asked him sternly, "What is the meaning of your conduct? Explain yourself!"

"You too!" cried the man angrily, not recognizing the Messiah. "How many more of you will come down to brow-beat me?"

"Why, don't you know who I am?" began the Messiah.

But before even he could finish what he had begun to say,

the man picked up his magic little sack and cried, "Little sack, little sack! Swallow this one too!"

And the Messiah also disappeared into the little sack.

And now, dear friends, do you want to know why the Messiah doesn't come?

## SKEPTICS AND SCOFFERS

### INTRODUCTION

The awed belief in the supernatural powers of the cabalists and in the wonder-working feats of the *Hasidic Tzaddikim* was far from being unanimous among the Jewish masses. These mystics always found a determined and powerful opposition arrayed against them in the Talmudic rationalists. The *Hasidim* especially had to contend with a dangerous enemy—one that fought with the devastating weapon of ridicule. The opponents of the *Hasidim* were known as *Misnagdim*. They were a gay set of rogues who created an entire humorous literature with their sly, tongue-in-the-cheek scoffing against the wonder-working rabbis, and most of all against their gullible, worshipful disciples. These quips and jokes received wide currency among the people and added a great deal to the merriment of Jewish community life which stood so badly in need of diversion. And if any proof is needed of the extraordinary capacity Jews have for telling jokes at their own expense it is furnished by the novel fact that these anti-*Hasidic* jokes were almost as popular among the *Hasidim* themselves as among the *Misnagdim*. Of course, the *Hasidim* found a convenient way of avoiding embarrassment. They always assumed that the scoffing was being directed against fanatics, to which category of *Hasidim* they themselves, of course, did not belong!

N.A.

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### Conclusive Proof

A WONDER-WORKING rabbi, accompanied by his disciples, once went on a journey. Late at night he came to a wayside inn. He knocked on the door and asked to be let in, but the innkeeper refused to get out of bed as it was a cold night. Full of holy wrath, the rabbi cried, "Wicked fellow! I hereby decree that your inn shall burn down tomorrow!"

Frightened out of his wits, the innkeeper got out of bed and let the rabbi and his disciples in. He treated them with

the utmost hospitality and set a feast before them. Mollified by the innkeeper's eagerness to please, the rabbi cried, "I now decree that your house shall not burn down tomorrow!"

And, miracles and wonders! It happened exactly as the rabbi said! The rabbi's disciples themselves witnessed this miracle. They saw with their own eyes that the inn did not burn down the next day!

### *The Right Kind of Judge*

A VILLAGER once came to see the rabbi in a big town and said to him, "Rabbi, I come from a nearby village. I want to bring a lawsuit against God. My reason for it is this. I had a wife and, in addition, ten thousand rubles. What did God do? First he took away the ten thousand rubles and, afterwards, my wife too. I ask you: what would it have mattered to God if He had done the reverse? Had He taken away my wife first I would have remained a widower with ten thousand rubles. In that case it would have been easy for me to have married a woman with a ten thousand ruble dowry. After that, had God wanted to take from me the ten thousand rubles, I still would have had left a wife and ten thousand rubles."

"Tell me, my friend," asked the rabbi a bit puzzled at all this, "why did you come to me with your suit and not to the rabbi in your village?"

"I'll be perfectly frank with you," replied the villager. "I couldn't trust such a matter to our rabbi because I know what a God-fearing man he is and he would give Him the decision. On the other hand, I know you have no fear of God and so, at least I'll have half a chance with you."

### *Leave It to the Rabbi*

A JEWISH innkeeper, who held the concession from a Jew-hating Polish nobleman, was in great despair. His landlord treated him with savage cruelty. Whenever he couldn't make his annual payment he even beat him and drove his wife and children into the wintry night. At his wit's end, he decided to ride to town to see the rabbi and get his counsel.

"Advise me, Rabbi," he begged him. "Save my life! I no longer know what to do. That Haman of a landlord is fast driving me into my grave. I can see only one solution to my trouble, and one only: that by your wonder-working powers you bring about his death."

"Ah! That's a very difficult thing to do, my son," the rabbi replied discouragingly. "Besides, you just can't go and kill a man as easily as all that! After all, aren't Jews called 'Sons of the Compassionate'? Even your landlord is a human being, just like you and me."

"*He a human being?*" snorted the petitioner, with indignation. "He's a torturer, Rabbi, a wild beast! He'd as soon kill me as take a pinch of snuff."

The rabbi agreed with a sigh and retired into his private study to hold communion with God. When he emerged, he said to the innkeeper, "Go home now! Your persecutor is dead."

Rejoicing greatly over this miraculous piece of news, the innkeeper started for home. But on the way he was suddenly filled with misgiving. "Was it wise of me to ask the rabbi to bring about the death of my landlord?" he asked himself. "What will I have gained by it? When his son and heir, who is in Paris now, hears of his father's death he will hurry home to take over the estate. In that case, it will be worse for me for he is even more wicked than his father. Then it will surely be the end of me!"

So he turned his cart around and, whipping up his horse, returned to the rabbi.

"Rabbi!" he cried. "I shouldn't have asked you to make the landlord die. I've done wrong—a terrible wrong! If he's as wicked as Haman, his son is like the Angel of Death. Now I'm sorry for the whole business!"

The rabbi threw up his hands in exasperation.

"What do you want me to do now—resurrect him?" he asked, bitingly. Then he relented and said, "Believe me, it's a very difficult matter, but I'll see what I can do."

The rabbi again went into his private study to commune with God. When he came out he said cheerfully to the innkeeper, "You may go home now—your landlord is alive again."

Murmuring a prayer of thanksgiving, the innkeeper climbed into his cart and drove him home. When he got there, what was his delight to see his landlord walking about hale and hearty and real as life, just as if nothing at all had happened to him!

*Deduction*

A DISCIPLE came to his rabbi. His wife was gravely ill at home and therefore he begged the holy man to pray for her.

"Go home and stop worrying," the rabbi told him.

Several days later the disciple came again, lamenting tearfully, "Oh Rabbi, my wife is dead!"

"That cannot be," insisted the rabbi heatedly. "I myself tore the slaughterer's knife from the hand of the Angel of Death!"

"I don't know about that, Rabbi, but my wife is dead!" wailed the bereaved husband.

"In that case," sighed the rabbi, "nothing else could have happened but that the Angel of Death strangled her with his bare hands!"

*Realistic Miracles*

A DISCIPLE was bragging about his wonder-working rabbi:

"When my rabbi climbs on a bench he can see with his luminous eyes to the very ends of the earth!"

"What's the idea of your rabbi having to get on a bench if he can see that far?" he was asked.

"My rabbi, I'd like you to know, wants his miracles to look realistic," answered the disciple proudly.

*A Believer's Truth*

A DISCIPLE of a wonder-working rabbi once was boasting of the supernatural feats of his master.

"Every night," he stated, "my rabbi transforms himself into the Prophet Elijah!"

"How do you know that?" asked a skeptic.

"Why the rabbi himself told it to me!"

"The rabbi could have told you a lie!"

"How dare you say such a thing about my rabbi!" raged the disciple. "Do you think for one moment that a man who can transform himself into the Prophet Elijah every night has the need to tell a lie?"

*Miracles*

Two disciples were bragging about the relative merits of their wonder-working rabbis. One said, "Once my rabbi was trav-

elling on the road when suddenly the sky became overcast. It began to thunder and to lighten and a heavy rain fell—a real deluge. What does my rabbi do? He lifts up his eyes to Heaven, spreads out his hands in prayer and immediately a miracle happens! To the right, darkness and a downpour—to the left, darkness and a downpour. But in the middle, a clear sky and the sun shining!"

"Call that a miracle?" sneered the other disciple. "Let me tell you what happened to my rabbi.

"Once he was riding in a wagon to a nearby village. It was on a Friday. He remained longer there than he had intended and, on his way back, he found that night was falling. What was to be done? He couldn't very well spend the Sabbath in the middle of the field, could he? So he lifted his eyes to Heaven, spread out his hands to right and left, and immediately a miracle took place! To the right of him stretched the Sabbath, to the left of him stretched the Sabbath—but in the middle was Friday!"

### *The Farseeing Rabbi*

THE rabbi of Odessa was deep in prayer one day when, interrupting himself with a wail, he announced that the rabbi of Warsaw had just died. Accordingly, the entire Odessa congregation went into mourning in his honor.

A few days later, some Jews from Warsaw arrived in Odessa. Asked for details of the sad event, they declared their rabbi was in the best of health.

"What a spectacle your rabbi made of himself," one of them said, "seeing our rabbi die in Warsaw, when as a matter of fact our rabbi was—and still is—living!"

"What of it?" answered the undaunted disciple of Odessa. "Isn't it marvelous enough that our rabbi can see all the way from Odessa to Warsaw?"

### *Pipe-Dreams*

THE holy rabbi died. All his disciples who loved him wished to obtain a memento of him. One of the disciples had fixed his heart upon the rabbi's long-stem pipe with the beautifully painted porcelain bowl.

"It will cost you a hundred rubles," the rabbi's wife told him.

"It's a lot of money for me," said the disciple with some

hesitation. "However, let me try it out and we'll see about it later."

So the rabbi's wife gave him the pipe and he lit it.  
And what do you suppose happened?

No sooner had he taken the first draw when it seemed to him as if all the seven gates of Heaven opened wide for him and he saw what even the prophet Ezekiel hadn't seen there!

With trembling hands he counted out the hundred rubles and, overjoyed, hastened home with his purchase.

No sooner did he arrive home than he eagerly lit the pipe once more. He gave one mighty draw.

And what do you suppose happened?  
Nothing!  
Nothing?  
Yes, nothing!

Pell-mell the disciple ran off with his pipe to see the new rabbi. He blurted out to him the whole story in a breathless voice.

"My son," said the new rabbi, smiling into his beard, "the whole matter is as clear as day. When the pipe still belonged to the rabbi, and you smoked it, you saw just what the rabbi saw when he smoked it. But, no sooner did it become yours when it turned into just a plain, everyday pipe, and you saw what you always see!"

### *The Gulden Test*

AN ATHEIST once came to see a wonder-working rabbi.

"*Sholom aleichem, Rabbi,*" said the atheist.

"*Aleichem sholom,*" answered the rabbi.

The atheist took a gulden and handed it to him. The rabbi pocketed it without a word.

"No doubt you've come to see me about something," he said. "Maybe your wife is childless and you want me to pray for her?"

"No, Rabbi, I'm not married," replied the atheist.

Thereupon, he gave the rabbi another gulden. Again the rabbi pocketed the gulden without a word.

"But there must be something you wish to ask me," he said. "Possibly you've committed a sin and you'd like me to intercede with God for you."

"No, Rabbi, I don't know of any sin I've committed," replied the atheist.

And again he gave the rabbi a gulden and again the rabbi pocketed it without a word.

"Maybe business is bad and you want me to bless you?" asked the rabbi, hopefully.

"No, Rabbi, this has been a prosperous year for me," replied the atheist.

Once more the atheist gave him a gulden.

"What do you want of me, anyway?" asked the rabbi, a little perplexed.

"Nothing, just nothing," replied the atheist. "I merely wished to see how long a man can go on taking money for nothing!"

### *A Fool Asks Too Many Questions*

ON THE fast day of *Tisha Ba'Ab* a sick Jew went to see the rabbi in order to get his permission to eat, for he was afraid his health would suffer if he didn't. But, as he entered the rabbi's house, he was struck dumb with amazement when he saw the rabbi enjoying a hearty lunch.

"Rabbi," he faltered, not at all sure of himself, "I'm a sick man—do I have to fast today?"

"What a question!" replied the rabbi, his mouth full of roast duck. "Of course you do!"

For a moment the petitioner stood in bewilderment, not knowing whether he was coming or going. Finally, he scraped up sufficient courage to ask, "Pardon my impertinence, Rabbi, but how can you order me to fast when you yourself are eating?"

"I wasn't fool enough to ask the rabbi," replied the rabbi with a grin and went on with his lunch.



## PART THREE



# The Human Comedy

## INTRODUCTION

There is a saying in the Talmud: "You may know a man by three things—by his wine-cup, by his anger, and by his purse. Some say: also by his laughter." The folk-philosophy of Jewish humor is revealingly expressed in many sayings. For instance, there is the optimistic counsel in Yiddish: "Does your heart ache? Laugh it off!" Among the sectarian *Hasidim*, for whom laughter and other modes of conviviality were considered forms of prayer, the telling of jokes was held in great esteem. "The *Rebbe* has ordered everybody to be merry!" is a well-known *Hasidic* saying. The same idea underlies the following anecdote:

The famous Rabbi Zevi Elimelech of Dinov had a son, Dovidl, who was himself a *Hasidic* rabbi and had many ardent disciples. On every Sabbath and also on Holy Days, Rabbi Dovidl refrained from the time-honored custom of expounding the Torah as he sat in the midst of his disciples. Instead, he diverted them with merry tales and jokes, and everybody, even the graybeards, would laugh heartily.

Once, Rabbi Yichezkel Halberstam was paying him a visit, and he was amazed at Rabbi Dovidl's odd carryings-on.

"Who ever heard," he began indignantly, "that a *tzaddik* and his disciples should behave in such an outrageous way? A fine thing indeed to celebrate God's Sabbath with nonsense, funny stories and jests! Really, Rabbi Dovidl, you ought to feel ashamed of yourself! Come now—expound a bit of Torah for us!"

"Torah!" exclaimed Rabbi Dovidl. "And what do you suppose I've been expounding all this time? Believe me, Rabbi, there's God's holy truth in all stories and jests!"

The average Jew cannot carry on a conversation without trying to illuminate it with a story or joke. In fact, the need for this is sometimes too compulsive. It has even given rise to a Jewish witicism in paraphrase of its Talmudic original: "Who is a hero? He who suppresses the urge to tell a joke."

Jews are skillful at joke-making because they are also virtuosos in the art of pathos. They have been tempered by necessity to take life passionately—with gaiety as well as with sober earnestness. This dual capacity for weeping and laughing at the same time, from which was coined the Yiddish expression, "laughter through tears," has had its origin in the chaos of life. The harmony of light and shadow is always at work; the same experi-

ences which have made the Jew realistic and thoughtful have also exposed to his ironic eye the foolishness and incongruities of the Human Comedy. It is one of the wholesome defense mechanisms by which he is enabled to keep a balanced outlook.

Like every thoughtful tragedian, from Dionysus down, he has taught himself how to laugh. Perhaps most important of all, he has learned how to laugh at himself. This has made it easier for him to take himself and his troubles less seriously and thus help remove the sting from an unjust fate. Gentiles too have recognized this talent of sophisticated irony in the Jew. In discussing the humor of Max Beerbohm, James Gibbons Huneker remarked: ". . . he has that delightful ironic touch which is Hebraic. It abounds in Hebraic literature."

Jewish jokes and witticisms, as those in this compilation will bear out, are not just "fun-loving" and laugh-provoking; they are frequently bitten with the acid of satire, and are permeated by a philosophy of gentle ruefulness which is a commentary on the limitations inherent in life and mankind. We find these same elements in Don Quixote and Sancho Panza and in Sholom Aleichem's droll but tragic Tevye and Menachem Mendel.

The psychologic trait of self-irony in Jews, for which Heine was celebrated, led Freud to remark in *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*: "This determination of self-criticism may make clear why it is that a number of the most excellent jokes . . . should have sprung into existence from the soil of Jewish national life. There are stories which were invented by Jews themselves and which are directed by Jewish peculiarities . . . I do not know whether one often finds a people that makes so merry unreservedly over its own shortcomings."

One outstanding feature of Jewish humor is its preoccupation with characterization and its relative unconcern with mechanical word-play. Human beings are not viewed *en masse* by the Jewish folk-mind in jokes and tales but are highly individualized, probed into psychologically and rounded out with all their peculiarities and foibles. By this means they cease being just amusing mannikins but become instinct with life. Everybody is thus able to recognize his own common humanity with theirs. Probably no other folklore can parade such a large variety of distinctive humorous characters as the Jewish.

Jewish humor is seldom savage or cruel, but genial, tongue-in-cheek and philosophic. To be sure, it holds up to ridicule stupidity, boorishness, avarice, hypocrisy and humbug. It gleefully exposes smug ignorance and the hollow pride of caste. Yet it is rarely marked by self-righteousness. By and large it reveals a tolerance of human frailties.

Certainly not all Jewish jokes are funny. As with all humor, they require a critical and selective approach. A large body of so-called "Jewish dialect jokes" are not Jewish at all, but the confessions of anti-Semites who delight in ridiculing and slandering the Jews. About this type of joke Freud has said: "The Jewish jokes made up by non-Jews are nearly all brutal buffooneries in which the wit is spoiled by the fact that the Jew appears as a comic figure to a stranger. The Jewish jokes which originate with Jews admit this, but they know their merits as well as their real shortcomings."

The overtones of satire, irony and quip we hear even in the Old Testament. For example, there is the gay mockery of the Prophet Elijah as he listens to the idol-worshipping soothsayers of Baal, invoking their god morning, noon and night: "O Baal, hear us!" To this the rational-minded Elijah remarks tauntingly: "Cry ye louder, for he is a god; he is perhaps talking or walking, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked."

We also find satire and irony in the Prophets, especially in the writings of Amos and Isaiah. With matchless skill they lay bare the weaknesses and the follies of their contemporaries. They satirize the hypocrite, the miser, the skinflint, the profligate, the coquette, the self-satisfied and the self-righteous. It is from this acid portraiture that much of Jewish folklore found its inspiration and themes. The fables, parables, anecdotes and sayings in the Talmud and *Midrash*, as the reader of this book will find out for himself, were rich in those very characteristics with which we associate Jewish humor today.

Laughter is a universal bond that draws all men closer. Jewish humor contains every variety of laughter: bitter and sweet and also bitter-sweet laughter; ironic, scornful and rapier-like laughter; gentle, world-weary laughter; tongue-in-cheek, skeptical and wry laughter; wise laughter turned deprecatingly against oneself. And not least, the turbulent and lusty laughter of the earth earthy, the infectious belly-laughter which shakes body, mind and emotions—an affirmation of the will-to-joy.

The liveliness and the many-sidedness of Jewish humor make it possible for everyone to find in it that which will suit his taste. It is a treasury in which lies stored up three thousand years of a people's laughter. Its variety recalls the words of Bar-Hebraeus, the Thirteenth Century Syrian-Jewish folklorist, in his introduction to his *Laughable Stories*: "And let this book be a devoted friend to the reader, whether he be Muslim, or Jew, or Aramean, or a man belonging to a foreign country and nation. And let the man who is learned, I mean to say the man who hath a bright understanding, and the man that babbleth conceitedly even

though he drive everyone mad, and also every other man, choose what is best for himself. And let each pluck the flowers that please him. In this way the book will succeed in bringing together the things which are alike, each to the other."

N.A.

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*Droll Characters*

## SCHNORRERS AND BEGGARS

## INTRODUCTION

It was but inevitable that the widespread poverty among the Jews of Europe should have given rise to a class of beggars and panhandlers. They possessed all the traits usually associated with their type, and practiced the proverbial skulduggery of beggars among all peoples. There were lynx-eyed "blind" men, "mutes" who were eloquent with abuse, fleetfooted "cripples" and "dying" *nebiches* with the appetite of a healthy horse. There are innumerable stories about beggars in Jewish folklore which merrily describe their duplicities in obtaining alms.

Apart from them was a certain type of beggar who stood entirely in a class by himself. This was the *schnorrer*. Although he had his counterpart among other peoples since he was the product of the same material necessity, nevertheless, he was cast in a distinctive mold. It might be well to point out that the psychologic makeup of the *schnorrer*, or for that matter of any other Jewish type, was not due to anything innately peculiar to the character of the Jewish people, but was due rather to the peculiar conditions with which Jewish life was burdened for so many centuries.

What were the characteristics of the *schnorrer*? He disdained to stretch out his hand for alms like an ordinary beggar. He did not solicit aid—he demanded it. In fact, he considered it his divine right. Unlike the whining, obsequious beggar, he recoiled from demeaning himself, this by no means from the compunctions of a sensitive soul, but from sheer arrogance and vanity. Since he was obliged to live by his wits he, understandably enough, developed all the facile improvisations of an adventurer. To reach his objective, he considered all means fair. Tact and self-restraint were not his strong points; they would only prove practical stumbling-blocks to the practice of his "profession." Next to his adroitness

in fleecing the philanthropic sheep was his *chutzpah*, his unmitigated impudence. He would terrorize his prey by the sheer daring of his importunities, leaving him both speechless and wilted, with no desire to continue the unequal combat.

*Schnorring* was no mean art. Duplicity and *chutzpah* were not enough; one also had to be trigger-intelligent, imaginative, persuasive—in short, a salesman to the gullible of one's crying poverty. Many men of this type were even learned; for Torah-scholarship was another dart in the quiver of *schnorring* persuasiveness. It often required the superficial glitter and respectability of the *schnorrer's* Torah-learning to make a kind-hearted Jew, steeped in the bookish traditions of his people, feel that it was a privilege to be mulcted.

It was with first-hand knowledge of this type of rogue that Israel Zangwill created his literary tour-de-force, *The King of Schnorrer*. When the smug patron of the story, Joseph Grobstock, complains plaintively to the "King of the Schnorrers": ". . . have I not given freely of my hard-earned gold?" the implacable *schnorrer* retorts scornfully: "For your own diversion! But what says the Midrash? There is a wheel rolling in the world—not he who is rich today is rich tomorrow, but this one He brings up and this one He brings down, as is said in the seventy-fifth Psalm. Therefore lift not up your horn on high, nor speak with a stiff neck."

Wit was another talent a successful *schnorrer* had to possess. He had to be good at repartée, at telling jokes, at proving agreeably diverting to his rich "client." This helped him greatly in maneuvering with lightning-fast timing. Imperceptibly he would spin a spider-web around the unwary rich fly who, like Joseph Grobstock, found it hard to disentangle himself.

Often, the sheer originality of the *schnorrer's* stratagems, and his lively wit during the course of their execution, would mollify his victim after he had caught his breath. If the latter had a sense of humor he would feel amply rewarded for the fleecing.

While morose rogues were given a wide berth, gay rogues—such as talented *schnorrers*—were even welcomed by some. *Schnorrer* stories abound by the hundreds in Jewish folklore. They are invariably gay with impudent mirth and have brought enormous diversion to the folk.

N.A.

### *The King of Schnorrers*<sup>1</sup>

IN THE days when Lord George Gordon became a Jew, and was suspected of insanity; when, out of respect for the prophecies, England denied her Jews every civic right except

that of paying taxes; when the *Gentleman's Magazine* had ill words for the infidel alien; when Jewish marriages were invalid and bequests for Hebrew colleges void; when a prophet prophesying Primrose Day would have been set in the stocks, though Pitt inclined his private ear to Benjamin Goldsmid's views on the foreign loans—in those days, when Tevele Schiff was Rabbi in Israel, and Dr. de Falk, the Master of the Tetragrammaton, saint and Cabalistic conjuror, flourished in Wellclose Square, and the composer of "The Death of Nelson" was a choirboy in the Great Synagogue; Joseph Grobstock, pillar of the same, emerged one afternoon into the spring sunshine at the fag-end of the departing stream of worshippers. In his hand was a large canvas bag, and in his eyes a twinkle.

There had been a special service of prayer and thanksgiving for the happy restoration of his Majesty's health, and the cantor had interceded tunefully with Providence on behalf of Royal George and "our most amiable Queen, Charlotte." The congregation was large and fashionable—far more so than when only a heavenly sovereign was concerned—and so the courtyard was thronged with a string of *Schnorrers* (beggars), awaiting the exit of the audience, much as the vestibule of the opera-house is lined by footmen.

They were a motley crew, with tangled beards and long hair that fell in curls, if not the curls of the period; but the gabardines of the German Ghettos had been in most cases exchanged for the knee-breeches and many-buttoned jacket of the Londoner. When the clothes one has brought from the Continent wear out, one must needs adopt the attire of one's superiors, or be reduced to buying. Many bore staves, and had their loins girded up with coloured handkerchiefs, as though ready at any moment to return from the Captivity. Their woebegone air was achieved almost entirely by not washing—it owed little to nature, to adventitious aids in the shape of deformities. The merest sprinkling boasted of physical afflictions, and none exposed sores like the lazars of Italy or contortions like the cripples of Constantinople. Such crude methods are eschewed in the fine art of *schnorring*. A green shade might denote weakness of sight, but the stone-blind man bore no braggart placard—his infirmity was an old established concern well known to the public, and conferring upon the proprietor a definite status in the community. He was no anonymous atom, such as drifts blindly through

Christendom, vagrant and apologetic. Rarest of all sights in this pageantry of Jewish pauperdom was the hollow trouser-leg or the empty sleeve, or the wooden limb fulfilling either and pushing out a proclaimatory peg.

When the pack of *Schnorrers* caught sight of Joseph Grobstock, they fell upon him full-cry, blessing him. He, nothing surprised, brushed pompously through the benedictions, though the twinkle in his eye became a roguish gleam. Outside the iron gates, where the throng was thickest, and where some elegant chariots that had brought worshippers from distant Hackney were preparing to start, he came to a standstill, surrounded by clamouring *Schnorrers*, and dipped his hand slowly and ceremoniously into the bag. There was a moment of breathless expectation among the beggars, and Joseph Grobstock had a moment of exquisite consciousness of importance, as he stood there swelling in the sunshine. There was no middle class to speak of in the eighteenth-century Jewry; the world was divided into rich and poor, so that everyone knew his station. Joseph Grobstock was satisfied with that in which it had pleased God to place him. He was a jovial, heavy-jowled creature, whose clean-shaven chin was doubling, and he was habited like a person of the first respectability in a beautiful blue body-coat with a row of big yellow buttons. The frilled shirt front, high collar of the very newest fashion, and copious white neckerchief showed off the massive fleshiness of the red throat. His hat was of the Quaker pattern, and his head did not fail of the periwig and the pigtail, the latter being heretical in name only.

What Joseph Grobstock drew from the bag was a small white-paper packet, and his sense of humour led him to place it in the hand furthest from his nose; for it was a broad humour, not a subtle. It enabled him to extract pleasure from seeing a fellow-mortal's hat rollick in the wind, but did little to alleviate the chase for his own. His jokes clapped you on the back, they did not tickle delicately.

Such was the man who now became the complacent cynosure of all eyes, even of those that had no appeal in them, as soon as the principle of his eleemosynary operations had broken on the crowd. The first *Schnorrer*, feverishly tearing open his package, had found a florin, and, as by electricity, all except the blind beggar were aware that Joseph Grobstock was distributing florins. The distributor partook of the general consciousness, and his lips twitched. Silently he dipped again

into the bag, and, selecting the hand nearest, put a second white package into it. A wave of joy brightened the grimy face, to change instantly to one of horror.

"You have made a mistake—you have given me a penny!" cried the beggar.

"Keep it for your honesty," replied Joseph Grobstock imperturbably, and affected not to enjoy the laughter of the rest. The third mendicant ceased laughing when he discovered that fold on fold of paper sheltered a tiny sixpence. It was now obvious that the great man was distributing prize-packets, and the excitement of the piebald crowd grew momently. Grobstock went on dipping, lynx-eyed against second applications. One of the few pieces of gold in the lucky-bag fell to the solitary lame man, who danced in his joy on his sound leg, while the poor blind man pocketed his half-penny, unconscious of ill-fortune, and merely wondering why the coin came swathed in paper.

By this time Grobstock could control his face no longer, and the last episodes of the lottery were played to the accompaniment of a broad grin. Keen and complex was his enjoyment. There was not only the general surprise at this novel feat of alms; there were the special surprises of detail written on face after face, as it flashed or fell or frowned in congruity with the contents of the envelope, and for undercurrent a delicious hubbub of interjections and benedictions, a stretching and withdrawing of palms, and a swift shifting of figures, that made the scene a farrago of excitements. So that the broad grin was one of gratification as well as of amusement, and part of the gratification sprang from a real kindness of heart—for Grobstock was an easy-going man with whom the world had gone easy. The *Schnorrers* were exhausted before the packets, but the philanthropist was in no anxiety to be rid of the remnant. Closing the mouth of the considerably lightened bag and clutching it tightly by the throat, and recomposing his face to gravity, he moved slowly down the street like a stately treasure-ship flecked by the sunlight. His way led towards Goodman Fields, where his mansion was situated, and he knew that the fine weather would bring out *Schnorrers* enough. And, indeed, he had not gone many paces before he met a figure he did not remember having seen before.

Leaning against a post at the head of the narrow passage which led to Bevis Marks was a tall, black-bearded, turbaned

personage, a first glance at whom showed him of the true tribe. Mechanically Joseph Grobstock's hand went to the lucky-bag, and he drew out a neatly-folded packet and tendered it to the stranger.

The stranger received the gift graciously, and opened it gravely, the philanthropist loitering awkwardly to mark the issue. Suddenly the dark face became a thunder-cloud, the eyes flashed lightning.

"An evil spirit in your ancestors' bones!" hissed the stranger, from between his flashing teeth. "Did you come here to insult me?"

"Pardon, a thousand pardons!" stammered the magnate, wholly taken aback. "I fancied you were a—a—a poor man."

"And, therefore, you came to insult me!"

"No, no, I thought to help you," murmured Grobstock, turning from red to scarlet. Was it possible he had foisted his charity upon an undeserving millionaire? No! Through all the clouds of his own confusion and the recipient's anger, the figure of a *Schnorrer* loomed too plain for mistake. None but a *Schnorrer* would wear a home-made turban, issue of a black cap crossed with a white kerchief; none but a *Schnorrer* would unbutton the first nine buttons of his waistcoat, or, if this relaxation were due to the warmth of the weather, counteract it by wearing an over-garment, especially one as heavy as a blanket, with buttons the size of compasses and flaps reaching nearly to his shoe-buckles, even though its length were only congruous with that of his undercoat, which already reached the bottoms of his knee-breeches. Finally, who but a *Schnorrer* would wear this overcoat cloak-wise, with dangling sleeves, full of armless suggestion from a side view? Quite apart from the shabbiness of the snuff-coloured fabric, it was amply evident that the wearer did not dress by rule or measure. Yet the disproportions of his attire did but enhance the picturesqueness of a personality that would be striking even in a bath, though it was not likely to be seen there. The beard was jet black, sweeping and unkempt, and ran up his cheeks to meet the raven hair, so that the vivid face was framed in black; it was a long, tapering face with sanguine lips gleaming at the heart of a black bush; the eyes were large and lambent, set in deep sockets under black arching eyebrows; the nose was long and Coptic; the brow low but broad, with

straggling wisps of hair protruding from beneath the turban. His right hand grasped a plain ashen staff.

Worthy Joseph Grobstock found the figure of the mendicant only too impressive; he shrank uneasily before the indignant eyes.

"I mean to help you," he repeated.

"And this is how one helps a brother in Israel?" said the *Schnorrer*, throwing the paper contemptuously into the philanthropist's face. It struck him on the bridge of the nose, but impinged so mildly that he felt at once what was the matter. The packet was empty—the *Schnorrer* had drawn a blank; the only one the good-natured man had put into the bag.

The *Schnorrer's* audacity sobered Joseph Grobstock completely; it might have angered him to chastise the fellow, but it did not. His better nature prevailed; he began to feel shamefaced, fumbled sheepishly in his pocket for a crown; then hesitated, as fearing this peace-offering would not altogether suffice with so rare a spirit, and that he owed the stranger more than silver—an apology to wit. He proceeded honestly to pay it, but with a maladroit manner, as one unaccustomed to the currency.

"You are an impudent rascal," he said, "but I daresay you feel hurt. Let me assure you I did not know there was nothing in the packet. I did not, indeed."

"Then your steward has robbed me!" exclaimed the *Schnorrer* excitedly. "You let him make up the packets, and he has stolen my money—the thief, the transgressor, thrice-cursed who robs the poor."

"You don't understand," interrupted the magnate meekly. "I made up the packets myself."

"Then, why do you say you did not know what was in them? Go, you mock my misery!"

"Nay, hear me out!" urged Grobstock desperately. "In some I placed gold, in the greater number silver, in a few copper, in one alone—nothing. That is the one you have drawn. It is your misfortune."

"My misfortune!" echoed the *Schnorrer* scornfully. "It is *your* misfortune—I did not even draw it. The Holy One, blessed be He, has punished you for your heartless jesting with the poor—making a sport for yourself of their misfortunes, even as the Philistines sported with Samson. The good deed you might have put to your account by a gratuity to me, God has taken from you. He has declared you unworthy

of achieving righteousness through me. Go your way, murderer!"

"Murderer!" repeated the philanthropist, bewildered by this harsh view of his action.

"Yes, murderer! Stands it not in the Talmud that he who shames another is as one who spills his blood? And have you not put me to shame—if anyone had witnessed your almsgiving, would he not have laughed in my beard?"

The pillar of the Synagogue felt as if his paunch were shrinking.

"But the others—" he murmured deprecatingly. "I have not shed their blood—have I not given freely of my hard-earned gold?"

"For your own diversion," retorted the *Schnorrer* implacably. "But what says the Midrash? There is a wheel rolling in the world—not he who is rich to-day is rich to-morrow, but this one He brings up, and this one He brings down, as is said in the seventy-fifth Psalm. Therefore, lift not up your horn on high, nor speak with a stiff neck."

He towered above the unhappy capitalist, like an ancient prophet denouncing a swollen monarch. The poor man put his hand involuntarily to his high collar as if to explain away his apparent arrogance, but in reality because he was not breathing easily under the *Schnorrer's* attack.

"You are an uncharitable man," he panted hotly, driven to a line of defence he had not anticipated. "I did it not from wantonness, but from faith in Heaven. I know well that God sits turning a wheel—therefore I did not presume to turn it myself. Did I not let Providence select who should have the silver and who the gold, who the copper and who the emptiness? Besides, God alone knows who really needs my assistance—I have made Him my almoner; I have cast my burden on the Lord."

"Epicurean!" shrieked the *Schnorrer*. "Blasphemer! Is it thus you would palter with the sacred texts? Do you forget what the next verse says: 'Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days'? Shame on you—you a *Gabbai* (treasurer) of the Great Synagogue. You see I know you, Joseph Grobstock. Has not the beadle of your Synagogue boasted to me that you have given him a guinea for brushing your spatterdashes? Would you think of offering him a packet? Nay, it is the poor that are trodden on—they whose merits are in excess of those of beadles. But the Lord

will find others to take up his loans—for he who hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord. You are no true son of Israel."

The *Schnorrer's* tirade was long enough to allow Grobstock to recover his dignity and his breath.

"If you really knew me, you would know that the Lord is considerably in my debt," he rejoined quietly. "When next you would discuss me, speak with the Psalms-men, not the beadle. Never have I neglected the needy. Even now, though you have been insolent and uncharitable, I am ready to befriend you if you are in want."

"If I am in want!" repeated the *Schnorrer* scornfully. "Is there anything I do not want?"

"You are married?"

"You correct me—wife and children are the only things I do not lack."

"No pauper does," quoth Grobstock, with a twinkle of restored humour.

"No," assented the *Schnorrer* sternly. "The poor man has the fear of Heaven. He obeys the Law and the Commandments. He marries while he is young—and his spouse is not cursed with barrenness. It is the rich man who transgresses the Judgment, who delays to come under the Canopy."

"Ah! well, here is a guinea—in the name of my wife," broke in Grobstock laughingly. "Or stay—since you do not brush spatterdashes—here is another."

"In the name of my wife," rejoined the *Schnorrer* with dignity, "I thank you."

"Thank me in your own name," said Grobstock. "I mean tell it me."

"I am Manasseh Bueno Barzillai Azevedo da Costa," he answered simply.

"A Sephardi!"<sup>2</sup> exclaimed the philanthropist.

"Is it not written on my face, even as it is written on yours that you are a Tedesco?"<sup>3</sup> It is the first time that I have taken gold from one of your lineage."

"Oh, indeed!" murmured Grobstock, beginning to feel small again.

"Yes—are we not far richer than your community? What need have I to take the good deeds away from my own people—they have too few opportunities for beneficence as it is, being so many of them wealthy; brokers and West India merchants, and—"

"But I, too, am a financier, and an East India Director," Grobstock reminded him.

"Maybe; but your community is yet young and struggling—your rich men are as the good men in Sodom for multitude. You are the immigrants of yesterday—refugees from the Ghettos of Russia and Poland and Germany. But we, as you are aware, have been established here for generations; in the Peninsula our ancestors graced the courts of kings, and controlled the purse-strings of princes; in Holland we held the empery of trade. Ours have been the poets and scholars in Israel. You cannot expect that we should recognise your rabble, which prejudices us in the eyes of England. We made the name of Jew honourable; you degrade it. You are as the mixed multitude which came up with our forefathers out of Egypt."

"Nonsense!" said Grobstock sharply. "All Israel are brethren."

"Esau was the brother of Israel," answered Manasseh sententiously. "But you will excuse me if I go a-marketing, it is such a pleasure to handle gold." There was a note of wistful pathos in the latter remark which took off the edge of the former, and touched Joseph with compunction for bandying words with a hungry man whose loved ones were probably starving patiently at home.

"Certainly, haste away," he said kindly.

"I shall see you again," said Manasseh, with a valedictory wave of his hand, and digging his staff into the cobblestones he journeyed forwards without bestowing a single backward glance upon his benefactor.

Grobstock's road took him to Petticoat Lane in the wake of Manasseh. He had no intention of following him, but did not see why he should change his route for fear of the *Schnorrer*, more especially as Manasseh did not look back. By this time he had become conscious again of the bag he carried, but he had no heart to proceed with the fun. He felt conscience stricken, and had recourse to his pockets instead in his progress through the narrow jostling market-street, where he scarcely ever bought anything personally save fish and good deeds. He was a connoisseur in both. To-day he picked up many a good deed cheap, paying pennies for articles he did not take away—shoe-latchets and cane-strings, barley-sugar and butter-cakes. Suddenly, through a chink in an opaque mass of human beings, he caught sight of a small attractive

salmon on a fishmonger's slab. His eye glittered, his chops watered. He elbowed his way to the vendor, whose eye caught a corresponding gleam, and whose finger went to his hat in respectful greeting.

"Good afternoon, Jonathan," said Grobstock jovially, "I'll take that salmon there—how much?"

"Pardon me," said a voice in the crowd, "I am just bargaining for it."

Grobstock started. It was the voice of Manasseh.

"Stop that nonsense, da Costa," responded the fishmonger. "You know you won't give me my price. It is the only one I have left," he added, half for the benefit of Grobstock. "I couldn't let it go under a couple of guineas."

"Here's your money," cried Manasseh with passionate contempt, and sent two golden coins spinning musically upon the slab.

In the crowd sensation, in Grobstock's breast astonishment, indignation, and bitterness. He was struck momentarily dumb. His face purpled. The scales of the salmon shone like a celestial vision that was fading from him by his own stupidity.

"I'll take that salmon, Jonathan," he repeated, spluttering. "Three guineas."

"Pardon me," repeated Manasseh, "it is too late. This is not an auction." He seized the fish by the tail.

Grobstock turned upon him, goaded to the point of apoplexy. "You!" he cried. "You—you—rogue! How dare you buy salmon!"

"Rogue yourself!" retorted Manasseh. "Would you have me steal salmon?"

"You have stolen my money, knave, rascal!"

"Murderer! Shedder of blood! Did you not give me the money as a free-will offering, for the good of your wife's soul? I call on you before all these witnesses to confess yourself a slanderer!"

"Slanderer, indeed! I repeat, you are a knave and a jackanapes. You—a pauper—a beggar—with a wife and children. How can you have the face to go and spend two guineas—two whole guineas—all you have in the world—on a mere luxury like salmon?"

Manasseh elevated his arched eyebrows.

"If I do not buy salmon when I have two guineas," he answered quietly, "when shall I buy salmon? As you say, it is a

luxury; very dear. It is only on rare occasions like this that my means run to it." There was a dignified pathos about the rebuke that mollified the magnate. He felt that there was reason in the beggar's point of view—though it was a point to which he would never himself have risen, unaided. But righteous anger still simmered in him; he felt vaguely that there was something to be said in reply, though he also felt that even if he knew what it was, it would have to be said in a lower key to correspond with Manasseh's transition from the high pitch of the opening passages. Not finding the requisite repartee he was silent.

"In the name of my wife," went on Manasseh, swinging the salmon by the tail, "I ask you to clear my good name which you have bespattered in the presence of my very tradesmen. Again I call upon you to confess before these witnesses that you gave me the money yourself in charity. Come! Do you deny it?"

"No, I don't deny it," murmured Grobstok, unable to understand why he appeared to himself like a whipped cur, or how what should have been a boast had been transformed into an apology to a beggar.

"In the name of my wife, I thank you," said Manasseh. "She loves salmon, and fries with unction. And now, since you have no further use for that bag of yours, I will relieve you of its burden by taking my salmon home in it." He took the canvas bag from the limp grasp of the astonished Tedesco, and dropped the fish in. The head protruded, surveying the scene with a cold, glassy, ironical eye.

"Good afternoon all," said the *Schnorrer* courteously.

"One moment," called out the philanthropist, when he found his tongue. "The bag is not empty—there are a number of packets still left in it."

"So much the better!" said Manasseh soothingly. "You will be saved from the temptation to continue shedding the blood of the poor, and I shall be saved from spending *all* your bounty upon salmon—an extravagance you were right to deplore."

"But—but!" began Grobstok.

"No—no 'buts,'" protested Manasseh, waving his bag deprecatingly. "You were right. You admitted you were wrong before; shall I be less magnanimous now? In the presence of all these witnesses I acknowledge the justice of your rebuke. I ought not to have wasted two guineas on one fish. It was not

worth it. Come over here, and I will tell you something." He walked out of earshot of the bystanders, turning down a side alley opposite the stall, and beckoned with his salmon bag. The East India Director had no course but to obey. He would probably have followed him in any case, to have it out with him, but now he had a humiliating sense of being at the *Schnorrer's* beck and call.

"Well, what more have you to say?" he demanded gruffly.

"I wish to save you money in future," said the beggar in low, confidential tones. "That Jonathan is a son of the separation! The salmon is not worth two guineas—no, on my soul! If you had not come up I should have got it for twenty-five shillings. Jonathan stuck on the price when he thought you would buy. I trust you will not let me be the loser by your arrival, and that if I should find less than seventeen shillings in the bag you will make it up to me."

The bewildered financier felt his grievance disappearing as by sleight of hand.

Manasseh added winningly: "I know you are a gentleman, capable of behaving as finely as any Sephardi."

This handsome compliment completed the *Schnorrer's* victory, which was sealed by his saying, "And so I should not like you to have it on your soul that you had done a poor man out of a few shillings."

Grobstock could only remark meekly: "You will find more than seventeen shillings in the bag."

"Ah, why were you born a Tedesco!" cried Manasseh ecstatically. "Do you know what I have a mind to do? To come and be your Sabbath-guest! Yes, I will take supper with you next Friday, and we will welcome the Bride—the holy Sabbath—together! Never before have I sat at the table of a Tedesco—but you—you are a man after my own heart. Your soul is a son of Spain. Next Friday at six—do not forget."

"But—but I do not have Sabbath-guests," faltered Grobstock.

"Not have Sabbath-guests! No, no, I will not believe you are of the sons of Belial, whose table is spread only for the rich, who do not proclaim your equality with the poor even once a week. It is your fine nature that would hide its benefactions. Do not I, Manasseh Bueno Barzillai Azevedo da Costa, have at my Sabbath-table every week Yankelé ben Yitzchok—a Pole? And if I have a Tedesco at my table, why should I draw the line there? Why should I not permit you, a

Tedesco, to return the hospitality to me, a Sephardi? At six, then! I know your house well—it is an elegant building that does credit to your taste—do not be uneasy—I shall not fail to be punctual. *A Dios!*"

This time he waved his stick fraternally, and stalked down a turning. For an instant Grobstock stood glued to the spot, crushed by a sense of the inevitable. Then a horrible thought occurred to him.

Easy-going man as he was, he might put up with the visitation of Manasseh. But then he had a wife, and, what was worse, a livery servant. How could he expect a livery servant to tolerate such a guest? He might fly from the town on Friday evening, but that would necessitate troublesome explanations. And Manasseh would come again the next Friday. That was certain. Manasseh would be like grim death—his coming, though it might be postponed, was inevitable. Oh, it was too terrible. At all costs he must revoke the invitation. Placed between Scylla and Charybdis, between Manasseh and his manservant, he felt he could sooner face the former.

"Da Costa!" he called in agony. "Da Costa!"

The *Schnorrer* turned, and then Grobstock found he was mistaken in imagining he preferred to face da Costa.

"You called me?" enquired the beggar.

"Ye—e—s," faltered the East India Director, and stood paralysed.

"What can I do for you?" said Manasseh graciously.

"Would you mind—very much—if I—if I asked you—"

"Not to come," was in his throat, but stuck there.

"If you asked me—" said Manasseh encouragingly.

"To accept some of my clothes," flashed Grobstock, with a sudden inspiration. After all, Manasseh was a fine figure of a man. If he could get him to doff those musty garments of his he might almost pass him off as a prince of the blood, foreign by his beard—at any rate he could be certain of making him acceptable to the livery servant. He breathed freely again at this happy solution of the situation.

"Your cast-off clothes?" asked Manasseh. Grobstock was not sure whether the tone was supercilious or eager. He hastened to explain. "No, not quite that. Second-hand things I am still wearing. My old clothes were already given away at Passover to Simeon the Psalms-man. These are comparatively new."

"Then I would beg you to excuse me," said Manasseh, with a stately wave of the bag.

"Oh, but why not?" murmured Grobstock, his blood running cold again.

"I cannot," said Manasseh, shaking his head.

"But they will just about fit you," pleaded the philanthropist.

"That makes it all the more absurd for you to give them to Simeon the Psalms-man," said Manasseh sternly. "Still, since he is your clothes-receiver, I could not think of interfering with his office. It is not etiquette. I am surprised you should ask me if I should mind. Of course I should mind—I should mind very much."

"But he is not my clothes-receiver," protested Grobstock. "Last Passover was the first time I gave them to him, because my cousin, Hyman Rosenstein, who used to have them, has died."

"But surely he considers himself your cousin's heir," said Manasseh. "He expects all your old clothes henceforth."

"No. I gave him no such promise."

Manasseh hesitated.

"In that case," repeated Grobstock breathlessly.

"On condition that I am to have the appointment permanently, of course."

"Of course," echoed Grobstock eagerly.

"Because you see," Manasseh condescended to explain, "it hurts one's reputation to lose a client."

"Yes, yes, naturally," said Grobstock soothingly. "I quite understand." Then, feeling himself slipping into future embarrassments, he added timidly, "Of course they will not always be so good as the first lot, because—"

"Say no more," Manasseh interrupted reassuringly, "I will come at once and fetch them."

"No. I will send them," cried Grobstock, horrified afresh.

"I could not dream of permitting it. What! Shall I put you to all that trouble which should rightly be mine? I will go at once—the matter shall be settled without delay, I promise you; as it is written, 'I made haste and delayed not!' Follow me!" Grobstock suppressed a groan. Here had all his manœuvring landed him in a worse plight than ever. He would have to present Manasseh to the livery servant without even that clean face which might not unreasonably have been ex-

pected for the Sabbath. Despite the text quoted by the erudite *Schnorrer*, he strove to put off the evil hour.

"Had you not better take the salmon home to your wife first?" said he.

"My duty is to enable you to complete your good deed at once. My wife is unaware of the salmon. She is in no suspense."

Even as the *Schnorrer* spake it flashed upon Grobstock that Manasseh was more presentable with the salmon than without it—in fact, that the salmon was the salvation of the situation. When Grobstock bought fish he often hired a man to carry home the spoil. Manasseh would have all the air of such a loafer. Who would suspect that the fish and even the bag belonged to the porter, though purchased with the gentleman's money? Grobstock silently thanked Providence for the ingenious way in which it had contrived to save his self-respect. As a mere fish-carrier Manasseh would attract no second glance from the household; once safely in, it would be comparatively easy to smuggle him out, and when he did come on Friday night it would be in the metamorphosing glories of a body-coat, with his unspeakable undergarment turned into a shirt and his turban knocked into a cocked hat.

They emerged into Aldgate, and then turned down Leman Street, a fashionable quarter, and so into Great Prescott Street. At the critical street corner Grobstock's composure began to desert him: he took out his handsomely ornamented snuff-box and administered to himself a mighty pinch. It did him good, and he walked on and was well nigh arrived at his own door when Manasseh suddenly caught him by a coat button.

"Stand still a second," he cried imperatively.

"What is it?" murmured Grobstock, in alarm.

"You have spilt snuff all down your coat front," Manasseh replied severely. "Hold the bag a moment while I brush it off."

Joseph obeyed, and Manasseh scrupulously removed every particle with such patience that Grobstock's was exhausted.

"Thank you," he said at last, as politely as he could. "That will do."

"No, it will not do," replied Manasseh. "I cannot have my coat spoiled. By the time it comes to me it will be a mass of stains if I don't look after it."

"Oh, is that why you took so much trouble?" said Grobstock, with an uneasy laugh.

"Why else? Do you take me for a beadle, a brusher of gaiters?" enquired Manasseh haughtily. "There now! that is the cleanest I can get it. You would escape these droppings if you held your snuff-box so—" Manasseh gently took the snuff-box and began to explain, walking on a few paces.

"Ah, we are at home!" he cried, breaking off the object-lesson suddenly. He pushed open the gate, ran up the steps of the mansion and knocked thunderously, then snuffed himself magnificently from the bejewelled snuff-box.

Behind came Joseph Grobstock, slouching limply, and carrying Manasseh da Costa's fish.

### *They Got the Itch*

AS A rich merchant of Lemberg was looking out of the window one day he saw a strange sight. A shabby-looking man was rubbing his back against the picket-fence. It was clear, the poor fellow had an itch. So the rich man called him into his house and listened to his tale of woe.

"I haven't had a bath for months," complained the unfortunate man, "I haven't on one stitch of underwear, and I'm so hungry I could eat nails!"

The rich man was moved to tears by the man's desperate plight. So he dined and wined him, gave him underwear, and, in addition, ten kreutzer for the steambath. Then he sent him away with God's blessings.

The news of the rich man's loving kindness swept through Lemberg like wildfire. That very day two *schnorrers* took their position against his picket fence and, with woeful cries, fell to rubbing their backs vigorously against it. Attracted by their cries, the rich man went to the window and, when he saw what the two rogues were up to, he got very angry.

"Out of my sight, you shameless *schnorrers!*" he cried. "Stop rubbing your filthy backs against my picket fence!"

"Why did you help the man with the itch before and why do you refuse to help us now?" they asked reproachfully. "Tell us, in what way is he better than we? We too have the itch."

"Is it my duty to relieve every man of his itch?" cried the rich man, outraged. "If I helped the man with the itch before it was because he had no one to scratch his poor back for

him. As for you—you louts—you are two. Go ahead—scratch each other's backs!"

### *On the Minsk-Pinsk Line*

ONCE a poor Jew had to go to Pinsk from Minsk. As he had no money he got on the train without a ticket. At the first stop the conductor took him by the scruff of his neck, kicked him in his rear end and threw him off the train.

The man got up, brushed the dust off his clothes and boarded the next train to Pinsk. This time, too, the conductor kicked him in his rear end and threw him off at the next station.

For a third time he boarded a train and, as the conductor appeared, a man sitting next to him inquired, "How far are you going, uncle?"

"That depends! If my backside holds out, I'm going to Pinsk!"

### *The Schnorrer and the Farmer*

A CITY *schnorrer* once came to a poor farmer and asked for a night's lodging.

"You are indeed welcome," said the farmer and he treated the *schnorrer* with the traditional Jewish hospitality shown to penniless strangers. His wife fed him well and gave him a comfortable bed to sleep in.

The *schnorrer* was so pleased with his host that in the morning he said to him, "I like it here so much—perhaps you will let me stay until tomorrow."

"You are welcome to stay," answered the polite farmer, but not as heartily as the day before.

That day the farmer's wife fed the stranger, but a little less lavishly. He felt the growing coldness toward him but paid no attention to it.

The following morning he decided he would stay another day, but this time he did not ask for permission, for he was afraid it might be refused. So he stayed on and, as the farmer and his wife were polite, they said nothing to him about it. But the meals they served him grew skimpier.

"What kind of hospitality is this?" suddenly cried the *schnorrer* angrily. "Do you want me to starve to death?"

The farmer felt abashed and began to apologize. "Believe me, it isn't from stinginess. We're poor people and we've

hardly enough food for ourselves. If you stay another day we'll simply have nothing more to eat."

"Good God!" exclaimed the *schnorrer*. "Had I only known this I wouldn't have accepted your hospitality in the first place. Please forgive me! I'll leave tomorrow morning. Be so good as to wake me bright and early."

At dawn the farmer came and woke him.

"It's time to get up," he said. "The cock has already crowed."

"What!" cried the *schnorrer*, overjoyed. "You still have a cock? Then I can stay another day!"

### *One Blind Look Was Enough*

A BLIND beggar stood on Essex Street in New York's East Side holding out his little tin cup.

"Help a blind man!" he whined piteously.

An old Jewish woman hobbled by.

"Nebich—a poor blind man!" she commiserated, and gave him a dime.

The beggar was enraptured.

"As soon as I took the first look at you I knew you had a kind heart!" he exclaimed.

### *Price Is No Object*

THE woman of the house took pity on a Jewish beggar and invited him on the Sabbath day to eat *gefille fish*. She placed a platter of black bread and white *chaleh* on the table. She noticed however that the beggar was gorging himself on the *chaleh* which was more expensive, but didn't touch the black bread at all.

"Why do you eat only *chaleh* and not black bread?" she asked with some irritation.

"I like *chaleh* better," he said.

"My friend, *chaleh* is very dear."

"Believe me, auntie, it's worth it!"

### *A Sure Cure*

A *schnorrer* came to a large city and went to see a rich man for an alms. But the servants would not let him in for the rich man lay gravely ill.

"I know a sure cure for the sick man," the *schnorrer* insisted.

And so they let him in.

"I have a sure cure for you," said the *schnorrer* when he was taken to the sick man's bedside. "But I want to be well rewarded for it."

"What's your cure?" asked the rich man.

"Move to Kolomea right away!"

"What's so good about Kolomea? Are there big doctors there?"

"No, not at all. But you see, I come from Kolomea and, in the memory of the oldest inhabitant there, no rich man has ever died in Kolomea!"

### *Every Expert to His Own Field*

A CERTAIN *schnorrer* attempted to gain Rothschild's ear, only to meet with rebuff. The beggar at last determined to create a bit of turmoil, this being one of the time-honored techniques when all appears to be lost.

So the *schnorrer* set up a commotion in the foyer of the Rothschild establishment, shrieking at the top of his voice, "My family is starving to death, and the Baron refuses to see me."

The baron, driven to distraction by the racket, came out. "Very well," he declared philosophically. "I'm defeated. Here are twenty thalers. And may I add a bit of advice. If you hadn't made so much noise, you'd have got forty."

"Sir," said the *schnorrer*, pocketing the money, "you are a banker; do I give you banking advice? I'm a *schnorrer*; don't give me *schnorring* advice."

### *No Credit*

THE *schnorrer* made his usual request modestly, firmly, with dignity.

"But I haven't a cent in the house right now. Come back tomorrow," said the householder.

"Ah, my friend," said the *schnorrer*, "if only you knew what a fortune I have lost by giving credit."

*He Spared No Expense*

DR. LEVINE, the great specialist, had just finished examining Blum the *schnorrer*.

"What is the cost?" asked the patient.

"Twenty-five dollars."

"Twenty-five dollars! It's too much! I ain't got it!"

"Too much? All right, fifteen dollars."

"Fifteen dollars! That's out of the question!"

"Out of the question? Make it five dollars."

"Five dollars! Who has five dollars? I'm a poor man!"

The doctor had had enough. "If five dollars is too much, how much have you?"

"I have nothing."

The doctor was now angry. "If you have nothing, how do you have the nerve to come to so expensive a specialist as myself?"

"For my health," shouted Blum, beating his breast with the strength of the righteous, "*nothing* is too expensive!"

*A Local Reputation*

A STRANGE *schnorrer* had just received so warm a welcome that he was touched.

"Your welcome is a heart-warming thing," he said to a rich miser, "but how do you know that I come from another city?"

"Because you came to me," said the miser. "Anybody from this town would know better."

*The Schnorrer-in-Law*

EVERY Friday evening for years, the *schnorrer* had appeared at the rich man's house for the Sabbath meal. But one Friday, a young stranger appeared with him.

The host, put out by this, asked, "Who is this?"

"Oh," replied the *schnorrer* tolerantly, "I suppose I should have told you. It's my new son-in-law. You see, I promised to give him board for the first year!"

## WAGS AND WITS

### INTRODUCTION

Like every other people the Jews were mirthfully entertained by their wits and wags, pranksters and scalawags. It was a normal expression of folk-life. There were a great number of such droll characters among Jews. Many were nameless, but others were real persons, like Shmerl Shnltkover, Yossel Marshalik, *Reb* Shloime Ludmirer, Mordchi Kharkover, Motke Chabad, Sheike Feifer and Froyim Greidinger. Some of the anecdotes in which they figured are still current but, by and large, their pranks and jests are no longer associated with their names and have been assimilated into the large body of anonymous Jewish humor. And often, where attribution does occur, it is of very doubtful authenticity; the same stories and jokes have been variously ascribed to several of them. They have very often served conveniently as personality-pegs on which to hang a popular story or jest.

Gay as all these wags were, none of them could compare with Hershel Ostropolier, for he was a man of comic originality. He belongs to the merry company of Nasreddin and Tyl Eulenspiegel. Like them he was a folk-jester whose crackling wit and droll pranks shook the Yiddish-speaking world with laughter. Like them too Hershel was no mythical character—a product of the folk fancy. On the contrary, it was Hershel who began the process of creating folklore about himself. If he has had such an enormous vogue to this very day, it is because his drolleries represent the sanity of laughter among Jews.

Hershel was endowed with an unusual capacity for self-irony, a rueful comicality in facing disaster, and a philosophy of disenchantment unmarred by a shred of defeatism. From the countless stories circulating about him for the past one hundred and fifty years emerges the portrait of a remarkably clear and uninvolved character. He was an impish likeable *schlimazl* whose misfortunes did not, by any means, arise from his own personal character weaknesses but rather from the illogic of the topsy-turvy world he lived in.

Born in Balta, in the Ukraine, during the second half of the Eighteenth Century, Hershel was condemned by pauperized parents and by the lack of opportunity so general in the ghetto to a life without a trade or calling. Whatever he put his hand to went askew. But because he was a dynamic individual, blessed with a nimble intelligence and an indestructible optimism, he and his family managed to subsist by his wits as well as by his wit.

For a number of years during the period 1770-1810, when Rabbi Boruch reigned as the hereditary *Hasidic tzaddik* of Miedziboz, Hershel served as his "court" jester. The rabbi, who was the dynastic successor of his grandfather, Rabbi Israel Baal-Shem, the founder of the *Hasidic* movement, was utterly unlike his saintly ancestor. He was a vain self-indulged man who lived as lavishly as the Polish *Pans* on the income of the "redemption fees" he collected from his worshipping followers. Because he suffered from melancholia, and also because he wished to ape the landed Polish nobility, he decided to acquire a jester. So he grandly hired the down-at-the-heels Hershel from Ostropolia to drive his gloom away with merry quips and capers.

It goes without saying that, although Rabbi Boruch was diverted by Hershel's clowning, he didn't like him a bit. How could he? Hershel was not particular upon whom he played his pranks. He struck at Rabbi Boruch's most vulnerable weaknesses, and it must have hurt. Nor in truth can it be said that Hershel was charmed by Rabbi Boruch. In fact, there is every evidence that he disliked him heartily, as would any man of sensibility if he were obliged to play the mountebank to a stingy and parasitical nonentity whose entire stock-in-trade lay in his *yiches*, in his illustrious ancestry. Tradition has it that Hershel Ostropolier could boast more Torah-learning than his rabbinical master and on occasion would successfully expose his ignorant pretensions before the *Hasidim*.

N.A.

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### *He Worried Fast*

ONCE there was a rabbi who was most unusual in one respect: he was a prosperous merchant on the side. It chanced that because of misjudgment he staked all his money on a certain business deal and almost overnight became a poor man. His disciples, hearing of this, hastened to his house in order to comfort him for they expected to find him broken in spirit. To their astonishment they found him serenely absorbed in his studies.

"Holy Rabbi!" they stammered incredulously. "We cannot understand . . . don't you worry at all?"

"Certainly I worry," said the rabbi, "but you see God has blessed me with a quick brain. The worrying that others do in a month I can do in an hour!"

### The Choice

THE little Jewish jester was overcome with grief. His world was at an end! For a long time he had served the Caliph at Bagdad and his Court, keeping them amused whenever they called upon him. But in a moment of thoughtlessness he had displeased his ruler who ordered that he be put to death.

"However," said the Caliph, "in consideration of the merry jests you've told me all these years, I will let you choose how you are to die."

"O most generous Caliph," replied the jester, "if it's all the same to you, I choose death by old age!"

### Mutual Introduction

A JEW was walking on the Bismarck Platz in Berlin when unintentionally he brushed against a Prussian officer.

"Swine!" roared the officer.

"Cohen!" replied the Jew with a stiff bow.

### Tit for Tat<sup>4</sup>

ONCE I was a rabbiner. A rabbiner, not a rabbi. That is, I was called rabbi—but a rabbi of the crown.

To old-country Jews I don't have to explain what a rabbi of the crown is. They know the breed. What are his great responsibilities? He fills out birth certificates, officiates at circumcisions, performs marriages, grants divorces. He gets his share from the living and the dead. In the synagogue he has a place of honor, and when the congregation rises, he is the first to stand. On legal holidays he appears in a stovepipe hat and holds forth in his best Russian: "*Gospoda Prihozhane!*" To take it for granted that among our people a rabbiner is well loved—let's not say any more. Say rather that we put up with him, as we do a government inspector or a deputy sheriff. And yet he is chosen from among the people, that is, every three years a proclamation is sent us: "*Na Osnavania Predpisania . . .*" Or, as we would say: "Your Lord, the Governor, orders you to come together in the synagogue, poor little Jews, and pick out a rabbiner for yourselves . . ."

Then the campaign begins. Candidates, hot discussions, brandy, and maybe even a bribe or two. After which come charges and countercharges, the elections are annulled, and we are ordered to hold new elections. Again the procla-

mations: "*Na Osnavania Predpisania . . .*" Again candidates, discussions, party organizations, brandy, a bribe or two . . . That was the life!

Well, there I was—a rabbiner in a small town in the province of Poltava. But I was anxious to be a modern one. I wanted to serve the public. So I dropped the formalities of my position and began to mingle with the people—as we say: to stick my head into the community pot. I got busy with the *Talmud Torah*, the charity fund, interpreted a law, settled disputes or just gave plain advice.

The love of settling disputes, helping people out, or advising them, I inherited from my father and my uncles. They—may they rest in peace—also enjoyed being bothered all the time with other people's business. There are two kinds of people in the world: those that you can't bother at all, and others whom you can bother all the time. You can climb right on their heads—naturally not in one jump, but gradually. First you climb into their laps, then on to their shoulders, then their heads—and after that you can jump up and down on their heads and stamp on their hearts with your heavy boots—as long as you want to.

I was that kind, and without boasting I can tell you that I had plenty of ardent followers and plain hangers-on who weren't ashamed to come every day and fill my head with their clamoring and sit around till late at night. They never refused a glass of tea, or cigarettes. Newspapers and books they took without asking. In short, I was a regular fellow.

Well, there came a day . . . The door opened, and in walked the very foremost men of the town, the sparkling best, the very cream of the city. Four householders—men of affairs—you could almost say: real men of substance. And who were these men? Three of them were the *Troika*—that was what we called them in our town because they were together all the time—partners in whatever business any one of them was in. They always fought, they were always suspicious of each other, and watched everything the others did, and still they never separated—working always on this principle: if the business is a good one and there is profit to be made, why shouldn't I have a lick at the bone too? And on the other hand, if it should end in disaster—you'll be buried along with me, and lie with me deep in the earth. And what does God do? He brings together the three partners with a

fourth one. They operate together a little less than a year and end up in a brawl. That is why they're here.

What had happened? "Since God created thieves, swindlers and crooks, you never saw a thief, swindler or crook like this one." That is the way the three old partners described the fourth one to me. And he, the fourth, said the same about them. Exactly the same, word for word. And who was this fourth one? He was the quiet little man, a little innocent-looking fellow, with thick, dark eyebrows under which a pair of shrewd, ironic, little eyes watched everything you did. Everyone called him Nachman Lekach.

His real name was Nachman Noss'n, but everybody called him Nachman Lekach, because as you know, *Noss'n* is the Hebrew for "he gave," and *Lekach* means "he took," and in all the time we knew him, no one had ever seen him give anything to anyone—while at taking no one was better.

Where were we? Oh, yes . . . So they came to the rabbiner with the complaints, to see if he could find a way of straightening out their tangled accounts. "Whatever you decide, Rabbi, and whatever you decree, and whatever you say, will be final."

That is how the three old partners said it, and the fourth, Reb Nachman, nodded with that innocent look on his face to indicate that he too left it all up to me: "For the reason," his eyes said, "that I know that I have done no wrong." And he sat down in a corner, folded his arms across his chest like an old woman, fixed his shrewd, ironic, little eyes on me, and waited to see what his partners would have to say. And when they had all laid out their complaints and charges, presented all their evidence, said all they had to say, he got up, patted down his thick eyebrows, and not looking at the others at all, only at me, with those deep, deep, shrewd little eyes of his, he proceeded to demolish their claims and charges—so completely, that it looked as if they were the thieves, swindlers and crooks—the three partners of his—and he, Nachman Lekach, was a man of virtue and piety, the little chicken that is slaughtered before *Yom Kippur* to atone for our sins—a sacrificial lamb. "And every word that you heard them say is a complete lie, it never was and never could be. It's simply out of the question." And he proved with evidence, arguments and supporting data that everything he said was true and holy, as if Moses himself had said it.

All the time he was talking, the others, the *Troika*, could

hardly sit in their chairs. Every moment one or another of them jumped up, clutched his head—or his heart! “Of all things! How can a man talk like that! Such lies and falsehoods!” It was almost impossible to calm them down, to keep them from tearing at the fourth one’s beard. As for me—the rabbinner—it was hard, very hard to crawl out from this horrible tangle, because by now it was clear that I had a fine band to deal with, all four of them swindlers, thieves and crooks, and informers to boot, and all four of them deserving a severe punishment. But what? At last this idea occurred to me, and I said to them:

“Are you ready, my friends? I am prepared to hand down my decision. My mind is made up. But I won’t disclose what I have to say until each of you has deposited twenty-five *rubles*—to prove that you will act upon the decision I am about to hand down.”

“With the greatest of pleasure,” the three spoke out at once, and Nachman Lekach nodded his head, and all four reached into their pockets, and each one counted out his twenty-five on the table. I gathered up the money, locked it up in a drawer, and then I gave them my decision in these words:

“Having heard the complaints and the arguments of both parties, and having examined your accounts and studied your evidence, I find according to my understanding and deep conviction, that all four of you are in the wrong, and not only in the wrong, but that it is a shame and a scandal for Jewish people to conduct themselves in such a manner—to falsify accounts, perjure yourselves and even act as informers. Therefore I have decided that since we have a *Talmud Torah* in our town with many children who have neither clothes nor shoes, and whose parents have nothing with which to pay their tuition, and since there has been no help at all from you gentlemen (to get a few pennies from you one has to reach down into your very gizzards) therefore it is my decision that this hundred *rubles* of yours shall go to the *Talmud Torah*, and as for you, gentlemen, you can go home, in good health, and thanks for your contribution. The poor children will now have some shoes and socks and shirts and pants, and I’m sure they’ll pray to God for you and your children. Amen.”

Having heard the sentence, the three old partners—the *Troika*—looked from one to the other—flushed, unable to speak. A decision like this they had not anticipated. The only

one who could say a word was Reb Nachman Lekach. He got up, patted down his thick eyebrows, held out a hand, and looking at me with his ironic little eyes, said this:

"I thank you, Rabbi Rabbiner, in behalf of all four of us, for the wise decision which you have just made known. Such a judgment could have been made by no one since King Solomon himself. There is only one thing that you forgot to say, Rabbi Rabbiner, and that is: what is your fee for this wise and just decision?"

"I beg your pardon," I tell him. "You've come to the wrong address. I am not one of those rabbis who tax the living and the dead." That is the way I answered him, like a real gentleman. And this was his reply:

"If that's the case, then you are not only a sage and a Rabbi among men, you're an honest man besides. So, if you would care to listen, I'd like to tell you a story. Say that we will pay you for your pains at least with a story."

"Good enough. Even with two stories."

"In that case, sit down, Rabbi Rabbiner, and let us have your cigarette case. I'll tell you an interesting story, a true one, too, something that happened to me. What happened to others I don't like to talk about."

And we lit our cigarettes, sat down around the table, and Reb Nachman spread out his thick eyebrows, and looking at me with his shrewd, smiling, little eyes, he slowly began to tell his true story of what had once happened to him himself.

All this happened to me a long time ago. I was still a young man and I was living not far from here, in a village near the railroad. I traded in this and that, I had a small tavern, made a living. A Rothschild I didn't become, but bread we had, and in time there were about ten Jewish families living close by—because, as you know, if one of us makes a living, others come around. They think you're shoveling up gold . . . But that isn't the point. What I was getting at was that right in the midst of the busy season one year, when things were moving and traffic was heavy, my wife had to go and have a baby—our boy—our first son. What do you say to that? "Congratulations! Congratulations everybody!" But that isn't all. You have to have a *bris*, the circumcision. I dropped everything, went into town, bought all the good things I could find, and came back with the *Mohel* with all his instruments, and for good measure I also brought the *shammes* of the

synagogue. I thought that with these two holy men and myself and the neighbors we'd have the ten men that we needed, with one to spare. But what does God do? He has one of my neighbors get sick—he is sick in bed and can't come to the *bris*, you can't carry him. And another has to pack up and go off to the city. He can't wait another day! And here I am without the ten men. Go do something. Here it is—Friday! Of all days, my wife has to pick Friday to have the *bris*—the day before the Sabbath. The *Mohel* is frantic—he has to go back right away. The *shammes* is actually in tears. "What did you ever drag us off here for?" they both want to know. And what can I do?

All I can think of is to run off to the railroad station. Who knows—so many people come through every day—maybe God will send some one. And that's just what happened. I come running up to the station—the agent has just called out that a train is about to leave. I look around—a little roly-poly man carrying a huge traveling bag comes flying by, all sweating and out of breath, straight toward the lunch counter. He looks over the dishes—what is there a good Jew can take in a country railroad station? A piece of herring—an egg. Poor fellow—you could see his mouth was watering. I grab him by the sleeve. "Uncle, are you looking for something to eat," I ask him, and the look he gives me says: "How did you know that?" I keep on talking: "May you live to be a hundred—God himself must have sent you." He still doesn't understand, so I proceed: "Do you want to earn the blessings of eternity—and at the same time eat a beef roast that will melt in your mouth, with a fresh, white loaf right out of the oven?" He still looks at me as if I'm crazy. "Who are you? What do you want?"

So I tell him the whole story—what a misfortune had overtaken us: here we are, all ready for the *bris*, the *Mohel* is waiting, the food is ready—and such food!—and we need a tenth man! "What's that got to do with me?" he asks, and I tell him: "What's that got to do with you? Why—everything depends on you—you're the tenth man! I beg you—come with me. You will earn all the rewards of heaven—and have a delicious dinner in the bargain!" "Are you crazy," he asks me, "or are you just out of your head? My train is leaving in a few minutes, and it's Friday afternoon—almost sundown. Do you know what that means? In a few more hours the Sabbath will catch up with me, and I'll be stranded." "So what!"

I tell him. "So you'll take the next train. And in the meantime you'll earn eternal life—and taste a soup, with fresh dumplings, that only my wife can make . . ."

Well, why make the story long? I had my way. The roast and the hot soup with fresh dumplings did their work. You could see my customer licking his lips. So I grab the traveling bag and I lead him home, and we go through with the *bris*. It was a real pleasure! You could smell the roast all over the house, it had so much garlic in it. A roast like that, with fresh warm twist, is a delicacy from heaven. And when you consider that we had some fresh dill pickles, and a bottle of beer, and some cognac before the meal and cherry cider after the meal—you can imagine the state our guest was in! His cheeks shone and his forehead glistened. But what then? Before we knew it the afternoon was gone. My guest jumps up, he looks around, sees what time it is, and almost has a stroke! He reaches for his traveling bag: "Where is it?" I say to him. "What's your hurry? In the first place, do you think we'll let you run off like that—before the Sabbath? And in the second place—who are you to leave on a journey an hour or two before the Sabbath? And if you're going to get caught out in the country somewhere, you might just as well stay here with us."

He groans and he sighs. How could I do a thing like that to him—keep him so late! What did I have against him? Why hadn't I reminded him earlier? He doesn't stop bothering me. So I say to him: "In the first place, did I have to tell you that it was Friday afternoon? Didn't you know it yourself? And in the second place, how do you know—maybe it's the way God wanted it? Maybe He wanted you to stay here for the Sabbath so you could taste some of my wife's fish? I can guarantee you, that as long as you've eaten fish, you haven't eaten fish like my wife's fish—not even in a dream!" Well, that ended the argument. We said our evening prayers, had a glass of wine, and my wife brings the fish to the table. My guest's nostrils swell out, a new light shines in his eyes and he goes after that fish as if he hadn't eaten a thing all day. He can't get over it. He praises it to the skies. He fills a glass with brandy and drinks a toast to the fish. And then comes the soup, a specially rich Sabbath soup with noodles. And he likes that, too, and the *tzimmes* also, and the meat that goes with the *tzimmes*, a nice, fat piece of brisket. I'm telling you, he just sat there licking his fingers! When we're finishing the

last course he turns to me: "Do you know what I'll tell you? Now that it's all over, I'm really glad that I stayed over for *Shabbes*. It's been a long time since I've enjoyed a Sabbath as I've enjoyed this one." "If that's how you feel, I'm happy," I tell him. "But wait. This is only a sample. Wait till tomorrow. Then you'll see what my wife can do."

And so it was. The next day, after services, we sit down at the table. Well, you should have seen the spread. First the appetizers: crisp wafers and chopped herring, and onions and chicken fat, with radishes and chopped liver and eggs and *gribbenes*. And after that the cold fish and the meat from yesterday's *tzimmes*, and then the jellied neat's foot, or *fisnoga* as you call it, with thin slices of garlic, and after that the potato *cholent* with the *kugel* that had been in the oven all night—and you know what that smells like when you take it out of the oven and take the cover off the pot. And what it tastes like. Our visitor could not find words to praise it. So I tell him: "This is still nothing. Wait until you have tasted our *borsht* tonight, then you'll know what good food is." At that he laughs out loud—a friendly laugh, it is true—and says to me: "Yes, but how far do you think I'll be from here by the time your *borsht* is ready?" So I laugh even louder than he does, and say: "You can forget that right now! Do you think you'll be going off tonight?"

And so it was. As soon as the lights were lit and we had a glass of wine to start off the new week, my friend begins to pack his things again. So I call out to him: "Are you crazy? Do you think we'll let you go off, the Lord knows where, at night? And besides, where's your train?" "What?" he yells at me. "No train? Why, you're murdering me! You know I have to leave!" But I say, "May this be the greatest misfortune in your life. Your train will come, if all is well, around dawn tomorrow. In the meantime I hope your appetite and digestion are good, because I can smell the *borsht* already! All I ask," I say, "is just tell me the truth. Tell me if you've ever touched a *borsht* like this before. But I want the absolute truth!" What's the use of talking—he had to admit it: never before in all his life had he tasted a *borsht* like this. Never. He even started to ask how you made the *borsht*, what you put into it, and how long you cooked it. Everything. And I say: "Don't worry about that! Here, taste this wine and tell me what you think of it. After all, you're an expert. But the truth! Remem-

ber—nothing but the truth! Because if there is anything I hate, it's flattery . . ."

So we took a glass, and then another glass, and we went to bed. And what do you think happened? My traveler overslept, and missed the early morning train. When he wakes up he boils over! He jumps on me like a murderer. Wasn't it up to me, out of fairness and decency, to wake him up in time? Because of me he's going to have to take a loss, a heavy loss—he doesn't even know himself how heavy. It was all my fault. I ruined him. I! . . . So I let him talk. I listen, quietly, and when he's all through, I say: "Tell me yourself, aren't you a queer sort of person? In the first place, what's your hurry? What are you rushing for? How long is a person's life altogether? Does he have to spoil that little with rushing and hurrying? And in the second place, have you forgotten that today is the third day since the *bris*? Doesn't that mean a thing to you? Where we come from, on the third day we're in the habit of putting on a feast better than the one at the *bris* itself. The third day—it's something to celebrate! You're not going to spoil the celebration, are you?"

What can he do? He can't control himself any more, and he starts laughing—a hysterical laugh. "What good does it do to talk?" he says. "You're a real leech!" "Just as you say," I tell him, "but after all, you're a visitor, aren't you?"

At the dinner table, after we've had a drink or two, I call out to him: "Look," I say, "it may not be proper—after all, we're Jews—to talk about milk and such things while we're eating meat, but I'd like to know your honest opinion: what do you think of *kreplach* with cheese?" He looks at me with distrust. "How did we get around to that?" he asks. "Just like this," I explain to him. "I'd like to have you try the cheese *kreplach* that my wife makes—because tonight, you see, we're going to have a dairy supper . . ." This is too much for him, and he comes right back at me with, "Not this time! You're trying to keep me here another day, I can see that. But you can't do it. It isn't right! It isn't right!" And from the way he fusses and fumes it's easy to see that I won't have to coax him too long, or fight with him either, because what is he but a man with an appetite, who has only one philosophy, which he practices at the table? So I say this to him: "I give you my word of honor, and if that isn't enough, I'll give you my hand as well—here, shake—that tomorrow I'll wake you up in time for the earliest train. I promise it, even if the

world turns upside down. If I don't, may I—you know what!" At this he softens and says to me: "Remember, we're shaking hands on that!" And I: "A promise is a promise." And my wife makes a dairy supper—how can I describe it to you? With such *kreplach* that my traveler has to admit that it was all true: he has a wife too, and she makes *kreplach* too, but how can you compare hers with these? It's like night and day!

And I kept my word, because a promise is a promise. I woke him when it was still dark, and started the *samovar*. He finished packing and began to say goodbye to me and the rest of the household in a very handsome, friendly style. You could see he was a gentleman. But I interrupt him: "We'll say goodbye a little later. First, we have to settle up." "What do you mean—settle up?" "Settle up," I say, "means to add up the figures. That's what I'm going to do now. I'll add them up, let you know what it comes to, and you will be so kind as to pay me."

His face flames red. "Pay you?" he shouts. "Pay you for what?" "For what?" I repeat. "You want to know for what? For everything. The food, the drink, the lodging." This time he becomes white—not red—and he says to me: "I don't understand you at all. You came and invited me to the *bris*. You stopped me at the train. You took my bag away from me. You promised me eternal life." "That's right," I interrupt him. "That's right. But what's one thing got to do with the other? When you came to the *bris* you earned your reward in heaven. But food and drink and lodging—do I have to give you these things for nothing? After all, you're a businessman, aren't you? You should understand that fish costs money, and that the wine you drank was the very best, and the beer, too, and the cherry cider. And you remember how you praised the *tzimmes* and the puddings and the *borsht*. You remember how you licked your fingers. And the cheese *kreplach* smelled pretty good to you, too. Now, I'm glad you enjoyed these things: I don't begrudge you that in the least. But certainly you wouldn't expect that just because you earned a reward in heaven, and enjoyed yourself in the bargain, that I should pay for it?" My traveling friend was really sweating; he looked as if he'd have a stroke. He began to throw himself around, yell, scream, call for help. "This is Sodom!" he cried. "Worse than Sodom! It's the worst outrage the world has ever heard of! How much do you want?"

Calmly I took a piece of paper and a pencil and began to add it up. I itemized everything, I gave him an inventory of everything he ate, of every hour he spent in my place. All in all it added up to something like thirty-odd *rubbles* and some *kopeks*—I don't remember it exactly.

When he saw the total, my good man went green and yellow, his hands shook, and his eyes almost popped out, and again he let out a yell, louder than before. "What did I fall into—a nest of thieves? Isn't there a single human being here? Is there a God anywhere?" So I say to him, "Look, sir, do you know what? Do you know what you're yelling about? Do you have to eat your heart out? Here is my suggestion: let's ride into town together—it's not far from here—and we'll find some people—there's a rabbiner there—let's ask the rabbi. And we'll abide by what he says." When he heard me talk like that, he quieted down a little. And—don't worry—we hired a horse and wagon, climbed in, and rode off to town, the two of us, and went straight to the rabbi.

When we got to the rabbi's house, we found him just finishing his morning prayers. He folded up his prayer shawl and put his phylacteries away. "Good morning," we said to him, and he: "What's the news today?" The news? My friend tears loose and lets him have the whole story—everything from A to Z. He doesn't leave a word out. He tells how he stopped at the station, and so on and so on, and when he's through he whips out the bill I had given him and hands it to the rabbi. And when the rabbi had heard everything, he says: "Having heard one side I should now like to hear the other." And turning to me, he asks, "What do you have to say to all that?" I answer: "Everything he says is true. There's not a word I can add. Only one thing I'd like to have him tell you—on his word of honor: did he eat the fish, and did he drink the beer and cognac and the cider, and did he smack his lips over the *borsht* that my wife made?" At this the man becomes almost frantic, he jumps and he thrashes about like an apoplectic. The rabbi begs him not to boil like that, not to be so angry, because anger is a grave sin. And he asks him again about the fish and the *borsht* and the *kreplach*, and if it was true that he had drunk not only the wine, but beer and cognac and cider as well. Then the rabbi puts on his spectacles, looks the bill over from top to bottom, checks every line, and finds it correct! Thirty-odd *rubbles* and some *kopeks*, and he makes his judgment brief: he tells the man to pay

the whole thing, and for the wagon back and forth, and a judgment fee for the rabbi himself....

The man stumbles out of the rabbi's house looking as if he'd been in a steam bath too long, takes out his purse, pulls out two twenty-fives and snaps at me: "Give me the change." "What change?" I ask, and he says: "For the thirty you charged me—for that bill you gave me." "Bill? What bill? What thirty are you talking about? What do you think I am, a highwayman? Do you expect me to take money from you? I see a man at the railroad station, a total stranger; I take his bag away from him, and drag him off almost by force to our own *bris*, and spend a wonderful *Shabbes* with him. So am I going to charge him for the favor he did me, and for the pleasure I had?" Now he looks at me as if I really am crazy, and says: "Then why did you carry on like this? Why did you drag me to the rabbi?" "Why this? Why that?" I say to him. "You're a queer sort of person, you are! I wanted to show you what kind of man our rabbi was, that's all . . ."

When he finished the story, my litigant, Reb Nachman Lekach, got up with a flourish, and the other three partners followed him. They buttoned their coats and prepared to leave. But I held them off. I passed the cigarettes around again, and said to the story-teller:

"So you told me a story about a rabbi. Now maybe you'll be so kind as to let me tell you a story—also about a rabbi, but a much shorter story than the one you told."

And without waiting for a yes or no, I started right in, and made it brief:

This happened, I began, not so long ago, and in a large city, on *Yom Kippur* eve. A stranger falls into the town—a businessman, a traveler, who goes here and there, everywhere, sells merchandise, collects money . . . On this day he comes into the city, walks up and down in front of the synagogue, holding his sides with both hands, asks everybody he sees where he can find the rabbi. "What do you want the rabbi for?" people ask. "What business is that of yours?" he wants to know. So they don't tell him. And he asks one man, he asks another: "Can you tell me where the rabbi lives?" "What do you want the rabbi for?" "What do you care?" This one and that one, till finally he gets the answer, finds the rabbi's house, goes in, still holding his sides with both hands.

He calls the rabbi aside, shuts the door, and says, "Rabbi, this is my story. I am a traveling man, and I have money with me, quite a pile. It's not my money. It belongs to my clients—first to God and then to my clients. It's *Yom Kippur* eve. I can't carry money with me on *Yom Kippur*, and I'm afraid to leave it at my lodgings. A sum like that! So do me a favor—take it, put it away in your strong box till tomorrow night, after *Yom Kippur*."

And without waiting, the man unbuttons his vest and draws out one pack after another, crisp and clean, the real red, crackling, hundred *ruble* notes!

Seeing how much there was, the rabbi said to him: "I beg your pardon. You don't know me, you don't know who I am." "What do you mean, I don't know who you are? You're a rabbi, aren't you?" "Yes, I'm a rabbi. But I don't know *you*—who you are or what you are." They bargain back and forth. The traveler: "You're a rabbi." The rabbi: "I don't know who you are." And time does not stand still. It's almost *Yom Kippur*! Finally the rabbi agrees to take the money. The only thing is, who should be the witnesses? You can't trust just anyone in a matter like that.

So the rabbi sends for the leading townspeople, the very cream, rich and respectable citizens, and says to them: "This is what I called you for. This man has money with him, a tidy sum, not his own, but first God's and then his clients'. He wants me to keep it for him till after *Yom Kippur*. Therefore I want you to be witnesses, to see how much he leaves with me, so that later—you understand?" And the rabbi took the trouble to count it all over three times before the eyes of the townspeople, wrapped the notes in a kerchief, sealed the kerchief with wax, and stamped his initials on the seal. He passed this from one man to the other, saying, "Now look. Here is my signature, and remember, you're the witnesses." The kerchief with the money in it he handed over to his wife, had her lock it in a chest, and hide the keys where no one could find them. And he himself, the rabbi, went to *shul*, and prayed and fasted as it was ordained, lived through *Yom Kippur*, came home, had a bite to eat, looked up, and there was the traveler. "Good evening, Rabbi." "Good evening. Sit down. What can I do for you?" "Nothing. I came for my package." "What package?" "The money." "What money?" "The money I left with you to keep

for me." "You gave *me* money to keep for you? When was that?"

The traveler laughs out loud. He thinks the rabbi is joking with him. The rabbi asks: "What are you laughing at?" And the man says: "It's the first time I met a rabbi who liked to play tricks." At this the rabbi is insulted. No one, he pointed out, had ever called him a trickster before. "Tell me, my good man, what do you want here?"

When he heard these words, the stranger felt his heart stop. "Why, Rabbi, in the name of all that's holy, do you want to kill me? Didn't I give you all my money? That is, not mine, but first God's and then my clients'? I'll remind you, you wrapped it in a kerchief, sealed it with wax, locked it in your wife's chest, hid the key where no one could find it. And here is better proof: there were witnesses, the leading citizens of the city!" And he goes ahead and calls them all off by name. In the midst of it a cold sweat breaks out on his forehead, he feels faint, and asks for a glass of water.

The rabbi sends the *shammes* off to the men the traveler had named—the leading citizens, the flower of the community. They come running from all directions. "What's the matter? What happened?" "A misfortune. A plot! A millstone around our necks! He insists that he brought a pile of money to me yesterday, to keep over *Yom Kippur*, and that you were witnesses to the act."

The householders look at each other, as if to say: "Here is where we get a nice bone to lick!" And they fall on the traveler: how could he do a thing like that? He ought to be ashamed of himself! Thinking up an ugly plot like that against our rabbi!

When he saw what was happening, his arms and legs went limp, he just about fainted. But the rabbi got up, went to the chest, took out the kerchief and handed it to him.

"What's the matter with you! Here! Here is your money! Take it and count it, see if it's right, here in front of your witnesses. The seal, as you see, is untouched. The wax is whole, just as it ought to be."

The traveler felt as if a new soul had been installed in his body. His hands trembled and tears stood in his eyes.

"Why did you have to do it, Rabbi? Why did you have to play this trick on me? A trick like this."

"I just wanted to show you—the kind—of—leading citizens—we have in our town."

*The Jew and the Caliph*

ONCE there was a Caliph of Arabia who hated Jews. So he issued the following decree: "Every Jew who enters my kingdom must be halted by the guards and ordered to tell something about himself. If he lies—he is to be shot. If he tells the truth—he is to be hanged."

By this stratagem the Caliph hoped to exterminate all the Jews in Arabia.

One day a Jew came. When the Caliph's servants commanded him to tell something about himself he said, "I am going to be shot today."

The guards were confused by his words, so they brought the matter to their royal master's attention.

"H-m-m!" cogitated the wily Caliph. "This is indeed a difficult matter! If I were to shoot the Jew it would imply that he told the truth. In that case the law is that he should be hanged; so I cannot shoot him. On the other hand, if I had him hanged it would imply that he told a lie, and for that the law provides shooting; so I cannot hang him."

And so they let the Jew go.

*You're as Old as You Feel*

A FORTY-YEAR-OLD man married a girl of twenty. It caused a sensation in their social circle. Once, when someone indelicately referred to the difference in their ages, he replied, "It's really not so bad. When she looks at me she feels ten years older, and when I look at her I feel ten years younger. So what's wrong—we're both thirty!"

*Mazel Tov!*

"I HAVE come to report," said Tevye the carpenter to the secretary of the burial society, "that my wife has died, and I wish the sum required for her burial."

"But how can that be?" asked the official. "We buried your wife two years ago."

"Oh, that was my first wife," said Tevye, "and now my second wife, too, has died."

"Excuse me," said the secretary, "I didn't know you had remarried. *Mazel tov!*"

*Wrong Order*

ON AN unbearably hot day, at the very door of a soda fountain, an elderly Jew fainted away.

People rushed to his side crying, "Water! Water! A man has fainted! Water!"

Feebly the old man raised his head, and corrected the bystanders: "A malted!"

*The Foresighted Traveller*

A WEARY traveller, alone in a train compartment enjoying a few hours of relaxation, was accosted by a stranger with the customary "*Sholom aleichem*."

Instead of the usual "*Aleichem sholom*," in reply, this traveller sat up and began wearily: "Listen closely, my friend. I'm from Byalistok, and I'm on my way to Warsaw. I'm in the wholesale grocery business, but it's really, I assure you, a small business. My last name is Cohen. My first name is Moishe. I have one son, about to be *Bar Mitzvah*, and two daughters, both lovely, one married and the other engaged to be married. I don't smoke, I don't drink, I have no hobbies, and I stay out of politics. I hope I haven't forgotten anything but if I have, please don't stand on ceremony. Ask me now, because I'm dead tired and I'm going to take a nap!"

*Dramatic Criticism*

MRS. GOLDSTEIN could never induce her husband to enter a theatre.

He had an excuse always for staying home, or for joining his cronies at gin rummy or pinochle.

But at last Mrs. Goldstein's patience was exhausted. "This time," she proclaimed, "you go with me, or I'll give you reason to regret it."

So Mr. Goldstein permitted himself to be dragged to the drama. He squirmed and fidgeted through the evening, while his wife responded appropriately to the play.

"What do you say now?" she asked, triumphantly, when the lights went up.

"It stinks," was the laconic reply.

"What do you mean it stinks?" she asked.

"I'll tell you," said Mr. Goldstein, disgust finally breaking through his restraint. "In the theatre it's always the same—a

man and a woman . . . Now when he wants, she doesn't want . . . And when she wants, he doesn't want . . . And when they both want, down comes the curtain!"

### *Why Noodles Are Noodles*

ONCE, someone asked Motke Chabad, the wag, "Tell me, Motke, you're a smart fellow—why do they call noodles 'noodles'?"

Motke answered without hesitation, "What a question to ask! They're long like noodles, aren't they? They're soft like noodles, aren't they? And they taste like noodles, don't they? So why shouldn't they be called noodles?"

### *The Big Blow*

FROYIM GREIDINGER, the Galician prankster, was on his way home one Friday night. It was past midnight when he passed the house of his pious grandparents. To his surprise he saw that they were still up, the Sabbath candles burning brightly, so he went in.

"Why aren't you sleeping?" he asked. "It's past midnight."

His grandparents looked dejected.

"We can't go to sleep on account of the candles," his grandfather explained. "If we let them burn themselves out the house may catch fire, and we can't snuff them out because it's the holy Sabbath. Nor is there a peasant around to blow them out."

For a moment Froyim was lost in thought.

"Tell me, grandpa, when is *Purim*?" asked Froyim, standing in front of one of the candles.

He spoke in a very loud voice and when he came to the letter *P* in *Purim* he puffed out his cheeks and bellowed. The candle went out instantly.

Then, standing in front of the second candle, Froyim asked, "And when is *Passover*?"

When he came to the letter *P* in *Passover* he again puffed out his cheeks and bellowed. The second candle also went out. Then turning with a grin to his grandparents, Froyim said, "Now you can go to bed. Thank God none of us had to violate the Sabbath!"

*The Sacrifice Was Too Great*

FROYIM GREIDINGER went into an inn and ordered supper. When the meat course was put before him he saw a tiny bit of roast. At this he burst into loud wailing. The startled inn-keeper ran up to him and cried, "What is it—what has happened?"

"Happened!" wept Froyim. "To think that just because of this little morsel of meat a great big ox had to be killed!"

**HERSHEL OSTROPOLIER***Hershel's Conflict*

ONCE, on a Thursday, Hershel Ostropolier came to his rabbi to ask from him money for the Sabbath. It had been definitely agreed that the rabbi was to pay him weekly wages. Had he not imported Hershel from Ostropolia to Miedziboz to serve as his jester in order to help him drive away his depression? But the rabbi, who was ill-natured and tight-fisted, was reluctant to pay him his wages. Hershel had to resort to all kinds of stratagems to collect from him. Many a time, he and his wife and children were forced to go hungry, did not have the wherewithal to observe the Sabbath with decency.

"What do you think—money grows on trees?" the rabbi said at first. Afterwards, when he saw that Hershel was determined, he put on a cheerful face and said to him, "If you'll tell me a good story I'll try and find for you a couple of guldens to buy food for the Sabbath."

Hershel almost burned up on hearing these words. He lusted for revenge! He thought the matter over and finally told the rabbi the following story:

"Two weeks ago, not having any money with which to buy food for the Sabbath, I began to worry. From whence will come my aid? And as I walked along the deserted road I suddenly saw rising before me, right out of the ground, the Evil Spirit himself!

"Why do you look so worried, Hershel?" he asked me.

"Why should I be jolly?" I replied. "It's Thursday already and my wife hasn't a broken kopek to go to market with."

"When the Evil Spirit heard this he laughed.

"What a fool!" he leered at me. "Why don't you go to the

rabbi's house and, when no one is looking, steal from his table a silver spoon so you'll spend a nice Sabbath?"

"So I did as he said. And believe me, I had a pleasant Sabbath! A week ago Thursday I again didn't have anything for the Sabbath. Again I decided to go to the rabbi's house for a silver spoon. But on the way there, I met with the Good Spirit who buttonholed me.

"Where is a Jew going, Hershel?" he asked.

"I cringed.

"I'm on my way to the rabbi's house to steal a silver spoon so that I'll be able to buy food for the Sabbath," I replied.

"Hearing this, the Good Spirit began to preach at me.

"How can you do such an awful thing, Hershel?" he demanded. "The very idea should make you tremble like a leaf! Surely, a man of your learning knows the difference between good and evil! It is specifically mentioned in the Ten Commandments: 'Thou shalt not steal.'

"Nonsense!" I replied. "Granted I do know that to steal a silver spoon from the rabbi is a sin, but what can I do when the rabbi, who employs me as his jester, doesn't pay me my weekly wages?"

"Follow my advice," said the Good Spirit, "don't steal and God will surely come to your aid."

"Believe me, Rabbi, the Good Spirit stuck to me like a leech and wouldn't let go of me until I agreed to follow his advice. I returned to my shanty and observed the Sabbath in a way, may it not be said of my worst enemy, O Lord!

"Now, Rabbi, today is again Thursday and, as usual, I expect to get no money from you, so my Sabbath will again be ruined. I walked about racking my poor brains—whose advice should I follow—that of the Good Spirit, or that of the Evil Spirit? And, as I was struggling within myself, who should appear if not the Good Spirit!

"You see, Hershell" he cried, triumphantly. "A man has got to be honest! You saw for yourself how it was possible for you to celebrate the Sabbath without wicked thievery!"

"Indeed I did," I answered him tartly. "And what a wretched Sabbath it was too! My family and I were so famished we were almost ready to collapse, although it was hardly a hair's difference from what we usually feel every day in the week. No, my good brother, rest assured I shan't

repeat that mistake twice. This coming week, praise God, I'll again follow the Evil Spirit's advice!"

"The Good Spirit almost jumped out of his shoes.

"Once and for all, Hershel, don't you dare steal!" he cried.

"That, Rabbi, was about the last straw! I was going to show him up, so I said to the Good Spirit, 'If you are such a saint, why don't you go to the Rabbi and tell him he should pay me my wages so I can celebrate God's Sabbath together with all other Jews?'

"So what do you think the Good Spirit answered?

"Believe me, Hershel," he assured me with tears in his eyes. "Gladly would I do you this little favor, but I swear before God that I don't know the rabbi at all. In fact, I've never even crossed his threshold in all these many years!"

### *Hershel's Revenge on the Women*

As soon as Hershel Ostropolier went to serve Rabbi Boruch of Miedziboz as his jester, he met with a hostile stare from the rabbi's wife. She found all sorts of petty pretexts to abuse him. Once, when he tried to defend himself, she turned her back on him insultingly and shut him up with the retort, "Your excuses are making me deaf—you're raising such a racket with them!"

Hershel smarted under the abuse and lay low. Someday, he vowed, he'd avenge the insult.

Some time soon after, the rabbi's wife said to Hershel, "Send your wife to me; it's high time we got to know each other."

"With pleasure," answered Hershel eagerly. "She'll regard it as a very great honor, believe me. But I must warn you—may it not happen to a dog—she's deaf as a wall! If you want her to hear you you've got to shout."

"I understand, I understand," the rabbi's wife assured him commiseratingly. "Never fear, I'll manage. Just have her come to see me."

When Hershel came home he said to his wife, that illustrious shrew, "The rabbi's wife told me she would like to get acquainted with you. But, I've got to warn you betimes: she's stone deaf. If you want her to hear you you've got to shout."

"I understand," said Hershel's wife knowingly, and went to see the rabbi's wife.

When the two women met they both began to shout and

scream at each other, ever louder and louder. Their cries even reached into the rabbi's study where he was closeted with his disciples. Frightened out of his wits, the rabbi dashed into his wife's room, the disciples close at his heels. What the rabbi saw was something he never forgot. Both women were at the point of collapse. Their voices were hoarse, and their cries sounded more like croaks.

"What's the meaning of this?" cried the rabbi in astonishment. "Why are you shouting this way?"

"Hershel's wife is deaf," gasped his wife. "I had to yell so she could hear me."

"And why do you shout?" asked the rabbi of Hershel's wife.

"What else should I do—your wife is stone deaf!" croaked Hershel's wife, her tongue hanging out.

"My wife stone deaf? You're crazy, woman!" cried the rabbi, beside himself with rage. "Who told you that?"

"Why Hershel did!"

All this while Hershel stood near the rabbi enjoying himself tremendously.

"Impudent fellow!" roared the rabbi. "Explain yourself instantly. What kind of a prank is this anyway?"

"I am innocent, Rabbi," pleaded Hershel.

"All right, so it's my fault!" said the rabbi sarcastically.

"Blame your wife, Rabbi," urged Hershel. "The other day she was angry at me for some reason. I was entirely innocent."

Then, addressing the rabbi's wife, Hershel continued, "Do you remember that when I tried to explain you turned your back on me and said: 'You're raising such a racket with your excuses they're making me deaf!' Well, what did you expect—I shouldn't believe you? Why should I have doubted you? Also, was it wrong of me to give due warning to my wife? If she spoke in a low voice you wouldn't have heard a thing. Besides, wouldn't it have been highly inconsiderate of her to do so?"

"But why did you tell me your wife was deaf?" rasped the rabbi's wife in a hoarse voice.

"What a foolish question!" retorted Hershel. "Imagine, if after only a few months I made you deaf with my excuses, how deaf do you think I've made my wife after being married twenty years to her? Don't either of you say I didn't warn you!"

*Reciprocity*

HERSHEL OSTROPOLIER was asked once, "Is it true, Hershel, what people say—that you beat your wife with a stick and she clouts you over the head with a rolling-pin?"

"That's not altogether true," answered Hershel. "Sometimes we change over."

*How Hershel Almost Became a Bigamist*

HERSHEL OSTROPOLIER'S wife was nagging him to death.

"You're a ne'er-do-well!" she cried. "You're a *schlimazl* and a fool, only you think you're smart. If you didn't speak so impudently to the rabbi and to the *gabbai* and to all the rich men of the town we wouldn't be so badly off."

When Hershel heard this he grew angry.

"You're a nice one to preach at me!" he said bitterly. "Why you've caused me more trouble than if you were ten good-for-nothing relatives!"

"What on earth are you jabbering about?" asked his wife.

"Listen to this story and you'll know," began Hershel. "Years ago, when I was still young and handsome, shortly after we had married, I was making a journey on foot. I never was more tired and hungry than I was that day. On the way I met another poor traveller.

"'Uncle,' I asked him, 'do you know if there's a Jewish settlement nearby where some kindhearted person will take pity on a footsore traveller and give him something to eat and a place to sleep?'

"Indeed I do," replied the man. "Not far from here lives a Jewish tenant-farmer. He is stuffed with money like a Passover goose, but he won't give a poor man a teaspoonful of water. The only person welcome in his house is a marriage-broker because his daughter is an ugly old maid, and he would like to see her married at all costs."

"When I heard this I went to call on the miser. I introduced myself, not as a marriage-broker but as a virtuous young man in search of a bride. Would you believe it, after being wined and dined in his house for several days, he proposed that I become his son-in-law!

"To make a long story short, I consented."

"You miserable wretch!" interrupted Hershel's wife. "How

could you have done a wicked thing like that with me being your wife then?"

"Easy, easy!" cautioned Hershel. "Just listen patiently to the end of my story.

"A day was fixed for the wedding to take place—in several weeks. In the meantime, I lived in luxury, tasted everything from honey to vinegar, and, when the wedding day arrived, there was nothing left to do but to break down and tell the truth. So I said to my bride's father, 'Listen, father dear, since today is my wedding day, it is my duty to tell you everything about my family so that later on you shouldn't have any grievances against me.'

"I am listening," he said.

"I have a brother," I began, "and he is an immoral fellow."

"What difference does it make?" he answered, cold-bloodedly.

"My sister-in-law is unfaithful to her husband."

"If your brother doesn't bother me, why should your sister-in-law?"

"I have two good-for-nothing uncles."

"That should be my biggest worry."

"I have a sister and she has an illegitimate child."

"What? An illegitimate child! Bad, bad! But what can we do about it?"

"I assure you that in my family there are drunks, card-players and libertines without number."

"At this my bride's father broke into a smile.

"What has that got to do with you?" he asked. "All we have to do is to take out the cow and burn the barn."

"I saw I was in a desperate position, so I finally said, 'But dear father, I have a wife!'

"When he heard this he became livid with rage. He seized me by the scruff of my neck and threw me out.

"I ask you—say yourself: doesn't that prove that you are worse than all the ten good-for-nothings in my family rolled in one?"

### *Hershel as Coachman*

HERSHEL's wife clamored: "Money! Money!"

"I have no money," he pleaded.

"You can tell that to your grandmother!" she retorted. "All I know is that the children are hungry."

When Hershel heard this he became serious and arose from his chair.

"Go to our next-door neighbor and borrow a whip," he said sternly to his oldest boy.

Hearing this, his wife began to tremble.

"God have mercy!" she thought with dismay. "Now he's going to give me a whipping!"

But this was farthest from Hershel's mind. When his boy brought him the whip he went into the market-place and cracked it loudly in the air.

"I'm taking people to Letitshev for half fare!" he shouted.

"What a bargain!" people thought, and in a wink there were eager customers.

Hershel collected money from them and gave it to his boy.

"Run home and give it to your mother," he said.

"Where are the horses?" inquired his passengers as they followed him down the road.

"Come along and don't worry!" Hershel told them. "I'll take you right into Letitshev."

So they followed him without further questions.

They had already left the town, but still no horses. In the distance they saw the bridge. "No doubt the horses are at the bridge," they thought. But when they reached the bridge there still were no horses. By this time they had already covered half the distance. So they thought to themselves: "Very well, this man is a swindler, but what good will it do us to turn back now?"

Finally, they reached Letitshev.

"Return us our money, you thief!" they demanded of Hershel. "You fooled us!"

"I fooled you?" laughed Hershel scornfully. "Answer me, did I or did I not promise to take you to Letitshev?"

"Yes, but ride there, not walk!"

"Pfui!" snorted Hershel. "Did I ever say a word about horses?"

The passengers looked at one another dumbfounded, and since there was nothing they could do about it they spat out in contempt and went away.

When Hershel got home his wife met him at the door, beaming.

"I can't understand, Hershel," she said. "You had a whip, but where on earth did you get the horses?"

"Don't ask foolish questions!" Hershel laughed. "What do I

need horses for? You know the saying: 'If you crack a whip you can always find some horses.' "

### *The Poor Cow*

ONE Sabbath afternoon Hershel Ostropolier stood at the window in the rabbi's study looking outside.

"Rabbi," he suddenly asked, "if one sees a cow drowning on the Sabbath—must one save her or let her drown?"

"Of course you can't save her! It's not allowed! What are you looking at anyway?"

"Nothing! A cow fell into the lake."

"What can one do?" sighed the rabbi. "The Torah forbids it!"

"Just look!" cried Hershel. "*Ai-ai-ai!* Now the water is going over her head! It's a pity on the poor dumb animal!"

"What can one do?"

"So you say, Rabbi, nothing can be done for her?"

"What concern is it of yours anyway?"

"Now I can no longer see the poor cow . . . she's gone under . . . drowned! A pity—a great pity!"

"What's the matter with you, Hershel! Why are you lamenting so?"

"You'll be sorry, Rabbi! I tell you—you'll be sorry!"

"Why, in God's name?"

"It's your cow, Rabbi!"

### *A Perfect Fit*

HERSHEL'S coat was falling to pieces. It was a disgrace, he felt, to show himself in it before decent people. But what was he to do? He didn't have a broken kopek. Somehow he had gotten wind of the fact that his wife had hidden a little pile, a few groschen at a time.

Hershel began to daydream. . . .

"If I could only get that money out of her," he said to himself, "I'd have a new coat made."

Shortly after, he climbed up the ladder to the garret. And, as his wife was below, she was surprised to hear Hershel talking angrily to someone.

"With whom are you talking, Hershel?" she called up to him.

"With whom do you think? With Destitution, of course," Hershel roared down from the garret.

"How on earth did he get up there?"

"He says he got sick and tired of our dingy rooms and so, for a change, he's come up to the garret."

"What does he want of you?"

"The Devil take him! He wants a new coat. He says if I'll order a new coat for him he'll move out of our house and never come back."

When Hershel climbed down from the garret his wife said to him, "It would pay to make Destitution a new coat if we can get rid of him that way."

"You're a smart one!" jeered Hershel. "If money grew on trees we could make a sweet pudding of it!"

"I've put by a couple of groschen," confessed Hershel's wife. "Here is the money, buy Destitution a coat, and then we'll tell him to go and break his hands and feet!"

As Hershel started to leave the house his wife called him back.

"You've forgotten to take Destitution's measure!"

Hershel nodded and went up again to the garret. When he came down he said, "I don't have to take his measure. He and I are like two peas in a pod—not a hair's difference."

Hershel went to a tailor who took his measure for a new coat. When it was completed he put it on, and under no circumstances would he take it off.

"Why don't you take the coat off, Hershel?" pleaded his wife. "If Destitution finds out that you are wearing his coat he'll get mighty angry and he'll give it to us in the neck."

"You're right," said Hershel, and, taking off his coat, he went up to the garret.

After a little while he returned with the coat.

"Why didn't you give him the coat?" his wife reproached him.

"It's no use!" said Hershel, downcast. "The coat doesn't fit him."

"I thought you said there wasn't a hair's difference between your measure and his."

"True!" replied Hershel. "But that was before we spent money on his new coat. Now that we've spent it we're poorer and Destitution has grown bigger!"

*A Tooth for a Tooth*

IN THE town was an upstart rich man—an ignoramus and a boor. He had an only daughter who had nothing to recommend her except her father's money. Whatever match was proposed for her the father would turn down.

"My daughter will marry only a man of good family!" he said haughtily.

One day, made desperate by need, Hershel Ostropolier came to him with a proposition.

"The youth I'm proposing for your daughter is a gem," he told the rich man. "He's handsome, he's learned in the Torah, and he has a fine character."

"Who is he?" asked the rich man, beaming with anticipation.

"Shmul, the cobbler's son," answered Hershel.

"You lout!" roared the rich man. "How dare you propose such a match for my daughter! Out of my house this minute!"

And he took Hershel by the scruff of his neck and the seat of his pants and threw him out of the house.

Several days later, who should call on the same rich man but Hershel!

"You here again!" shouted the rich man angrily. "I told you not to show your face again here!"

"Don't be angry," began Hershel, mollifyingly. "I have a first-class match for your daughter this time."

The rich man became curious.

"Really?" he asked. "Who is it now?"

"None other but the rabbi's son."

The rich man leaped to his feet with delight.

"Wonderful! This is really unexpected!" he murmured. "But tell me Hershel, my dear friend, were you already at the rabbi's? Did you talk to him about the matter yet?"

"What a question: 'Was I there?' Of course I already spoke to the rabbi about it."

"Tell me! What did he say?" inquired the rich man eagerly.

"What did he say? He said just what you said to me the other day! 'You lout! How dare you propose such a match for my son! Out of my house this minute!' And he took me by the scruff of my neck and the seat of my pants and threw me out!"

*What Hershel's Father Did*

ONCE Hershel Ostropolier stopped at an inn to spend the night. There were no other guests at the time. The innkeeper was away and only his wife was there to receive Hershel.

"I'm half dead with hunger," Hershel told her. "Do give me something to eat."

Looking at his shabby clothes the woman thought to herself, "This man is a tramp. Why take a chance and feed him?"

"I'm very sorry, my good man, but there isn't a drop of food in the house."

"What? No food?" cried Hershel, jumping up.

For a moment he stood deep in thought. Then he muttered, "In that case, I'm afraid I'll have to do just what my father did!"

When the innkeeper's wife heard this she grew alarmed.

"What did your father do?" she asked, all a-tremble.

"Never mind, my father did what he did!" said Hershel, ominously.

"What in heaven's name could this man's father have done?" the innkeeper's wife wondered. "It's a bad business, me all alone with him in the house. Who can tell—his father may have been a murderer, and if he threatens to do what his father did—good God . . .!"

Without a word she set the table and served Hershel all manner of good things. Hershel was so hungry he ate like a wolf. When he had finished he smacked his lips and said, "I haven't eaten such a good dinner since Passover!"

Seeing that the stranger was in a good mood the woman asked timidly, "Be so good and tell me—what was it that your father did!"

"Oh, my father?" replied Hershel innocently. "Whenever my father didn't have any supper he went to bed without it."

*Gilding the Lily*

"HERSHEL," said a rich man to the celebrated pauper-wag, "if you'll tell me a lie without thinking, I'll give you one ruble."

"What do you mean one ruble—you just said two!"

*When Hershel Eats——*

IN A certain village lived a rich man. He was stingy and hard-hearted, but he was also clever and knew how to conceal his

corruption. Those who didn't know him even got the impression that he was kind-hearted. On the Sabbath he would invite some poor traveller to his table, but woe to the unwary victim who fell into his clutches!

As a mark of honor he would place the wretch at the head of the table. Then the cat-and-mouse play began. He would ply the stranger with innumerable questions so that out of politeness he'd have to answer them. This gave him no opportunity to eat. In the meantime his host was enjoying both his food and his own cunning. To add insult to injury, when practically nothing was left on the table the host would turn with solicitude to his guest and upbraid him gently, "Why didn't you eat? Why did you talk so much?"

What was the poor man to do? He had to thank his host like a hypocrite and go to bed hungry.

Once it chanced that Hershel Ostropolier arrived in this village. Hearing of the queer ways of this rich man and his tricks, he decided to take revenge on him for all the poor unfortunates he had maltreated.

When Friday night arrived Hershel asked the *shammes* of the synagogue to arrange that he be invited to this rich man's house as his Sabbath guest. The *shammes* even tried to dissuade him from the step.

"Take my word for it," he said, "this rich man is wicked."

But Hershel insisted. So the *shammes* made the necessary arrangements for his visit.

After the Friday night service in the synagogue Hershel went home with the rich man. When they sat down to supper his host seated him in the place of honor, introduced him to the members of his household and showed him marked attention. After they all had recited the blessings over the wine the servants brought in a tureen of fish. Its aroma made the already hungry Hershel even hungrier.

The head of the household first stuck his fork into a fine portion of *gefilte fish* and put it on his plate. Then, as if absent-minded, he didn't pass the tureen to Hershel but kept it near himself. He fell into a reverie.

"From where do you come, uncle?" he asked.

"From Vishnitz," answered Hershel, mentioning a name at random.

"From Vishnitz? Then surely you must know Shaiah the miller! How is he? What's he doing?"

"Shaiah the miller?" echoed Hershel. "He died."

Thereupon, without any further ceremony, Hershel extended his arm across the table and stuck his fork into a large portion of fish which he put on his plate. He fell to and ate with zest.

But his host was flabbergasted at what Hershel had told him. He turned pale and put down his fork.

"Did you hear, Malke?" he cried incredulously to his wife. "My old friend Shaiah is dead! Why didn't his wife let me know? I wonder what will happen to his fortune—he must have left a nice little pile! But tell me—how is Velvel?"

"Which Velvel?"

"Why Shaiah's eldest son, you know, the one who runs the inn in Vishnitz."

"Oh, you mean Velvel who runs the inn? He died too!" said Hershel in a matter-of-fact voice, spearing another piece of fish.

"Velvel died?" cried the rich man incredulously. "Did you hear, Malke—Velvel died! Woe is me. He owes me five hundred rubles! But tell me how is Velvel's partner, Yoshe the vintner? Is he running the inn now?"

"No!" sighed Hershel, chewing away at the fish. "He also died."

"What! Yoshe the vintner is also dead! Woe is us, Malke! My money is lost!"

And as the rich man continued to rave and get excited Hershel went on eating calmly, smiling into his beard.

"Uncle," the rich man finally ventured with trepidation, "maybe you know what Shaiah's brother, Avrum the dry-goods merchant, is doing?"

"What Avrum?" asked Hershel innocently, almost choking on a mouthful of delicious white *chaleh*.

"Why, don't you know—Avrum the dry-goods merchant! He lives near the lake, in the big white house!"

"Oh, he? I knew him well," answered Hershel. "He's dead too!"

"Have you gone out of your head, uncle?" shrieked the rich man in an unearthly voice, jumping up from his chair. "Surely, you don't mean to tell me that everybody in Vishnitz died?"

"My dear friend," drawled Hershel in his nasal way, "when I eat, everybody is as good as dead for me! But say, my good host, you've been so busy talking you've forgotten to eat! Know what? Your *gefillte fish* is really first rate!"

*Hershel as Wine-Doctor*

AT A time when the grape crop failed, the wine dealer of the town began to skin his customers alive. "I don't need any customers!" he said haughtily. "I can afford to wait for my price!"

Because of his attitude the townfolk had to go without wine, and so they thirsted for revenge.

"Just you wait!" Hershel Ostropolier said to them. "I'll teach this wretch such a lesson that he'll remember his grandmother!"

Hershel borrowed some good clothes in order to look respectable and, accompanied by the young men of the town, he went to call on the wine-seller. His companions waited outside as he entered.

"Good morning!" began Hershel. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am a well-known wine-maker from Lemberg. I can make good wine out of bad and better wine out of good."

The wine-seller was overjoyed.

"Are you staying long in town?"

"No, just passing through. I wanted to see how the wine business was in these parts."

"I'll be much obliged to you, young man, if you'll teach me how to improve my wine."

"With the greatest of pleasure!" answered Hershel. "Take me down to your cellar and I'll teach you."

So they went down into the wine-cellar. Out of his travelling bag Hershel took a drill and bored a hole in one barrel. He stuck his finger in the hole, then moistened his lips with it.

"Not bad," he wagged his head, judiciously, like an expert. "Be so good as to put your finger into this hole while I taste the wine in the next barrel."

The wine-seller did as he was told.

Hershel then bored a hole in the next barrel, tasted the wine and smacked his lips.

"Not bad!" he said judiciously. "Please be good enough to stop up this hole with a finger of your other hand."

The wine-seller did as he was told. And, when he had both hands thus occupied, Hershel called to his companions. Realizing that he had been trapped the profiteer became livid with rage.

"You rogue!" he cried. "I'll have you thrown into prison for this!"

"Just see how well he holds on to his wine," said Hershel gleefully. "We'll let him hold on this way all night, just to teach him not to be such a pig!"

### *The Feast*

HERSHEL OSTROPOLIER found himself travelling in a stage coach with a company of *Hasidim*. These were upstart rich men who had a lot of fun making sport of Hershel. He didn't enjoy their fun at all, but held his peace, thinking: "Just you wait, you rascals! My name isn't Hershel for nothing! Make sport of me to your hearts' content—you'll pay for it dearly."

"Hershell!" one of the company suddenly called out. "You owe us a feast!"

"I owe you a feast? What miracle has happened?"

"You were appointed jester to the rabbi some time ago, and we haven't yet had a chance to drink on it."

"A feast, a feast!" cried the others.

"I haven't any money."

"Sell your clothes then. Pawn your wife's pearls! But make a feast for us."

"But my wife has no pearls."

"What do you mean, your wife has no pearls! Buy them for her and then pawn them!"

Seeing that he was in a hole Hershel agreed reluctantly, saying, "You're right! I owe you a feast and I'll pay up."

So they continued on their journey. Towards noon they came to an inn. The *Hasidim* were hungry and wanted to stop there. But Hershel didn't want to go in with them.

"I owe the innkeeper some money," he said. "And I can't pay him now."

The *Hasidim* laughed and gave him the following instructions: "You, Hershel, ride ahead with the carriage. We'll eat and rest awhile and later on we'll catch up with you at the inn in the next village."

Hershel did as they suggested, and in three hours' time he reached the next inn. Before entering he took his Sabbath gabardine out of his travelling bag. Looking important, he went up to the innkeeper, extended his hand with a loud "*Sholom aleichem!*" and said, "Know that in a short while a large carriage will arrive with a company of rich people.

They sent me ahead to give you the message—that you should prepare the finest *gefille fish*, the fattest geese, and the most expensive wines. Prepare everything with generosity. There's absolutely no question about money! Only hurry, because they'll soon be here."

"And what, if I may ask, is the reason for this celebration?" asked the innkeeper.

Hershel answered without hesitation, "Several days ago, while passing through the forest, they were waylaid by a gang of robbers. But they came out of the business unscathed. Therefore, they're making this feast in thanksgiving."

The innkeeper told his wife the good news, and in a wink everybody became feverishly busy, cooking, scouring and cleaning as one would, expecting important guests. Hershel requested that the place be brightened festively. So they lit many candles.

When the *Hasidim* neared the inn they saw Hershel running towards them. At first they were frightened.

"Why do you run all out of breath, Hershel?" they asked.  
"What has happened?"

"God is good!"

"What! Have you found a treasure?"

"You wanted a feast, didn't you? Well, the good Lord has arranged it. There, in that inn, they've already been celebrating for a week. Every Jewish traveller who passes by is obliged to stop here and feast with the innkeeper without paying one kopek."

"The innkeeper is crazy!" the *Hasidim* agreed among themselves.

"Why is he crazy?" protested Hershel. "There's a whole story to it. A week ago a gang of robbers waylaid the innkeeper as he was passing through a dark forest. Because he escaped without a scratch the innkeeper is celebrating this way in thanksgiving to God. It would be a sin, believe me, to let such a fine feast get away from us! Remember though, don't mention a word about money! You'll only embarrass the innkeeper."

This story pleased the *Hasidim* so they drew up before the inn and entered.

Everybody could see that Hershel had told the whole truth. The inn was beautifully illuminated as though for a feast. The tables were set with all good things. The innkeeper and his wife were dressed in their Sabbath best. Without hesita-

tion the *Hasidim* seated themselves and began to make merry. The innkeeper almost crawled out of his skin to please his guests. The *Hasidim* gorged themselves. They sang and they even danced in a circle.

Thus the night passed.

Just at the point of daybreak the door of the inn was thrown wide open and the driver of the carriage in which the *Hasidim* had come stormed in.

"It's high time to leave!" he announced. "And I'm not going to wait a minute longer!"

When Hershel heard this he stole out of the inn. Barely able to stand on their legs, the *Hasidim* staggered out and began to climb into the carriage. Seeing this, the innkeeper ran up and held on to the horses.

"I won't let you go until you pay me!" he cried.

Everybody began to shout at the same time, and no one knew what anybody was saying. The shock of the news almost sobered up the *Hasidim*. Blazing with anger they said to the innkeeper, "How dare you demand payment of us? Hershel distinctly told us that you were inviting every passerby to a feast of thanksgiving because you were saved from a gang of robbers in the woods last week."

"That's a lie!" raged the innkeeper. "Hershel told me distinctly that it was *you* who escaped unscathed from a gang of robbers and that's why you were sending him with a message to me that I should prepare a feast of thanksgiving *for you*. A fine bunch of robbers you are yourselves, you pious hypocrites! On my word as a Jew, if you don't pay up immediately I'll have you arrested and sent to prison!"

And the *Hasidim* paid.

### *The Way to Die*

HERSHEL OSTROPOLIER, the famous jester, died as he had lived—with a joke on his lips.

When Rabbi Boruch and his disciples stood around Hershel's bed and listened to him making sport of everything and everybody they were filled with wonder.

"Haven't you done enough ridiculing in your life without having to do so on your deathbed?" the rabbi rebuked him sternly. "Aren't you afraid of Hell?"

"Never fear," replied the dying Hershel, "I'll joke myself out of there, too!"

"For instance?" asked the rabbi.

"If the Angel of Death asks me whether I devoted my days and nights to the study of the Torah, I'll answer: 'If you think I'm not a scholar don't make me your son-in-law.' If he asks me what my name is—I'll tell him: 'Getzel.' Naturally, he'll get angry, 'What's the idea, your name is Hershel?' So I'll tell him: 'Since you know, why do you ask?' And if he asks me: 'What have you accomplished in life? Have you mended anything that was wrong in the world?' I'll answer: 'Mended? Surely, I mended—I mended my socks, my shirt, my pants. . . .'"

A little later, when the members of the Burial Society arrived, Hershel said to them with his dying breath, "Remember, my friends, when you lift me up to lay me in my coffin be sure not to hold me under the arm-pits. I've always been very ticklish there!"

And so, with a smile on his lips, Hershel breathed his last.

## FOOLS AND SIMPLETONS

### INTRODUCTION

Laughing at the absurdities of fools is one of the oldest diversions of mankind. There is within all of us a deep-seated psychological drive to achieve self-elevation by means of disparaging others whom we are pleased to consider less bright than ourselves. A fool, of course, is always the other fellow, never ourselves.

There are a great number of ancient and modern Jewish sayings that refer disdainfully to fools: "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools. . . . For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of a fool. . . . A fool's voice is known by a multitude of words. . . . It is better to lose to a wise man than to win from a fool. . . . Never show half-finished work to a fool."

However, there is still another tradition about fools. It, on the contrary, is not scornful but understanding and compassionate, and springs from the ethical values of the folk who keep in mind the admonitions of the Prophet Jeremiah: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." This attitude is derived from the precept of humility taught in Israel since the days of the Prophets and the sages. This is trenchantly pointed in the saying: "All wise people act foolishly sometimes."

There is a whimsical little story in the Talmud about a man

who had left a will stipulating: "My son shall not receive his inheritance until he becomes foolish." The rabbinical judges were confounded by this clause. What on earth could it mean? So they decided to call on the astute Rabbi Joshua ben Korha (2nd Century A.D.) in order to ask his advice in the matter.

When they entered the rabbi's house they drew back in amazement. There, on the floor, crawling on all fours was Rabbi Joshua! With a cord in his mouth and his little son astride him, he was playing the time-honored game of "horsie."

When Rabbi Joshua regained his dignity and listened to the rabbis' question about the will he could not contain his mirth: "My Masters," he laughed, "I have given you a concrete illustration of your case. Know that everyone becomes foolish as soon as he has children!"

During the Middle Ages, when "The Fool in Christ" became a cherished belief of the Christian mystics, the Jews did not remain unaffected by it. There are stories about the *Lamed-Vav-Tzaddikim*, the Thirty-Six Hidden Saints, that carry this theme in modified form and in characteristic Jewish garb. There is a striking similarity between them and the Christian tales about saintly fools, and even with modern literary treatments of these folktales, such as Tolstoy's moral stories about "holy fools" and the "holy simpleton" tale, *Fra Giovanni*, by Anatole France.

There is no body of humorous folk-literature more widely disseminated among Yiddish-speaking Jews than the stories about the fools (or "sages" as they are scoffingly called) of Chelm. There are, of course, fools and fools, but in the Jewish folk-fancy the fools of Chelm represent the *ne plus ultra* in simpletons. They have even entered into the Yiddish language. When a Jew refers to a pretentious foolish person, likely as not he will say of him ironically: "Just look at him—a regular *Chelmer chochme*."

What is Chelm? It is a real town in Poland, like Gotham in England and Schildburg in Germany. These three towns have one thing in common—for some unaccountable reason they were elected in irreverent folklore to serve as the centers of all innocent stupidity. The historical origin of the foolish stories about the inhabitants of all three places is closely linked. Which of them came first chronologically is like debating which came first—the chicken or the egg. However, we do know one fact, that the tales about the fools of Schildburg were translated in 1597 from the German into Yiddish, and enjoyed enormous popularity in central and eastern Europe.

Whether there already existed before that time a body of humorous Yiddish stories about the fools of Chelm, we have no way of knowing. It is reasonable, though, to conjecture that, prior to that time, there must have been in circulation among

Jews many jokes about fools but there was no unifying peg on which to hang them. Conceivably, the Schildburger tales may have served as a model for the adoption of Chelm as a town of Jewish fools. Since then many a story about fools has conveniently been ascribed to the inhabitants of Chelm.

The Chelm stories have their own flavor and coloration, differing considerably from the Schildburg and Gotham stories. They not only have Jewish settings and, to some extent, are an index to Jewish character, customs and manners, but they also possess many facets of Jewish irony and wit. Unquestionably, they constitute an original body of folk-humor.

N.A.

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### *What Makes a Fool*

A FOOL went to the rabbi and said: "I know I'm a fool, Rabbi, but I don't know what to do about it. Please advise me what to do."

"Ah, my son!" exclaimed the rabbi, in a complimentary way. "If you know you're a fool, then you surely are no fool!"

"Then why does everybody say I'm a fool?" complained the man.

The rabbi regarded him thoughtfully for a moment.

"If you yourself don't understand that you're a fool," he chided him, "but only listen to what people say, then you surely *are* a fool!"

### *Some of the Nicest People*

A JEW came to his rabbi to lodge a complaint against other members of the congregation.

"Rabbi," he asked plaintively, "do you think it right of them to call me a fool?"

The rabbi listened with sympathy.

"Why get upset by such a trifle!" he consoled him. "Do you think fools are so very different from other people? Believe me, some of the nicest people I've ever known were fools. Why, even a fine, intelligent man like you could be one!"

*Why Waste Money?*

ONCE there was a nitwit, and he could not be trusted with anything from here to there. Naturally, he was a source of grief to his parents. But what could they do, poor people—he was their own flesh and blood!

One day his mother said to him, "Motkele, my son, here is a ruble! Go to market and buy a hen for me. But remember, hold tight to the ruble and don't lose it."

Motkele promised faithfully and went to market. But on his return his mother almost fainted. Motkele had brought back a jug filled with water!

"Motkele, my son, what on earth have you done?" she cried. "Didn't I ask you to buy a hen? What's this water for?"

"Don't be angry with me, mother!" pleaded Motkele. "Let me tell you what happened. I went to market to buy a hen, as you told me to. When I asked the poultry woman to sell me a hen she said: 'I want you to know that this is no mere hen—it's heavenly chicken-fat!' When I heard her praise chicken-fat so I knew that chicken-fat must be better than a hen, so I went to buy chicken-fat. I asked the butcher for some chicken-fat. He said to me: 'This is no mere chicken-fat—it's as clear as oil!' I understood then that oil must be better than chicken-fat. So I went into a shop and asked for oil, and the shopkeeper said: 'This is no mere oil! You can see it's pure as water!' When I heard that water was better than oil, I said to myself: 'What's the use of wasting a good ruble?' So I got the pitcher and filled it with pure water, and here I am!"

*Philosophy with Noodles*

ONCE a proposal of marriage was brought to a young man who was simple-minded. Poor fellow! He had no idea how to behave in the company of others. And so, in order to save him from embarrassment, his father, who was a man of the world, cautioned him as follows:

"When you visit the bride for the first time you no doubt will not know what to talk to her about. Therefore, if you want to make a good impression on her, here's my advice. First, begin talking about love. Then you can touch on family affairs. You can wind up with a little philosophy."

The groom nodded gravely and replied that he understood perfectly well how he was to behave. Then, with his father's

blessings, he went off to make his first call on his intended.

At first he felt great constraint because the girl's parents were present, but when they left from motives of delicacy, he relaxed somewhat. Then, remembering his father's counsel, he suddenly asked the girl, "Do you love noodles?"

"Sure," she answered in surprise. "Why shouldn't I love noodles?"

After a moment of silence, he continued, "Do you have a brother?"

"No, I have no brother."

The groom rejoiced—he had safely weathered his father's first two instructions, had talked about love and family matters. Now he still had to philosophize a bit.

"*Kaleh*," he asked, furrowing his brow, "if you had a brother, would he have loved noodles?"

### *Surplus*

IN ANY Jewish village of old Russia a Gentile could earn small sums on the Sabbath and holy days by performing certain duties for orthodox Jews that were forbidden to them by their religion.

On a train, Yoshke the *luftmensch*, from a tiny village, was sitting next to a Jew from Kharkov.

In the course of the inevitable conversation Yoshke stated with pride, "Our town is quite a town. We have five hundred Jews and fifty Gentiles. How big is your town?"

"In our town we have a hundred thousand Jews," said the man from Kharkov bluntly.

Yoshke was overwhelmed. "Unbelievable!" he said. "How many Gentiles have you?"

"About a million."

"A million! What do you need so many Gentiles for?"

### *If It Were Anyone Else*

"DOCTOR, I need help," complained a patient. "I talk to myself."

"Do you suffer pain?" asked the doctor.

"No, no pain."

"Well," said the doctor, "then go home, don't worry. Millions of people talk to themselves . . ."

"But, doctor," cried the patient, "you don't know what a *nudnik* I am!"

*It's Terrible*

IN A hot, dusty train unequipped with the luxury of water an old Jew sat opposite a stranger in the cramped seats.

"*Oy*," said the old man for about the ninetieth time, "am I thirsty!"

The stranger twitched with irritation.

"What a terrible thirst I have!" the old man repeated hoarsely.

Again the stranger's nerves tensed.

"*Oy, am I thirsty!*" again exclaimed the old man.

Just then the train stopped at a station. The stranger hastened into the station, obtained a cup of water, and returned. Thrusting it at the old man he cried, "Here, drink!"

"Thank you," said the old man, and drank.

As the train started up again the stranger settled back to enjoy the peace. But in a moment the quiet was shattered by a mighty sigh.

"*Oy, did I have a thirst!*"

*Making It Easy*

EVERY afternoon Herr Gutman went to play pinochle with several cronies at the Café Schlagobers in Vienna. One afternoon, as he sat playing, he suddenly fell forward; he had died from a stroke.

His cronies decided to send the dead man's bosom companion, Herr Lubin, to break the news to the poor widow.

"*Guten Tag, Herr Lubin,*" Frau Gutman greeted her unexpected visitor. "How are things?"

"How should they be? Fine."

"Have you seen my husband?"

"I have."

"In the Café, no doubt?"

"Where else?"

"No doubt he played pinochle?"

"What else?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if he lost all his money!"

"Who else's money would he lose?"

"What! He lost his money? May he be struck dead, the good-for-nothing!"

"You see, Frau Gutman," cried Herr Lubin, overjoyed. "That's just what I've come to see you about!"

## THE WISDOM OF CHELM

*The Mistake*

THE rabbi of Chelm and one of his Talmud students were spending the night at the inn. The student asked the servant to wake him at dawn because he was to take an early train. The servant did so. Not wishing to wake the rabbi, the student groped in the dark for his clothes and, in his haste, he put on the long rabbinical gabardine. He hurried to the station, and, as he entered the train, he was struck dumb with amazement as he looked at himself in the compartment mirror.

"What an idiot that servant is!" he cried angrily. "I asked him to wake me, instead he went and woke the rabbi!"

*The Golden Shoes*

THE citizens of Chelm met in council and decided that for a community like theirs, so renowned for its wisdom, it was only fitting that it should have a Chief Sage. So they elected a Chief Sage. But to their dismay, nobody seemed to pay any attention to him when he walked out on the street, for he looked like any other ordinary Chelm citizen.

So they bought him a pair of golden shoes.

"Now everybody will know that he is the Chief Sage!" they said.

The first day the Chief Sage put on his golden shoes a deep mud lay on the streets. In no time at all the mud covered the shoes and it was impossible to see that they were golden. Therefore nobody knew it was the Chief Sage. No attention was paid to him.

The Chief Sage did not like to be ignored that way so he went to complain to the Council of Sages.

"If I don't get some respect quickly I'll resign!" he threatened.

"You're perfectly right!" the Council agreed. "We're going to do something drastic about it! The dignity of our Chief Sage must be protected!"

They therefore ordered for him a pair of fine leather shoes to wear over the golden shoes. True enough, when the Chief Sage went out upon the street the leather shoes protected the golden shoes from the mud, but since no one got a glimmer

of the golden shoes, how could they tell it was the Chief Sage? So again they paid no attention to him.

"It is an outrage!" cried the Chief Sage. "What's the use of being Chief Sage if everybody ignores you?"

"You're right—absolutely right!" agreed the Council. "Trust us—we'll do everything to protect your dignity."

So they ordered from the shoemaker a new pair of leather shoes for the Chief Sage. These were to have holes in them. In this way they would protect the golden shoes against the mud, and at the same time would reveal them. Everybody would thus be able to recognize the Chief Sage.

Unfortunately, this plan, too, miscarried. The mud went through the holes and mired the golden shoes as well as the leather shoes. Therefore, since nobody had any inkling that it was the Chief Sage they paid no attention to him, as usual.

"This is an outrage!" cried the Chief Sage. "I'm humiliated, and soon I won't be able to show my face on the street!"

"When you are mortified we are mortified too!" the Council consoled him. "Never fear, we shall do something about it."

Thereupon, they stuffed the holes in his leather shoes with straw. True, the straw prevented the mud from entering the shoes but the old trouble was still there—nobody could get a glimmer of the golden shoes. And again the Chief Sage passed ignored. This was the last straw!

So the sages of Chelm went into solemn council, once for all to settle the matter. And, after long and heated deliberation, they emerged triumphantly with a solution.

"Henceforth," they told the Chief Sage, "you will walk out on the street wearing ordinary leather shoes, but, in order that everybody might know that you are the Chief Sage, you will wear the golden shoes one on each hand!"

### *The Chelm Goat Mystery<sup>5</sup>*

THE rabbi of Chelm once fell gravely sick. While he could work wonders for others, he refused to use his supernatural powers for himself—such a saint he was! So they had to do the next best thing and call the doctor.

The doctor examined the holy man and shook his head.

"Bad, bad!" he muttered to the *rebbitzin*. "There's only one thing that can help him—a steady supply of fresh goat's

milk. But for this you've got to own a goat. My advice to you is: buy a goat."

So the *rebbitzin* asked two of the rabbi's disciples to go to the next village and buy a good nanny goat at a reasonable price.

"Trust us!" cried the disciples. "We'll bring you the best goat in goatland!"

So they went to the next village and bought a white nanny goat.

"Are you sure it's a good nanny goat?" the disciples asked the dealer, just to make sure.

"Is it a good nanny goat?" cried the dealer offended. "Why, it gushes milk like a fountain!"

Delighted with their purchase, the disciples started for home, leading the goat by a rope.

"With such an animal the rabbi will surely get well!" they rejoiced.

On the way they came to an inn. Already in high spirits the disciples said, "Let's drink to the health of our rabbi and his nanny goat!"

So, after tying their goat to a post in the stable, they went into the inn and ordered some drinks.

Made talkative by the *schnapps* they began to boast before the innkeeper.

"Some goat we've just bought for our rabbi! It's positively the best goat in goatland—it gushes milk like a fountain! There isn't another like it in Chelm!"

"You don't say so!" replied the innkeeper with amazement.

Now this innkeeper was an irreverent rogue; he had a hearty dislike for wonder-working rabbis as well as for all the people of Chelm. Therefore, he plotted a mischievous prank against the rabbi's disciples. While they were merrily celebrating, he quietly slipped out into the stable. He untied the wonderful white nanny goat they had bought and in its place he tied his own white billy-goat.

When the disciples had sobered up a bit they paid the innkeeper, untied their goat, and continued on their homeward journey.

They arrived in Chelm toward nightfall. In their eagerness to show off their purchase they ran to the rabbi's house, with the goat galloping behind them and a crowd of curious children trotting after the goat. When they reached the rabbi's

house the disciples called, "Rebbitzin, quick, come out and look at the wonderful goat we bought for you!"

"Really a fine goat!" said the *rebbitzin*, judiciously. "The question is, does she give a lot of milk?"

"Don't ask—just milk her and you'll see for yourself!" said the disciples, beaming.

The *rebbitzin* went for a stool and a pot and sat down to milk. She tried and tried but no milk came.

"May such a misfortune happen to my enemies!" she burst out angrily. "What kind of a goat did you buy? She doesn't give a drop!"

"Don't be so hasty, *rebbitzin*," they implored her. "The Torah says specifically: 'Everything has to be done with knowledge and with understanding.' Since you have never owned a goat before let's call in a goat expert."

So they called in a goat expert, who took one look at the goat and he cried out in surprise, "This is no nanny goat! This is a billy-goat!"

The disciples grew bitter.

"That enemy of Israel!" they cried, referring to the dealer in goats. "Tomorrow we'll take this wretched beast back to him and tell him a thing or two for this swindle."

Early the next morning the disciples, boiling with anger, started out with the goat. Again they passed the wayside inn.

"Let's go in and cheer ourselves up with a drink," one suggested. "After all, we don't have to make ourselves miserable on account of a flea-bitten goat!"

So, after tying the goat in the stable, they went into the inn and ordered drinks.

"What kind of a swindle do you suppose that dog of a goat dealer put over on us?" they said to the innkeeper. "Gave us a billy instead of a nanny!"

"Tsk, tsk!" exclaimed the innkeeper commiseratingly. "The trouble with you scholars is that you're so unworldly. You believe everything you're told. Why don't you keep your eyes open when you buy something?"

To drown their humiliation the disciples drank heavily and, while they were at it, the innkeeper went quietly into the stable, removed his own billy and in its place he tied the nanny that he had taken from the disciples the day before.

Through with their drinking, the disciples untied their goat and departed.

"Enemy of Israel!" they called out with rage when they

saw the goat-dealer. "Don't think you can swindle honest folk so easily!"

"What's wrong, what's wrong?" murmured the dealer in confusion.

"What's wrong? You said you sold us a nanny! And what do you suppose we found when we got home—a billy!"

"I swear, you're crazy!" cried the dealer as he took but one look at the goat.

"Malkel!" he called to his wife. "Just milk this nanny for these fine scholars!"

The woman brought a stool and a pot and began to milk the goat. The disciples stood by, their eyes popping out of their heads. There, right before their very eyes, the goat was streaming milk like a fountain, just as the dealer had told them she would!

"*Nu, schlemihs*, are you satisfied now?" he asked scornfully.

Muttering their apologies the rabbi's disciples took their goat and started for home.

Elated, they burst into song. When they passed the inn again one said, "Now we should really celebrate! Our goat is some gusher!"

Into the inn they went and ordered a big bottle of *schnapps* and, while they were drinking to the health of the rabbi and the goat, sure enough that rascal of an innkeeper stole away and once more exchanged the goats.

Unsuspectingly the happy disciples returned home. But the same thing happened this time as before. When the *rebbitzin* sat down to milk the goat she discovered it was a billy!

"There's witchcraft in this!" cried the disciples horrified. "With our own eyes we saw the dealer's wife milk this goat. We must tell the whole story to the rabbi!"

Breathlessly they went to the sick rabbi and told him all that had happened.

"It's clear to me that the dealer is a swindler," was the rabbi's judicious opinion. "There's only one thing left for you to do. Return immediately to the dealer with the goat and summon him to Rabbi Shmul in his town. Demand a signed document from the rabbi that the goat you finally leave with is a nanny and not a billy."

The following day, bright and early, the disciples started out again with the goat. As they had done every time before they went into the inn to cheer themselves up. When he

heard their story the innkeeper said, "You're a bunch of *schlemihls!* If your goat dealer had played a trick on me like that I'd have broken every bone in his body!"

"Never fear!" promised the disciples. "We'll fix him so he'll see his dead grandmother!"

And, while they were drinking to give themselves courage for the final encounter with the goat-dealer, the sly innkeeper again exchanged the goats.

The disciples left in high spirits to call on the dealer.

"Swindler!" they cried. "Do you expect us to spend the rest of our lives travelling from Chelm to your cursed village with this miserable animal? Here's your goat. Now show us, before we make you join your dead grandmother, how much milk you can squeeze out of your gusher!"

Without a word the dealer sat down and milked the animal.

The disciples looked on stunned. They could hardly believe their eyes. The milk was pouring into the pot in a foaming stream.

"To your rabbi! Take us to your rabbi!" they now demanded. "We want a document from him that this is a genuine nanny!"

The goat-dealer shrugged his shoulders disdainfully and went with them to the rabbi who carefully examined the goat and pronounced it a nanny. He gave them a signed and sealed document attesting to that effect.

Now the disciples were certain that all their troubles were over, so they started for home in a merry mood. To crown their triumph they again went into the inn for a round of drinks. Once more the innkeeper exchanged the goats.

When the disciples reached the rabbi's house, they cried joyfully, "*Rebbitzin!* Just come out and see! It's a genuine nanny this time. Here you have Rabbi Shmul's written word for it!"

Eagerly the *rebbitzin* ran for her pot and stool and sat down to milk the goat. With a cry she leaped up and screamed, "Numskulls! Lunatics! What sort of game do you think you're playing with me?"

She then made them go with her to the rabbi's room.

"Here you have Rabbi Shmul's document!" cried the disciples in bewilderment. "Tell us, what does all this mean? Do you perhaps see the Evil Eye in it, Rabbi?"

"Bring me my spectacles!" ordered the rabbi.

They brought him his spectacles. He put them on and carefully read Rabbi Shmul's document.

For a long time the rabbi sat deliberating, his brow furrowed, his eyes far away. Then he spoke, "This is my opinion: Rabbi Shmul is a wise and upright man. He never writes anything that is not true. If he tells us that the goat is a nanny you can rest assured that it is not a billy. Now, you will ask: how is it that the goat he tells us is a nanny turns out to be a billy? The answer is very simple: true, the goat he examined and testified to was a nanny. But such is the confounded luck of us Chelm *schlimazls* that, by the time a nanny goat finally reaches our town, it's sure to turn into a billy!"

### *Innocence and Arithmetic*

A YOUNG scholar of Chelm, innocent in the ways of earthly matters, was stunned one morning when his wife gave birth. Pell-mell he ran to the rabbi.

"Rabbi," he blurted out, "an extraordinary thing has happened! Please explain it to me! My wife has just given birth although we have been married only three months! How can this be? Everybody knows it takes nine months for a baby to be born!"

The rabbi, a world-renowned sage, put on his silver-rimmed spectacles and furrowed his brow reflectively.

"My son," he said, "I see you haven't the slightest idea about such matters, nor can you make the simplest calculation. Let me ask you: Have you lived with your wife three months?"

"Yes."

"Has she lived with you three months?"

"Yes."

"Together—have you lived three months?"

"Yes."

"What's the total then—three months plus three plus three?"

"Nine months, Rabbi!"

"Then why do you come to bother me with your foolish questions!"

*By the Beard of His Mother*

A YOUNG man from Chelm, who was studying to be a sage, felt very much troubled in mind. So he went to the Chief Sage and asked him, "Perhaps you can tell me why no hair is growing on my chin? Now it couldn't be heredity—or could it? Take my father—you know what a fine thick beard he has."

The Chief Sage reflectively stroked his beard for a while and then his face lit up.

"Perhaps you take after your mother!" he suggested.

"That must be it, since my mother has no beard!" cried the youth with admiration. "What a sage you are!"

*The Great Chelm Controversy*

ALTHOUGH the Jews of Chelm loved their rabbi, he remained aloof from the populace, as a wonder-working rabbi should. They hardly ever saw him. That's why nobody knew for certain whether he had a head or not.

One day the rabbi disappeared and all the people of Chelm went searching for him. They looked high and low, but found no trace of the rabbi. Finally, one searching party found a headless body in the woods. So the sages were sent for. They examined the body carefully, reflected and reflected. Then up spoke the Chief Sage, "This is indeed very puzzling! If the rabbi had a head, then it's clear that this is not his body."

"On the other hand," another sage took exception, "if the rabbi didn't have a head then it's certain, as my name is Shabsi, that this is his body!"

"We must clear up this point!" insisted the Chief Sage. "Let us question the *shammes* who always waited on the rabbi."

So they called the *shammes*.

"Reb Todros," they asked, "do you know whether our rabbi had a head?"

Reb Todros knitted his forehead. He thought and he thought and finally he said, "God preserve us all! I don't know what to tell you. You know what kind of a man our rabbi was. He was always wrapped up in his prayer-shawl, like the saint he was. Therefore, I never saw anything of him but his feet. How should I know whether this is his body?"

"Let the bathman be questioned now," ordered the Chief Sage.

So the bathman stepped forward.

"Tell us, my good man, do you know whether our rabbi had a head?" he was asked.

The bathman shook his head doubtfully.

"For the life of me I can't tell whether our rabbi had a head or not! The only time I ever saw him was in the steam-bath where he would lie sweating on the topmost bench. When I scourged him with birch-twigs I could only see his backside. So how do you expect me to know whether this is our rabbi?"

"This is bad! A very knotty problem indeed!" cried the sages.

"Let us call on the *rebbitzin!*" suggested the Chief Sage. "She should know!"

"An excellent idea!" echoed his colleagues, and they went to see the rabbi's wife.

They found her drenched in tears.

"What a saint my dear husband was!" she lamented. "As a wonder-working rabbi there wasn't his like in the whole world. He himself told me his soul went up to heaven every night!"

"We know, we know all that!" the Chief Sage interrupted her impatiently. "What we should like to know is whether he had a head or not."

"A head, did you say?" asked the *rebbitzin*, drying her tears. "Now let me think! The only thing I'm certain of is that he had a nose because he used to take snuff. But whether he had a head or not only the Lord knows!"

And so what do you think happened? All Chelm became divided into two hostile camps; one maintained heatedly that the rabbi did have a head—the other just as heatedly argued that he didn't.

Now, I ask you *Reb Jew*, what's your opinion?

### *Superfluous*

"WHICH is more important, the sun or the moon?" a citizen of Chelm asked his rabbi.

"The moon, of course," replied the rabbi. "It shines at night, when it is needed. The sun shines only during the day, when there is no need of it at all!"

*Wet Logic*

A SAGE of Chelm went bathing in the lake and almost drowned. When he raised an outcry other swimmers came to his rescue. As he was helped out of the water he took a solemn oath: "I swear never to go into the water again until I learn how to swim!"

*Can This Be I?*

A MAN of Chelm, having concluded that people could be distinguished from one another only by their clothing, began to fear lest one day he be lost in the bathhouse, where all are naked and therefore indistinguishable one from the other. To guard against such a risk he tied a string around his leg.

Unfortunately the string came loose, and he lost it. Another man of Chelm found it and, perhaps disturbed by the same fear, fastened it around his own leg.

This first man noticed the second as both were emerging to dress. "Woe is me," he cried, "if this fellow is me, who am I?"

*The Columbus of Chelm*

IN THE town of Chelm there lived a man whose name was *Reb Selig*. He was a sage, but a restless one. He had the wanderlust in his blood and always dreamed of seeing the world. But, since he was a sage, he was poor, so he could never afford to travel abroad like the rich merchants in the town.

One day, a Chelm merchant returned from a visit to Warsaw. That day, and every day thereafter for a week, one could hear nothing else talked about in Chelm except the wonders of Warsaw that the merchant had described so vividly. No one listened more raptly than *Reb Selig*.

From that time on he walked about like one possessed, filled with only one desire: to see Warsaw. He could neither eat nor sleep nor find rest for himself. His wife was perplexed; she didn't know what had come over her *Selig*.

One morning he arose and said to her with a faraway look in his eyes, "I've got to go to Warsaw!"

"What for?"

"I hear it's a wonderful city!"

"But you have no money."

"I'll walk."

"But you'll wear out your shoes."

"I'll walk barefoot and carry them in my hand."

"You've gone out of your mind, Selig!"

"I've got to see Warsaw!" *Reb Selig* insisted.

So he put some bread and cheese in a knapsack and threw it over his shoulder. He took up his oak stick and, with his shoes in his hands, he started out for the great city.

*Reb Selig* hastened along borne on wings. He didn't mind at all that he was barefoot and that the sharp pebbles pricked the soles of his feet. He sang all the way and was filled with joy thinking that soon his eyes would feast on the wonders of Warsaw.

When the sun stood high in the sky *Reb Selig* began to feel the pangs of hunger. He sat down in the shade of a tree at a fork of the road. He ate his noonday meal of bread and cheese. Then, feeling drowsy, he decided to take a short nap in order to refresh himself. But before doing that, he wanted to make sure that he would continue on the right road when he awoke.

"Now, let me see," he said to himself. "I'm at the fork of two roads; one goes to Warsaw and the other goes back to Chelm. I must make sure to take the one to Warsaw and not the one back to Chelm."

So he took his shoes and placed them on the road with the toes facing Warsaw. "When I awake I'll be sure to take the right road," he thought.

Pleased with his cleverness he stretched his length on the grass and went to sleep.

*Ai*, what a sleep that was! It was the sleep of the blessed, like that of the Patriarch Jacob when he saw angels in his dream! And while *Reb Selig* slept so soundly, so sweetly, a peasant came jogging along in his cart. When the peasant saw the pair of shoes in the road he said to himself: "What luck! Here's a pair of shoes sitting like orphans in the road!"

So he stopped his horse, climbed off the cart and picked up the shoes.

"The black cholera take them!" he murmured. "They're not shoes—they're so full of holes they're sieves!"

So he dropped the shoes, but, in dropping them, they fell with the toes facing Chelm.

After a while *Reb Selig* awoke. Recalling where he was he jumped up, eager to continue on his journey.

"How clever of me," he gloated, "to have had the foresight

to place my shoes with their toes pointing toward Warsaw. Now I just can't go wrong!"

And he continued on his journey.

Soon he came in sight of the city. Selig hastened his footsteps. As he passed through the streets he couldn't help marvelling at the strange appearance of things, at the houses, the streets and the people.

"As I live and breathe!" he cried. "Warsaw isn't as big as I expected it to be. Why it looks exactly like Chelm, like two peas in a pod!"

He continued on his way and, as he passed the bathhouse, a man sitting at the door greeted him amiably with a "*Sholom aleichem!*" Selig responded with a hearty, "*Aleichem sholom!*"

"As my name is Selig," he muttered to himself, "this man looks like Fishel the bathman way back in Chelm, and the bathhouse looks like ours, too! What can it all mean?"

Soon he came to the synagogue.

"This is an exact copy of ours in Chelm!" he thought in surprise.

Out of force of habit he went inside.

What he saw there made his hair stand on end.

"If I didn't know that I was in Warsaw I could swear that the people here are all my fellow townsmen!" he muttered to himself.

And, as he stood gaping, the *shammes*, hurrying by, elbowed him aside and stepped on his corns.

"Out of my way!" he cried.

"As there's a God in Heaven," Selig said to himself not believing his own senses, "this *shammes* not only looks like our *shammes* in Chelm but he even talks and acts like him! Strange, very strange."

*Reb* Selig left the synagogue full of bewilderment.

"What can all this mean?" he asked himself, anxiously. He was so wrapped up in his thoughts that he did not realize where he was going. Suddenly he looked up and found himself walking on a very familiar street.

"So help me God!" he cried. "Why this looks like my own street! So this is Warsaw? What a disappointment! Did I have to go to all this trouble to come here only to see a street that looks exactly like my own?"

In front of a house that also looked like his own he saw some children rolling hickory nuts into a hole.

"May I break hands and feet if that is not my Moishele playing there!"

At that very moment a woman stuck her head out of a window and cried:

"Selig, why do you stand there right in the middle of the street with your mouth open like an idiot? Come in—dinner is ready!"

Selig marvelled: He could have sworn the woman was like a twin sister of his wife, Leah! Spoke exactly the same way too! Besides, had she not called him Selig? Indeed, he had to get to the bottom of it all. So he went inside and pretended he was her husband Selig.

Sure enough, the house was furnished just like his own! He sat down to dinner. Just as he had expected—the roast was burnt, the same way his wife Leah burned it.

"The only conclusion I can come to," finally decided *Reb* Selig, "is that Warsaw is *exactly* like Chelm, down to the last detail. True, this is a house that looks like my own, a woman like my wife and a little boy like my Moishele, and her husband's name is Selig. But I *know* very well that they are not mine!"

So *Reb* Selig sat thoughtfully at table and began to feel very homesick for his own little family in Chelm.

"What bothers me though," he decided finally, "is whether the Warsaw Selig that lives in this house is also exactly like me. I know already that his name is Selig and that he looks like me. The question is: who and where is he?"

And so *Reb* Selig, provided he's still living, is waiting to this very day, with characteristic Chelm patience, for the arrival of the other Selig—the Selig of Warsaw.

To such lengths do the sages of Chelm go in order to establish the truth!

### *Food Out of the Horse's Mouth*

A MERCHANT from Chelm drove to market in a neighboring town.

"What are you selling?" asked a prospective customer.

Bending over confidentially, the merchant whispered in his ear: "Oats."

"Oats?" the customer asked in astonishment. "What the devil's the secret then?"

"Sh-sh!" cautioned the merchant of Chelm. "Not so loud! I don't want the horse to know!"

### *A Sage Question*

A SAGE was examining a horse in the marketplace of Chelm.

"This is a wonderful horse!" the horse-dealer went into raptures. "He gallops like the wind! Imagine, if you leave Chelm with him at three in the morning you'd get to Lublin at six!"

The sage looked doubtful.

"What on earth will I do in Lublin so early in the morning?" he asked, scratching his head.

### *Chelm Justice*

A GREAT calamity befell Chelm one day. The town cobbler murdered one of his customers. So he was brought before the judge who sentenced him to die by hanging.

When the verdict was read a townsman arose and cried out, "If your Honor pleases—you have sentenced to death the town cobbler! He's the only one we've got. If you hang him who will mend our shoes?"

"Who? Who?" cried all the people of Chelm with one voice.

The judge nodded in agreement and reconsidered his verdict.

"Good people of Chelm," he said, "what you say is true. Since we have only one cobbler it would be a great wrong against the community to let him die. As there are two roofers in the town let one of them be hanged instead!"

### *Pure Science*

Two sages of Chelm got involved in a deep philosophical argument.

"Since you're so wise," said one, sarcastically, "try to answer this question: Why is it that when a slice of buttered bread falls to the ground, it's bound to fall on the buttered side?"

But as the other sage was a bit of a scientist he decided to disprove this theory by a practical experiment. He went and buttered a slice of bread. Then he dropped it.

"There you are!" he cried triumphantly. "The bread, as

you see, hasn't fallen on its buttered side at all. So where is your theory now?"

"Ho-ho!" laughed the other, derisively. "You think you're smart! You buttered the bread on the wrong side!"

### *Overcoming Messiah*

ITZIK the landowner, a leading citizen of Chelm, startled his wife, Chashe, by storming into the house with the news that the Messiah was coming—was at that very moment only a few hours from Chelm.

But the news dismayed Itzik somewhat. "I have only recently built this home, and have invested our funds in cattle, and besides, I have just finished sowing our crops!"

Chashe calmed him, declaring philosophically, "Don't worry! Think of the trials and tribulations our people have met and survived—the bondage in Egypt, the wickedness of Haman, the persecutions and pogroms without end. All of these the good Lord has helped us overcome, and with just a little more help from Him, we will overcome the Messiah, too!"

### *The Umbrella*

TWO sages of Chelm went out for a walk. One carried an umbrella, the other didn't. Suddenly, it began to rain.

"Open your umbrella, quick!" suggested the one without an umbrella.

"It won't help," answered the other.

"What do you mean, it won't help? It will protect us from the rain."

"It's no use, the umbrella is as full of holes as a sieve."

"Then why did you take it along in the first place?"

"I didn't think it would rain."

### *Excavation in Chelm*

THE citizens of Chelm were digging a foundation for a new synagogue when one of them suddenly paused in his labors, rested on his spade, and began to stroke his beard. "What are we going to do," he asked of no one in particular, "with all this earth we're digging up?"

"I never thought of that," said another. "What, indeed, are we going to do with it?"

"Ah, I know," the first went on, "we will make a pit, and into it we'll put all this earth we're digging up for our synagogue."

"But wait a minute," said the other, "that doesn't solve it at all! What will we do with the earth from the pit?"

"I'll tell you what," said the first, "we'll dig another pit, twice as big as the first, and into it we'll shovel all the earth we're digging now, and all the earth from the first pit!"

Whereupon, both went back to their digging.

### *The Worriers of Chelm*

THE people of Chelm were worriers. So they called a meeting to do something about the problem of worry. A motion was duly made and seconded to the effect that Yossel, the cobbler, be retained by the community as a whole, to do its worrying, and that his fee be one ruble per week.

The motion was about to carry, all speeches having been for the affirmative, when one sage propounded the fatal question: "If Yossel earned a ruble a week, what would he have to worry about?"

### *The Safeguard*

TO THE scandal of Chelm the poor box was stolen from the synagogue. So it was unanimously resolved that a new poor box be prepared, and suspended from the ceiling of the synagogue entrance hall, but so close to the ceiling that no thief would ever be able to reach it. Satisfied that a crisis had been averted, the people dispersed congratulating each other on a sage decision.

But soon the *shammes* raised a new problem. "It is true," he declared, "that the new box is safe from thieves, but it is out of reach also of the charitable! No one at all can reach it!"

But no problem was too discouraging for the wisdom of Chelm. It was promptly decreed that a ladder be built, reaching to the poor box, so that the charitable might get to it, and that, lest any pious citizen be hurt, the ladder be permanently and immovably fastened to both floor and ceiling!

### *The Discreet Shammes*

A MAN died suddenly in Chelm while doing business in the market-place. So the rabbi sent the *shammes* to the dead man's wife.

"Be careful," he cautioned him, "and break the news to her as gently as possible!"

The *shammes* knocked. A woman came to the door.

"Does the widow Rachel live here?" he asked.

"I'm Rachel, and I live here," replied the woman, "but I'm no widow."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the *shammes*, triumphantly. "How much do you want to bet you are?"

### *A Riddle*

ONCE on a visit to Berditchev a certain sage of Chelm joined a circle of kibbitzers around the synagogue stove while waiting for the services to begin. Seeing a stranger, the *shammes* tried to entertain him, so he put to him the following riddle: "Who is it—he's my father's son, yet he's not my brother?"

The sage of Chelm racked his brains for the answer but in vain.

"I give up!" he said finally. "Now tell me—who is it?"

"Why, it's me!" replied the *shammes*, triumphantly.

The sage of Chelm was amazed by the cleverness of the riddle and when he returned home he lost no time in assembling all the other sages.

"My masters," he began gravely, stroking his long gray beard reflectively, "I am going to put to you a riddle and see if you can answer it. Who is it—he's my father's son, yet he's not my brother?"

The sages of Chelm were greatly perplexed. They thought and thought and finally said: "We give up! Tell us! Who is it?"

"He's the *shammes* in the Berditchev synagogue!" the sage announced triumphantly.

### *Taxes*

TWO sages of Chelm were tangled up in deep argument.

"What I would like to know," asked one, "is why the Czar has to collect from me a ruble for taxes. Hasn't he got a mint of his own? Surely he can make as many rubles as he likes."

"What a silly argument for a sage!" his colleague mocked at him. "Now take a Jew: every time he does a good deed he creates an angel. So you will ask: why on earth does God need your good deed in order to add one more angel to the millions of angels that are already in Heaven? Surely, He's fully capable Himself of creating as many angels as He likes! Then why doesn't He do so? Simply because He prefers *your* angel. The same thing is true about taxes. Of course the Czar can make as many rubles as he likes; but, you see, he prefers to take *your* ruble!"

### *The Affair of the Rolling Trunk*

A *melamed* once lived on top of the hill on Synagogue Street in Chelm, and he was a great *schlimazl*. Everything turned for him, as the saying goes, "buttered side down." It was therefore with a nagging envy that he watched the rich people of Chelm having all the good things in life, while he, poor *schlimazl*, had to dine daily on a dry crust of bread and an onion.

One day, he said wistfully to his wife, "Leah-Zoshe, my heart, I can no longer endure bread and onion; it's already crawling out of my gullet. It's about time we had a little pleasure, just like the rich. Let's put money by for a cake, the kind we tasted at the wedding of the rabbi's daughter, full of honey and delicious raisins and almonds."

The idea pleased Leah-Zoshe no end. "Good—I have a plan!" she said eagerly. "You know my grandmother's large trunk with the four wheels up in the garret. Let's make a little hole in it. Every Friday afternoon before you go to the *mikveh* you drop in a kopek. I will do the same before I light the Sabbath candles. In that way, by the time *Shevuos* comes around, we'll have enough money to make a cake that will melt in your mouth."

On the first Friday the *melamed* and his wife dutifully dropped into the trunk a kopek each. But when the second Friday came around the *melamed*, who was a profound scholar, thought the matter over in this wise. "Fool that I am! What's the earthly use of dropping in kopek after kopek in this trunk? Surely Leah-Zoshe, that faithful old soul, will keep dropping in kopeks regularly so that we'll soon have money for a wonderful cake without my contributions. I can use the money for other things."

So the *melamed* stopped his contributions.

Now Leah-Zoshe was so smart she could even have been a *rebbitzin*. "If God gave you a head, Leah-Zoshe, use it!" she admonished herself. "After all I'm only a poor *yiddene!* Must I bother my head with kopeks? That's a man's job! I have enough trouble as it is to make ends meet on the ten rubles a month that *schlimazl* gives me for household expenses. There are important things for which I can use my kopeks. In any case what do we need so many kopeks for? The kopeks Mendel drops in will be enough, I'm sure."

So she too stopped her contributions.

Several days before *Shevuos* Mendel the *melamed* and Leah-Zoshe his wife decided it was time to open the trunk and take out all the kopeks.

"*Ai*, what a cake that'll be!" exclaimed Mendel rapturously. "It will have all the tastes of the Garden of Eden!" And Mendel sighed contentedly and smacked his lips as if he had already eaten the cake.

With great ceremony Mendel unlocked the trunk. Carefully he lifted the lid and peered inside.

"*Gewalt!*" he cried, turning pale. "We're robbed!"

Leah-Zoshe quickly stuck her head into the trunk and exclaimed, "*Tateniu!* They left us only two kopeks, the rascals!"

Then suddenly a dark thought clouded her mind. "*Schlaimazl*," she cried, "tell me the truth! Did you drop more than one kopek into the trunk?"

"What do you take me for, a fool?" retorted Mendel. "Of course not. I figured your kopeks would be enough. Now that you have mentioned it, my fine shrew, what happened to your kopeks?"

"My kopeks? What do you mean, *my kopeks*? If you were honest enough to put in yours we wouldn't have needed mine."

At this both became inflamed with anger at each other and they set to with a right good will so that their cries could be heard all the way down Synagogue Street. In the scuffle, Mendel lost his balance and fell into the trunk, pulling Leah-Zoshe with him.

And before you could say "Constantinople" the lid had snapped shut on them! However, in their frantic struggle to get out they set the trunk in motion on its four wheels. The door of their little cottage being open, for it was a balmy

day, the trunk rolled through the doorway with the greatest of ease and down the hill into Synagogue Street.

"*Gewalt! Gewalt!*" Unearthly voices issued from the trunk as it rolled toward the synagogue.

Women shrieked, children bawled and all the dogs of Chelm ran barking madly after it.

"It surely must be a demon!" commented the Chief Sage as the trunk whirled by him and he heard the muffled cries inside it.

The trunk's wild journey came suddenly to an end in front of the synagogue. By this time all of Chelm had gathered around it, gaping with curiosity.

"Fetch Berl the locksmith!" ordered the Chief Sage in a voice of authority. "All together we'll drive this demon out!"

And so, after chanting appropriate incantations, the lock was pried open by Berl the locksmith and, more dead than alive, out peered Mendel the *melamed* and his wife Leah-Zoshe.

"Heaven preserve us, look who's here!" the people of Chelm cried.

The runaway trunk had so frightened the people of Chelm that in response to the general clamor, the Chief Sage was obliged to call a special meeting of all the sages of Chelm.

After long and judicious deliberation they resolved that never again must such an unseemly thing happen in their town. To make their decision effective and binding forever upon all future generations of Chelmites they passed the following laws:

1. That every door in Chelm had to be provided with a high threshold.
2. That no *melamed* could ever live on Synagogue Street.
3. That henceforth no trunk could have any wheels.

### *The Secret of Growing*

Two sages of Chelm sat around the synagogue stove on a cold winter day. They debated heatedly over the following question: at which end does a human being grow?

"What a question!" cried one. "Any fool knows that a man grows from his feet up."

"Give me proof," demanded the other.

"Several years ago I bought myself a pair of pants but they

were so long that they trailed on the ground. Now look at them—see how short they've gotten. There's your proof."

"It's just the other way around," maintained the other. "Anyone with eyes in his head can see that man grows from the head. Why, just yesterday I watched a regiment of soldiers on parade and it was clear as daylight that at the bottom of their feet they were all the same; they differed in size only at the top!"

## SCHLEMIHLS AND SCHLIMAZLS

### INTRODUCTION

Out of the poverty of European ghetto life arose two folktypes—the *schlemihl* and the *schlimazl*. True, they had their counterparts in the misfits and the maladjusted of all peoples, but who could compare with them in the extent and intensity of their almost comic wretchedness?

The words *schlemihl* and *schlimazl* are rarely applied according to their precise meanings. Almost always they are used interchangeably. This, of course, is not altogether without reason—the two types did have an affinity; they both had their origin in the same economic swamp of ghetto-stagnation. Also their end product was identical—failure!

What actually is a *schlemihl*? The etymology of the word is very much in doubt. Outside of Yiddish, the first mention of the word is in the title of Chamisso's famous story of *Peter Schlemihl* (1813), the man who sold his shadow. The Bible mentions a She-lumiel who was a prince of the tribe of Simon. But there is nothing to associate him with a *schlemihl*. A theory about the *schlemihl*, one not to be taken too seriously, is built upon the folk story of probable medieval origin concerning a certain Schlumiel who went off on a journey for more than a year. Upon his return he is aghast to discover that his wife has just given birth; but the rabbinical authorities by a very liberal interpretation of the laws of nature convince him that he is no cuckold.

In the Jewish folk-mind, however, the *schlemihl* is conceived of as an awkward, bungling fellow, plagued not only with "butter-fingers," but with absolutely no skill in coping with any situation in life. He is forever getting in his own and everybody else's way and spoils everything he attempts. A comic-strip portrayal of the *schlemihl* on the American scene was *Moishe Kapoir* (Moses Up-side-Down). He regaled readers of a Yiddish newspaper in the early 1920's and proved so popular that his name even entered into the language.

What is a *schlimazl*? He is a first cousin to the *schlemihl*. No matter what he too puts his hand to turns out wrong, but not because he lacks ability or intelligence but because he simply has no luck; the cards of an intensely competitive life are stacked against him. In fact, that is the probable meaning of the word *schlimazl*: *schlim* being the German word for "bad"—*mazl* the Hebrew word for "luck."

To put it succinctly, a wit has made the following neat distinction between these two types: "A *schlemihl* is a man who spills a bowl of hot soup on a *schlimazl*."

In the Twelfth Century a *schlimazel* of genius, the poet Abraham ibn Ezra (of whom Robert Browning has written), laughed at his own misfortunes with mirthful irony:

If I sold shrouds, No one would die. If I sold lamps,	Then, in the sky The sun, for spite, Would shine by night
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How the *schlemihl* or *schlimazl* managed to survive was a minor miracle. He seemed to draw his livelihood, such as it was, from the very air. That is what led Max Nordau, a well-known Jewish figure at the turn of the century, to coin the word *luftmensch* (air-man).

As identifiable types, *schlemihls* and *schlimazls* must have sprung into being with the first drastic economic discriminations against Jews by the Byzantine emperors, beginning with Justinian (530–560) who froze the social and economic restrictions against the Jews into ruthless Roman law. The Imperial Code bristled with a great number of prohibitions—"the Jews shall not" and "the Jews must not," features which thereafter entered into almost all legal codes in European countries down to the Nuremberg Laws of Hitler. As one writer has remarked: "It reduced men, who through the generations had loved to live by the work of their hands, to the necessity of living by the exercise of their wits."

In the course of time the *schlemihl* and the *schlimazl* became typed in folklore and acquired traditional physiognomies that were half-ludicrous and half-pathetic. In order to survive, they had to be eternally hopeful, untiringly enterprising, and yet—by the very nature of circumstance and their personalities they were pathetic flops. The many anxieties of their family life, the uncertainties of their sustenance which became a daily harassment, brought a haunted apologetic look into their eyes. Sholom Aleichem drew endless amusement out of the misadventures of his irrepressible, daydreaming *schlimazls*, Tevye the Dairymen and Menachem Mendel. If he made merry over them it was only with the compassionate intention of minimizing their own troubles for

thousands of other Tevyes and Menachem Mendels struggling for survival.

In the Russian and Polish ghettos, not only the unemployed scholar, but the petty shopkeeper, the occasional trader, and the man without a trade as well, were driven to pursue the elusive firefly of many occupations, and usually starved on all of them.

This particularly held true during the Nineteenth Century when, by Imperial ukase, there took place many mass-expulsions of Jews from the small towns and villages into the already over-crowded city ghettos. Keen as competition was before in those places, it now became even more feverish and desperate. Count Pahlen reported to the Czar in 1888: "About ninety per cent of the whole Jewish population form a mass of people that are entirely unprovided for . . . a mass that lives from hand to mouth amidst poverty."

There is a type of *schlemihl* in Jewish folklore who stands by himself. He is the henpecked husband. Because there were so many *schlemihls* in Jewish life there was naturally a superfluity of henpecked husbands. In Bible times the shrew was considered as a divine punishment "which shall fall to the lot of the sinner." There is the proverb: "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman." An unknown, but probably long-suffering Talmudic sage became downright bitter about it: "Life is not worth living for a husband who has a domineering wife."

Of course there were some gentle and unembittered souls among henpecked husbands who endured their marital martyrdom with philosophical resignation. They tried hard to read into their misfortune some hidden blessings. The sage Rabbi Hiyya, for instance, had a quarrelsome and shrewish wife. He tried to turn her wrath from him with gifts. Whenever he saw some pretty trinket that he thought would charm her, he would buy it, put it in his turban, and hasten home with it to surprise her.

"Isn't she a shrew, continually pecking at you?" he was asked once.

Rabbi Hiyya replied: "Taking care of our children and saving us from sin is sufficient for us to be tender to our wives, regardless of their dispositions."

N.A.

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### *The Henpecked Rabbi*

RABBI JACOB ISAAC of Lublin had a shrewish wife. She constantly nagged him but, as he practiced great self-restraint, he suffered in silence. At last one day, when his patience had

worn thin, he retorted to her with a few sharp words. When his disciple, Rabbi Bunam, heard this he was filled with amazement.

"What suddenly made you talk back to your wife, Rabbi?" he asked.

"It would have been cruel not to answer her," replied Rabbi Jacob Isaac. "What irritated her more than anything else was the fact that I did not respond to her nagging."

### *Poor Man's Luck*

A RABBI was asked to explain why it was that everything was permitted the rich but not the poor.

"Is there a separate Torah for the rich and another for the poor?"

"It's all a matter of luck," answered the rabbi. "Moses came down from Mt. Sinai and found that the Jews had fashioned a golden calf. He got so angry about it that he went and shattered the Ten Commandments. The Tables of the Law, as you know, were made of the most precious gems. When the multitude saw Moses break them they leaped forward to pick up the valuable pieces that fell in every direction. Now who do you think had all the luck in the world? The rich, of course! They picked up all the pieces on which was written—*Thou shalt*. The poor, on the other hand, who have been *schlimazls* ever since the beginning of Creation, had no luck at all. All they could pick up in the scramble were little bits of the Tables on which was written the word *not*. So there!"

### *Two Possibilities*

A POOR *melamed* made up his mind he was going to get a cow, for he had many children and he could not afford to buy milk for all of them. So he tried hard to convince his wife that his idea was sound.

"Believe me," he urged with enthusiasm, "it would even be worthwhile to pawn everything we've got in order to buy a cow!"

But his wife was more cautious than he, so she asked, "What guarantee do you have that the cow you'll buy will give milk?"

"What a silly question to ask!" replied the teacher heatedly. "In any case there are two possibilities! If the cow gives

milk—it will be fine! On the other hand—if the cow does not give milk—What do you mean if the cow does not give milk! How is it possible that the cow will not give milk?"

### To Avert Disaster

"... BUT you've just *got* to give me some money!" insisted the *schlimazl*.

"Why so?" demanded the rich man.

"Because if you don't, I'll . . . I'll go into the hat business!"

"So what?"

"What do you mean, so what? If a man with my luck goes into the hat business, every baby in this country from that day on will be born without a head!"

### Poor Fish

A FISH dealer in a Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx once put out a sign, reading: "Fresh fish sold here."

A customer came in and asked in surprise, "Why did you put the word 'fresh' on your sign? It's understood your fish are fresh—or do they stink?"

"Of course not!" agreed the fish dealer, and hurriedly he painted out the word "fresh."

A little while later another customer came in and commented, "What for do you need the word 'here' on your sign? Where else could you be selling your fish?"

"You're right!" agreed the fish dealer, and he painted out the word "here."

Later, another customer complained, "'Sold'! What do you mean, 'sold'? Surely you're not giving away any of your fish!"

"Indeed not!" agreed the fish dealer, and he went and painted out the word "sold."

Finally, an old lady wearing a kerchief hobbled in. She saw the sign, and croaked in a high thin voice, "'Fish'? You don't need to advertise your fish! Believe me, you can smell them a mile away!"

The fish dealer heaved a deep sigh, picked up his brush and painted out the word "fish."

*A Jewish Highwayman*

ONCE there was a poor Jew who had a wife and six children but no source of income. His wife scolded him all day long for being a *schlemihl* and his children cried all the time because they were hungry. And so, with a troubled spirit, he sat down to think.

Suddenly a terrible thought occurred to him! He was going to be a highwayman, a wicked, throat-slitting highwayman! He had often heard tales of such men, how with the greatest of ease they acquired large sums of money. Not that he had ever seen any or knew how they went about their business. But he was not going to stand his wife's nagging anymore! He would show her what kind of a *schlemihl* he was!

So early one morning he put on a large sack over his clothes, stuck a hatchet in his belt, took along his *tallis* and *tefillin* and went into the forest.

He hid behind a tree and from there kept a sharp lookout. He waited and waited. But what poor Jew has luck? The morning passed and then the afternoon, and still not a solitary person came in sight. Finally the sun began to set and the shadows of night fell. Seeing this the highwayman grew uneasy.

"*Nu, what can I do now?*" he thought. "It's time to say the *Mincha* prayer."

So he started to pray. But no sooner had he started the eighteen benedictions and was reciting: "Look but upon our affliction, and fight our fight, and redeem us speedily for the sake of Thy Name," when he suddenly saw a Jew coming towards him. Silently he motioned to him to wait until he had finished the prayer. Politely, and with a pious man's regard for another's devotions, the stranger waited.

Having finished the recitation of the eighteenth benediction with a resounding "Amen!" the highwayman ran up to the stranger and, drawing his hatchet, he cried, "Your money or your life!"

The stranger regarded him with amazement.

"What are you—crazy or just a nit-wit?" he inquired.

"I am a highwayman!" answered the highwayman sternly. "And if you won't give me all your money right away I'm going to kill you in cold blood!"

"See here," pleaded the stranger seeing that he was in earnest, "I am a Jew, a destitute man! I am a father and a hus-

band! Where do you suppose a man like me would get money from? Surely you don't want to make my children orphans and my wife a widow! Who will provide for them? With me dead they'll perish of hunger!"

The highwayman listened attentively and nodded his head.

"*Nebich!*" he thought. "A poor man, a father and a husband!"

"You're right!" he said aloud. "It would indeed be a pity to kill you. Very well then, so I won't kill you—but do give me a ruble."

"A ruble!" cried the stranger, getting red in the face with anger. "Who do you take me for—Rothschild?"

"Well then give me ten kopeks."

"Ten kopeks! Are you crazy? Why should I give you ten kopeks? Even a rich man doesn't give an alms of ten kopeks at one smack."

"In that case, give me a cigarette."

"A cigarette! I don't smoke."

"*Nu,*" sighed the highwayman wearily, "let me have a pinch of snuff."

"Oh, a pinch of snuff! Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

So the stranger opened his snuff-box and graciously offered it to the highwayman.

The highwayman took a pinch of snuff and sneezed: "A-choo!"

"*Gesundheit!*" said the stranger heartily.

Then the stranger took a pinch of snuff and sneezed: "A-choo!"

"*Gesundheit!*" echoed the highwayman politely.

They sneezed so heartily that the forest reverberated with the sound. Then they shook hands and said goodnight.

### *Definition*

A POOR man, a *schlimazl*, once came to the rabbi.

"Advise me, Rabbi—what shall I do?" he complained. "Whatever I put my hand to fails. If I sell umbrellas—it doesn't rain. And if I sell shrouds—nobody dies. What trade shall I take up?"

"Take my advice, my son, and become a baker," said the rabbi. "If you become a baker you'll at least have bread in the house."

"True," answered the hard-bitten *schlimazl*, "but what will happen if I don't have money to buy flour?"

"You won't be a baker then," said the rabbi.

### *X Marks the Spot*

SHMUL the tailor came to America from a little Russian town. He didn't know how to read or write but he opened a clothing shop in New York and he began to prosper. In time he went to the bank to open a checking account. Not knowing how to write, he signed two crosses on the bank documents in lieu of his name.

As time went on he prospered still more. He sold his cloak-and-suit business and began to manufacture textiles. So he went to the bank and opened up a new account. This time he signed all the bank documents with three crosses.

"Why three crosses?" asked the bank president. "You've always signed with two."

"Oh, you know how women are, fancy-shmancy," he muttered apologetically. "My wife wants me to take on a middle name!"

### *Marriages Are Made in Heaven*

FOR many years the meek rabbi endured the nagging of his shrewish wife with resignation. Everyone marvelled greatly over his self-control. One day a friend of his said to him:

"It's simply not human to be as patient as you are! If I were in your place I'd divorce your wife—she's the scandal of the whole town."

The rabbi sighed wearily and murmured:

"It must be God's will."

"Nonsense!" protested his friend. "Surely you don't mean to tell me that it is God's will to punish a holy man like you!"

"Far be it from me to question the justice of God's will," gently answered the rabbi. "My own common sense tells me that it is wise. What if my wife had been married instead to an impatient man? Why, he would have divorced her and ruined her life forever after! Therefore, you see that God must have known what he was doing when he gave her to me who can tolerate her nagging."

*An Absent-Minded Fellow*

ONCE there was a gentle Talmud scholar, but in his wife's eyes he was only a *schlemihl*. He always lost things—never found anything.

One Friday afternoon, he came home from the steambath. His wife was startled to see that he was without a shirt.

"Where is your shirt, my fine *schlemihl*?"

"Oh, the shirt? Somebody must have changed his for mine at the bath by mistake!"

"But where is his? I can see you haven't got yours."

"Tsk, tsk!" reflected the teacher. "The man must have been an absent-minded fellow—he forgot to leave me his!"

*A Prayer and a Deal*

ONCE there was a poor man, a *schlemihl*. He was so unhappy that he took pleasure in day-dreaming.

One day he uttered the following prayer:

"Dear God—give me ten thousand dollars for the New Year. I'll tell you what—I'll make a deal with you. I swear to give five thousand dollars of this amount for charity, the other half let me keep. You say you have doubts about my honorable intentions?—then give me the five thousand dollars I ask for myself and the other five thousand dollars *you* give to charity yourself."

*Vice Is Also an Art*

THE rabbi was disappointed in his son-in-law.

"What a simpleton our son-in-law is!" he complained to his wife. "He doesn't know the first thing about drink and cards."

"Is that a misfortune?" asked his wife wonderingly. "May all sons-in-law be as ignorant about such things! So again, what is the misfortune?"

"The misfortune is," lamented the rabbi, "that not knowing how to drink, he drinks nevertheless, and not knowing how to play cards, he insists on playing them!"

## IGNORAMUSES AND PRETENDERS

### *From What Einstein Makes a Living*

BENNY's old grandfather, a grey-bearded patriarch from Poland, was very much puzzled by all the newspaper talk about Einstein and his theory of relativity.

"Tell me, Benny," he finally asked with curiosity one day when his grandson returned home from college. "Who is this Einstein and what is all this relativity business about?"

"Einstein is the greatest living scientist," began Benny enthusiastically, a little uneasy about his own knowledge of the matter. "Relativity is—well, it's hard to explain. Let's put it this way: if a man's sweetheart sits on his knee, an hour feels like a minute. On the other hand, if the same man sits on a hot stove, a minute feels like an hour. That's the theory of relativity!" concluded Benny triumphantly.

Grandpa looked shocked. For a minute he kept stunned silence, an expression of incredulity in his eyes. Then he muttered into his beard: "America goniff!"

"Tell me, Benny," he finally asked, "and from this your Einstein makes a living?"

### *One Use for Scholarship*

ONE day a stranger came into the House of Study; no one had ever seen him before. Without a word he made his way to the shelves where the books of sacred lore were stored. He began to pull out one huge tome after another, folios of the Talmud, the commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra and the *Rambam*.

At the time, the House of Study was full of scholars. They watched the man at his work with incredulity.

"What a learned scholar he must be!" whispered one, awestruck.

"Never in my life have I seen a scholar use so many authorities at one time!" said another.

Methodically, the stranger piled up his big books. Then, to everybody's amazement, he climbed on top of them and reached for a hard cheese he had hidden on the very top shelf.

*The Truth about Falsehood*

NO MAN was imposed upon by rabbinical careerists as much as the kind-hearted Rabbi Elijah, the Vilna Gaon.

One day, a pretentious Talmudic scholar asked him for a testimonial for a learned treatise he was about to publish. Rabbi Elijah couldn't say "no," as much as he wanted to do so, and wrote a half-hearted testimonial. Although he had plenty of room he signed his name at the very bottom of the page.

"Why do you sign your name so far from your testimonial, Rabbi?" asked the scholar.

Rabbi Elijah smiled ruefully and answered:

"Scripture commands us: 'Get thee at a distance from falsehood!'"

*A Violation of Nature*

ONCE there was a pretentious scholar who lost no opportunity to sing his own praises and to push his own wares.

One day, having finished a commentary on the Book of Psalms, he came to the Vilna Gaon for a testimonial. The great Rabbi Elijah read it and, when he had finished, said firmly, "I'm sorry, but I cannot give you a testimonial."

"Why?"

"It reverses the natural order of things."

"How so?" inquired the pretender, flattered at the thought that his ideas were daringly original.

"The natural order is to make paper out of rags," replied the Vilna Gaon. "But you, my friend, have reversed the process—you have made a rag out of paper!"

*It Takes More than Brains*

CONGRATULATIONS were showered on Kaplan. His number 49 had won the top prize in the lottery.

"Say, Kaplan," asked Goldstein, "how did you happen to pick number 49?"

"I saw it in a dream. Six sevens appeared and danced before my eyes. Six times seven is 42, and that's all there was to it."

"But, six times seven is 42, not 49."

"Hah? . . . All right, so you be the mathematician!"

*The Diagnosis*

A STRANGER came to town and called on a rich *apikoiros*.

"I'm a rabbi and a scholar and I am very sick. Please give me a donation," he asked.

Unimpressed with the man's appearance, the freethinker, who was also a bit of a scholar, began to feel his visitor's intellectual pulse.

"Tell me, my dear Rabbi, are you familiar with the Rambam's<sup>6</sup> *Guide to the Perplexed*?"

"Am I familiar with it! I studied it when I was thirteen!" replied his visitor.

"Have you ever studied Rabbi Tolstoi's Talmudic commentary, *Resurrection*?"

"What a question!" the stranger replied airily. "I know it by heart! I studied it when I was a youth at the *Yeshiva*."

"My friend," remarked the freethinker with a smile, "in my opinion you're not so much a sick scholar as a healthy ignoramus!"

*What Does It Matter?*

ONE day, complaining of a stomach ache, Tevye visited a doctor. After due deliberation, with solemnity, the doctor informed him that he had cancer.

"Cancer, shmancer," said Tevye, gaily, "as long as I'm healthy!"

*Philosophy*

FOR a long time Levy and Bernstein sat over their teacups, saying nothing. At last Levy broke the silence. "You know, Bernstein," he said, "life is like a glass of tea."

"Life is like a glass of tea . . . why?" asked Bernstein.

"How should I know," said Levy, "am I a philosopher?"

*Note to Obstetricians*

ALTHOUGH he himself had been deprived of the opportunity for an education, the wealthy Mr. Levine sent his only daughter to a "finishing" school in Paris.

Upon her return to Cleveland she married and, in due course of time, was taken to the maternity hospital.

When her obstetrician came to find out how she was doing she moaned languorously: "*Mon dieu! Mon dieu!*"

"Doctor, doctor—quick, she's giving birth!" gasped her father in alarm.

The doctor indifferently shook his head and answered: "Not yet! Not yet!"

An hour later, when the daughter heard the doctor coming, she wailed elegantly: "*Sauvez moi, Docteur!*"

"Doctor, doctor—quick, she's giving birth!" cried Mr. Levine wringing his hands frantically.

"Not yet," replied the doctor, looking bored.

A few minutes later a piercing shriek rang through the hospital corridors.

"*Oy, gewalt, Mama!*"

"She's giving birth now!" said the doctor to Mr. Levine as he hurried into the daughter's room.

### *The Dachshund*

THE great Russian landowner summoned his Jewish business-agent and said to him:

"Here are twenty-five rubles—I want you to buy me a dachshund!"

"May it please Your Excellency," urged the agent, "but how is it possible to buy a good dachshund for such a small sum? Take my advice, give me fifty rubles and I'll buy you a dachshund that *will be* a dachshund!"

"Good!" agreed the landowner. "Here are twenty-five more rubles—but make sure it's a first class dachshund!"

"You can rest on that, Your Excellency," the agent assured him.

And as he was about to leave he hesitated and asked apologetically: "A thousand pardons, Your Excellency, but what is a dachshund?"

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## *Rogues and Sinners*

### TRICKSTERS AND ROGUES

#### INTRODUCTION

Tricksters and rogues, and all other men who live by cunning and deceit, are treated with almost condescending pity in the folk tales of the Jews. This attitude is not difficult to explain about a people one of whose cardinal religious beliefs is in God's justice, and in its corollary—that divine retribution must always follow the evil that men do. Sooner or later, the ethical-minded Jew maintains, it must catch up with the rascal and lay him low—if not in this life, most certainly in the World-to-Come.

Scripture is full of comfort to the righteous when they bitterly complain against the worldly good-fortune of rogues, and, conversely, against the frequent bedevilment on earth of the righteous. "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers," the Psalmist consoles the good man, "neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as a green herb." (Psalm 37.1, 2.) The Book of Proverbs also offers the balm of solace to the suffering men of virtue. It sees the good-fortune of the wicked as being only deceptive and ephemeral. "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone it will return upon him." (Proverbs 26.27.)

According to Jewish folk-belief, the first evil men in the world were those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of the Patriarch Abraham. Both the Bible and the Talmud tell of God's wrath against the inhabitants of those cities of sin. Because of their wickedness, He vowed to destroy them root and stem but, upon Abraham's compassionate intercession, He agreed to spare Sodom provided ten good men could be found there. But, when Abraham failed to find even that modest number, God descended upon the city in His wrath and destroyed it and all its wicked inhabitants with fire and brimstone.

In time, the Men of Sodom began to personify the genius of evil to the Jewish folk. And thus we find many ancient Rabbinic tales in which their wicked traits and diabolical cleverness are graphically described for the edification of all posterity in order that it be forewarned betimes and thereby avoid the terrible fate of those unheeding evil-doers.

N.A.

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### *The Thief Who Was Too Clever<sup>7</sup>*

A MERCHANT went on a distant journey to buy goods. He carried five hundred gold pieces in a bag. When he arrived at his destination he began to get worried. He said to himself: "I'm a stranger here and I don't know a soul. If I carry the money on me I may be robbed. Better that I conceal it until I'm ready to make my purchases."

With this thought in mind the merchant went to an unfrequented place. He looked cautiously about him and, convinced that no one was looking, he dug a hole and concealed his money in it. However, he did not know that there was an opening in the wall of a house nearby and that someone had seen him hide his money.

No sooner had the merchant left than the man who saw him bury the bag of gold came out of his house and dug it up.

Several days passed. The merchant was now ready to pay for the goods he had bought. He therefore went to the spot where he had buried his money. When he saw that it had been stolen he was filled with despair.

"What will I do now?" he lamented. "From whom can I claim my money? No one saw me bury it."

Troubled, the merchant began to look around him and soon discovered the opening in the wall. He began to suspect that the owner of that house was the likely thief. So he went to him and said:

"I've heard it said that you're a wise man and can give me good advice. I came here to buy merchandise and I brought with me two bags of gold. One was filled with five hundred gold pieces; the other with eight hundred pieces. Since I'm a stranger here and don't know a soul, I decided to conceal the bag with the five hundred gold pieces in a hole in the ground. I still carry around with me the bag with the eight hundred gold pieces, but I find it a great burden. Please advise me

what to do; shall I keep it with me, shall I bury it in the same hole with the other gold, or shall I look for another hiding place for it? Possibly you might know of an honest man in town to whose care I could entrust it."

The man thought for a moment and replied with cunning:

"Take my advice. Don't entrust your money to anyone because it is possible that he might even deny that you ever gave it to him. Also, I counsel you not to look for a new hiding place but to bury your gold in the same hole with the other bag."

The thief reasoned this way: "It's clear that this poor fool doesn't know yet that the bag with the five hundred gold pieces is missing. Therefore, the best way to get his second bag is to return the first bag to its place, because, if I don't do that, he will be afraid to bury the second bag there. In that way I'll get both bags."

The merchant was fully aware that the thief would follow such a course. Therefore, he said to him:

"Thank you for your good advice. I will do as you bid me and will bury the gold after dark tonight."

No sooner had the merchant left him than the thief went in great haste to put the first bag of gold back in its place. The merchant, who was hiding nearby, quickly dug up his money and joyfully walked away.

### *You Can't Fool God<sup>8</sup>*

Two sisters, twins, lived in a certain town. They looked so much alike that when they were together no one could tell them apart. Although both sisters were married, one of the two was a wanton and made a cuckold of her husband.

One day on a pretext this wanton told her husband that she had to go to another town. Instead she had a secret meeting with a lover. Upon her return her husband became very suspicious and, being exceedingly troubled by his doubts, he demanded that she go with him to the High Priest so that he might prove her with the bitter waters. If the bitter waters she drank did not harm her, it would be divine proof of her innocence. On the other hand, should she be guilty, she would die from the drink.

The woman had no alternative and was forced to go with her husband to the High Priest for the ordeal. On the way

they passed the house where her twin sister lived. With pretended innocence she said to her husband:

"I beg you, my husband, let me go for a moment into the house of my sister while you wait for me here."

The sinful woman went into her sister's house and said to her:

"Help me, sister! My husband is outside waiting to take me to the High Priest to put me through the ordeal of the bitter waters. Now listen to me: There is something you can do for me. We both look alike, and if you put on my clothes my husband won't know the difference. I know I'm a sinful woman and the bitter waters will kill me. But you are innocent and the waters cannot harm you. Go in my place and you will save my life!"

And so the good sister changed garments with the faithless one and went out to the waiting husband. Unsuspectingly, he led her into the house of the High Priest. There she drank the bitter waters and passed through the ordeal without harm.

"I pronounce this woman innocent!" cried the High Priest. "You have misjudged her," he rebuked the husband.

Overjoyed, the man went home with his wife. On the way they passed the sister's house.

"Do wait for me here for one moment," begged the woman, "while I tell my sister that I have safely passed through the ordeal."

The happy husband agreed. As she entered, the wanton sister ran to greet her with tears of gratitude in her eyes.

"You have saved my life!" she cried, embracing and showering kisses on her.

But as she kissed her sister she inhaled from her mouth the aroma of the bitter herbs and they entered into her body. With a moan she fell to the floor, dead, her body swollen, her belly split.

### *The Wise Rogue<sup>9</sup>*

A MAN once caught stealing was ordered by the king to be hanged. On the way to the gallows he said to the governor that he knew a wonderful secret and it would be a pity to allow it to die with him and he would like to disclose it to the king. He would put a seed of a pomegranate in the ground and through the secret taught to him by his father he would make it grow and bear fruit overnight. The thief was brought

before the king and on the morrow the king, accompanied by the high officers of state, came to the place where the thief was waiting for them. There the thief dug a hole and said, "This seed must only be put in the ground by a man who has never stolen or taken anything which did not belong to him. I being a thief cannot do it." So he turned to the Vizier who, frightened, said that in his younger days he had retained something which did not belong to him. The treasurer said that dealing with such large sums, he might have entered too much or too little and even the king owned that he had kept a necklace of his father's. The thief then said, "You are all mighty and powerful and want nothing and yet you cannot plant the seed, whilst I who have stolen a little because I was starving am to be hanged." The king, pleased with the ruse of the thief, pardoned him.

#### *Justice in Sodom<sup>10</sup>*

THERE were four judges in Sodom. Their names were: Liar, Falsifier, Bribe-taker and Swindler.

Whenever an inhabitant of Sodom came to the judges and complained: "That wicked man has gone and cut my ass's ears off!" the judges would say: "Give your ass to that man, and, as punishment, let him feed the ass until its ears grow back again!"

#### *Sodom's Bed for Strangers<sup>11</sup>*

THE inhabitants of Sodom constructed a wonderful bed for the reception of strangers. If the stranger was too tall, they amputated his legs to fit the bed. If he was too short, they stretched him until they tore off a limb or two.

Once, when Eleazar came for a visit, they invited him to lie on the bed.

He replied evasively: "Ever since my dear mother died I've taken a vow never to sleep in a bed again."

#### *Charity in Sodom<sup>12</sup>*

THE people of Sodom practiced charity in their own hypocritical way. Whenever a poor stranger used to ask for alms everyone would give him a gold piece on which was engraved the name of the donor.

However, there was a town law that no stranger could buy

food, so in time he'd die of hunger. Afterwards, each man sorrowfully would come and take back his gold piece.

### *Example in Sodom<sup>13</sup>*

THE rogues of Sodom had an odd custom. The man who owned a cow was obliged to graze all the town's cattle for one day; he who had none was made to graze them for two days.

Now there was a youth of Sodom, an orphan, who lived with his poor mother. He owned no animal at all. But, following the custom, he was forced to graze all the cattle for two days.

Enraged by this injustice, the orphan went and killed all the cattle in Sodom. Then he said to the inhabitants, "Let him who owned one cow come and take one hide. Let him who had none, come and take two hides."

"What kind of calculation is that?" cried the inhabitants.

"Don't blame me! You yourselves set the example for me," answered the youth.

### *Cunning Against Greed<sup>14</sup>*

ONCE there was a cunning man who came to his rich neighbor and asked him to lend him a silver spoon. The rich man gave it to him. A few days later, the borrower returned the spoon and with it a small spoon.

"What is that for?" the rich man asked. "I lent you only one spoon."

"Your spoon," the borrower replied, "gave birth to this little spoon, so I have brought you back both mother and child, because both belong to you."

Although what the man said sounded foolish, the rich man, who was avaricious, accepted both spoons.

A while later the cunning man again came to his rich neighbor and asked that he lend him a large silver goblet.

The rich man did so. Several days later the borrower returned with the goblet and with it a little goblet.

"Your goblet," he told him, "gave birth to this little goblet. I'm returning them because both belong to you."

After a while the cunning man paid a visit to his rich neighbor for the third time and said to him: "Would you mind lending me your gold watch?"

"With pleasure!" answered the rich neighbor, thinking to

himself that it would be returned to him together with a small watch. So he gave him his watch which was set with diamonds.

One day passed, and another, and still another, but the borrower failed to show up with the watch. The rich man became impatient and went to the house of his neighbor to make inquiry.

"What about my watch?" he asked.

The cunning borrower heaved a deep sigh.

"Alas!" he said. "I am sorry to tell you that your watch is *neblich* dead! I had to get rid of it."

"Dead? What do you mean dead?" cried the rich man angrily. "How can a watch die?"

"If a spoon can bear little spoons," answered the cunning man, "and if a goblet can bear little goblets, why should it surprise you that a watch can die?"

### *The Way Tailors Figure*

A MAN bought some material and went to see a tailor.

"Have I enough goods for a suit?" he asked.

The tailor measured the material carefully and said, "No. It'll never do. There just isn't enough material."

So the man went to see another tailor. He too measured the goods carefully.

"There's enough material," he said.

He took the measurements and told the customer the suit would be ready in two weeks' time.

When the man called for his suit, what was his amazement to see that the tailor's little boy was wearing a suit made out of the same stuff as his own.

"See here," he asked the tailor, "can you tell me why the tailor across the street told me there wasn't enough material, and yet not only have you made me a suit out of it but have had enough left to make a suit for your little boy?"

"Well," replied the tailor, "you see, for me the material was enough because I've only one boy—but for the other tailor it would never do. He's got two boys!"

### *He Was Underpaid*

ONCE there was a tailor in Galicia and, although he sewed clothes for the entire population of the town, he himself walked about in tatters. He even would appear this way in

synagogue on the Sabbath day to the mortification of all, particularly of the *gabbai*.

"Isn't it a disgrace that you, a respectable tailor, should go around dressed in rags?" the *gabbai* reproached him one day.

"What can I do? I'm a poor man and I've got to work all the time to make a living," replied the tailor piteously. "Where do you think I'll find the time to work on my own clothes?"

"Here are two gulden," said the *gabbai*. "Imagine I am one of your customers and I am paying you to fix your own coat."

"Agreed!" cried the tailor with alacrity and he pocketed the two gulden.

However, on the following Sabbath, when the tailor again came to the synagogue, the warden noticed with annoyance that he was still wearing the same ragged coat.

"What sort of behavior is this?" cried the *gabbai* angrily, feeling he had been imposed upon. "Didn't I give you two gulden last week to mend your own coat? Anybody can see you haven't even touched it!"

"What am I to do?" the tailor apologized. "When I got home and examined my coat I realized that I'd be losing money on the job if I did it for two gulden!"

### *The Penitents*

Two students of the Talmud came woebegone to their rabbi and wailed: "Rabbi, we've committed a sin!"

"What have you done?"

"We looked with lust upon a woman!"

"God preserve you!" cried the rabbi. "You've indeed committed a terrible sin!"

"We wish to do penance, Rabbi!"

"In that case, I order you to put peas into your shoes and walk about that way for a week. Then perhaps you'll remember not to commit such a sin again."

The two penitents went away and did as the rabbi told them. Several days later they met on the street. One was hobbling painfully and looked haggard, but the other one was calm and smiling. So the hobbler said to his friend reproachfully, "Is this the way you do penance? I see you haven't followed the rabbi's orders. You didn't put peas in your shoes!"

"Of course I did!" insisted the other. "But I cooked them first!"

### *One Shot Too Many*

WHEN the Passover holidays were drawing near, a Jewish carpenter, who had been working in Gomel, was on his way home to his little village with three months' wages in his pocket. As he was passing through a dark forest he suddenly found himself looking into the muzzle of a robber's gun.

"Hand over your money or I'll shoot!" roared an evil-looking bandit.

What could the poor man do? He gave him his money.

As the robber was stuffing the money into his pockets his victim pleaded with him:

"See! It's just before Passover. The money you took from me was to have bought *matzos*, wine, chickens and new clothes for my wife and children. Do you think my wife will believe me when I go home and tell her that a robber in the forest took my money?"

"That's your affair!" growled the bandit.

"At any rate, can't you help me a bit, make everything look real so that my wife will believe me?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Put a bullet through my cap."

The robber laughed, threw the poor fellow's cap into the air and shot through it as it came down.

"Fine!" rejoiced the Jew. "Now fire into my coat."

The robber sent a bullet through a corner of his coat.

"Once more," pleaded the Jew, holding up the other corner for him.

"No more bullets," grunted the bandit.

"In that case, my fine fellow, to the devil with you!" cried the Jew, overjoyed. And he pummelled the rascal so hard that he didn't leave one whole bone in his body. Then, taking back his money, he continued joyfully on his way home.

### *The Clever Thief*

IN A certain village they once caught a thief. So they laid hold of him and beat him black and blue.

At this he raised a great outcry.

"Do with me what you like! Beat me, hang me, shoot me—but for God's sake, don't throw me over the fence!"

When the villagers saw how scared he was of being thrown over the fence, they thought: "No doubt something terrible awaits him there!" So they threw him over the fence, crying: "Served the rascal right!"

When the thief found himself on the other side of the fence he laughed heartily and ran away.

### *Very Very Antique*

A MAN, who had a passion for old things, went into an antique shop and asked the owner to show him some rare objects. The shopkeeper showed him an old watch.

"My friend, here you see a watch that's one of the seven wonders of creation. Most certainly you know that the *Rambam* (Maimonides) was a famous doctor? Well, this was his watch. He used to look at it as he felt the pulse of his patients and he brought it with him after a visit to America."

"What are you talking about?" marvelled the customer. "How could the *Rambam* ever have been in America? When he lived no one had even heard of America!"

"Precisely!" said the antique dealer. "That's the wonder of it. That's what makes the watch so valuable!"

### *New Management*

OTTO KAHN, the well-known financier, was one day driving through the lower East Side of New York when he saw a large sign reading: "Samuel Kahn, cousin of Otto Kahn." He immediately called up his lawyer, instructing him to have the sign changed, sparing no expense. A few days later, Kahn drove by the place again. The offending sign had been changed. It read: "Samuel Kahn, formerly cousin of Otto Kahn."

### *The Ways of a Rogue*

A THIEF cast a longing eye on a cow that belonged to a peasant.

One night, he knocked on the peasant's door and said pitifully, "I'm a poor traveller—let me spend the night here!"

The peasant was kind-hearted and gave him a night's lodging.

Hours later, while the peasant was fast asleep, the thief went into the barn and stole the cow. He led it deep into the

woods, tied it to a tree, and then returned to the peasant's house.

Early in the morning, when the peasant arose, he found the barn-door open and the cow gone. He looked high and low but could not find it.

Then a suspicion occurred to him. "Maybe the stranger took it!" He hurried into the house but he found the stranger sound asleep. He shook him so that he awoke.

"What is the matter?" asked the thief, innocently.

"Someone has stolen my cow!" said the peasant.

"You poor man!" exclaimed the thief, pityingly.

Later, when it was safe to do so, the thief made his departure.

He went into the woods, untied the cow, and then sold it to a peasant in the next village. But, as he left, he stole the peasant's horse and returned to the first peasant with it.

"I've come back to tell you," he told him, "that, as God is my witness, I saw your cow in a peasant's barn in the next village!"

Then, very casually, he offered to sell him the horse cheap. The peasant bought it and the thief went away for the second time.

The peasant then mounted the horse he had bought and rode off to the next village to claim his cow.

Sure enough, he found her tied in a stall in the other peasant's barn.

"Thief!" cried the first peasant. "You stole my cow!"

"Thief yourself!" cried the second peasant. "You stole my horse!"

"You're a liar—I bought the horse!"

"Liar yourself—I bought the cow!"

And before you could pronounce Con-stant-i-no-ple they were rolling on the ground, pummeling each other, while the thief was on his way gleefully rattling the money in his pockets and whistling a gay tune.

### *Professional Pride*

THE rabbi's fur hat was stolen. The whole town was stunned by the news. It was generally agreed that a professional thief must have been the perpetrator of the crime. So the rabbi sent for a man who was known as the leader of all the thieves in town.

"What do you think—will you be able to get back my fur cap?" asked the rabbi.

"Well, that depends," mused the thief. "In the event that one of my disciples stole it, I promise I can get it back for you. But if one of your own disciples stole it, then, Rabbi, you had better forget about it!"

### *Honor among Thieves*

Two beggars, one blind and the other a cripple, came to a Jewish tenant-farmer and said they were hungry. The farmer's wife placed a large bowl of cherries before them.

"You take one and I take one, but always wait for your turn," admonished the blind man with cunning for he was afraid that his partner would try to cheat him.

"Agreed," said the cripple readily.

Then they both attacked the cherries with relish.

For several minutes neither of them spoke, being too intent on devouring the cherries. Suddenly, the blind beggar caught the wrist of the cripple and raised an outcry: "Liar! Thief!"

"How dare you call me such names!" protested the crippled beggar indignantly.

"What else should I call you—you wretch!" rasped the blind man. "Here am I behaving like a gentleman and taking only two cherries at a time but just because I'm blind must you take advantage of me and steal four at a time?"

"How in the world do you know I took four?" the cripple asked startled.

"What else could it be?" shot back his blind companion. "If for five minutes you didn't say 'bool' while I ate two cherries at a time it became perfectly clear to me that you were cheating and taking at least four at a time!"

## LIARS AND BRAGGARTS

### INTRODUCTION

In Rabbinical lore there were four classes of evil-doers who would be denied the joys of the World-to-Come. They were the hypocrites, talebearers, scoffers and liars. However, the Jewish folk-attitude toward liars, as reflected in its tales and sayings, was a great deal more tolerant. The liar, who is deceitful because of

corrupt aims, is, of course, considered a rogue. Yet there are liars, and also braggarts, who are recognized as being quite harmless, who tell untruths or exaggerate, not out of malice and evil intention, but out of sheer perverseness and imaginativeness, or because of some childish compulsion. About such liars and braggarts, humorous Jewish lore makes merry. "A liar should have a good memory," it advises good-naturedly.

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### *The Strategists*

Two rival Jewish merchants met in a railway station.

"Where are you going?" asked one.

"To Pinsk."

"Ahah!" said the other, "you tell me you are going to Pinsk because you think I'll figure you are going to Minsk. But I happen to know you *are* going to Pinsk. So what's the idea of lying?"

### *Total Destruction*

A POOR man, whose house had burnt down, trudged from town to town collecting alms with which to rebuild his house.

"Have you written proof that your house was burnt down?" he was asked.

"Oh, the proof!" wailed the poor man. "That too, *nebich*, was destroyed in the big fire!"

### *Veracity*

A POOR Jewish farmer called on his more affluent neighbor to borrow his donkey.

"I'm sorry, neighbor," said the well-to-do farmer, "but my donkey is over in the pasture now."

At that very moment the hee-haw of a donkey was heard coming from the stable.

"What a foolish excuse to give me!" said the poor farmer angrily. "Why, your donkey has just brayed in its stall!"

The well-to-do farmer became offended.

"Whom would you rather believe," he asked with dignity, "the braying donkey or me?"

*The Birds That Turned to Stone<sup>15</sup>*

KING SOLOMON, the wisest of mankind, understood the language of the birds of the air, the beasts in the forest, the fowl in the barnyard and the fish in the sea. One day he sat at the entrance to his palace on the Temple Mount, delighting in the bright sky and clear daylight. Before him two cooing birds caressed each other, twittering merrily.

As the King looked up he heard one bird say to his spouse, "Who is this man seated here?" And she answered, "This is the King whose name and fame fill the world." Then the bird answered in mocking pride, "And do they call even him mighty? How is his power sufficient for all these palaces and fortresses? Did I so desire I could overthrow them in a second by fluttering one wing."

His spouse encouraged him, saying, "Do so and show your valor and power, if you have the strength to carry out your words." And Solomon, listening to the conversation in astonishment signed to the bird to approach and asked him the cause of his overweening pride.

Terrified, the trembling bird answered the august King, "Let my Lord the King grant me forgiveness out of his loving-kindness and goodness of heart. I am naught but a poor powerless bird who can do him no evil. All that I said was only to please my wife and raise myself in her esteem." And Solomon laughed to himself and sent the bird back to his spouse.

She, meanwhile, stood on the roof and could not contain herself, waiting for her mate to return and tell her why the King had sent for him. When he came back she asked excitedly, "What did the King want?"

And his chest swelling with pride, he answered, "The King heard my words and entreated me not to bring destruction upon his court and not to carry out my purpose."

When Solomon heard this he grew wroth with the brazen bird and changed them both into stone slabs, to warn others to refrain from vain bragging and empty boasting, and to teach women folk not to incite their chosen ones in their vanity to undertake foolish and foolhardy deeds.

If nowadays you gaze at the southern wall of the Mosque of Omar, which rises on the site of Solomon's Temple, you will see a marble slab set in a black border; it is veined

through with red in the likeness of two birds, and these are the birds that Solomon turned to stone.

### *Miracles and Wonders*

Two disciples of rival camps were bragging about their respective wonder-working rabbis.

"Take my rabbi," began one disciple, "his like has not been seen in the world before. He can do such wonders that would raise your hair on end were you just to hear about them. The other day, when he unexpectedly brought home some dinner-guests, the *rebbitzin* told him: 'I've only one fish in the pot!' But do you think my rabbi was upset? Not at all! 'Look again in the pot,' he told her. She looked—and what do you suppose she found? *Five fish!*'"

"Don't brag!" chided the other disciple. "How can your rabbi compare to mine? The other day he sat down to play cards with the *rebbitzin*. She had four queens. So what do you suppose my rabbi did? Very casually he laid his cards on the table. He had *five kings!*"

"What sort of grandmother's tale are you telling me!" protested the other disciple indignantly. "You know very well there are only four kings!"

"I'll tell you what then," answered the other, "let's make a deal. You take out one fish from your *rebbitzin's* pot and I'll take a king away from my rabbi's cards!"

## MISERS AND STINGY MEN

### *The Great Experiment*

ONCE there was a miser who was very clever at thinking up original ideas.

One day he decided that his horse was eating too much oats.

"He'll eat me out of my house!" he wailed.

So he decided to cut down on his horse's feed, but not too drastically, a little bit each day. In this way, he thought, the creature would get accustomed to eating less.

As time went on, although the horse got thinner and thinner, the miser was overjoyed to see that it did easily with less food. Naturally, he thought he was a very smart man and

went about bragging of his discovery. But one fine day, what does his obliging horse do but stretch itself out and die!

As the miser looked down on the dead horse he muttered:

"A pity! What a pity! Just when I had almost got him trained not to eat at all that stupid ass had to go ahead and die!"

### *The Sweating Will*

THE town miser, who had never given a groschen in his life to the poor, fell gravely ill. He was wracked with fever but he could not perspire. It was absolutely necessary for him to perspire if he was to live. And so the doctor tried, by all homeopathic means, to induce him to sweat, but to no avail.

Frightened, the miser called for the rabbi. He confessed and he drew up a will in which he left a large sum for charity.

"Write it down, Rabbi! Write it down!" he cried. "It's for the good of my soul!"

And the rabbi wrote down everything the miser told him, when suddenly the miser gave an unearthly cry: "Hold on, Rabbi, I'm sweating!"

### *The Orphan*

A RICH man, who was a miser, was once asked to give a donation to buy *matzos* for the poor. He gave a trifling sum to the committee.

"Your son, who is a poor man, has given more generously than you," he was told ironically.

"How can you compare me to my son?" he replied. "He has a father who's a rich man. I have no father at all."

### *He Got His Ruble Back*

A RICH man, who had been stingy all his life, suddenly sickened and died.

As his spirit floated down into the other world the demons seized hold of him by his hands and feet and whirled him down to Hell.

At this he began to shriek: "Help! Let me go! I belong in Paradise and not in Hell!"

"Only people who have done good on earth go to Heaven," the imps teased him.

"But I have one good deed to my credit," wailed the spirit.  
"What is that?" they asked him.

"Twenty years ago I gave a ruble to a poor man. I swear I did! Look into your account book and you'll see it's entered to my credit."

The demons, not knowing what to do with him, sent a messenger posthaste to consult God in the matter.

"Return his ruble to the wretch," commanded God angrily, "and send him straight to the Devil!"

### *The Miser*

THE ailing miser needed the aid of a specialist. Yet the fees appalled him: \$25 for a first visit and \$10 for subsequent visits. Still, it was life or death, and besides, he had an inspiration.

As he entered the doctor's inner office the miser exclaimed, "Well, doctor, here I am *again*."

The doctor examined the patient with great thoroughness, then said, "And as for the treatment . . . just continue . . . the same as before."

### *Who Counts?*

THE guests were bidding their hosts farewell. "And I want to tell you, Mrs. Liebowitz," Mrs. Ginsberg concluded, "your cookies were so *tasty*, I ate four."

"You ate five," Mrs. Liebowitz corrected, "but who counts?"

### *A Sure Sign*

ONCE a miser died. Even when the deceased was being prepared for burial his wife did not cry. But no sooner had the funeral procession started and the charity-collectors began to rattle their tin boxes, crying: "Charity saves from death!" when the wife burst into bitter weeping.

"Up till now you didn't cry—why do you carry on so now?" her son rebuked her.

"Why shouldn't I cry?" wailed the widow. "Now that I see that your father doesn't run away when the charity-collectors come around I'm definitely convinced he is dead!"

## SINNERS

### INTRODUCTION

The sinner is dealt with almost gently in Jewish belief and in folklore. This is due to the ages-old cultivation among Jews of a scorn for self-righteousness. The pious man says about an evildoer, even if he himself has been victimized by him: "Let God judge him." Or, if in anger he should speak harshly of him, he hastens to add: "May God not punish me for the words." Besides, it is regarded wrong of anyone to imagine that he himself is without sin: "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not." (*Ecclesiastes 7.20*.)

There is a layer of mellow humanism in Jewish thought, secular as well as religious, which shrinks from harsh strictures against the misconduct of others. "Live and let live," is its benign attitude. This springs, no doubt, from a practical realism which starts out with the fundamental recognition that men are not angels and that everybody has his weaknesses and limitations. After all, sinning is a matter of degree—everybody sins, from the holy rabbi down to the tavern roisterer!

In Jewish folk-humor the sinner gets a merry ribbing—but no more. Frequently, however, as in the delightful stories, *Saint and Sinner* by the Preacher of Dubno, and in *Heavenly Justice*, he is contrasted with scoffing hilarity to the overpious saint. Surprisingly enough, he gets the better end of the treatment here. And this, not because he is considered an admirable character. Far from it. He serves merely as a convenient pretext to shoot a barbed arrow at the holier-than-thou men who expect heavenly rewards for their virtue. As such, these jokes about sinners and saints have served as an excellent corrective in Jewish life, for they preach the doctrine of the Golden Mean and warn against fanaticism.

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### *Saint and Sinner*<sup>16</sup>

A RICH man, who was a profligate, a souse and a lecher, died in a certain town. The entire community mourned his death and followed his hearse to his last resting place. What a wailing, what a lamentation, was heard as his coffin was lowered into the grave! In the recollection of the oldest inhabit-

ant no rabbi or sage had ever departed this life amidst such general sorrow.

It chanced that on the following day another rich man died in the town: He was just the opposite of the first in character and manner of living. He was ascetic and dined on practically nothing but dry bread and turnips. He had been pious all the days of his life and sat all the time in the House of Study poring over the Talmud. Nonetheless, no one except his own family mourned his death. His funeral passed almost unnoticed, and he was laid to rest in the presence of only a handful.

A stranger, who happened to be visiting in the town at the time, was filled with wonder, and asked:

"Explain to me the riddle of this town's strange behavior. It honors a profligate yet ignores a saint!"

To this one of the townsmen replied:

"Know that the rich man who was buried yesterday, although he was a profligate and a drunkard, was the leading benefactor of the town. He was easy-going and merry and loved all the good things in life. Practically everybody in this town profited from him. He'd buy wine from one, chickens from another, geese from a third, and cheese from a fourth. And, being kindhearted, he'd pay well. That's why he is missed and we mourn after him. But what earthly use was that other one, the saint, to anybody? He lived on bread and turnips and no one ever made a kopek on him. Believe me, no one will miss him!"

### *Heavenly Justice*

A SAINT and a sinner died on the same day, and both appeared before the Heavenly Judgment Seat to hear their reward or punishment.

First the saint was called up.

"What reward, in your opinion, do you deserve?" the Heavenly Judge asked him.

"I deserve Paradise," he said confidently.

The angels laughed.

"What makes you think you're so deserving?" the saint was asked.

"I always lived uprightly," answered the saint. "I studied the Torah night and day. I faithfully observed all the six hundred and thirteen regulations of piety. Furthermore, I

renounced as evil all the pleasures of life, lived with my ugly wife for fifty years and never was unfaithful to her."

"Truly a *tzaddik*!" cried the angels rapturously.

"Just a moment!" called out the Accusing Angel. "I wish to call a witness who will disprove this *tzaddik*'s hypocritical claims!"

Thereupon, he called the soul of a tiny flea to the witness-stand.

"Tell the Court what this man did to you," the Accusing Angel demanded of him.

The flea then spoke:

"One day, as I was taking a nap in his ear, what does this brute do but stretch out his huge hairy hand and crush me to death."

"When did that happen?" asked the Accusing Angel.

"On a Sabbath."

Triumphantly the Accusing Angel turned to the Court.

"Did the Court hear that?" he cried. "This '*tzaddik*' killed a defenceless little creature, God's own creation, and on the holy Sabbath, too!"

The angels began to murmur angrily amongst themselves.

"This is really a serious matter!" the Heavenly Tribunal declared. "We cannot decide this case right away so the judgment will have to wait until the coming of the Messiah. Until that time, it is decreed that the accused *tzaddik* and the witness flea shall both be confined in the same cell."

And they led the *tzaddik* away.

Then tremblingly, the sinner came forward to be judged.

"Tell us, what in your own opinion do you deserve?" the Heavenly Tribunal asked him.

The sinner burst into sobs and wailed:

"God's justice has at last caught up with me! I've no doubt that the fiery caldrons of all the purgatories are already boiling for me—and serves me right too! There isn't a vice that I didn't practice, a sin that I didn't commit, a holy precept I didn't violate. I robbed widows and orphans, stole from the charity-box, slandered all my neighbors and lusted after strange women. But I'm fully reconciled to my fate—pronounce your punishment and let us be done with it!"

"What a wretch!" cried the angels in horror. "He deserves a place in the bottommost purgatory!"

"Just a moment!" cried the angelic counsel for the defendant. "I wish to call a witness with whose testimony I will

prove that not only was this man not the villain that he has painted himself but is in fact a saint, a noble creature!"

And he called to the witness stand the soul of a charming young widow.

"You tell your story," he bade her.

"One day," she began, "while I was all alone a fire broke out in the house. Soon the flames enveloped it and I was in danger of being burned alive, when this good man, hearing my cries for help, broke through the flames and rescued me!"

The angels were amazed. "He's not such a bad sort, after all!" they murmured.

"This is a very baffling case!" declared the Heavenly Tribunal. "Judgment is therefore postponed until the coming of the Messiah. In the meantime, we order that both accused and his witness be confined in one cell and wait for the first blast from the *shofar* of Redemption!"

### *Filial Love<sup>17</sup>*

A RICH man, having confidence in his son, gave him all his property in his lifetime. After a while the son commenced to neglect his father, ill-treating him and sending him away to be among the beggars.

One day the old man, clad in tatters, met his grandson and asked him to beg his father to let him have a mantle to cover himself, as it was so cold.

After much begging the father sent his son up to the loft and told him to fetch a certain mantle which was hanging on a hook. Whilst on the loft the boy took a knife and cut the mantle in half.

The father, wondering what the boy was doing all that time, went to find out. The son told him that he had been busy cutting the mantle in half and added that he would give his grandfather one half and keep the other half for his own father when he grew old.

The man was greatly surprised at this reply and, recognizing the wickedness of his action, took his father back and treated him with all honour.

### *Relativity*

YOSHKE the Drunkard died. Members of the Burial Society came and prepared him for his final rest. When the body was lowered into the grave not one pious man had a good word

to say for the wretch with which to send him off into the life everlasting.

Just as the grave-digger lifted his spade to cover the coffin with earth a compassionate old Jew cried out:

"Just a moment! How can we let the dead depart from this life without a good word from those of us who knew him? Believe me, he was not as bad as you think! I myself know that he has a son in New York who is a thousand times worse a guzzler than he ever was!"

The members of the Burial Society heaved a sigh of relief.

"What a pious man he was!" they exclaimed heartily.

### *When Prayer Is No Help*

A SAINT and a sinner were once fellow passengers on an ocean voyage. Suddenly a storm broke. The ship seemed in danger of sinking. Thereupon all the crew and the passengers began to pray.

"Save us, O Lord!" cried the sinner.

"Sh-sh!" warned the saint. "Don't let God know you are here or it will be the end of all of us!"

### *Absent-Minded*

A GROUP of young miscreants were caught redhanded breaking the Sabbath peace. They were smoking, playing cards and doing other things forbidden on the Sabbath.

On the following day, when they were brought up on charges before the rabbi, he sternly demanded an explanation of them.

The first said: "Rabbi, I was absent-minded; I forgot that it was the Sabbath."

"That could be," said the rabbi, stroking his beard reflectively. "You are forgiven!"

The second said: "I also was absent-minded; I forgot that one mustn't gamble on the Sabbath."

"That could be," said the rabbi, stroking his beard reflectively. "You are forgiven."

Then the turn came for the owner of the house in which the young men had been found desecrating the Sabbath.

"And what is your excuse?" asked the rabbi. "Were you absent-minded too?"

"Indeed I was, Rabbi," answered the man regretfully.

"What did you forget?"

"I forgot to pull the curtains down!" said the man.

### *From Bad to Worse*

AS THE rabbi sat deep in thought, a youth came before him and said:

"Rabbi, I want to confess—I'm guilty of a great sin. I failed to say grace one day last month."

"Tsk-tsk!" murmured the Rabbi. "How can any Jew eat without saying grace?"

"How could I say grace, Rabbi, when I hadn't washed my hands?"

"*Oy vey!*" wailed the Rabbi. "How can a Jew swallow a mouthful without first washing his hands?"

"But you see, Rabbi, the food was not kosher."

"Not kosher! How can a Jew eat food that's not kosher?"

"But Rabbi, how in the world could it be kosher; it was in the house of a Gentile?"

"What! You miserable apostate! How could you eat in the house of a Gentile?"

"But Rabbi, no Jew was willing to feed me!"

"That's a wicked lie!" cried the Rabbi. "Who has ever heard of a Jew refusing food to anybody who is hungry?"

"But Rabbi," argued the youth, "it was the Day of Atonement!"

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*Traditional Types*

An entire gallery of distinctive traditional types has been created by the volatile forces in Jewish life. They are all to be met with in folklore, many of them in colorful humorous garb. Though different from one another, every type had an organic unity with the rest, because all emerged from the same social-cultural environment. The confined ghetto of bygone days, in which Jews led their own semi-autonomous existence, was an entertaining as well as a tragic microcosm.

The Jew, an adept at the Wise King's teaching to do everything in its own season, found time to scoff as well as to revere, to be skeptical as well as to extoll. This was not done from caprice or malice, but rather out of good-humored raillery, prompted by a recognition that the noblest and the wisest also have their comic and foolish sides. Therefore, all life passed in review before the folk-humorist who was no respecter of persons or of the degree of their eminence. Everybody without exception was a candidate for the butt of his jokes: preachers and rabbis, scholars and teachers, sextons and charity collectors, cantors and marriage brokers, waiters and innkeepers, doctors and patients, tailors and butchers, shopkeepers and peddlers, rich men, poor men, philanthropists and misers. In short, it was the procession of the whole Jewish people, a motley array of characters in all of their complex laugh-provoking relationships.

Take the *hazzan*, the synagogue cantor. He often is as vain of himself and his art as any operatic tenor, a prey to all the tantrums and exhibitionism of the artistic temperament. Yet he has his special characteristics due probably to the peculiar role he plays in the congregation. More often than not he serves as a cause of contention among its members. Either he is idolized and hero-worshipped as a nightingale of God, or he serves as the butt of the sarcastic jokes of his deriders.

It is well known that there are among Jews many passionate music lovers. There is hardly one among the pious who doesn't think of himself as a bit of a sagacious musical critic in matters

of the cantorial art. He is avid in discussing and analyzing all the technical faults of a cantor, ready to point out his inferior musicianship or his lack of understanding of the text in his interpretation. And just like an Italian opera enthusiast, who performs a musical autopsy on a singer, the cantorial connoisseur too contrasts his victim's failings with the virtues of more favored cantors. However, because there are more cantors there are also more carping musical critics among Jews.

The cantor himself does not always enjoy the congregational civil war over him. Being sensitive, like any other artist, he takes offence easily. He is ready to hand in his resignation upon the slightest provocation. In fact, many cantors never let the synagogue grass grow under their feet, but are constantly on the lookout for other posts; the cantorial pasture always looks greener elsewhere.

It was the great poverty of the Jews in Europe that made them regard the few Jewish millionaires with awe, and sometimes even with incredulity. Because of the isolation of ghetto life a Rothschild or a Montefiore was largely a legendary creature to them. They tried to reconstruct in imagination the sort of world in which these rich men lived. And out of this fantasy came a number of stories in which, with studied innocence and sly banter, was depicted the life of luxury they were supposed to lead—the way they did business, dispensed charity and ran their households.

It was only natural that the many philanthropies of the Rothschilds and the Brodskys should have attracted them, like flies to honey, all the *schnorrers* in creation. There are, accordingly, many anecdotes about Rothschild's encounters with these buzzards. Now, of course, when Jews said "Rothschild" it wasn't necessarily any particular member of that large family they had in mind; it was a generic name for all Jewish millionaires.

Perhaps the wittiest of all these anecdotes are those which describe the pity of the poor for the pleasures of the rich, as in *Montefiore's Buttons* and *Rich Man's Folly*. In this connection it is interesting to point out that it was this same humorous pity for the rich which led to the adoption by East Side Jewish folklore of John D. Rockefeller. "Poor Rockefeller!" the Yiddish folksay runs commiseratingly. "He's the richest man in the world and just look at him—all he can eat is crackers and milk!"

Perhaps peculiar to the American scene alone is the old-time Jewish restaurant waiter. You never see him flatter or kowtow to his customers. He is proud of his independence and, because of the jealousy with which he guards it, he frequently acts with defensive gruffness. To a genial, submissive customer he acts like a

protector, a patron, even like a father—advising, warning, lecturing and scolding. He tells him what's good and what's bad for his health, what to choose on the menu and what to avoid like the plague.

But woe to the arrogant high-and-mighty customer! He not only browbeats him but shrivels him with scorn. And if he provokes him too much he tells him straight up and down to go to another restaurant—or to the devil! In fact, a customer rash enough to offend a Jewish waiter is liable to remember the encounter with lingering indigestion, and that not so much from the food he ate, but from the near apoplexy brought on by the excitement of the collision. Yes, the old-time Jewish waiter is an upstanding mettlesome fellow, and it is these traits of his which are mirthfully recorded in anecdote.

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## ROTHSCHILD AND OTHER RICH MEN

### *His Bad Luck Held*

A PETITIONER once came to see the great banker Rothschild in Vienna.

"I've been having a lot of bad luck all my life," he complained.

"What is your profession?" asked the banker politely.

"I'm a musician. I played for years in the Philharmonic Orchestra but ever since it was disbanded I haven't been able to get any employment."

"Too bad, too bad," murmured Rothschild commiseratingly. "What sort of instrument do you play, anyway?"

"I play the bassoon."

"The bassoon!" echoed Rothschild, his face lighting up. "That's wonderful! You must have heard how much I love good music. In fact, I have a surprise for you—I own a bassoon! I'm simply crazy about the bassoon; it's my favorite orchestral instrument! Come, my friend, let's go into the music room and you'll play me something on the bassoon."

"What was I telling you, Herr Baron?" wailed the petitioner. "I've never had anything but bad luck in my life. Of all instruments I might have mentioned I had to go and pick a bassoon!"

*Discovery at 7 A.M.*

THE banker Baron de Rothschild of Paris was a hard task-master to his clerks. Once, he called them together and said, "It's about time that you all came into the counting house early. From now on you have to report to work at seven A.M. To set you all an example in punctuality I will do the same. And what I, Rothschild, can do all of you can do!"

Then up spoke a thin frightened little clerk, "Monsieur le Baron, it may be all right for you to come in an hour earlier. That way you have the pleasure of discovering one hour earlier each day that you are the mighty Baron de Rothschild. But take me, for instance, Jacques Velvel-Shmul—when I come in an hour earlier what do I discover? I discover, Monsieur le Baron, one hour earlier than usual than I am the clerk, Jacques Velvel-Shmul, whose salary is seventy-five francs a month—woe is me!"

*Whose Money?*

THE famous Viennese Jewish wit and author, Saphir, was a protégé of Baron Rothschild, for he could never make a living out of his writing. His dependence on the largesse of the banker embittered him no end.

One day, when he came for his annual stipend, Rothschild spoke to him in a bantering tone of voice: "Ah, Saphir, I see you've come for your money!"

"For my money, Baron?" retorted Saphir ironically. "You mean—for *your* money."

*Living de Luxe*

IN THE Jewish cemetery at Frankfort-Am-Main lies the magnificent grave of Reb Amshel Rothschild, the founder of the famous banking family.

One day a poor man from Galicia came to see the grave and stood marvelling at the tombstone's beauty and costliness.

"Tsk-tsk, that's what I call living!" he murmured to himself in rapture.

*Rothschild's Poverty*

BERNSTEIN the *schnorrer* was passing Rothschild's house one day when Epstein the *schnorrer* was bodily thrown out of it.

"What happened to you?" asked Bernstein, when his colleague had picked himself up.

"They claimed in there," said Epstein, "that they kicked me out because I was making too much noise, but they can't fool me! Things are bad with Rothschild; I just saw, in that big parlor, his two girls playing on one piano!"

### *The Rights of Schnorrers*

FOR several years two brothers had presented themselves at the home of Rothschild once a month and each had been given 100 marks. Then, one died, so the survivor made the usual call alone.

The keeper of the Rothschild funds handed him the usual 100 marks.

"But you've made a mistake!" the *schnorrier* protested. "I should get 200 marks, 100 for my brother."

"No," said the treasurer, "your brother is dead. This is your hundred."

"What do you mean?" The *schnorrier* drew himself up indignantly. "Am I my brother's heir . . . or is Rothschild?"

### *Montefiore's Buttons*

"THEY say that when Sir Moses Montefiore was received by the Czar he wore a fancy dress-coat on which the buttons, all ten of them, were of gold and each one was studded with a diamond worth five thousand rubles!

"Now I ask you—aren't the rich first-class idiots? What on earth makes them do silly things like that? Take me, for instance. On my Sabbath gabardine I have three buttons. All three of them together are worth half a groschen. Should I lose one—so what? It's like losing a chick-pea. But imagine that Montefiore—how he must fuss and take care and keep watch over his precious buttons! Should he lose one—good-bye to five thousand smackers! Tell me your honest opinion, do you think he sleeps nights? *Ach!* the pleasures of the rich!"

### *The Price of a Millionaire*

WHEN the millionaire Brodsky came to a small Ukrainian town all the inhabitants poured out into the streets to welcome him. With official pomp he was led to the inn where he

ordered two eggs for breakfast. When he had finished, the innkeeper asked him for twenty rubles. Brodsky was astonished.

"Are eggs so rare in these parts?" he asked.

"No, but Brodskys are!" was the quick answer.

### *The One to Call the Tune*

NATHANSON, the wealthy millinery supply wholesaler, lay dying. He motioned to his wife to come nearer to his bedside.

"Leah, I neglected to draw up a will," he began in a weak voice. "Listen carefully to what I'm going to tell you:

"First of all, I'm leaving the business to Irving."

"You're making a mistake," protested his wife tearfully. "Irving has only one thing on his brain—horses. He'll surely ruin the business! I think you'd do better if you left it to Max; he's serious minded and steady."

"Good—let it be Max then," sighed the dying man resignedly.

"Our summer house in the Catskills I leave to Rachel," Nathanson continued.

"Rachel!" exclaimed his wife. "What does Rachel need our summer home for? Her husband is rich enough. It would be better if you gave it to Julia who is poor."

"Very well," sighed her husband. "Let Julia have it. Now, as for the car, I leave it to Benny."

"Benny?" asked his wife in surprise. "What does Benny need your car for? Hasn't he got one already? Believe me, Louie could make much better use of it!"

At this a look of exasperation came into the dying man's face. Collecting his ebbing strength he cried, "Listen, Leah! Who's dying around here—you or I?"

### *True Grief*

AT THE funeral of the richest man in town a great many mourners turned out to pay their last respects to the dead. Among the multitude was a poor man who heaved deep sighs as he followed the hearse.

"Are you a close relation of the deceased?" someone asked him commiseratingly.

"I'm no relation at all!" he replied.

"Then why do you weep?"

"That's why."

*Steam-Bath Soliloquy*

"BELIEVE me, uncle, it's a topsy-turvy world! The rich merchants have all the money in the world, yet they're the ones who are being stuffed with credit and goods, but the poor little shopkeeper who never has a broken groschen in his till, he's got to pay cash for everything! If there was justice in the world wouldn't they arrange things just the opposite? The rich merchant who has plenty of money would be forced to pay cash and the little shopkeeper who hasn't a groschen would get plenty of credit. Would that be so terrible? Under my plan, suppose the poor shopkeeper cannot afford to pay his bills. So what? The rich merchant who extends him the credit will therefore lose money and will probably become poor, too. Where's the tragedy? Once he's a poor man he'll be entitled to unlimited credit. So what's there to worry about for anyone?"

*Rich Man's Folly*

A POOR man ran home in haste and told his wife breathlessly, "I've just been to see the richest man in town and I found him at dinner eating *blintzes*. As I stood there and smelled their delicious fragrance, the juices in me began to work. Those *blintzes* certainly must taste wonderful! Believe me when rich men eat something, it's *something*."

Then the poor man sighed longingly. "Oh, if I could only taste *blintzes* just once!"

"But how can I make *blintzes*? I need eggs for that," answered his wife.

"Do without the eggs," her husband advised.

"And I'll need cream."

"Well, you'll have to do without the cream."

"And you think sugar doesn't cost any money?"

"You'll have to do without sugar, then."

The wife then set to work and made the *blintzes*, but without eggs, cream and sugar. With a judicious air the husband started to eat them, chewed them slowly and carefully. Then suddenly a look of bewilderment came into his face. "Let me tell you, Sarah," he murmured, "for the life of me, I can't see what those rich people see in *blintzes*!"

*Credit Too Good*

KOGAN borrowed a hundred rubles from Katz, promising to repay him in a week. And he did, much to Katz's surprise.

A few days later, again needing funds, Kogan borrowed another hundred rubles, again agreeing to pay it back in a week. Once more he kept his word.

Not long after, Kogan asked for another hundred, but this time Katz said, "Enough's enough! Twice already you've fooled me! Three times would be too much to expect!"

*A Father with Foresight<sup>18</sup>*

ONCE there was a rich man who owned a factory and other business establishments. In addition, he was the proprietor of the only wine-house in town. He had two sons and heirs: one was respectable and well-behaved, the other was a roisterer and spendthrift.

A time came when the rich man felt that he was reaching his end. So he drew up a will in which he left his factory and all his other properties to his profligate son. To his good and upright son he left only the wine-house.

When his friends heard of this they reproached him, saying, "How did you come to do such a silly thing? Why are you leaving the bulk of your wealth to that good-for-nothing sot who will only waste the wealth you accumulated with the effort of a lifetime?"

"Believe me," said the rich man, "I have carefully considered the matter. Were I to leave the wine-house to my good-for-nothing son there's no doubt that he'd drink it all away in no time with his boon companions. In the end, his creditors would take it away from him. Therefore, in order to prevent this situation from arising, I have left the wine-house to my sober, well-behaved son, and my other possessions to his brother. You see it's all very simple! Because my wine-shop is the only one in town, it is certain that my profligate son will go to drink there with his bad companions. I have no doubt that he will thus fritter away the factory and everything else. In that case it will be my good son who, in the long run, will not only have the wine-shop but will also acquire the rest of my wealth."

## TAILORS

### *Out of Style*

THE tailoring business was so bad that Feitelberg said to his partner, "Only the Messiah could help us."

"How could even the Messiah help us?" asked the partner in despair.

"Why," said Feitelberg, "he'd bring back the dead, and naturally they'd need new clothes."

"But some of the dead are tailors," the partner observed gloomily.

"So what?" asked Feitelberg. "They wouldn't have a chance! How many would know this year's styles?"

### *Both from Minsk*

A CZARIST police inspector, glittering in his gold-braid uniform, was walking through the streets of Moscow when he passed an anemic little Jewish tailor who failed to doff his cap.

"Here, Jew!" he roared angrily and seized the unlucky tailor by the scruff of his neck and shook him until his teeth rattled. "What do you mean by passing me without removing your cap! I won't be surprised if you haven't even a residence permit! Quick, tell me—where do you come from?"

"From Minsk," stammered the Jew.

"Now, what about your hat?" rasped the police inspector, kicking him in the shins.

"Also from Minsk," stuttered the tailor

### *Napoleon and the Jewish Tailor<sup>19</sup>*

WHILE the Emperor Napoleon was retreating from Russia he passed through a Jewish village as he fled before the enemy. Seeing that all avenues of escape were cut off he dashed into a house in which lived a Jewish tailor.

In a tremulous voice he pleaded with the tailor, "Hide me quick! If the Russians find me they'll kill me!"

Although the little tailor had no idea who the stranger was he was moved by pity for a fellow-creature. So he said to the Emperor, "Get under the featherbed and lie still!"

Napoleon got into bed and the tailor piled on him one featherbed, and another, and then still another.

It wasn't long before the door burst open and two Russian soldiers with spears in their hands rushed in.

"Is there anybody hiding here?" they asked.

"Who would be foolish enough to hide in my house?" the tailor answered.

The soldiers pried into every corner but found no one. As they were leaving, just to make sure, they stuck their spears several times through the featherbeds.

When the door had finally closed on them Napoleon crawled out from under the pile of featherbeds. He looked deathly pale and was covered with perspiration. Then turning to the tailor he said, "I want you to know, my dear noble friend, that I am the Emperor Napoleon. Because you have saved me from certain death you can ask me three favors. No matter what they are I will grant them to you."

The little tailor thought for a while, then he said, "Your Majesty, the roof of my house has been leaking for the past two years but I've never had any money to fix it. Would you be so kind and have it fixed for me?"

"Blockhead!" exclaimed Napoleon impatiently. "Is that the greatest favor you can ask of an Emperor? But never mind—I'll see that your roof is fixed! Now you can make your second wish, but make sure this time that it's something substantial."

The little tailor scratched his head. He was really perplexed. What on earth could he ask for? His face suddenly brightened.

"Some months ago, Your Majesty," he began, "another tailor opened his shop across the way and he is ruining my business! Would it be too much trouble for you to ask him to find himself another location?"

"What a fool!" cried Napoleon disdainfully. "Very well, my friend—I'll ask your competitor to go to the devil! Now you must try and think of something that's *really* important. Keep in mind though that this is positively the last favor I'll grant you!"

The tailor knitted his brows and thought and thought. Suddenly an impish look came into his eyes.

"Begging your pardon, Emperor," he asked with burning curiosity, "but I'd very much like to know how you felt while the Russian soldiers were poking their spears through the featherbeds!"

"Imbecile!" cried Napoleon beside himself with rage. "How

dare you put such a question to an Emperor? For your insolence I'll have you shot at dawn!"

So said, so done. He called in three French soldiers who placed the little tailor in irons and led him away to the guardhouse.

That night the tailor could not sleep. He wept and quaked, quaked and wept. Then he recited the prayer of confession and made his peace with God.

Promptly at dawn he was taken out of his cell and tied to a tree. A firing squad drew up opposite him and aimed their muskets at him. Near by stood an officer with watch in hand waiting to give the signal to fire. He lifted his hand and began to count: "One—two—thr—" But before he could even complete the word, the Emperor's aide-de-camp dashed up on horseback, crying, "Stop! Don't shoot!"

Then he went up to the tailor and said to him, "His Majesty, the Emperor, gives you his gracious pardon. He also has asked me to give you this note."

The tailor heaved a deep sigh and began to read, "You wanted to know," wrote Napoleon, "how I felt under the featherbed in your house. Well, now you know."

## SCHOLARS AND SCRIPTURE TEACHERS

### *Etiquette Among Scholars*

A RICH man once invited two hungry scholars to tea. They came, sat down at the table and began to discuss Torah, for what other pastime do Jews have? As they got themselves well tangled up in Talmudical argument, the hostess entered and placed before them glasses of tea with lemon. Then she brought in a platter with two cookies. It so happened that one cookie was somewhat larger than the other. Understanding etiquette very well, neither of the two scholars wished to be the first to reach for the cookies.

One said gallantly, "You first, Reb Yankel."

"No, no! Help yourself first, Reb Isaac!" urged Reb Yankel with equal delicacy.

Finally, after much aimless feinting, Reb Yankel suddenly reached out and took a cookie—but he chose the larger one.

Reb Isaac looked on dumbfounded.

"How is it, Reb Yankel," he chided him in an injured tone

of voice, "that a scholar like you should be so utterly without table manners? How could anybody be so rude as to grab for himself the bigger portion and leave the smaller one to another?"

"*Nu*, and what would you have done in my place?" asked Reb Yankel.

"What do you mean what would I have done? As a man who knows etiquette I most certainly would have taken the smaller cookie."

"Well, that's what you got," answered Reb Yankel sweetly. "So what are you getting excited about?"

### *Goal Achieved*

A CERTAIN *melamed* was in the habit of snatching a quiet drink while his students droned on. But in the course of time this became known and he lost all his pupils.

A friend, moved by the teacher's sad situation, tried to induce him to reform. "Look, Chatzkl," he pleaded, "if only you'd give up drinking, you'd have all your pupils back. Come on, try and give it up!"

"You're a fool!" the *melamed* replied. "Here for years I've been teaching so I'd be able to drink . . . and you suggest I stop drinking, so I'll be able to teach!"

### *Strictly Kosher*

THE teacher of Scripture in a little Polish town got sick and tired of his drudgery and of suffering cold and hunger. He decided to become a robber.

One day, he took a knife from the kitchen and went into the woods. Hiding behind a tree he lay in ambush for passersby. At last he saw a rich lumber dealer in the town trudging along unsuspectingly. Without a word, he threw himself upon him and raised his knife as if to stab him. Suddenly he seemed to recall something and let the knife drop to the ground.

"It's your luck," he muttered. "I just remembered that this is a *milchig* knife!"

### *Potatoes*

A POOR Talmud student was making the rounds from one householder to another. Each one, out of the goodness of his heart and as an act of piety, gave him food and lodging for

several days. In one of these homes, however, he was treated with ill-grace and in a perfunctory manner. Three times daily they gave him only one dish to eat—potatoes.

One day, when he saw the platter of potatoes being placed before him, he shuddered and asked his host, "Tell me, please, what is the benediction that is said over potatoes?"

"What a question to ask!" exclaimed his host. "You're a Talmud student, aren't you? Why, even the most ignorant man knows that you say: 'Blessed are the fruits of the earth,' over everything which comes out of the soil."

"That may be so," retorted the Talmud student, "but what should I say when the potatoes are coming out of my ears?"

## MERCHANTS, SHOPKEEPERS, PEDDLERS

### *To Save Time*

ON THE express train to Lublin, a young man stopped at the seat of an obviously prosperous merchant.

"Can you tell me the time?" he said.

The merchant looked at him and replied: "Go to hell!"

"What? Why, what's the matter with you! I ask you a civil question, in a properly civil way, and you give me such an outrageous, rude answer! What's the idea?"

The merchant looked at him, sighed wearily, and said, "Very well. Sit down and I'll tell you. You ask me a question. I have to give you an answer, no? You start a conversation with me—about the weather, politics, business. One thing leads to another. It turns out you're a Jew—I'm a Jew. I live in Lublin—you're a stranger. Out of hospitality, I ask you to my home for dinner. You meet my daughter. She's a beautiful girl—you're a handsome young man. So you go out together a few times—and you fall in love. Finally you come to ask for my daughter's hand in marriage. So why go to all that trouble. Let me tell you right now, young man, I won't let my daughter marry anyone who doesn't even own a watch!"

### *A Tradesman's Revenge*

SEVERAL merchants sat at a table in an Odessa restaurant absorbed in conversation about business affairs. Every once in a while a peddler came up to them and pestered them to buy something from him.

"I have fine handkerchiefs, and scarves that are beauties, and coin purses that are A-1," he called out in a raucous voice.

Out of patience with him, one of the merchants said, "What do you say to this pest! I'd like to play a trick on him that he'll never forget."

And, turning to the peddler, he asked, "Do you have any suspenders, uncle? But they must be A-1."

"What a question!" cried the peddler with an offended air. "Do I have A-1 suspenders?" And quickly he fished out a pair of suspenders. "You asked for A-1, but, believe me, these are A-1 A-1."

"How much?"

"Two rubles."

Without a word the merchant paid the two rubles and the peddler walked away with a dazed look on his face.

"What was the idea?" asked a colleague of the merchant who had bought the suspenders. "Why did you immediately pay him what he asked?"

"Never fear, I've struck home," replied the merchant with glee. "He'll eat his heart out now because he didn't ask for three rubles."

### *A Kindness*

A CERTAIN merchant was notorious for not paying his bills, so his good friend Abrams was astonished one day to find him haggling endlessly over a deal. He took the merchant aside.

"Look," he said, "I can't understand you. You know you won't ever pay this man anyway, so why do you bargain so brutally?"

"Listen," said the merchant, "he's a nice guy, and I want to keep down his losses!"

### *The Rich Uncle*

ONCE there was a retired New York merchant who owned a large summer home in the Catskill Mountains. He had a kind heart and because of that his summers became a nightmare for him. With the appearance of the crocuses and with the first liquid notes of the robin all his poor relations from Brownsville, East New York, Midwood and West Bronx descended upon him in the country in force. They never gave him a moment's peace or privacy until the leaves began to turn. Then they returned to New York.

One day, as he sat gloomily regarding a young third cousin-in-law upon whom a thousand hints had been wasted, he sighed and said, "There is little likelihood, is there, that you'll ever come on another visit here?"

"What a thing to say!" protested the young man with heat. "Why, you are the prince of hosts! Why shouldn't I come again?"

"How can you come again if you never go away?" moaned his host plaintively.

### *Production Worries*

FRIEDMAN the clothier was distressed at the haggardness of his partner Weinberg, who suffered from insomnia. "I'll bet you," he said to him, "you never tried the commonest remedy, after all your specialists."

"What's this commonest remedy?"

"Counting sheep."

"All right," said the sick man. "What can I lose? Tonight I'll give it a try."

But next morning Weinberg was more haggard than ever. "Did you do like you said?" Friedman eagerly asked.

"Sure I did," said Weinberg wearily. "But something terrible happened. I counted sheep up to 50,000. Then I sheared the sheep, and in a little while I made up 50,000 overcoats. Then all of a sudden a problem came up, and I was tearing my hair all night: *where could I get 50,000 linings?*"

### *Nickeleh-Pickeleh*

AN OLD Jewish woman on Essex Street stuck her hand into the brine of a pickle barrel and fished out a large pickle.

"How much is this pickle?" she asked.

"A nickel," answered the dealer.

"A nickel is too much," she said and put the pickle back into the barrel.

She fished in the barrel again and came up with a little pickle.

"How much is this little *pickeleh*?" she asked in a tender voice.

"That *pickeleh*?" answered the shop-keeper, just as tenderly. "Only a *nickeleh*!"

*Too Late*

A JUNK peddler on the East Side died. His widow collected two thousand dollars insurance.

"What miserable luck!" she complained. "For forty years we lived in poverty and now that God has made us rich, Sol had to go and die!"

## DOCTORS AND PATIENTS

*A Calculation*

Two Galicians went to live in Vienna. After some time they met on the street.

"How are you making out in Vienna?" one asked with a sigh.

"One step removed from the grave," answered the other bitterly. "How about you?"

"Not so bad! Why should I complain? I'm making a living. After all, can a Jew ask for more? But I have been sick of late. Why, do you know that in the last three months I've spent 400 gulden on doctors and medicines!"

"Ach!" exclaimed the other with a homesick sigh. "Back in Galicia you could have been sick on that money for at least six years."

*One of the Diseases of Mankind*

DR. ISAAC HOURWICH, the noted Yiddish scholar, had a goatee and he looked exactly like Russian-Jewish doctors are expected to look.

One day, an old Jewish woman came to see him.

"Doctor," she complained, "I suffer the tortures of hell from my rheumatism. Would you please—"

"I'm sorry," Dr. Hourwich interrupted her, "but you've made a mistake, my dear woman. I'm only a Doctor of Philosophy."

"Tell me, doctor," she murmured, "what kind of sickness is 'philosophy'?"

*How to Collect Dues*

IN THE great, gay days of Vienna a certain physician determined to slough off his Jewish origin in an effort to achieve the maximum social distinction.

Into the hospital where he served as clinical professor of

dermatology there came one day a little Jew, bearded, wearing a greenish derby hat, a rusty alpaca coat, and carrying a battered briefcase. "I wish to see Professor Mannheimer," he proclaimed.

"Impossible," said the attendant curtly.

"What do you mean 'impossible'? I'll wait," said the little man. He sat down on a bench in the reception room, and waited, all day long. For several days thereafter he came and waited all day.

On the fifth day, a new attendant decided to help the little old man. "I'll give you a tip," he said. "Professor Mannheimer gives a clinical lecture tomorrow, and he uses people as examples of diseases while he lectures. The only chance you have of ever seeing him is to join the line of these people. They pass through that corridor, over there, exactly at three o'clock. But you've got to undress."

"Nu," said the old man, "if I have to undress, I have to undress."

So the next day, at three, the old man, naked except for his hat, his briefcase still clutched in one hand, brought up the end of the line. In a moment, with the half-dozen other "specimens," he found himself in the amphitheatre. The professor entered, and began his lecture.

Pointing with a long professorial staff at the first of the poor souls, he said, "Here, gentlemen, we have a perfect case of dermatitis. . . ." And, after a lengthy description of the symptoms, he thanked the "specimen" and waved his pointer to the next in line.

"This," he declared, "is tertiary syphilis . . . note this symptom . . . note that . . ." And again, he waved to the next case.

Finally the great professor stood face to face with the little old man. He looked the "specimen" over from head to foot, wiped his own spectacles and then, thoroughly puzzled, asked, "What's the matter with *you*?"

"What's the matter with *me!*" echoed the little man. "What's the matter with *you*, Professor Mannheimer? For four years, you haven't paid one cent of your dues to the Jewish charities!"

### *Insomnia*

OLD man Epstein suffered from insomnia. His family had tried dozens of doctors, and scores of home remedies, to no avail. Finally a great specialist was recommended, a

neurologist reported never to fail. He was forthwith sent for.

Arriving at the house, the great doctor said to the son, "You wait here, while your father and I have a few moments together." And the doctor entered the old man's room.

"It's all very simple," said the doctor when they were alone. "Just follow me. Do everything I do."

And the great neurologist raised both arms aloft. So did Epstein. Then he lowered his arms and breathed deeply. Epstein followed suit. The physician raised his arms sideways, did three quick knee-bending maneuvers, put his hands on his hips, and then executed five or six more calisthenic operations. Epstein followed faithfully.

Suddenly, panting a little from these rigorous exercises, the doctor fixed little Epstein with a commanding eye, and declared soothingly, "Now . . . you will go . . . to sleep!" He pointed to the bed.

The doctor then strode from the room, and summoned the younger man. "You may go in to your father, now," he said. "You'll find him fast asleep."

Happily, the son tiptoed to his father's bedside, put his lips near the old man's ear, and whispered, "Papa, it's me. You're sleeping?"

Very cautiously, old man Epstein opened one eye, and asked, "That *meshuggener* . . . he's still here?"

## WAITERS AND RESTAURANTS

### *The Customer Is Always Right*

A CUSTOMER in a Jewish restaurant in New York gave his order to the waiter.

"I want some roast duck."

"I'm sorry—we have no roast duck today—only roast goose."

"Ask the boss."

The waiter went to the boss.

"Mr. Weintraub wants roast duck."

"Tell him we have no roast duck today—only roast goose."

"I told him so, but he insists on having roast duck."

The boss sighed and said, "All right, if Weintraub insists, he insists! Ask the cook to cut off a portion of roast duck from the roast goose."

### Service

THE restaurant was crowded. Waiters scurried everywhere. A line of standees awaited tables. The noise was overpowering.

As a waiter whizzed past one table, a customer looked up and asked, "Waiter—what time is it?"

He got a quick answer. "I'm not your waiter."

### A Fishy Conversation

A CUSTOMER came into a restaurant in Kharkov, ordered a fish, and when it was brought, bent over the fish as if it were a friend, apparently talking to it. The manager, observing this, came over to the table.

"What," he asked the diner, "are you doing?"

"Oh, just conversing with the fish."

"Conversing with this fish?" The manager was astounded. "And what were you saying to it?"

"I asked him where he was from. And he said the Dnieper."

"The Dnieper, eh?" The manager determined to see this through. "Then what did you say?"

"I asked what was new on the Dnieper."

"And he answered?"

"He was terribly sorry, but he'd left there so long ago, he wouldn't know."

### Oysters for Atonement

ON HIS way to *shul* on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, holiest of fast days, a Jew spied his partner at a table in the very window of a seafood restaurant. Storming into the restaurant, he planted himself at his partner's elbow.

"How can you do such a thing?" he bellowed. "How on this day of all days can you sit here and eat oysters?"

"What's the matter?" asked the culprit. "There's no 'R' in *Yom Kippur*!"

## MATCHMAKERS

### INTRODUCTION

Matchmaking, practiced among many peoples, has had a venerable history among Jews. It had an honorable tradition for countless generations, and served a socially useful purpose besides. It

received serious discussion as far back as the Talmudic tractate, *Baba Kama*. But then, unlike modern times, it was not regarded as a business but as a pious practice to be carried on for the love of God, the perpetuation of the Jewish family, and the increase of Israel. As a distinctive calling, matchmaking was already in existence among European Jews during the Twelfth Century. The *shadchan* was even then a clearly recognizable personage. In fact, he was an important Jewish communal functionary, who collected his modest fees prescribed by rabbinical decisions and by the legal statutes of the realm.

It was the Crusades which spurred the growth of Jewish matchmaking throughout Europe. Wholesale massacres, persecutions, and the constant flights of Jews hither and thither before their enemies, made normal social life impossible. In such circumstances, the *shadchan* became a pillar of national survival, an important instrumentality for the preservation of the Jewish people.

He was among those brave souls who devoted themselves to the vital task of establishing and preserving contact among the scattered remnants of Israel. It was a labor of devotion on his part, involving many risks to life and limb as he traveled through hostile territory from town to town and province to province.

No mere hucksters or business "agents" were permitted by the Jewish communities to devote themselves to the "sacred" union of youth. Only high-minded rabbis and scholars were chosen. It is interesting to note that such celebrated scholars and rabbis as Levi of Mayence, Jacob Molir and Leona da Modena were *shadchonim*; and they were honored for this work by their communities.

In time, with the growth and permanency of Jewish settlements in ghetto-towns, the traditional integrity of the *shadchan* began to waver. By the time of the Jewish "Dark Ages," which began at the end of the Sixteenth Century, there were already *mussar* (moralistic) writings in which the *shadchan* was roasted over the coals for his venality and gross misrepresentations. With pointed sarcasm he was reminded that, in olden times, only selfish scholars and great rabbis were privileged to practice his profession.

One of the principal reasons for the decline in the moral stature of the matchmakers was the fact that usually men with unstable backgrounds and occupations were tempted into its uncertain undertakings. The peculiar persuasive and social talents required drew toward it, and even stimulated, the development of a unique type. It would be an understatement to say that the *shadchan* became the Jewish counterpart of Figaro. Even more than he, the *shadchan* was a perpetual chatterbox, lively and impudent by turn, good-natured with raillery and guileless with malice.

The *shadchan* is a classic type in the great portrait gallery of Jewish folklore and in the works of fiction writers as well. He is drawn vividly and in broad satiric lines, dressed up in all the fine

plumage of his humbug, talkativeness, and genius for euphemistically glossing over the physical and character defects of his clients. Yet, with it all, he is touched with a certain comic pathos which belongs to the *schlimazl*, a trait Figaro did not possess.

N.A.

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### *The Unreasonable Young Man*

AN OLD marriage broker once came to a young man proposing a match with an ugly girl. The young man, who knew the girl, looked at the broker as if he had gone out of his mind.

"What's the idea of making sport of me?" he asked him indignantly.

"You're wrong!" the broker assured him. "You know I don't like to joke. I mean it very seriously. What are your objections to the girl anyway?"

"Objections? Why she's blind!"

"You call that a fault? In my opinion it's a virtue. You'll be free to do whatever you please."

"But she's also a mute!"

"For a woman that's a virtue. You'll never hear a sour word from her."

"But she's also deaf!"

"Can you think of anything better? You'll be able to abuse her to your heart's content and she won't hear you."

"But she's also lame!"

"Call that a fault? You'll be able to run after other women and she won't be able to follow you."

"But she's also hunchbacked!"

"Really, I cannot understand you!" cried the marriage broker in exasperation. "Can't you tolerate even one fault in the girl you plan to marry?"

### *Happiness, Ready-to-Wear*

THE young man was indignant.

"What sort of a match are you proposing to me, anyway?" he rebuked the *shadchan*. "Why, this woman is the mother of three children!"

"So what if she is?" countered the *shadchan*. "Believe me, it's a lot better so. Suppose you were to marry a girl and you both decided to have children. What inconvenience you'd have to go through to have three children! Three pregnancies and all the fuss that goes with them. What a waste of time,

energy and expense, of doctors, nurses, hospitals and medicines! After each birth your wife would have to convalesce, no? You even may have to send her to the country to recuperate. Since you work in town you'll both be cruelly separated. What sort of a dog's life will you lead then? You'll have to eat in rotten restaurants and spoil your digestion. And you'll have to look after your kids while your wife is away. This way, if you'll marry the widow with the three children I'm proposing, it'll be a ready-made job. She's all through with the bother. Three nice children, all custom-made, and their mother is in the pink of condition, thank you! My friend, if you don't grab this proposition you're a fool!"

### *The Art of Exaggeration*

ONCE there was a marriage broker who felt he was getting old and unable to get around any more as much as he used to. He therefore hired a young assistant who knew nothing about the business. He had to start from scratch with him.

"Know, young man," said the marriage broker, "that the most important thing in matchmaking is exaggeration. You must lay it on thick!"

"I fully understand," answered the assistant brightly.

One day the master took his assistant along on a matchmaking visit to a rich man who had an only son.

"Remember what I told you!" the marriage broker warned his assistant. "Above all things, be enthusiastic and don't hesitate to lay it on."

When they came to the rich man the broker began:

"I've just the right girl for your son! She comes of a good family."

"Good family!" exclaimed his assistant rapturously. "Why, they're descendants of the Vilna Gaon!"

"And they are rich too," the broker went on.

"What do you mean 'rich'?" interrupted his assistant. "They're millionaires!"

"As for the girl, she's as pretty as a doll!" gushed the broker.

"A doll!" snorted his assistant with scorn. "Why, she's a raving beauty!"

At this the broker threw a dubious look at his assistant.

"To tell the truth," he faltered, "she has just a trifling little handicap—she has a tiny wart on her back."

"What do you mean, a tiny wart!" enthused his assistant.  
"Why, she has a regular hump!"

### *The Aristocrat*

SHORTLY after the Bolshevik Revolution, a *shadchan* called on a lady client in Minsk.

"How much dowry have you?" he asked delicately.

"Two thousand rubles."

The *shadchan* then took out his little black book and said, "Well now, let me see! H-mm. For two thousand rubles I can give you a doctor."

"No, I don't want a doctor."

"Maybe you'd like a rabbi?"

"No, no rabbi."

"How about a cantor?"

"No, no cantor."

"Then what is it you want?"

"I want a worker."

"A worker? You're a smart one! For two thousand rubles you think you can get a worker?"

### *The Over-Enthusiastic Shadchan*<sup>20</sup>

A *shadchan* once came to a young man and said, "Young man, I have a girl for you—pure gold!"

"Thank you very much," answered the young man politely, "but I don't want to get married."

"Don't want to get married!" cried the *shadchan* incredulously. "Who ever heard of such a thing? How can a Jew live without a wife?"

"What do I need a wife for?" retorted the young man irritably.

"Ai-ai! That's bad!" sighed the *shadchan*, sadly shaking his head. "You talk like a child. You simply have no idea how good it is to have a wife! Without one, my dear friend, you can't know the meaning of life. Bachelors are always depressed; they feel as lonely as a stone in the wilderness. But with a wife—and believe me I know what I'm talking about for I have a wife of my own (may God keep her in health and vigor!)—with a wife, life is a joy without end."

"Imagine for a moment—you get up in the morning and your wife places before you a steaming cup of coffee. Then, while you are away for morning prayer or on business in the

market-place, she makes ready a delicious breakfast—the same as my wife does (may God preserve her to one hundred and twenty years!). Later, when you return, you eat together, alone and at the same table. Everything is so cosy, so pleasant! Just think of it—you eat every meal the same way, three times a day, seven days a week, and every day of your life!

"Then on Friday, before the Holy Sabbath arrives, she dusts and cleans and scours until everything is spick and span. She polishes the large silver candlesticks that your mother-in-law gave you for a wedding gift, until you can almost see your face in them. She then places them on the table, and, saying a prayer, she lights the candles, as a pious Jewish daughter should. When you return from evening prayer in the synagogue you chant the benediction over excellent wine in a silver goblet. And think of it! There, opposite you, sits your loving wife looking up at you smiling with her dear eyes, just as my wife (God bless her!) does on such occasions.

"After supper, you both sit down to chat comfortably. You first talk of this and of that. Then your wife (what a clever little head she has on her shoulders!) begins to tell you one witty story after another. You listen as she prattles so sweetly, so charmingly, just as my wife does. And so she goes on talking while you listen—and she talks . . . and she talks . . . and talks . . . and talks . . . *Oy*, can she talk! She's driving me crazy with her talk!"

### *The Truth Will Out*

A MARRIAGE broker had taken a young man on a visit to a prospect. As they left the house the broker said triumphantly, "Didn't I tell you what a wonderful family they were, and how rich? Did you notice the quality of the silverware on the table? Pure sterling!"

"Y-e-s," grudgingly conceded the young man. "But don't you think it's possible that in order to make a good impression on me they borrowed the silverware?"

"Ach, what nonsense!" cried the broker with exasperation. "Who'd lend any silverware to those thieves?"

*What a Life!*

"WHAT was the idea of fooling me that way?" a prospective bridegroom bitterly reproached his *shadchan*.

"What do you mean, I fooled you?" indignantly replied the broker. "What did I say that wasn't so? Isn't the girl a beauty? Doesn't she embroider nicely? Doesn't she sing like a canary?"

"Ye-es," grudgingly conceded the groom. "The girl is all right, as far as that goes. But she comes from a terrible family! That's where you lied to me: you told me her father was dead, but the girl herself tells me he's been in jail for ten years."

"Nu—I ask you? Do you call that living?" asked the *shadchan*.

*Speak Up*

"You faker, you swindler!" hissed the prospective bridegroom, taking the *shadchan* aside. "Why did you ever get me into this? The girl's old, she's homely, she lisps, she squints—"

"You don't have to whisper," interrupted the *shadchan*, "she's deaf, too!"

*Only Sometimes*

THE boy and girl went for a stroll. The boy said to his *shadchan* when next they met, "But she limps!"

"Only when she walks," agreed the *shadchan*.

*In Haste<sup>21</sup>*

To MY honored, beloved and respected friend, Sholom Aleichem:

I want to begin by informing you that I am still—Bless the Lord—among the living, and that I hope to hear the same from you, Amen. Next I want to tell you that, with God's help, I am now a king; that is, I have come home to Kasrilevka to spend the Passover with my wife and children, my father-in-law and mother-in-law, and with all my loved ones. And at Passover, as we all know, a Jew surrounded by his family is always a king. If only briefly, I hasten to inform you of all this, my dear, true friend. For a detailed account there is no time. It is Passover Eve, and on this day we must all do everything in great haste, standing on one foot. As it is

written, "For *in haste* didst thou come forth out of the Land of Egypt."

But what to write of first, I hardly know myself. It seems to me that before anything else I ought to thank you and praise you for the good advice you gave me, to try my hand at matchmaking. Believe me, I shall never, never forget what you have done for me. You led me forth from the Land of Bondage, from the Gehenna of Yehupetz; you freed me from the desolate occupation of a commission salesman, and lifted me to a noble, respected profession. And for this I am obligated to praise and exalt you, to bless and adorn your name, as you well deserve.

It is true that thus far I have not succeeded in negotiating a single match, but I have made a beginning. Things are stirring, and once things begin to stir there is always the possibility and the hope that with God's help something may come of it. Especially in view of the fact that I do not work alone. I operate in partnership with other matchmakers, the best matchmakers in the world. As a result of these connections I now have a reputation of my own. Whenever I come and introduce myself, Menachem-Mendel from Yehupetz, I am invited to sit down, I am given tea with preserves, I am treated like an honored guest. They introduce me to the daughter of the house, and the daughter shows me what she can do. She turns to her governess and begins to speak French with her. Words come pouring like peas out of a sack, and the mother sits gazing at her daughter proudly, as though to say, "What do you think of her? She speaks well, doesn't she?"

And listening to these girls, I have picked up some French myself and I can understand quite a bit of the language. For instance, if someone says to me, "*Parlez-vous Français?*" ("How are you feeling these days?") I say, "*Merci, bonjour.*" ("Not bad, praise the Lord.")

Then, after she has given a demonstration of her French, they have her sit down at the pianola to play something—overtures and adagios and finales—so beautiful that it penetrates to the very depth of one's soul! In the meantime the parents ask me to stay for supper and I let them talk me into it. Why not? . . . At the table they serve me the best portions of meat and feed me *tzimmes* even on weekdays. Afterwards, I strike up a conversation with the daughter. "What," I ask, "is your heart's desire—a lawyer, an engineer, a doctor?" "Naturally," she says, "a doctor." And once more she starts

jabbering in French with the governess, and at this point the mother has an opportunity to display her daughter's handiwork. "Her embroidery and her knitting are a feast to the eye," she says, "and her kindness, her goodness, her consideration for others—there is no one like her! And quiet—like a dove. And bright—as the day . . ."

And the father, in his turn, traces his pedigree for me. He tells me what a fine family he comes from, and his wife as well. He tells me who his grandfather was, and his great-grandfather, and all his wife's connections. Every one of them of the finest. Rich people, millionaires, famous and celebrated all over the world. "There is not a single common person in our whole family," he assures me. "And not one pauper," his wife adds. "Not a single workingman," he says. "No tailors and no cobblers," she adds. "You'll find no fakes or frauds among us," he tells me. "Or apostates either, I can assure you," she puts in.

In the doorway, when I'm ready to leave and they wish me a good journey, I sigh and let them know how expensive it is to travel these days. Every step costs money. And if he is not obtuse he knows what I mean, and gives me at least enough for expenses . . .

I tell you, my dear friend, that matchmaking is not at all such a bad profession—especially if God ever intercedes and you actually conclude a match! So far, as I have told you, I have not succeeded in marrying anyone off. I have had no luck. At the start everything looks auspicious. It could hardly be better. It was a match predestined since the Six Days of Creation. But at the last moment everything goes wrong. In this case the youth does not care for the maiden; in the other, the girl thinks the groom is too old. This one has too fine a pedigree; that one does not have enough money.. This one wants the moon on a platter; that one doesn't know what he wants. There is plenty of trouble connected with it, and heartaches, and indigestion, I can assure you.

Right now I am on the verge of arranging a couple of matches—naturally with a few partners—which, if the Lord has mercy and they go through, will be something for the whole world to talk about. Both parties come from the wealthiest and finest and oldest families—there is none like them. And the girls are both the greatest beauties. You can't find their equal anywhere. Both are well-educated, gifted, kind, bright, quiet, modest—all the virtues you can think of.

And what do I have to offer them? Real merchandise! One—a doctor from Odessa. But he wants no less than thirty thousand *rubles* dowry, and he has a right to it, because according to the practice that he says he has, he should be worth much more. I have another from Byelotzerkiev—a rare find! A bargain at twenty thousand! And another in Yehupetz—only he doesn't want to get married. And a whole flock of young little doctors who are only too anxious to get married.

Besides these I have a pack of lawyers and attorneys and justices at fifteen thousand and ten thousand, and smaller lawyers—young ones just hatched—that you can have for six thousand or five thousand, or even less. On top of that I have a couple of engineers who are already earning a living, and a few engineers still looking for work. And that is not all. I have an assortment of miscellaneous clients, elderly men, reliques of past campaigns from Tetrevitz, from Makarevka, from Yampola and from Strishtch, without diplomas, but fine enough specimens, distinguished, skilled, intelligent. In short, there are plenty to pick from. The only trouble is that if the gentleman wants the lady, the lady does not want the gentleman. If the girl is willing, the man is not. Perhaps then you will ask why the man who does not want girl number one will not take number two, and vice versa? I thought of that myself, but it doesn't seem to work. Do you know why? Because strangers are always mixing in. They may be good people. They mean no harm. But they spoil everything. And meanwhile letters are flying back and forth. I send telegrams and receive telegrams every day. The whole world rocks and rolls!

And in the midst of it all, Passover gets in the way, like a bone in the throat, blocking everything. I think it over. My fortune won't run away from me. The merchandise I deal in is not so perishable. Why shouldn't I take a few days off and go to see my family in Kasrilevka? It's been so long since I've been there. It is not fair to my wife and children to be away from them so long. It does not look good to others, and it is even embarrassing to myself. So, to make it short, I have come home for Passover, and that is where I am writing you this letter from.

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*Humorous Anecdotes and Jests**Züsskind the Tailor*

THE Bishop of Salzburg issued a decree that on a certain day the Jews of the principality were to present their champion to hold a dispute with a certain Christian scholar who was a great Bible authority and theologian. The dispute was to take place in the Cathedral Square before the entire populace. Whichever of the two opponents was bested in argument was to lose his life.

A great terror fell upon the Jews when they heard of this. They rent their garments and fasted. The Rabbinical Council issued a call that whoever wished to engage in the disputation with the Christian scholar should report to the Chief Rabbi.

But only Züsskind the Tailor showed up.

The communal leaders were filled with consternation. Was this the man to represent them against the most learned priest in the land? But what was there to be done? No one else had come forward for everyone knew it spelled certain death, and here was the town tailor, ready to sacrifice his life for the good of all and for the sanctification of His Name!

The appointed day for the disputation arrived. The populace assembled in the Cathedral Square according to the Bishop's decree. The Bishop then asked the Jewish champion to step forward and begin the disputation.

Said Züsskind the Tailor to the Christian scholar: "If you are such an authority on Jewish lore, then tell me: what is the meaning of the Hebrew words *Lo Idati*?"<sup>22</sup>

"I don't know," answered the scholar, readily.

"Aha!" cried the tailor exultantly. "Let me put the question to you again: What does *Lo Idati* mean?"

"I don't know!" answered the scholar, this time with some exasperation.

When the Bishop heard the scholar's apparent admission of ignorance for the second time he ordered that the disputation be halted. They then quickly hanged the scholar and the Jews returned home with songs of thanksgiving on their lips. They conducted the tailor in triumph to the rabbi.

"Tell me," asked the rabbi, "how did you hit upon such a clever plan to best the scholar?"

"I'll tell you, Rabbi," replied the tailor. "I looked into the Yiddish translation of the Torah because I do not know any Hebrew, and it said about *Lo Idati*: 'I don't know.' So I figured—if the holy Yiddish Bible translation admits 'I don't know' how can this enemy of Israel know! And, as you see, I judged right."

### *The Power of a Lie*

IN THE town of Tarnopol lived a man by the name of *Reb Feivel*. One day, as he sat in his house deeply absorbed in his Talmud, he heard a loud noise outside. When he went to the window he saw a lot of little pranksters. "Up to some new piece of mischief, no doubt," he thought.

"Children, run quickly to the synagogue," he cried, leaning out and improvising the first story that occurred to him. "You'll see there a sea monster, and what a monster! It's a creature with five feet, three eyes, and a beard like that of a goat, only it's green!"

And sure enough the children scampered off and *Reb Feivel* returned to his studies. He smiled into his beard as he thought of the trick he had played on those little rascals.

It wasn't long before his studies were interrupted again, this time by running footsteps. When he went to the window he saw several Jews running.

"Where are you running?" he called out.

"To the synagogue!" answered the Jews. "Haven't you heard? There's a sea monster there—a creature with five legs, three eyes, and a beard like that of a goat, only it's green!"

*Reb Feivel* laughed with glee, thinking of the trick he had played, and sat down again to his Talmud.

But no sooner had he begun to concentrate when suddenly he heard a dinning tumult outside. And what did he see? A great crowd of men, women and children, all running toward the synagogue.

"What's up?" he cried, sticking his head out of the window.

"What a question! Why, don't you know?" they answered. "Right in front of the synagogue there's a sea monster. It's a creature with five legs, three eyes, and a beard like that of a goat, only it's green!"

And as the crowd hurried by *Reb Feivel* suddenly noticed that the rabbi himself was among them.

"Lord of the world!" he exclaimed. "If the rabbi himself is running with them surely there must be something happening. Where there's smoke there's fire!"

Without further thought *Reb Feivel* grabbed his hat, left his house, and also began running.

"Who can tell?" he muttered to himself as he ran, all out of breath, toward the synagogue.

### *The Merchant from Brisk*

A MERCHANT from Brisk ordered a consignment of dry-goods from Lodz. A week later he received the following letter: "We regret we cannot fill this order until full payment has been made on the last one."

The merchant sent his reply: "Please cancel the new order. I cannot wait that long."

### *The Biggest Favor*

ONE day, while Hitler was horseback riding in a Berlin park, his mount became frightened and ran wild.

"Help! Help!" cried the Fuehrer.

A passerby leaped forward, caught the reins of the runaway horse, and brought it to a standstill.

"My good man," said Hitler gratefully. "Do you know who I am? I am your Fuehrer! And who are you?"

"I am Israel Kohn, a Jew," answered his rescuer, all-a-tremble.

Hitler looked startled for a moment. Then he said, "You may be a Jew but you're a brave man! You've saved my life and I want to reward you! Just tell me what favor you'd like me to do for you."

"Favor!" muttered Israel Kohn, despondently. "The biggest favor you can do for me is not to breathe a word about this to a soul!"

*Secret Strategy*

DURING the first World War a Jewish soldier greatly distinguished himself by the large number of prisoners he took. Late at night, when all firing had ceased and everything was still, he would cautiously crawl over the top into No Man's Land. Before long he would return followed by a number of prisoners. He did this with baffling regularity all night long until dawn broke. No one could understand how he managed it, and he wouldn't divulge his secret even to his superior officers.

When the General of his division heard of it he ordered him up for questioning.

"My boy," he said sternly, "out with your secret! If you can take prisoners that easily it's your duty to tell us how so we can teach others."

"General," the young soldier confessed, embarrassed, "my method is not according to the Army Manual. I do simply this. Late at night I crawl to the nearest enemy trench. Then I call out in Yiddish: 'Jews, wherever you are! We need a *minyan* of ten men for reciting the *Kaddish* prayer over a dead comrade.' Immediately, Jews come piling over the top from the German trenches and I lead them back to camp."

*Mother-in-Law Relativity*

"HELLO, Mrs. Levine! How are you?"

"Fine and dandy!"

"And how's your daughter Shirley?"

"God bless her, she's fine! What a wonderful husband she has! He doesn't let her put her hand in cold water all day long! She lies in bed until twelve and then her maid serves her breakfast in bed. At three she goes shopping in Saks Fifth Avenue and at five she has cocktails at the Ritz. And dresses just like a movie star! What do you say to such *mazel*?"

"And how's your son? I hear he's married."

"Yes, he's married! Poor boy—he has no *mazel*. He's married to one of those fancy-shmancy girls. What do you think she does all day long? She doesn't do a thing! The good-for-nothing! She sleeps until noon. Then she has to have her breakfast brought to her in bed. And do you think she takes care of her home? No! She has to shop all afternoon and waste her husband's hard-earned money on dresses like a

movie star. How do you think she winds up the day? Guzzling cocktails! Call that a wife?"

### *All Agents Are Alike*

ONCE there was an old couple. They did poorly, and even suffered hunger. At last, driven by desperation, the old man said to his wife, "Malke, let's write God a letter."

So they sat down and wrote God a letter, imploring Him for help. They signed it, sealed it carefully, and wrote the name of God on the envelope.

"How do you suppose we can mail this letter?" the old woman asked in perplexity.

"God is everywhere," her pious husband replied. "Our letter is bound to reach Him any way we send it."

So he went outside and threw it into the wind which whirled it away down the street.

It happened that at that very moment a charitable rich man was out walking and the wind blew the letter towards him. He picked it up out of curiosity, read it, and was touched by the trusting innocence of the old couple as much as by their sad plight. He resolved to help them.

A little later he knocked on their door.

"Does Reb Nute live here?" he asked.

"I am Reb Nute," replied the old man.

The rich man beamed at him.

"In that case, I've some business to transact with you," he said. "I want you to know that God received your letter a few minutes ago. As I am His personal agent in White Russia He gave me a hundred rubles for you."

"What do you say to that, Malke?" exclaimed the old man with joy. "You see, God did get our letter!"

The old couple took the money and showered their blessings on God's agent in White Russia.

When they were alone again the old man's face became clouded.

"What's wrong now?" his wife asked him.

"I've a suspicion, Malke," answered the old man thoughtfully, "that that agent wasn't altogether honest; he was a little too smooth. Well, you know how agents are! Likely as not God probably gave him two hundred rubles for us but that swindler must have taken off fifty percent as his commission!"

*All About the Elephant*

A PROFESSOR of zoology at Harvard some years ago asked his graduate students, among whom were several foreigners, to write papers on the elephant.

A German student wrote: "An Introduction to the Bibliography for the Study of the Elephant."

A French student wrote: "The Love-Life of the Elephant."

An English student wrote: "Elephant Hunting."

An American student wrote: "Breeding Bigger and Better Elephants."

There was also a Jewish student in the class. He wrote: "The Elephant and the Jewish Problem."

*Babe Ruth and the Jewish Question*

A LITTLE Jewish boy on the East Side of New York came home from school and with great excitement told his patriarchal grandfather: "Grandpa! Imagine! Babe Ruth hit three homers today!"

"Tell me," asked the old man, "what this Babe Ruth did—is it good for the Jews?"

*The Captain*

HE HAD always been a simple and unassuming man until he suddenly became rich. Looking around he noticed that the very rich owned yachts. Clearly, to own a yacht was a badge of wealth. So why shouldn't he own a yacht too? He therefore bought himself one and appropriately rigged himself out in a fancy "captain's" uniform.

For the first trip he invited his old father and mother from the Bronx. They seemed impressed but slightly dubious of his new glory.

"What do you say to me now, mama?" cried her son proudly, pointing to his new uniform. "I'm a regular captain now!"

His old mother smiled indulgently and murmured, "That's fine, that's fine!"

"But mama," protested her son, looking a little hurt, "you don't seem very enthusiastic about it."

"Listen, Benny dear," replied his mother, "by papa you're a captain, by me you're a captain, by you you're a captain—but, believe me, by a *captain* you're no captain!"

### *Ready for Everything*

A TALMUD student was sleeping in a strange house. At night he was awakened by a noise, so he cried out: "Scat! Scat! *Gewalt! Gewalt! Shema Yisroel! Shema Yisroel!*"

"What's the meaning of your gibberish?" his host called out to him in surprise.

"Very simple," explained the Talmud student. "I wish to cover all eventualities. If it was a cat—'scat! scat!' would drive it away. If it was a thief—'*gewalt! gewalt!*' would frighten him off. If it was a ghost—then '*Shema Yisroel!*' would protect me."

### *Also a Minyan-Man*

"WHAT is your business?" asked the judge of the witness, a little bearded old Jew.

"I'm a *minyan-man*."

"What's that?" asked the judge.

"When there are nine persons in the synagogue and I join them they are ten," answered the old man.

"What kind of talk is that?" snapped the judge, impatiently. "When there are nine persons, and I join them, there are also ten."

A look of delight appeared on the old Jew's face. Bending over towards the judge he asked in a confidential whisper, "Also a Jew?"

### *When Your Life Is in Danger*

A JEWISH merchant once came on matters of business to the estate of a Polish landowner in the country. He found the landowner at breakfast. On the table were hot cutlets and a bottle of wine. The host politely asked the merchant to take a seat at the table and urged him to eat a pork chop. The Jew thanked him but declined.

"Don't you like pork chops?"

"On the contrary, I would like them very much but they're forbidden to us Jews."

The landowner laughed. "I know, I know," said he, "you call them *tref*."

After that he poured him a glass of wine. Again the Jew declined with thanks. That, too, was forbidden.

Out of patience, the landowner exclaimed, "Your God cer-

tainly is a hard-hearted one! He puts upon your shoulders a burden too heavy to carry. Tell me what, for instance, would you do if you got lost in a forest, had nothing to eat for several days, and began to feel that you were about to collapse from hunger? Suppose somebody came along and handed you food that was *tref*—would you eat it?"

"That's entirely another matter," answered the Jew. "Our Law makes provision for emergencies where human life and health are at stake."

Suddenly, the landowner jumped to his feet. He glared murderously at the Jew and, whipping out a revolver, pointed it at him, crying, "Drink this wine, or I shoot!"

Before you could say *Bim* the Jew had downed the wine in one gulp. Still pointing the revolver at him, the landowner poured him a second glass. Before you could say *Bam* the Jew had gulped it down.

Putting down the revolver, the landowner said smiling to the Jew, "Don't be angry with me, I beg you, I was only joking. Assure me you're not angry."

"Why shouldn't I be angry—I have every right to be angry," retorted the Jew. "You should have started your joke a little earlier, when you first got around to the pork chops!"

### *They Misled the Gendarme*

WHEN the Czar had issued the infamous May Laws against the Jews in 1881, three Jews in a little Ukrainian town gave vent to their indignation.

"He is an idiot, a nitwit!" jeered one.

"He guzzles vodka like a swine!" sneered another.

"Not only that, but he's a thief! He collects taxes and puts them in his own pocket!" raged the third.

No sooner had he said this than a gendarme appeared as though he had sprung out of the ground.

"Seditious Jews!" he roared angrily. "Just wait—you'll pay dearly for insulting our Holy Czar! Come with me—you're under arrest!"

So the three Jews, trembling with fear, went with the gendarme to the police station.

"How dare you insult our beloved Czar?" shrieked the commissioner of police.

"Who was talking about the Czar?" replied the Jews innocently. "We were talking about Kaiser Wilhelm, that enemy of Israel!"

The police commissioner softened.

"Oh, in that case—be more careful the way you talk next time. How was the gendarme to know? When you said 'idiot . . . drunkard . . . thief' . . . he naturally thought you meant the Czar."

### *Very Understandable*

A PREACHER once came to a village and held forth in the synagogue on the Sabbath afternoon. A great crowd turned out to hear him. In the village lived a man who was a bit of a scholar. Seeing that everybody was going to hear the preacher, he went too.

The following morning the preacher met this man on the street.

"How did you like my sermon?" he asked him.

"All I can tell you is that I could not fall asleep after I heard you preach."

"Did my preaching have such an effect on you?"

"Not at all, only when I sleep during the day I can't close an eye at night!"

### *Commentary*

Two old men sat silently over their glasses of tea for what might have been, or at any rate seemed, hours. At last, one spoke: "Oy, veh!"

The other said: "You're telling me!"

### *Comfort*

"WHAT'S news, Mr. Goldstein? What does your son write from Detroit?"

"Ail! Thank you for asking. Believe me—it's bitter. His wife died recently. She was *nebich* a young woman, a mother of three children, the prettiest little doves you've ever seen! But now, blessed be His name, he has only two left—the third fell sick and died. And his business is going to the devil! He had a house, but it burned down. Burglars looted his little shop so that nothing remains of any value. In one word—he has been left *nebich* without a shirt on his back. It's a bitter misfortune! But let me tell you—*does he write a letter in Hebrew!* Ail! It's a pleasure to read—I'm telling you!"

### Cold Hospitality

A RICH man was annoyed because every time he sat down to dinner the door opened and in came a certain *schnorrer*. What was the rich man to do? He had to invite him to dinner.

One night at the usual dinner hour when his steady customer called again, the rich man suddenly asked him, "Do you like cold noodles?"

"Oh, I love cold noodles!" replied the *schnorrer*, enthusiastically.

"Fine!" snapped the host. "Come back tomorrow night for them. They're hot just now."

### Conversation Piece

"How are you?"

"Mm-mm."

"I mean, how is business?"

"Tsk-tsk!"

"And how's your wife?"

"Eh-eh!"

"And your children?"

"Nn-nn!"

"Well, good-bye! It certainly was good to see you. Believe me—there's nothing like a good heart-to-heart talk with a friend to get your troubles off your chest!"

### Stop Me If . . .

AN old Jew, seated at the end of a sparsely filled subway car, was making strange and elaborate gestures and grimaces, interspersed with laughter and deprecatory hand wavings.

A fellow passenger, overcome with curiosity, approached the old man, asking, "Is something wrong? Is there anything I can do?"

"No, no!" said the gesturer, "thank God, I'm all right. But when I travel I have the habit of passing the time telling myself stories."

"Well," said the other, "why do you make such faces and gestures, as if you were in pain?"

"Oh, that!" said the old man. "Every time I start a new story I have to tell myself that I've heard it before."

### *A Livelihood*

LEVINE bought a diamond and emerald ring for his wife. At lunch he showed it to his friend, Siegel.

"What did you pay for it?" asked Siegel.

"Five hundred dollars."

"I like it," said Siegel. "I'll give you seven hundred, that's \$200 profit for you."

So it was done. But the next day Levine regretted it. His wife would have liked it. He went to Siegel and offered to buy it back for \$800.

Siegel sold. After all, it was a quick \$100 profit. But he had become attached to the ring and phoned Levine, later, saying, "Look, if you'll sell it back to me I'll give you a thousand for it." So it was again Siegel's. And Levine joyously pocketed the extra \$200.

Before Siegel could present it to his own wife, his partner, Berman, saw it and offered \$1500. The ring changed hands.

The next day, Levine again sought the ring, offering Siegel \$1200.

"I've sold it to Berman for \$1500," Siegel explained.

"You idiot," cried Levine. "How could you do such a thing! From that ring we were both making such a nice living!"

### *A Full Accounting*

WHEN Mr. Berg came home his wife accosted him. "Sam, give me five dollars."

"What happened to the five dollars I gave you this morning?"

"Do you want me to give you an accounting?"

"Yes," said Mr. Berg.

"All right," said his wife. "A dollar here and a dollar there is two dollars."

"Yes."

"And before you turn around is another two dollars."

"Yes."

"And the last dollar—I won't tell you!"

### *Mother Love*

A MOTHER tenderly guided her four-year-old Sarale down Second Avenue. As they crossed 14th Street, the child sneezed.

"God bless you, my sweet!" breathed Mama, patting the child's head.

As they crossed 13th Street, the child sneezed again.

"Ah, may your health be a thing of wonder, my jewel," Mama sweetly sighed.

At 12th Street, the child sneezed again and once more Mama patted her head and uttered a fervent "*Gesundheit!*"

At 11th Street, little Sarale sneezed again, and received a smart slap in the face. "Go to the devil!" cried Mama. "You're catching another cold!"

### *Initiative*

A JEW was engaged once to drive a bus on a lower East Side line in New York. As he handed in his receipts at the end of the first day he looked plainly discouraged. They amounted to less than ten dollars.

The following day he started out on his route early in the morning but somehow he eluded the inspectors. Very much puzzled they tried to find out what had become of him and his bus.

Finally, toward nightfall, the new bus driver appeared at the terminal grinning happily. With a flourish he handed the cashier one hundred and nine dollars.

"What's this? What's this?" the cashier exclaimed in amazement. "We never had so much money made on that run before. How did you do it?"

"Very simple," answered the driver. "I said to myself: 'What's the use of wasting my time on this God-forsaken route where there are hardly any passengers?' I'm not such a fool! I turned my bus into 14th Street and, believe me, it's a gold mine over there!"

### *No Admittance*

ONE of the synagogue's chief means of obtaining revenue is the sale of seats for the high Holy Days. This is always done in advance since the carrying and handling of money on these days is forbidden to orthodox Jews. For the same reason, it is customary to employ non-Jews as keepers of the gate.

One *Yom Kippur*, a ticket-taker at a Brooklyn house of worship was confronted by a Jew with no ticket who pleaded to be allowed to enter.

"No ticket, no admission," the guard said, firmly.

"But I've got to see my partner, Liebowitz, in the fourth row," insisted the man. "It's urgent."

"For the last time," said the guard, "I'm telling you, no ticket, no admission to this synagogue!"

"But it's a business matter," persisted the man. "I'll just be a minute. I swear to you . . . just a minute."

"Well, if it's a business matter," said the guard, finally weakening, "I'll let you in for a minute. . . . But remember—no praying!"

### *Whose Drawers?*

DURING his first visit to America, Israel Zangwill, the noted Anglo-Jewish writer, was the guest of Jacob Schiff, the banker-philanthropist. To his dismay, Zangwill found the weather in New York too balmy for his heavy English woolies. Schiff, a conservative banker of the old school, promptly lent him a pair of his own jean underdrawers, the kind with tapes around the ankles.

Blithely Zangwill strolled down Fifth Avenue, basking in the fine afternoon sunshine, completely unaware that the tapes on his underwear had gotten loose and were trailing on the ground.

As he passed a corner a policeman called out to him, "Hey, Mister, the strings of your drawers are hanging out!"

For a moment Zangwill was taken aback.

"You're mistaken," he finally replied, recovering from his embarrassment, "they're not *my* drawers, they're Mr. Jacob Schiff's drawers."

### *Shortcut*

FELD and Bein met on the street. "*Sholom aleichem,*" said Feld, politely. "Go to hell," said Bein.

"Look," Feld said indignantly, "I speak nicely to you and you tell me to go to hell. What's the idea?"

"I'll tell you," said Bein. "If I answered you politely you would ask where am I going, and I would tell you I'm going to the 8th Street baths.

"You would tell me I'm crazy, the Avenue A baths are better, and I would say *you're* crazy, the 8th Street baths are better, and you would call me a damn fool and I would tell you to go to hell.

"This way it's simpler. I tell you right away go to hell, and it's finished."

### *A Matter of Degree*

AS THEY were driving by Calvary Cemetery, Goldman suddenly turned to Meyerson, saying, "If you don't mind, I want to stop here so I can visit a grave."

"But it's a *goyish* cemetery!" Meyerson said, surprised.

"Just the same," said Goldman, "I want to go in."

So they went in and walked until they arrived at a family plot marked "Reilly." At its entrance was a block of granite bearing the names:

James Joseph Reilly  
Francis Xavier Reilly  
John James Reilly  
Mary Martha Reilly  
William John Reilly  
Rebeccah Reilly

Pointing to the last name, Goldman said, "This was my daughter."

"Your daughter?" exclaimed Meyerson dismayed. "She might as well be dead!"

## RETORTS

### *Rabbincical Limits*

THE saintly rabbi was deep in his devotions, praying with his face turned to the wall. Suddenly, a practical joker came up to him from behind and smacked him on his backside. Startled, the rabbi turned around.

"Oh, Rabbi!" cried the joker, his teeth chattering with fright. "The truth is . . . your back was turned . . . I didn't recognize you . . . I thought it was somebody else . . . Please forgive me I . . . I didn't mean to . . ."

"Never mind!" the rabbi interrupted him. "There's no harm done—I'm no rabbi in my rear end."

### *Montefiore and the Anti-Semite*

ONCE the great Baron Montefiore of London visited the Emperor of Austria. At dinner, one of the Imperial Ministers,

who was an anti-Semite, gave an account of his travels in equatorial Africa.

"I didn't see one pig or Jew there," he remarked maliciously to the champion of the Jews.

"In that case," answered Montefiore, "it would be advisable that Your Excellency and I go there."

### *Animated Conversation*

SHOLOM ALEICHEM, the celebrated Yiddish writer, was once seen by a friend talking to himself on the street.

"For heaven's sake," cried the friend, "do you realize you're talking to yourself?"

"And what if I do?" retorted Sholom Aleichem. "When at last I've found a clever person to talk to—do you have to butt in?"

### *The Snob*

IN A certain town there lived two brothers. One was a rabbi—the other was a thief. The rabbi was ashamed of his brother and always gave him a wide berth. One day, as the two met by accident on the street, the rabbi deliberately snubbed his brother. This enraged the thief who reproached him:

"What makes you so stuck up? If I were stuck up I'd have reason—my brother is a rabbi! But you have a brother who is a thief, so why do you put on airs!"

### *Pessimist and Optimist*

THE eminent German-Jewish physician and philosopher, Marcus Hertz, used to go calling on his patients in a carriage which bore his monogram M.H. on the door.

"Why do you have such a suggestive monogram on your carriage?" his friend Heinrich Heine, the poet, chided him. "Don't you know that in Hebrew M.H. stands for the *Malech Hamoves* (The Angel of Death)?"

"Ach, Heine, what a pessimist you are!" laughed the old doctor. "Don't you know that in Hebrew M.H. also stands for *Mechayai Hameissim* (to give life to the dead)?"

*Why Not?*

THE prosecutor began to cross-examine the witness: "Do you know the accused?"

"How should I know him?"

"Did he ever try to borrow money from you?"

"Why should he borrow money from me?"

Out of patience, the judge asked the witness, "Why do you answer every question of the prosecutor with another question?"

"Why not?"

*Proper Distinctions*

THE Jewish communal official was summoned to court as a witness in a case.

"*Shochet Levy!*" called out the Polish judge.

"I beg your pardon, Your Honor—my name is not *Shochet Levy*," the witness demurred. "I am Levy, the communal official."

But the judge was obstinate.

"In my records," he persisted, "I read that, among other things, you are also a slaughterer. I, therefore, am justified in calling you '*Shochet Levy*.' "

"Your Honor," replied the witness with dignity, "when I stand before the court I'm *Pan Levy*. When I stand before my congregation and conduct the service I'm *Cantor Levy* and, when I stand before an ox, I'm *Shochet Levy*."

*Evil to Him . . .*

A TRAVELLING charity collector was invited by a hospitable villager to spend the night. Before the stranger went off to the synagogue for evening prayer, his host noticed with surprise that he clamped a padlock on the box in which he kept his money. Offended by this, his host went and put his own padlock on the box.

When the charity collector saw the unfamiliar padlock on his box he was chagrined and asked his host, "What's the idea of putting a padlock on my box?"

"What do you mean 'padlock'? There are two padlocks!"

"One of them is mine."

"Why did you put it on?"

"W-e-l-l! You know how things are . . . I'm away from

home . . . among strangers . . . one has to be careful! Things could be taken out of my box!"

"You're absolutely right!" answered his host. "I feel the same way about it. You know how it is . . . a stranger in the house . . . valuable things around . . . one has to be careful! Things could be put into your box."

### *Essential Trade*

WHILE patrolling the streets of Saint Petersburg two Czarist policemen arrested a Jew who had no residence permit. When the Jew came before the inspector he defended his right to live in the capital on the grounds that he was an essential worker. Not wishing to take the responsibility of a decision on himself the inspector referred the matter to the Governor of the city.

"What is this trade of yours that's so essential?" the Governor asked the Jew when he was brought before him.

"I make ink!" modestly answered the Jew.

"What's so essential about that?" asked the Governor contemptuously. "Why, even I could make ink if I wanted to!"

"That's fine!" beamed the Jew. "In that case, your Excellency has the right to live in Saint Petersburg too!"

## BITTER JESTS

### INTRODUCTION

The bitter jests of the Jews are dipped in the gall and wormwood of their experience. Since the Book of Proverbs, the Jewish folk have been saying: "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." This type of humor, of course, is not unique to the Jews, but among them, however, it has acquired deep undertones that stamp it with originality. Jewish bitter jests exude a certain cosmic irony. They show the rational intelligence of the Jew staggered by the cruel incongruities of his enemies' conduct.

Most of the themes of these bitter jests treat of the luckless fate of the Jews. Their mirth has a sardonic bite as it contemplates the bizarre helplessness of their position in a hostile world. An anonymous Cervantes must have conceived the story, *The Life of a Jew!* (see JEWISH SALT, page 18), which makes bitterly merry over some of the so-called "protectors" of the Jews who,

out of a pretended solicitude for them, inflict on them as much harm as their worst enemies. The ruefulness of the Jew in the face of the violation of every civilized value is sharply drawn in the anecdote, *The Independent Chicken*, which describes an unequal encounter with Nazi storm-troopers. The helpless victim tries to joke himself out of his fix, but his humor rings absurd in his own ears, so outraged is his intelligence.

Where else could there have arisen such grim jests as *God's Mercy* and *They Shoot First* but out of the special conditions of Jewish life? They are timeless in their application, for the incidents they relate might easily have occurred in almost any age in the Jewish past. The story of *Hitler's Circus*, for instance, which has run through innumerable variants, could just as well have held true in Roman days when, to amuse the "master-race," live Jews were thrown to the lions in the circus.

N.A.

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### *The Independent Chicken*

A JEW, carrying a chicken under his arm, was walking along the street in Frankfort-am-Main. He was stopped by a Nazi storm trooper who demanded, "Where are you going, Jew?"

"To the store, to buy my chicken some food."

"And what will you feed this chicken?"

"Corn."

"Corn, eh? Germans go hungry while you, Jew, feed your chicken on German corn!" So saying, the trooper beat the Jew, then went on his way.

A few minutes later another trooper stopped the Jew. "Where are you going, dog?"

"To the store, to buy my chicken some food."

"Food, eh? What kind?"

"Some wheat, maybe."

"Wheat! Germans are starving and you give your Jewish chicken wheat!" And he beat him severely.

The poor, battered Jew continued on his way and was challenged by yet another trooper. "Where are you going?"

"To get my chicken something to eat."

"So! And what will you feed this chicken?"

"Listen," said the Jew, desperately, "I don't know. I'll give him a couple of *pfennigs* and he'll buy what he likes!"

### *Applied Psychology*

IN A little Southern town where the Klan was riding again, a Jewish tailor had the temerity to open his little shop on the main street. To drive him out of town the Kleagle of the Klan set a gang of little ragamuffins to annoy him.

Day after day they stood at the entrance of his shop.

"Jew! Jew!" they hooted at him.

The situation looked serious for the tailor. He took the matter so much to heart that he began to brood and spent sleepless nights over it. Finally, out of desperation, he cooked up a plan.

The following day, when the little hoodlums came to jeer at him, he came to the door and said to them, "From today on any boy who calls me 'Jew' will get a dime from me."

Then he put his hand in his pocket and gave each boy a dime.

Delighted with their booty the boys came back the following day and began to shrill: "Jew! Jew!"

The tailor came out smiling. He put his hand in his pocket and gave each of the boys a nickel, saying, "A dime is too much—I can afford only a nickel today."

The boys went away satisfied because, after all, a nickel was money too.

However, when they returned the next day to hoot at him the tailor gave them only a penny each.

"Why do we get only a penny today?" they yelled.

"That's all I can afford today."

"But two days ago you gave us a dime, and yesterday we got a nickel. It's not fair, mister!"

"Take it or leave it. That's all you're going to get!"

"Do you think we're going to call you 'Jew' for one lousy penny?"

"So don't!"

And they didn't.

### *Handicapped*

AN OLD patriarchal Jew from a small Polish town was on his way to Warsaw. Opposite him in the train sat a Jew-hating "Pilsudski Colonel" with his dog.

The officer openly showed his contempt for the old Jew. Whenever he spoke to his dog he called him "Yankel." But the Jew said nothing. Finally, it got under his skin.

"What a pity that the poor dog has a Jewish name!" he muttered.

"Why so?" asked the Colonel.

"With such a name as 'Yankel' he just has no chance!" replied the Jew. "It's a real handicap. Without it—who knows? He could even become a colonel in Pilsudski's army!"

### *God's Mercy*

A GREAT calamity threatened the little Ukrainian village. Shortly before the Passover holidays a young peasant girl had been found murdered. Those who hated the Jews quickly took advantage of the unhappy incident and went about among the peasants, inflaming them with the slander that the Jews had killed the girl in order to use her Christian blood for making *matzos*. The fury of the peasants knew no bounds.

A report spread like wildfire throughout the village that a pogrom was in the offing.

Dismayed by the news the pious ran to the synagogue. They rent their garments, and prostrated themselves before the Holy Ark. As they were sending up their prayers for divine intercession, the *shammes* ran in breathlessly.

"Brothers—brothers!" he gasped. "I have wonderful news for you! We've just discovered, God be praised, that the murdered girl was Jewish!"

### *They Shoot First*

A TRAVELLING circus once came to a Jewish town. It had all kinds of performing animals, among them a bear. One day the bear broke out of its cage. Thereupon, the chief of police issued an order that the bear should be shot on sight.

The news that the bear was on the loose frightened the inhabitants of the town. One Jew said to another, "I'm leaving town!"

"What for?"

"What do you mean 'what for'? Haven't you heard the police chief's order to shoot the bear on sight?"

"Well, you're no bear."

"That's what you say! Before you know it some Jew will be shot. Only afterwards they'll find out he's no bear...."

*Sedition Saved Him*

A JEW was drowning in the Dnieper River. He cried for help. Two Czarist policemen ran up. When they saw it was a Jew, they said, "Let the Jew drown!"

When the man saw his strength was ebbing he shouted with all his might, "Down with the Czar!"

Hearing such seditious words, the policemen plunged in, pulled him out, and arrested him.

*Hitler's Circus*

A CIRCUS came to a Bavarian town shortly after Hitler decreed the Nuremberg laws against the Jews. Posters were pasted up all over the town announcing the various attractions but stressing the main feature which was to consist of a man dressed in the skin of a lion who would enter the cage of a tiger to wrestle with him.

The circus had advertised for a man to do this dangerous job, but the only applicant to show up was a Jew with the degrading yellow badge on his arm.

"Why, you're a Jew!" exclaimed the manager in amazement.

"Who else but a Jew would accept such a job?" replied the applicant bitterly. "No one will give me any employment because of my race."

"Aren't you afraid?" the manager asked with a laugh. "This is dangerous—you may be killed by the tiger!"

"Yes, I know, but it doesn't matter," replied the Jew wearily. "I have to take this chance for my starving family."

And so the Jew was hired.

On the day of the opening a great crowd turned out to see the main feature; it promised to be very exciting indeed. The circus was filled to the tent-top.

When the main feature came on the Jew appeared. He was trembling in every limb and, before the very eyes of the spectators, he put on a lion's skin. Then, roaring like a real lion and crawling on all-fours, he opened the tiger's cage and dashed in. As he came face to face with the terrible tiger and looked into his cruel green eyes he was frantic with fear.

"It's all over with me now," he said to himself and he cried out in an unearthly voice the creed Jews recite in the face of death:

"*Shema Yisroel! Hear O Israel!*—"

"*Adonoy Elohenu adonoy echod!* The Lord our God, the Lord is One," fervently finished the tiger.

"Why you scared me out of my wits—I thought you were a real tiger!" the lion rebuked him.

"Listen, uncle," snorted the tiger. "What makes you think you're the only Jew in Germany trying to make a living?"

### *Wasted Protection*

GOTTLIEB, the proprietor of a little candy-store, had his money deposited in a savings bank. When business began going badly he went to the bank, drew his last \$73.19 and had his account closed. As he walked out with reluctant steps, feeling sad and let down by the world, he saw the armed guard at the door. Impulsively he walked up to him and said, "My friend, for my part you can go home—there's nothing to guard anymore!"

### *Pity*

LITTLE Mary McHale liked the boy who sat next to her in school and talked of him incessantly to her mother. "What is he?" she asked, one day.

"Why, he's an American, of course, just like you," said the mother.

"I know that," answered Mary, "but what else is he?"

"Oh," said her mother, "that! Why, he's a Jew."

"So young," mused little Mary, "and already a Jew . . ."

## PART FOUR



# Tales and Legends

# 1

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## *Biblical Sidelights*

### INTRODUCTION

Jewish religious lore was never fully frozen into canon. It was in a constant state of organic growth and left room for further elaboration and interpretive deepening. This dynamic purpose was served by the vast literature of the *Midrash*. The *Midrash* attempted to penetrate into the spirit of the Bible by revealing its inner meanings which were not in literal evidence in the text. The Talmud describes the expository method of the *Midrash* as: "A hammer which awakens the slumbering sparks in the rock." This it tried to do, as we have already noted, by means of legends, parables, myths, fables and ethical sayings.

This body of folklore came into being because the masses of the people found the Scriptural text insufficient for their understanding. The folk were eager for deeper and more interior explanations of the characters and incidents recorded in the Bible. This need may be seen from the fact that the voluminous literature of the *Midrash* was in continuous growth until about the time of the Crusades.

The mass-mind had a natural inclination to seek a personal identity with its national heroes. This resulted in a remarkable individualization in the *Midrash* writings of all outstanding Biblical worthies from Adam down to Jonah and his whale. It goes without saying that the *Midrash* hardly yields the same religious authority as Scripture. Nonetheless, its very vivid characterizations of Bible personages, with its added wealth of details and incidents, have in many ways superseded the Scripture versions in the folk-fancy. It is both the nature and the power of folklore that the people themselves serve as the recreators of that which they are taught.

Not always does the *Midrash* legend follow closely the Bible text. Frequently the unknown folk poet finds in some general situation indicated in Scripture, a convenient pretext for his narrative creations. Thus God's fashioning of the world as recounted in

Genesis gave him the opportunity to weave such exquisite allegories as *The Secret of Power* [see JEWISH SALT, page 20] and *The First Tear*. With its celebrated informality the *Midrash* even offers leeway for banter. A folk-humorist, who wished to make merry over certain failings allegedly peculiar to women, even composed a tongue-in-cheek "takeoff" on the Bible text which deals with God's creation of Eve out of one of Adam's ribs.

In the entire history of the Jewish people there was no personality that left its stamp on the Jewish consciousness as indelibly as Moses. The folk regarded him not only as its greatest hero, its supreme prophet, its lawgiver and its ruler, but also as its teacher. That is why for three thousand years Jews have referred to him as *Mosheh Rabbenu* (Moses, Our Teacher). The love and veneration of the people for him in every generation knew no bounds. Jews were drawn to him by those ties of intimacy created by the need of a weak and persecuted people for a protector-father. For them he possessed all the intellectual and moral qualities required for such a role. He it was who had led them out of the Land of Bondage; he had stilled their hunger and quenched their thirst during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness; and he had shielded them against God's wrath when they offended Him with their misdeeds.

Of all the stirring Moses legends in the *Midrash*, that which describes his solitary death on the summit of Mount Pisgah has lain closest to the hearts of the people. The Bible account of it troubled them. They found it hard to understand why, after having suffered and battled all his life on their and God's behalf, he should have been condemned by the Divine Will to die at the very gates of the Promised Land. The moral question for many became challenging: was there no reward for virtue? If Moses, the most righteous man who ever lived, was denied the just attainment of his strivings, how could they, sinners and backsliders all, ever hope for forgiveness and the peace of the World-to-Come?

Out of these troubled gropings of the Jewish folk-mind, out of its compelling need to reconcile divine justice with the limitations of life, emerged the *Midrash, Petirat Mosheh*, The Death of Moses.

The Prophet Elijah has been the subject of a greater number of legends than any other Bible hero. In the totality of all these legends, naive in character as they may appear, he is built up into a highly individualized personality—partly human, partly divine. His principal mission, as it appears in most of these legends, is to counsel and protect the common folk in times of trouble. In short, he is an invisible household friend.

Elijah is pictured in legend as being gentle, benign and tolerant of human failings. To the poor he gives material help, to the sorrowful he gives comfort. Like a devoted shepherd he watches over the sheep that have gone astray, pleading their cause before God with the fervor of a father petitioning for his children.

Much of Rabbinic and later legend about Elijah is based upon the *Agada* belief that he did not die like other mortals but was "translated" to Heaven while still alive, swept aloft in a chariot of fire by a whirlwind.

Because the Prophet Malachi foretold that God would send Elijah as a forerunner of the Messiah before "the great and dreadful day," he has been associated in the Jewish folk-mind with the mysterious designs of Providence. And, added to the fact of his miraculous "translation" for which he is called, in the *Agada*, "The Bird of Heaven," popular fancy has assigned to him a unique role—to be guide and helper to the souls of men in the World-to-Come. The folk conception sees him as a benevolent friend standing at the crossroads of Paradise and Hell. The souls of the pious he escorts to their appointed places in Paradise; those of the sinner, out of compassion for their torments, he conducts out of Hell for their "day of rest" on the Sabbath and returns them forthwith at the close of the Sabbath.

Because of Elijah's "translation" to Heaven the folk-mind considers that he never really died and will remain immortal. Cabalistic literature endows him with supernatural attributes as an angel of the highest rank. Thus he can move about among men on earth in time, space and eternity, taking on human shape whenever he chooses. His disguises, of course, are protean because his humility obliges him to dispense his benevolence incognito. It is only after Elijah has departed that his true identity is discovered.

In cabalistic and *Hasidic* folklore, Elijah is delineated as the eternally wandering Jew who never finds rest from the missions of mercy he has to perform. This conception, of course, has no connection with the well-known medieval legend of the Wandering Jew which is anti-Semitic in character. Jewish folk-fancy pictures Elijah with all the loving details of informality. He is a plain Jew, shabbily dressed, with a wanderer's sack slung over his shoulder, trudging along his solitary way, dusty and footsore. In this humble guise, legend usually has him appear before the afflicted, the needy and the sorely beset to help them in their distress. Probably from this popular visualization of Elijah, as the anonymous doer of good hiding behind the humility of his plainness, emerged the mysterious figures of the *Lamed-Vav-Tzadikim*, the Thirty-Six Hidden Saints.

As an intimate friend, though usually invisible, the plain folk have always accorded Elijah a hearty welcome by means of a quaint symbolism. During the rite of circumcision, for instance,

Elijah served as the "Angel of the Covenant." Therefore, in his honor, the most comfortable chair in the household is reserved for him and is placed at the right hand of the *sandek*, or godfather. This is designated as "Elijah's Chair." In orthodox homes it also is the custom during the *Seder* home service on Passover Eve to pour a cup of wine for him and for the youngest child to open the door in order "to let Elijah in." Symbolically he thus spends this most convivial of all Jewish festivals in the bosom of every family.

King Solomon (*Shelomo Ha-Melech*) too occupies a foremost position in legendary lore. His wisdom, which became proverbial, marked him for the hero-as-sage in many *Midrashic* legends.

The Solomonic folklore literature is very considerable. This is not only because of the material splendor which characterized Solomon's reign—which legend magnified a thousand-fold—but principally because most Jews revered wisdom. Tradition has it, of course, that King Solomon was the author of many wisdom books: the *Song of Songs*, *Ecclesiastes* and the *Book of Proverbs* in the Old Testament, and of the pseudoepigraphic works: the *Psalms of Solomon*, *The Testament of Solomon* and *The Wisdom of Solomon*. The Rabbinic writers of those days sometimes wrote anonymously or they modestly hid their individuality under the name and prestige of King Solomon.

King Solomon was fabled to be so wise that he could read the guilt or the innocence of those he judged merely by looking into their faces. He was also considered to be one of the prophets upon whom the *Shekhina* or Divine Radiance dwelled. When the *Shekhina* descended upon him, legend has it, he was inspired to write the *Song of Songs*, *Ecclesiastes*, and the *Book of Proverbs*.

Because he had chosen the pursuit of wisdom for his goal, the folk believed that God had rewarded him with the splendor of power and great riches. He also gave him dominion over the upper world of angels, over the nether world of spirits and demons, over all the earth and its inhabitants, including beasts and reptiles, birds and fishes. During the forty years of his reign, some of the laws of nature were miraculously reversed: for instance, the full moon never waned. All living creatures obeyed his command, the eagle especially serving as his messenger and principal means of conveyance. When he built the Temple, reputed by legend to have been the most beautiful structure the world had ever seen, angels and demons helped him in the task. He hewed the immense stones which sent into its construction by means of the magical worm, the *Shamir* [see *King Solomon and the Worm: DEMON TALES*, page 421].

It is indeed curious that only in later *Midrashic* legends was Solomon hero-worshipped. In earlier folklore he was held up to righteous scorn for having negated by his conduct the wisdom he

affected. With one solitary exception, the sages used him as a springboard for their ethical preachments. They charged he was no wise man at all, for only a fool would be so concerned with accumulating a thousand wives, owning innumerable horses and hoarding untold gold and silver to no good purpose. Moreover, they castigated him for being overweeningly proud of his wisdom. Of *Ecclesiastes*, they said it could hardly be considered a sacred work because it represented only the wisdom of Solomon.

Vivid in the recollection of the Jewish folk is their memory of the Prophet Jeremiah. Next to Moses they revere him most, conceive him in terms of moral grandeur. In the *Agada* Jeremiah and Moses are often linked together as having experienced the same trials. A *Midrash* says: "As Moses was a prophet for forty years, so was Jeremiah; as Moses prophesied concerning Judah and Benjamin, so did Jeremiah; as Moses' own tribe (the Levites under Korah) rose up against him, so did Jeremiah's tribe revolt against him; Moses was cast into the water, Jeremiah into a pit . . . ; Moses reprimanded the people in discourse, so did Jeremiah."

The Jewish folk revered Jeremiah not only for his prophetic writings and the *Book of Lamentations* which is credited to him by tradition, but because of his selfless labors on behalf of his people. Moreover *Midrashic* legend is steeped in a national consciousness of guilt toward him. This is because Jews believe that, while he had devoted his life to his people and was persecuted on their account, they had not heeded his pleas and warnings to return to righteousness. Thus, because of their many transgressions, God had punished them. The Babylonian invader, Nebuchadnezzar, served as God's instrument of retribution, and he destroyed the Temple that Solomon had built and led the Children of Israel into captivity.

*The Sorrow of Jeremiah* undoubtedly represents the most elegiac of all Jewish legends. The folk-mind identifies itself emotionally with the Prophet Jeremiah's sorrowful reflections and with their people's historic misfortunes. The legend gives utterance to a national grief perhaps unmatched in all folklore.

N.A.

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### *The Making of Adam<sup>1</sup>*

WHEN the Creator wished to make man he consulted with the ministering angels beforehand, and said unto them: "We will make a man in our image."

The angels asked: "What is man that Thou shouldst remember him, and what is his purpose?"

"He will do justice," said the Lord.

And the ministering angels were divided into groups.  
Some said: "Let not man be created."

But others said: "Let him be created."

Forgiveness said: "Let him be created, for he will be generous and benevolent."

Peace objected and said: "Let him not be created, for he will constantly wage wars."

Justice said: "Let him be created, for he will bring justice into the world."

Truth said: "Let him not be created, for he will be a liar."

The Creator then hurled Truth from Heaven to earth, and, in spite of the protests of the angels, man was created.

"His knowledge," said the Creator, "will excel yours, and tomorrow you will see his wisdom."

The Creator then gathered all kinds of beasts before the ministering angels, the wild and the tame beasts, as well as the birds, and the fowls of the air, and asked the ministering angels to name them, but they could not.

"Now you will see the wisdom of man," spake the Creator. "I will ask him and he will tell their names."

All the beasts and fowls of the air were then led before man, and when asked he at once replied: "This is an ox, the other an ass, yonder a horse and a camel."

"And what is your own name?"

"I," replied man, "should be called Adam because I have been created from *adama* or earth."

### *The First Tear<sup>2</sup>*

AFTER Adam and Eve had been banished from the Garden of Eden, God saw that they were penitent and took their fall very much to heart. And as He is a Compassionate Father He said to them gently:

"Unfortunate children! I have punished you for your sin and have driven you out of the Garden of Eden where you were living without care and in great well-being. Now you are about to enter into a world of sorrow and trouble the like of which staggers the imagination. However, I want you to know that My benevolence and My love for you will never end. I know that you will meet with a lot of tribulation in the world and that it will embitter your lives. For that reason I give you out of My heavenly treasure this priceless pearl.

Look! It is a tear! And when grief overtakes you and your heart aches so that you are not able to endure it, and great anguish grips your soul, then there will fall from your eyes this tiny tear. Your burden will grow lighter then."

When Adam and Eve heard these words sorrow overcame them. Tears welled up in their eyes, rolled down their cheeks and fell to earth.

And it was these tears of anguish that first moistened the earth. Adam and Eve left them as a precious inheritance to their children. And since then, whenever a human being is in great trouble and his heart aches and his spirit is oppressed then the tears begin to flow from his eyes, and lo! the gloom is lifted.

### *Falsehood and Wickedness\**

APFTER Noah had completed the building of the ark, the animals were gathered together near it by the angels appointed over them. They came in pairs, and Noah stood at the door of the ark to see that each one entered with its mate. As soon as the waters of the flood rose upon the surface of the earth, the children of men hid themselves in their homes for safety. All traffic and business ceased, for the angel of death was abroad. This state of affairs caused Falsehood to realize that henceforth there was no chance of her plying her trade. Was it not quite evident that the ever-increasing waters of the flood would soon sweep away the wicked folk who had rebelled against their Heavenly Creator? Where should Falsehood betake herself for safety?

Forthwith she hastened to the ark, but its door was shut. What was to be done?

Falsehood knocked at the door with trembling hand. Noah opened the window of the ark, and put out his head to see who was knocking. It was a strange creature before the door. Noah had never seen her before, because he was a righteous man who never told lies.

"What dost thou want?" he cried.

"Let me go in, please," she replied.

"Gladly," cried Noah, "would I admit thee if thy mate were with thee, for only pairs are admitted here."

In grief and disappointment Falsehood went away. She had not gone a few yards before she met her old friend Wickedness, who was now out of employment.

"Whence comest thou, dear friend Falsehood?" asked Wickedness.

"I come," said Falsehood, "from old father Noah. Just listen. I asked him to let me come into the ark, but he refused unless I complied with his rules."

"What does he require?" asked Wickedness.

"The good old man stipulated that I must have a mate, because all the creatures admitted into the ark are in pairs," Falsehood replied.

"Now, dear friend, is this the truth?" queried Wickedness with a merry twinkle in his evil eye.

"Of course it is the truth, on my word of honour," rejoined Falsehood. "Come now," she added, "wilt thou be my mate? Are we not just fit to be joined together, two honest and poor creatures?"

"If I agree," said Wickedness, "what wilt thou give me in return?"

Falsehood thought awhile and with a cunning look at her friend she exclaimed, "I faithfully promise to give to thee all that I earn in the ark. Have no fear, I shall do excellent business even there, because I feel very fit and energetic."

Wickedness agreed to the terms immediately, and there and then a proper agreement was drawn up, and duly signed and sealed. Without further delay they both hastened to Noah, who readily admitted the happy pair.

Falsehood soon began to be very busy and earned good money. She often thought of her agreement with Wickedness with regret, as she realized that she alone did all the business. She even said to him one day, "Look here, how easily I can carry on my trade singlehanded!"

Wickedness merely reminded her of the agreement, and day by day he wrote down in his ledger the sum total of the day's takings.

At the end of the year, for the flood lasted twelve months, they came out of the ark. Falsehood brought home much treasure, but Wickedness came with her and claimed the whole of the hard-earned fortune. Thereupon Falsehood said to herself, "I will ask my mate to give me some of my earnings."

She approached Wickedness and in a gentle voice said, "Dearest friend, please give me a share of what I have so honestly earned, for I alone did all the work."

Wickedness looked at her in contempt and with harsh

voice cried aloud, "Thy share is nought, O cheat! Did we not solemnly agree that I was to take everything which thou shouldest earn? How could I break our agreement? Would this not be a very wicked thing to do, now would it not?"

Falsehood held her peace and went away, well knowing that she had been foiled in her attempt to cheat her friend Wickedness.

True indeed is the proverb: "Falsehood begets much, but Wickedness taketh all that away."

#### *Abraham and the Idols<sup>4</sup>*

TERAH, the father of Abraham, was himself an idol worshipper; he even carried on a substantial trade in idols.

One day he had to leave home and left his shop full of idols in charge of his son Abraham who was then very young.

Soon an idol worshipper came in and wished to buy an idol.

"How old are you?" asked Abraham.

"Fifty years," answered the idolator.

"What! An old man like you bows down before a mere image that was just finished yesterday! Think it over."

The seeds of Truth were thus planted in the heart of the idolator.

Another time, again while his father Terah was away, a woman came and placed before the idols in the shop a bowl of flour as a sacrificial offering. No sooner had the woman left when Abraham picked up a stick and broke all the idols. Only one, the largest, did he spare. In the hand of this one Abraham then stuck the stick.

Upon his return Terah saw the destruction Abraham had wrought among the idols. He flung himself upon him, crying, "Who did this?"

"Just listen, father, and be amazed!" replied Abraham serenely. "A woman came and brought a full bowl of flour for an offering. I placed the bowl at the feet of the idols. Immediately, a murderous battle broke out among them. Each of the idols said the flour was meant for him. While they all squabbled and pulled, the largest of them, determined to create order, picked up a stick and . . . See for yourself—he killed them all!"

"You ne'er-do-well!" cried Abraham's father. "How can

you say the idols squabbled and pulled when they can neither speak nor understand?"

"Father, father!" replied Abraham, "the holy truth lies in your words!"

### *Abraham Before Nimrod<sup>6</sup>*

THE report reached Nimrod's ears that Abraham was mocking the idols, so he ordered that the boy be brought before him.

Nimrod turned his gaze on him and said imperiously, "Here is fire; worship it!"

"My Lord," answered Abraham fearlessly, "wouldn't it be better to worship water since it can put out the fire?"

"Let it be as you say: worship water!"

"Shall I do an injustice to the clouds which give the earth all its water?"

"Very well then: worship the clouds!"

"But how can the clouds compare with the winds who have the power to scatter them?"

"Then worship the wind!"

"The wind? What will He who directs the fire, water, clouds and wind say to that? . . . O you blind man! Don't you perceive the mighty Hand that guides the world?"

The King was abashed and, turning away, left young Abraham in peace.

### *God Protects the Heathen Too<sup>8</sup>*

ONCE, as Patriarch Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent, he saw an old tired man approach. Abraham arose and ran forward to bid him welcome. He begged him to enter his tent and rest, but the old man declined the invitation and said, "No, thank you! I will take my rest under a tree."

But, after Abraham continued to press him with his hospitable attentions the old man allowed himself to be persuaded and entered the tent.

Abraham placed before him goat's milk and butter and baked for him fresh cakes. The stranger ate until he was satisfied. Then Abraham said to him, "Now praise the Lord, the God of Heaven and earth, Who gives bread to all His creatures!"

"I do not know your God," replied the old man coldly. "I will only praise the god that my hands have fashioned!"

Then Abraham spoke to the old man, told him of God's greatness and loving kindness. He tried to convince him that his idols were senseless things who could neither help nor save anyone. He urged him therefore to abandon them and put his faith in the one true God and thank Him for His gracious acts that He did for him every day. But to all of Abraham's fervent pleas the old man answered indignantly, "How dare you talk to me this way, trying to turn me away from my gods! You and I have nothing in common, so do not impose on me any further with your words, because I will not heed them!"

At this Abraham grew very angry and cried out, "Old man, leave my tent!"

Without a word the old man departed and he was swallowed up by the dark night and the desert.

When the Almighty saw this He grew very wrathful and appeared before Abraham.

"Where is the man who came to you this night?" He asked sternly.

"The old man was stubborn," replied Abraham. "I tried to persuade him that if he believed in You everything would be well with him. He refused to heed my words so I grew angry and drove him out of my tent."

Then spoke God: "Have you considered what you have done? Reflect for one moment: Here am I, the God of all Creation—and yet have I endured the unbelief of this old man for so many years. I clothed and fed him and supplied all his needs. But when he came to you for just one night you dispensed with all duties of hospitality and compassion and drove him into the wilderness!"

Then Abraham fell upon his face and prayed to God that He forgive him his sin.

"I will not forgive you," said God, "unless you first ask forgiveness from the heathen to whom you have done evil!"

Swiftly, Abraham ran out of his tent and into the desert and after much searching found the old man. Then he fell at his feet and wept and begged for his forgiveness. The old man was moved by Abraham's pleas and he forgave him.

Again God revealed Himself to Abraham and said, "Because you have done what is righteous in My eyes I will never forget My covenant with your posterity. When they sin I will punish them, but never will I sever My covenant with them!"

*Moses the Shepherd<sup>7</sup>*

ONE day, while Moses was grazing his flock, he noticed that a little goat had strayed away, so he ran after it for fear that it would get lost and die of hunger and thirst in the wilderness.

Suddenly, from a distance, Moses saw the little goat stop and drink eagerly from a spring. Then he understood that the little animal was thirsty and for that reason had left the flock. When Moses came nigh it he said, "My dear little goatkin! Had I known that you were only thirsty I would not have run after you."

When the little goat had quenched its thirst, Moses placed it upon his shoulders and carried it all the way back to the flock. "The little goat is weak and young," he thought compassionately, "therefore I must carry it."

When God saw what Moses had done He was greatly pleased and said to him, "Deep is your compassion, O Moses! Because of your kindness to this little animal you will be the leader of My people Israel, and are destined to serve as their devoted shepherd."

*Israel Undying<sup>8</sup>*

MOSES was grazing his flock deep in the wilderness and far from the habitation of men. Once, when he came to Mount Horab, he saw a thorn bush. It looked ugly and forbidding. It was stunted and its branches were full of briars. As he gazed upon it Moses mused bitterly: "To this thorn bush in the wilderness, O my people of Israel, can you be likened! You are as lowly and all who see you shun you!"

And as he stood thus lost in sorrowful thought about the suffering of his people, suddenly he saw that the bush was enveloped in flame. Startled, Moses cried out: "To this thorn bush have I compared my people Israel, when alas—out of it must spring forth a flame to consume it! O my Lord God, must my people perish?"

And when Moses saw how the thorn bush burned and yet was not consumed his sorrow vanished and he was filled with exceeding joy. Then he heard the Voice saying: "Even as the thorn bush is not consumed by the flame, so will the Jewish people endure. All the fires of hate that will be kindled

against it will be put out, and no evil and misfortune will be able to destroy it!"

### *The Crossing of the Red Sea<sup>9</sup>*

God spake to Moses, saying, "Why dost thou stand here praying? My children's prayer has anticipated thine. For thee there is naught to do but lift up thy rod and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it." . . .

Moses spoke to the sea as God had bidden him, but it replied, "I will not do according to thy words, for thou art only a man born of woman, and, besides, I am three days older than thou, O man, for I was brought forth on the third day of creation, and thou on the sixth." Moses lost no time, but carried back to God the words the sea had spoken, and the Lord said: ". . . Lift up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it."

Thereupon Moses raised up his rod—the rod that had been created at the very beginning of the world, on which were graven in plain letters the great and exalted Name, the names of the ten plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians, and the names of the three Fathers, the six Mothers, and the twelve tribes of Jacob. This rod he lifted up, and stretched it out over the sea.

The sea, however, continued in its perverseness, and Moses entreated God to give His command direct to it. But God refused, saying: "Were I to command the sea to divide, it would never again return to its former estate. Therefore, do thou convey My order to it, that it be not drained dry forever. But I will let a semblance of My strength accompany thee, and that will compel its obedience." When the sea saw the Strength of God at the right hand of Moses, it spoke to the earth, saying, "Make hollow places for me, that I may hide myself therein before the Lord of all created things, blessed be He." Noticing the terror of the sea, Moses said to it: "For a whole day I spoke to thee at the bidding of the Holy One, who desired thee to divide, but thou didst refuse to pay heed to my words; even when I showed thee my rod, thou didst remain obdurate. What hath happened now that thou skippest hence?" The sea replied, "I am fleeing, not before thee, but before the Lord of all created things, that His Name be magnified in all the earth." And the waters of the Red Sea divided, and not they alone, but all the water in

heaven and on earth, in whatever vessel it was, in cisterns, in wells, in caves, in casks, in pitchers, in drinking cups, and in glasses, and none of these waters returned to their former estate until Israel had passed through the sea on dry land. . . .

God caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind, the wind He always makes use of when He chastises the nations. The same east wind had brought the deluge; it had laid the tower of Babel in ruins; it was to cause the destruction of Samaria, Jerusalem, and Tyre and it will, in future, be the instrument for castigating Rome drunken with pleasure; and likewise the sinners in Gehenna are punished by means of this east wind. All night long God made it to blow over the sea. To prevent the enemy from inflicting harm upon the Israelites, He enveloped the Egyptians in profound darkness, so impenetrable it could be felt, and none could move or change his posture. He that sat when it fell could not arise from his place, and he that stood could not sit down. Nevertheless, the Egyptians could see that the Israelites were surrounded by bright light, and were enjoying a banquet where they stood, and when they tried to speed darts and arrows against them, the missiles were caught up by the cloud and by the angels hovering between the two camps, and no harm came to Israel.

On the morning after the eventful night, though the sea was not yet made dry land, the Israelites, full of trust in God, were ready to cast themselves into its waters. The tribes contended with one another for the honor of being the first to jump. Without awaiting the outcome of the wordy strife, the tribe of Benjamin sprang in, and the princes of Judah were so incensed at having been deprived of pre-eminence in danger that they pelted the Benjamites with stones. God knew that the Judæans and the Benjamites were animated by a praiseworthy purpose. The ones like the others desired but to magnify the Name of God, and He rewarded both tribes: in Benjamin's allotment the Shekinah took up her residence, and the royalty of Israel was conferred upon Judah.

When God saw the two tribes in the waves of the sea, He called upon Moses, and said: "My beloved are in danger of drowning, and thou standest by and prayest. Bid Israel go forward, and thou lift up thy rod over the sea, and divide it." Thus it happened, and Israel passed through the sea with its waters cleft in twain.

The dividing of the sea was but the first of ten miracles

connected with the passage of the Israelites through it. The others were that the waters united in a vault above their heads; twelve paths opened up, one for each of the tribes; the water became as transparent as glass, and each tribe could see the others; the soil underfoot was dry, but it changed into clay when the Egyptians stepped upon it; the walls of water were transformed into rocks, against which the Egyptians were thrown and dashed to death, while before the Israelites they crumbled away into bits. Through the brackish sea flowed a stream of soft water, at which the Israelites could slake their thirst; and, finally, the tenth wonder was, that this drinking water was congealed in the heart of the sea as soon as they had satisfied their need.

And there were other miracles, besides. The sea yielded the Israelites whatever their hearts desired. If a child cried as it lay in the arms of its mother, she needed but to stretch out her hand and pluck an apple or some other fruit and quiet it. The waters were piled up to the height of sixteen hundred miles, and they could be seen by all the nations of the earth. . . .

Wonderful as were the miracles connected with the rescue of the Israelites from the waters of the sea, those performed when the Egyptians were drowned were no less remarkable. First of all God felt called upon to defend Israel's cause before Uzza, the Angel of the Egyptians, who would not allow his people to perish in the waters of the sea. He appeared on the spot at the very moment when God wanted to drown the Egyptians, and he spake: "O Lord of the world! Thou art called just and upright, and before Thee there is no wrong, no forgettting, no respecting of persons. Why, then, dost Thou desire to make my children perish in the sea? Canst Thou say that my children drowned or slew a single one of Thine? If it be on account of the rigorous slavery that my children imposed upon Israel, then consider that Thy children have received their wages, in that they took their silver and golden vessels from them."

Then God convoked all the members of His celestial family, and He spake to the angel hosts: "Judge ye in truth between Me and yonder Uzza, the Angel of the Egyptians. At the first I brought a famine upon his people, and I appointed My friend Joseph over them, who saved them through his sagacity, and they all became his slaves. Then My children went down into their land as strangers, in consequence of the famine, and they made the children of Israel to

serve with rigor in all manner of hard work there is in the world. They groaned on account of their bitter service, and their cry rose up to Me, and I sent Moses and Aaron, My faithful messengers, to Pharaoh. When they came before the king of Egypt, they spake to him, 'Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel, Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness.' In the presence of the kings of the East and of the West, that sinner began to boast, saying: 'Who is the Lord, that I should hearken unto His voice, to let Israel go? Why comes He not before me, like all the kings of the world, and why doth He not bring me a present like the others? This God of whom you speak, I know Him not at all. Wait and let me search my lists, and see whether I can find His Name.' But his servants said, 'We have heard that He is the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings.' Then Pharaoh asked My messengers, 'What are the works of this God?' and they replied, 'He is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, who created the heaven and the earth.' But Pharaoh doubted their words, and said, 'There is no God in all the world that can accomplish such works beside me, for I made myself, and I made the Nile river.' Because he denied Me thus, I sent ten plagues upon him, and he was compelled to let My children go. Yet, in spite of all, he did not leave off from his wicked ways, and he tried to bring them back under his bondage. Now, seeing all that hath happened to him, and that he will not acknowledge Me as God and Lord, does he not deserve to be drowned in the sea with his host?"

The celestial family called out when the Lord had ended His defense, "Thou hast every right to drown him in the sea!"

Uzza heard their verdict, and he said: "O Lord of all worlds! I know that my people deserve the punishment Thou has decreed, but may it please Thee to deal with them according to Thy attribute of mercy, and take pity upon the work of Thy hands, for Thy tender mercies are over all Thy works!"

Almost the Lord had yielded to Uzza's entreaties, when Michael gave a sign to Gabriel that made him fly to Egypt swiftly and fetch thence a brick for which a Hebrew child had been used as mortar. Holding this incriminating object in his hand, Gabriel stepped into the presence of God, and said: "O Lord of the world! Wilt Thou have compassion with the accursed nation that has slaughtered Thy children so cru-

elly?" Then the Lord turned Himself away from His attribute of mercy, and seating Himself upon His throne of justice He resolved to drown the Egyptians in the sea.

The first upon whom judgment was executed was the Angel of Egypt—Uzza was thrown into the sea. A similar fate overtook Rahab, the Angel of the Sea, with his hosts. Rahab had made intercession before God in behalf of the Egyptians. He had said: "Why shouldst Thou drown the Egyptians? Let it suffice the Israelites that Thou hast saved them out of the hand of their masters." At that God dealt Rahab and his army a blow, under which they staggered and fell dead, and then He cast their corpses in the sea, whence its unpleasant odor.

At the moment when the last of the Israelites stepped out of the bed of the sea, the first of the Egyptians set foot into it, but in the same instant the waters surged back into their wonted place, and all the Egyptians perished.

But drowning was not the only punishment decreed upon them by God. He undertook a thoroughgoing campaign against them. When Pharaoh was preparing to persecute the Israelites, he asked his army which of the saddle beasts was the swiftest runner, that one he would use, and they said: "There is none swifter than thy piebald mare, whose like is to be found nowhere in the world." Accordingly, Pharaoh mounted the mare, and pursued after the Israelites seaward. And while Pharaoh was inquiring of his army as to the swiftest animal to mount, God was questioning the angels as to the swiftest creature to use to the detriment of Pharaoh. And the angels answered: "O Lord of the world! All things are Thine, and all are Thine handiwork. Thou knowest well, and it is manifest before Thee, that among all Thy creatures there is none so quick as the wind that comes from under the throne of Thy glory," and the Lord flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind.

The angels now advanced to support the Lord in His war against the Egyptians. Some brought swords, some arrows, and some spears. But God warded them off, saying, "Away! I need no help!" The arrows sped by Pharaoh against the children of Israel were answered by the Lord with fiery darts directed against the Egyptians. Pharaoh's army advanced with gleaming swords, and the Lord sent out lightnings that discomfited the Egyptians. Pharaoh hurled missiles, and the

Lord discharged hailstones and coals of fire against him. With trumpets, sackbuts, and horns the Egyptians made their assault, and the Lord thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered His voice. In vain the Egyptians marched forward in orderly battle array; the Lord deprived them of their standards, and they were thrown into wild confusion. To lure them into the water, the Lord caused fiery steeds to swim out upon the sea, and the horses of the Egyptians followed them, each with a rider upon his back.

Now the Egyptians tried to flee to their land in their chariots drawn by she-mules. As they had treated the children of Israel in a way contrary to nature, so the Lord treated them now. Not the she-mules pulled the chariots, but the chariots, though fire from heaven had consumed their wheels, dragged the men and the beasts into the water. The chariots were laden with silver, gold, and all sorts of costly things, which the river Pishon, as it flows forth from Paradise, carries down into the Gihon. Thence the treasures floated into the Red Sea, and by its waters they were tossed into the chariots of the Egyptians. It was the wish of God that these treasures should come into the possession of Israel, and for this reason He caused the chariots to roll down into the sea, and the sea in turn to cast them out upon the opposite shore, at the feet of the Israelites.

And the Lord fought against the Egyptians also with the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. The former made the soil miry, and the mire was heated to the boiling point by the latter, so that the hoofs of the horses dropped from their feet, and they could not budge from the spot.

The anguish and the torture that God brought upon the Egyptians at the Red Sea caused them by far more excruciating pain than the plagues they had endured in Egypt, for at the sea He delivered them into the hands of the Angels of Destruction, who tormented them pitilessly. Had God not endowed the Egyptians with a double portion of strength, they could not have stood the pain a single moment.

The last judgment executed upon the Egyptians corresponded to the wicked designs harbored against Israel by the three different parties among them when they set out in pursuit of their liberated slaves. The first party had said, "We will bring Israel back to Egypt"; the second had said, "We will strip them bare," and the third had said, "We will slay them all." The Lord blew upon the first with His breath, and the sea

covered them; the second party He shook into the sea, and the third He pitched into the depths of the abyss. He tossed them about as lentils are shaken up and down in a saucepan; the upper ones are made to fall to the bottom, the lower ones fly to the top. This was the experience of the Egyptians. And worse still, first the rider and his beast were whisked high up in the air and then the two together, the rider sitting upon the back of the beast, were hurled to the bottom of the sea.

The Egyptians endeavored to save themselves from the sea by conjuring charms, for they were great magicians. Of the ten measures of magic allotted to the world, they had taken nine for themselves. And, indeed, they succeeded for the moment; they escaped out of the sea. But immediately the sea said to itself, "How can I allow the pledge entrusted to me by God to be taken from me?" And the water rushed after the Egyptians, and dragged back every man of them.

Among the Egyptians were the two arch-magicians Jannes and Jambres. They made wings for themselves, with which they flew up to heaven. They also said to Pharaoh: "If God Himself hath done this thing, we can effect naught. But if this work has been put into the hands of His angels, then we will shake His lieutenants into the sea." They proceeded at once to use their magic contrivances, whereby they dragged the angels down. These cried up to God: "Save us, O God, for the waters are come in unto our soul! Speak Thy word that will cause the magicians to drown in the mighty waters." And Gabriel cried to God, "By the greatness of Thy glory dash Thy adversaries to pieces." Hereupon God bade Michael go and execute judgment upon the two magicians. The archangel seized hold of Jannes and Jambres by the locks of their hair, and he shattered them against the surface of the water.

Thus all the Egyptians were drowned. Only one was spared—Pharaoh himself. When the children of Israel raised their voices to sing a song of praise to God at the shores of the Rea Sea, Pharaoh heard it as he was jostled hither and thither by the billows, and he pointed his finger heavenward, and called out: "I believe in Thee, O God! Thou art righteous, and I and My people are wicked, and I acknowledge now that there is no god in the world beside Thee." Without a moment's delay, Gabriel descended and laid an iron chain about Pharaoh's neck, and holding him securely, he addressed him thus: "Villain! Yesterday thou didst say, 'Who is the Lord that I should hearken to His voice?' and now thou

sayest, 'The Lord is righteous.' " With that he let him drop into the depths of the sea, and there he tortured him for fifty days, to make the power of God known to him. At the end of the time he installed him as king of the great city of Nineveh, and after the lapse of many centuries, when Jonah came to Nineveh, and prophesied the overthrow of the city on account of the evil done by the people, it was Pharaoh who, seized by fear and terror, covered himself with sack-cloth, and sat in ashes, and with his own mouth made proclamation and published this decree through Nineveh: "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed nor drink water; for I know there is no god beside Him in all the world, all His words are truth, and all His judgments are true and faithful."

Pharaoh never died, and never will die. He always stands at the portal of hell, and when the kings of the nations enter, he makes the power of God known to them at once, in these words: "O ye fools! Why have ye not learnt knowledge from me? I denied the Lord God, and He brought ten plagues upon me, sent me to the bottom of the sea, kept me there for fifty days, released me then, and brought me up. Thus I could not but believe in Him."

### *The Widow and the Law<sup>10</sup>*

KORAH was a great scoffer. He used to gather the Children of Israel around him and abuse our teacher Moses and his brother Aaron and the multitude of the laws they established.

One day he told them the following story:

"In my neighborhood there lived a poor widow and her two daughters. She owned a field that she had inherited from her husband. When she began to plow Moses said to her, 'Thou shalt not plow with ox and ass together.'

"When she began to sow Moses said to her, 'Thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seed.'

"When the time for cutting the wheat and making sheaves arrived Moses again came to her and said, 'You must leave "gleanings," "the poor man's sheath," and the "corner."'

"When the widow got ready to thresh the wheat, he said to her, 'Yield up the priest's share and the first and second tithes.'

"The poor woman did as she was told and gave Moses

whatever he asked. But seeing that she got nothing out of her wheat she sold the field and with the money bought two sheep. She expected a great deal from them—she'd make clothing from their wool and the little sheep would supply her with mutton.

"But no sooner did the sheep bear their young when Aaron the high priest came and said, 'Give me the first-born, for Moses decreed that all the firstlings belong to the priests.'

"The widow thereupon obeyed the law and gave away the first-born.

"When shearing time came Aaron again came and said to her, 'Give me the first shearing, for that too belongs to the priest.'

"Out of patience, the widow cried out, 'I can no longer endure this! I shall slaughter these animals, eat their meat, and bring an end to all this!'

"But no sooner had she slaughtered them when Aaron said to her, "According to the Law you must give me the neck, the cheeks and the belly."

"'What!' exclaimed the widow. 'Is it possible that I'm still not rid of you? In that case neither you nor I are going to have any of it. By my life, I shall consecrate it!'

"'If you consecrate it,' replied Aaron, 'then it belongs altogether to me, for the Lord hath said: "Everything consecrated in Israel shall be thine."

"So he took the sheep and went away and left the widow weeping."

### *The Angels Jealous of Moses<sup>11</sup>*

RABBI JOSHUA, son of Levi, says that at the time when Moses went up to heaven to receive the Law, which the Lord, blessed be He, was giving him, the angels said, "Lord of the universe, what is a mortal man doing here in the heavens amongst us?" And the Lord replied, "He has come to receive the Torah." Then the angels said, "Wilt Thou hand over to man that hidden jewel which Thou hast treasured up with Thee during 974 generations, before Thou hadst created the world? What is man whom Thou hast created? 'Give Thy beauty to the heavens' (Ps. 8.2). Leave the Torah here and do not give it to man." Then God said, "Moses, answer the angels concerning that which they have spoken to Me." And Moses replied, "Lord of the universe, I would fain answer

them, but I fear lest they burn me up with the breath of their mouths." Then God said, "Moses take hold of the throne of glory and answer their speech." And when our master Moses heard this, he began to speak, and said, "Lord of the universe, what is written in that Torah which Thou intendest to give to me? 'I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt' (Ex. 20.2). O angels, have you gone down into Egypt? Have you served Pharaoh? Then why should the Lord, blessed be He, give you the Torah? Again, what else is written in this Torah? Is it not written, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before Me' (*ibid.* v. 3)? Are you living among heathens that you should serve other gods? It is further written therein, 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy' (*ibid.* v. 8), which means, rest on that day. Are you working that you should have to be commanded to rest? Furthermore, it is written therein, 'Thou shalt not take a false oath' (*cf. ibid.* v. 7). Are you engaged in business that you should be commanded not to take a false oath? Furthermore, 'Honour thy father and thy mother' (*ibid.* v. 12). Have you a father and a mother that you should be commanded to honour them? 'Thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal' (*ibid.* v. 13). Is there envy and hatred among you that you should be commanded not to do these things? Of what good, therefore, is the Torah to you?" When the angels heard this, they became friendly to Moses and everyone of the angels taught him something, even the angel of death.

### *The Death of Moses<sup>12</sup>*

#### I. JOSHUA IS CHOSEN AS HIS SUCCESSOR

AFTER the defeat of the Midianites at the hands of Israel, God said to Moses: "Go up to the mountain of Abarim from whence you will see the land which I have given to the children of Israel, and then you will die, as your brother Aaron died."

"Oh Lord," pleaded Moses, "You know the spirit of the living, both those that are proud and those that are humble, those that are patient and those that are restive. I am about to depart from this world, I pray You, appoint a leader over the Israelites who will know how to deal with each according to his due. Appoint a leader over them, who shall not be like

the kings of the heathens that send their people to war while they themselves remain in their palaces and waste their time in revelry, but one who will go out before the Israelites and lead them into battle."

"Your successor shall be he who has served you with devotion," said God, "he who has shown you the greatest veneration. Joshua, the son of Nun, shall bring forth my people from the wilderness and take them into the Promised Land."

"Indeed," answered Moses, "I have proven him, and he knows how to deal with people of every kind, and he is certainly the man who I expected would be chosen as my successor."

"Take Joshua then," said God, "lay your hand upon him and bestow of your spirit upon him, so that the children of Israel may accept him as their leader while you are still alive, and honor him."

Moses went to Joshua and related to him what God had spoken concerning him. Joshua wept bitterly when he heard that his beloved master would soon die in the wilderness, and would not lead Israel into the Promised Land. "Alas, Master!" he wailed, "your words fill me with sorrow. All Israel will join me in the prayer that God may forgive you and allow you to enter the Promised Land."

"God is no mortal who is apt to change his mind," replied Moses. "His decree must stand."

"But am I the one who deserves succeeding you?" asked Joshua.

With kind words Moses at last persuaded Joshua to succeed him as the leader of Israel after his death. He then led him before Eleazar, the high priest, and before all the people of Israel, and in their presence he laid his hand upon Joshua, and bestowed his spirit upon him.

Moses then said to Joshua: "Heed my advice concerning how to lead Israel, and God will be with you. Know that Israel is still young and has a great deal to learn yet. Should he sin do not be angry with him. For God himself never was too exacting concerning Israel, but always forgave him his backslidings, although he was many a time provoked to great anger against him. Now you must rule over Israel as a father rules over his children, and only then will you deserve to be called the 'Leader of Israel.'"

Joshua promised his master to be true to his teachings, and

with a heavy heart and tears in his eyes, he accepted the leadership over Israel.

## II. MOSES PRAYS THAT GOD SUSPEND HIS JUDGMENT

As the days of Moses' life drew near to their end, he began to pray to God to forgive him his sins and allow him to enter the Promised Land, saying:

"O Lord of the world! In Your mercy have you chosen me for Your servant and through me You have performed great and wondrous miracles in the land of Egypt. But now You say to me: 'Behold, you will die!' Shall my final end likewise be dust and worms as that of all other mortals?"

And God replied: "No man can escape death. Even Adam, who was the work of My own hands, was doomed to die; so how can a man born of a woman escape it?"

"O Lord of the World!" said Moses. "You gave only one command to the first man and yet he disobeyed you!"

"Isaac who laid his neck upon the altar to be sacrificed as an offering to Me, also died."

"But from Isaac issued Esau who will destroy your temple and burn your house and exile your children!"

"From Jacob issued twelve tribes that did not anger me, and yet he too died."

Yet Moses persisted, saying: "But Jacob's feet never ascended into heaven, and he did not walk upon clouds. Neither did You speak face to face with him, nor did he receive the Torah from Your hand."

"Enough!" cried God. "Speak to Me no longer of this matter!"

But Moses pleaded on: "With all Your creatures, O my Lord God, You deal according to Your attribute of mercy. You forgive them their sins but You will not even overlook my one sin."

"Not once but six times have you sinned against Me," reminded him God.

"O Lord of the World!" pleaded Moses again. "How often did Israel sin before You, and when I implored Your mercy toward them You forgave them, but me You will not forgive."

"Two vows have I made," answered God, "one that you will die before Israel enters the Promised Land, and the other that Israel shall be forgiven and not be allowed to perish. If I

am to break the first I must also cancel the other, and Israel will have to die."

And Moses cried out: "Rather shall Moses and a thousand more of his kind perish than a single soul in Israel!"

### III. GOD REJECTS MOSES' LAST PLEA

Moses now made a last effort to obtain God's mercy, saying: "Although I never saw the Promised Land, I have praised it to the people. Shall I share the lot of spies who, although they saw the good land, spoke evil of it in the presence of the people? You know, O Lord, that my desire to enter the Promised Land is not prompted by self-interest. I wish to go there that I might perform all those of Your Commandments that are still to be fulfilled. Forgive me then my sin and allow me to enter the land. Then all living flesh shall know that You are forgiving and merciful."

"Your sin shall not be forgiven you," answered God, "so that all flesh shall know that the Lord does not even discriminate in favor of him with whom He spoke face to face."

"If it be your wish," urged Moses, "that I do not enter the land as leader of the people, then let me enter as the humblest of them all."

And God answered: "Even this cannot be granted to you."

Then Moses pleaded: "Change me into a beast that eats grass and drinks water, but let me enter the land which You have given to the Children of Israel."

"This too must be denied you," replied the Almighty.

"If You are unwilling to change me into a beast, then change me into a little bird that picks its daily food wherever it can find it and then at the fall of night returns to its nest, only let me enter into the Promised Land!"

"Enough, My decree is unalterable!" cried God.

Hearing God's final decision, Moses exclaimed: "The Rock of Ages—all His ways are just!"

And he implored: "Permit me, O Lord, to make but one request of You. Let the heavens be opened and the abyss be rent asunder, so that Your people may see that here is none besides You, O my Lord, neither in the heavens nor upon the earth."

No sooner had Moses finished speaking when the heavens were opened, the abyss was rent asunder, a great light shone in the dark of the night, and the eyes of all Israel were

opened and they saw that neither in the heavens above nor on the earth below was there anything except the greatness and glory of God. Thereupon, all the people cried out as one man: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One!"

#### IV. MOSES IS READY TO DIE

Moses then sat down to write thirteen scrolls of the Torah, twelve for the twelve tribes, and one to be put into the Holy Ark.

When Moses had completed his writing, he went to the tent of Joshua. He stood at the entrance and listened as his disciple expounded the Torah to a number of Israelites. Meanwhile more people arrived, and when they beheld Moses standing at the entrance, they ran into the tent and exclaimed: "Alas! you show no respect to our great leader and teacher, if you thus permit him to stand at the entrance of your tent."

Joshua thereupon looked toward the entrance, and when he saw Moses standing there, he tore his garments and weeping said: "Pray enter the tent and expound the Torah to your humble servants."

"From this day on," Moses replied, "I shall be your disciple."

Moses and Joshua then went to the Tabernacle, but as they entered, a cloud descended and separated them. God then spoke to Joshua, and His words were not audible to Moses. Moses asked Joshua what God had said, but Joshua replied that God would not permit him to tell of what He had spoken to him.

"Now, I am willing to die," said Moses to God.

"Go up to the top of Mount Pisgah," God commanded him, "and from there I will show you the land of Israel and tell you of all that will befall the Israelites in days to come."

#### V. MOSES CHASTISES SAMAEL, THE ANGEL OF DEATH

When God saw that Moses was ready to die, he said to the angel Gabriel: "Go fetch Me the soul of Moses!"

"How can I approach and take the soul of him who has wrought so many miracles?" asked Gabriel. "O Lord of the world! Adam sinned against You, and therefore You removed Your glory from him and bestowed it upon Moses whom You love."

"Noah, who found favor in My eyes because of his righteousness and simplicity, also died."

"Noah saved only himself when You sent a flood upon the world," argued Gabriel, "nor did he care to pray to You for the lives of the people who were to be destroyed. But Moses, your servant, would not leave Your presence until You had promised him that You would forgive the people their sin."

"Abraham, who was kind and righteous, he too did not escape death," answered God.

"Abraham was indeed a great man, for he gave food to the poor and provided them with all their wants, but this was done by him in a settled land, whereas Moses provided an entire nation with food in a wilderness where there was neither food nor drink," said Gabriel.

"No mortal can escape death!" said God. "Such is My decree!"

Then Gabriel went on to plead: "O Lord of the world! Pray give this mission to anyone it pleases You, but not to me."

God then turned to the angel Michael and said to him: "Go and fetch me the soul of Moses!"

Answered Michael: "How can I presume to approach and take the soul of him who is equal in Your eyes to sixty myriads of people?"

"You go then!" said God to the angel Zagzagel. "Go and fetch me the soul of Moses."

"Lord of the world!" replied Zagzagel. "When Moses ascended to heaven to receive the Torah, I was his teacher and he was my disciple. How can I take his soul?"

God then said to Samael, the Angel of Death: "Go and fetch me the soul of Moses!"

Samael rejoiced over this mission. He took his sword and wrapped himself in wrath and hastened to Moses. But when he beheld the face of Moses and gazed into his eyes, the radiance of which was equal to that of the sun, he trembled and drew back.

"Why do you stand there? What is it you want of me?" asked Moses.

"The God of heaven and earth, He who created all souls, has sent me to take your soul," replied the Angel of Death.

"I will not give you my soul!" cried Moses. "Leave me at once, for I stand here declaring the glory of God!"

To which the Angel of Death replied: "The heavens de-

clare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His handiwork."

"But I will silence the heavens and the firmament, and I myself will narrate His glory," said Moses.

"All souls since the creation of the world were delivered into my hands," continued the Angel of Death. "Now pray let me approach you and take your soul too."

"Go away!" cried Moses. "I will not give you my soul!"

In great terror Samael returned to God and said: "Lord of the world! I am unable to approach the man to whom You sent me."

God's wrath was now kindled against Samael and He said to him: "Go to him again and fetch Me his soul!"

So Samael drew his sword from its sheath, girded himself in cruelty, and in a towering fury went off to see Moses. When Moses beheld Samael he arose in anger and with the staff upon which was engraved the Ineffable Name, he drove him away. The Angel of Death fled in terror but Moses pursued him. When finally he caught up with Samael he struck him with his staff and blinded him. At that very moment a ringing Voice from heaven was heard calling:

"Your last second is at hand, Moses!"

Hearing this, Moses stood up in prayer, and murmured: "Lord of the world, remember the day on which You appeared to me in the bush of thorns and commanded me to go to Pharaoh and bring forth Your people from the land of Egypt. Recall also the day I ascended into heaven where for forty days I had neither food nor drink. I pray You, gracious and merciful God, do not surrender my soul into the hands of the Angel of Death!"

Then the Heavenly Voice spoke once again: "Be comforted, Moses! I myself will take your soul. I myself will bury you."

## VI. THE DEATH OF MOSES

God revealed Himself to Moses from the highest heaven, and with God descended three angels, Michael, Gabriel and Zagzagel. Michael arranged the couch for Moses, Gabriel spread upon it the white napkin for the head, and Zagzagel the one for the feet.

Then Michael stood on the right side of Moses, Gabriel on

his left, Zagzagel at his feet, and the Majesty of God hovered over his head.

And the Lord said to Moses: "Shut your eyes."

Moses obeyed.

Then the Lord said: "Press your hand upon your heart."

Moses did so.

Then the Lord said: "Place your feet in order."

Moses obeyed God's command.

Thereupon the Lord addressed the soul of Moses: "My daughter! For one hundred and twenty years have you inhabited this undefiled body of dust. But now your hour is come. Rise and fly into Paradise!"

But the soul replied: "I know that You are the God of spirits and of souls. You created me and put me into the body of this righteous man. Is there anywhere in the world a body so pure and holy as this one? During these one hundred and twenty years I learned to love it, and now I do not wish to leave it."

God replied: "My daughter, do not hesitate, but come forth for your end has come. I will place you in the highest heaven and let you dwell, like the Cherubim and the Seraphim, beneath the throne of Divine Majesty."

But the soul replied: "Lord of the world! I desire to remain with this righteous man, for he is purer and holier than the very angels. When the Angels Azael and Shemhazai descended from heaven to earth, they became corrupt, but the son of Amram, a creature of flesh and blood, has not sinned from the moment he saw the light of day. Let me therefore, I implore You, remain where I am."

Then God bent over the face of Moses and kissed him. At once the soul leaped up in joy and with the kiss of God flew into Paradise.

A sad cloud darkened the sky, and the heavens and the earth wailed: "The pious one has been lost from the earth, and there is none more righteous among men!"

Joshua rent his garments and lamented: "Help, O Lord, for there are no longer any pious ones, and the faithful have departed from the midst of men!"

And all Israel lamented the loss of Moses, crying: "The righteousness of the Lord has he performed, and he has executed his judgment in Israel."

And when all the voices were silenced, the Divine Presence

proclaimed: "There has not arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses whom the Lord knew face to face."

### *Why God Forgives Man<sup>18</sup>*

ELIJAH the Prophet once told the following story:

"It happened that I came to a great city, one of the greatest in the world. In that city lived a government official whose duty it was to investigate suspicious characters. When he saw me he led me into the king's palace where a priest came toward me and asked, 'Are you a scholar?'

"I answered, 'I know a little.'

"To which he said, 'If you'll give me the right answer to the question which I am going to ask you I will let you go in peace.'

"I said, 'Ask!'

"'Why did the Almighty create reptiles? Why did he need such ugly crawling creatures in his beautiful world?'

"I answered him: 'The Almighty is a stern judge. But He also loves justice, benevolence and truth. He foresees the outcome of everything and foretells the future. He is concerned with the good only. With His profound wisdom He created the world and all that is on it. After that He fashioned man. And the only reason He made man was that he serve Him with all his heart, so that He should take pleasure in him and in the generations that spring from his loins until the end of days.'

"But when man procreated and his number became great he began to worship the sun and stones and wooden idols. From day to day the sinfulness of man had been mounting so that he deserved death and greatly tried God's patience.

"At that point God looked upon all the creatures He had created in the world and said: "Men have life and these creatures have life. Men have souls and these creatures have souls. Men eat and drink and these creatures eat and drink. Therefore, men too are animals and are no better than the reptiles that I have created."

"Immediately thereafter the Almighty's wrath subsided and he withheld his hand from destroying mankind. From this, therefore, you can see that God created reptiles, so that He would have some creatures with which to compare man and shame him into humility.'"

*King David Bows Before an Idol<sup>14</sup>*

WHEN David reached the summit of the Mount of Olives he said to his servants, "Go and find me an idol and bring it here!"

When David's servants went to do his bidding they met Hushai the Archite, the king's friend. He asked them, "Where are you going?"

They answered, "David, our king, has commanded us to bring him an idol."

Astounded, Hushai went to David and asked, "Tell me, O King, why did you bid your servants to bring you an idol?"

And David replied, "I wish to bow before the idol."

When Hushai heard these words he rent his garments and strewed ashes on his head and cried aloud, "Woe is me that a man like King David should bow before an idol."

Then spoke the king: "Do not grieve so, my friend! Don't you know how great my fame is throughout the world? All who have heard of me say: 'There is no man as virtuous as David. He rules his people with the fear of God in his heart. He does only good, metes out justice and fulfills all of God's commandments.' Now therefore consider, Hushai, when the people hear about my miserable plight, how my son Absalom attacked me and tried to kill me, what do you suppose they will think? They will say, 'What a waste to worship such a God! With Him there is neither justice nor reward of virtue.' For that reason, I have decided to bow down before an idol in order to defame myself. Then people will be able to say, 'There you have proof there is a God in heaven and a sovereign over the earth! He rules with truth and with justice and punishes even mighty King David for his idol-worship.' "

*Better than a Dead Lion<sup>15</sup>*

ONCE King David said to God, "Lord of the Universe! I beg of You, tell me the day when I will die."

God answered, "I have decreed that no mortal should know his last day."

"Then tell me—how many years will I live?" David implored.

"I have decreed that no mortal shall know the number of his years on earth."

"Tell me then, O Lord of the Universe, on what day in the week will I die?"

And the Creator answered, "You will die on the Sabbath day."

"Let me die on the day after the Sabbath," pleaded David.

"That cannot be," answered God. "The rule of your son, Solomon, begins on the day after the Sabbath."

"Then let me die a day before the Sabbath!" implored King David.

"No man may die before his hour comes," answered the Almighty. "Dearer to Me is the Torah that you will study for one single day than a thousand sacrifices your son Solomon will bring upon My altar as King."

From that time on King David spent the entire Sabbath day in devoted study of the Torah. And, when the Sabbath on which he was to die arrived, the Angel of Death rose up against him; but he had no power over him, for King David did not cease his studying.

"What shall I do with him?" cried the Angel of Death in exasperation.

Behind the royal palace lay a lovely garden, and so the Angel of Death entered it and began to shake the trees. Hearing the noise, David went to see who was disturbing the Sabbath peace. And as he walked he did not cease his devoted study of the Torah. But as he descended the steps he lost his balance and for one instant the sacred words became stilled on his lips. In that very instant the Angel of Death smote him.

Thereupon, Solomon inquired of the sages: "What shall I do? My father lies dead in the fierce sun. The dogs are hungry. They bark and sharpen their teeth."

The sages replied, "Your father was a king in his life. Now that he is dead he is only a corpse. One may not violate the Sabbath for the sake of a dead man."

And when Solomon heard these words he commented, "A live dog is better than a dead lion."

### *The Wall of the Poor<sup>16</sup>*

WHEN Solomon wished to build the Temple in the holy city of Jerusalem, an angel of God appeared to him and said, "Solomon, son of David, King of Israel, since thou dost know that the Temple which thou wilt build Me will be the holy place of the people, the portion of all Israel, summon all Is-

rael and let each man take part in the work, each one according to his capacity."

So King Solomon sent forth and summoned assemblies of his people Israel, and not one man was missing. There came the princes and the rulers, and priests and the nobles, as well as the needy and the poor. And Solomon cast lots for the labor, for everything was apportioned by lot. And the lots fell in this manner: to the princes and rulers, the cupolas of the pillars and the steps; to the priests of Aaron's seed and to the Levites, the Ark of the Testimony and the curtain which is upon it; to those mighty in wealth, the eastern side; to the poor and the needy, the Western Wall. Thus were the lots cast and since it came from the Lord, may it be forever a wonder in our eyes!

Then began the labor for the House of God.

The princes and rulers and all the rich men of Israel took the golden earrings from the ears of their wives and their daughters, also their jewels which were very precious; and they bought cedar wood wherewith to cover both the ground and the walls, and cypress wood for the doors, and olive wood for the lintels. Also day-laborers did they hire from the Sidonians and Tyrians and others of the heathen who dwelt in the land; and over them they appointed foremen to urge them and press them on, saying, "Ye slackers, finish your work!" Thus was speedily ended and completed the work of the princes and rulers and the mighty in wealth; also that of the priests of Aaron's seed and of the Levites according to their families.

Only the work of the poor was delayed exceedingly, for they could not bring fine things from afar; and the men, the women and the children hewed stone in the great cave which is the cave of Zedekiah, until by the toil of their hands they completed their portion, the Western Wall.

Now when the holy work was ended and the Temple stood upon its height, perfect in its beauty, the Divine Presence descended and rested upon it, and the Lord chose the Western Wall; for He said, "The toil of the needy is precious in My eyes and My blessing shall be upon it." And a holy Echo went forth, saying, "The Holy Presence shall never be removed from the Western Wall."

So when the enemy destroyed our House of Glory—speedily may it be builded and established in our days, Amen!—the angels of the Most High descended and spread

their wings over the Western Wall; and a holy Echo went forth, and proclaimed, "Never shall the Western Wall be destroyed."

### *Gates of Beauty<sup>17</sup>*

NIKANOR journeyed to Alexandria to bring back the gates of copper he had ordered from the great Egyptian artificers in metal. They were for the entrance to the Temple in Jerusalem. He received the gates and loaded them on a ship and then journeyed back to the Land of Israel.

On the way home a storm broke out and the ship began to sink. To lighten the ship the sailors took one of the copper gates and cast it into the sea. And as the storm still raged unabated they started to cast the remaining gate into the sea. Then Nikanor rushed forward and embraced the door with both arms.

"If you wish to cast this beautiful gate into the sea you must cast me with it!" he cried.

At that very instant the sea became calm.

The loss of one of the gates caused Nikanor great grief. He could find no solace. But as the ship entered the harbor at Akku how amazed he was to see the lost gate being tossed ashore by the waves!

God moves in a mysterious way....

### *The Beauty of Simple Things<sup>18</sup>*

ONE of the musical instruments employed in the Temple service in Jerusalem was a pipe. It was made of ordinary reed. It was smooth and slender and it dated back to the days of Moses.

Seeing how valuable it was the King ordered that the pipe be encrusted with gold. After that, whenever the pipe was played during the Temple service, its voice was no longer as limpid as it was before. So they took the beaten gold off, and the pipe's voice again sounded as sweet as ever.

A pair of cymbals were among the musical instruments in the Temple in Jerusalem. They were made of copper and when they were struck together they produced a wondrous sound.

It happened once that they became damaged. So the Jewish sages brought great artists in metal from Alexandria who mended the cymbals and laid gold on them. But when one

cymbal was struck against the other the sound was no longer as delightful as before. So they took off the gold and the voice of the cymbals as they clashed together was as wondrous sweet as before.

### *King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba<sup>19</sup>*

#### I. THE HOOPOE BIRDS

KING SOLOMON commanded all animals and birds, as well as all demons and devils, to assemble. And when they had gathered they danced and capered before him and the elders of the nation who had come to Jerusalem for this occasion.

When he looked about him the King saw that the hoopoe, a mountaineacock, was not among those who had assembled. He therefore became angry and commanded the eagles: "Bring before me the hoopoe so that I may punish him for disobeying me!"

Obediently, the eagles flew away to fetch the culprit. And when they found him they brought him before the King.

"Please do not be angry with me, my Lord the King, because I failed to make my appearance with all the other animals today," pleaded the hoopoe. "Believe me, truly, it wasn't out of evil intention or because I took your command lightly."

"Where were you then? Explain your absence!" cried the King sternly.

"Three months ago," the hoopoe began, "I decided to fly to all the far corners of the earth to inquire if there was one single nation that had not heard of the greatness and wisdom of my Lord the King. And thus I flew about for ninety days and ninety nights. I neither ate nor drank nor rested, until I reached the city of Kittor, which is located in the east at the end of the world. What was my astonishment when I saw that the earth there was of pure gold! Although there was much silver rolling in the streets no one seemed to take any notice of it.

"All about me stretched magnificent gardens and orchards, radiantly in blossom as on the day when God created heaven and earth. The fertile fields were irrigated by a winding river. On the trees grew the most beautiful and delicious fruit I have ever tasted. But most wonderful of all—the inhabitants of the land were all peace-loving! Every man sat serenely in

his own vineyard and under his fig tree. He carried no weapons nor wished to learn the art of war.

"This tranquil land is ruled over by a woman of wondrous wisdom and beauty. She is called the Queen of Sheba, and all her subjects, both the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor, serve her obediently."

## II. IN THE LAND OF KITTOR

When King Solomon heard the hoopoe's story he was delighted and ordered his servants to give the bird the most delicious food and drink, served in golden dishes. After he had eaten the hoopoe said to the King, "Now I'm ready to do your bidding."

So King Solomon called his scribes and had them write the following letter:

"Peace be with you, O Queen of Sheba, and peace be with all your people! Know that God appointed me King over many lands and peoples. He made me sovereign over all the beasts and the animals, over the fish, the birds and the insects. Therefore, I promise you that if you will come and pay me homage I will honor you and raise you above all the sovereigns under my rule. But, should you not obey me, then be forewarned that I will send against you my mighty legions, who will grind you and your kingdom to dust! Should you ask what are those mighty legions of which I speak—know then: that the birds in the sky are my cavalry and the animals of the earth are my infantry. At my command, they will descend upon your land and annihilate you and your people, for against them you can find no protection."

The scribes then tied this letter to a wing of the hoopoe who, as he went winging through the air, called upon all the other birds to follow him.

It was early in the morning when the hoopoe arrived in the land of Kittor, just at the hour when the Queen of Sheba left her palace to worship the sun. When he saw her he gathered all the birds about him and said to them, "Do not scatter about in all directions, but assemble in the air close together."

When the army of birds closed their ranks they hid the light of the sun and the earth grew dark. At this the Queen of Sheba became frightened.

"Woe is me!" she cried. "Something terrible has happened

to me! I can no longer see—everything has grown dark before my eyes!"

The hoopoe alighted at the feet of the Queen and stretched out his wings. She saw the letter tied to his wing, and when she read it she began to tremble.

In haste she gathered her counsellors and sages and read them the letter. And when they heard it they looked puzzled and said, "How odd that we have never heard of this King Solomon nor of his kingdom!"

And, despite the advice of her counsellors to ignore the letter, the Queen of Sheba summoned the captains of all her ships and placed in their care many gems, much gold and silver, also six hundred beautiful boys and girls, all of the same size and proportions and dressed alike. These she sent as gifts to King Solomon with the following message:

"And thus speaks the Queen of Sheba: the span of a seven years' journey lies between my country, Kittor, and the land of Israel; but, in order that I may hear your great wisdom from your own lips, I am starting out immediately on the long journey to Jerusalem. Be assured I will neither rest nor spare any effort to make the seven years' journey in only three years, for so great is my eagerness to see you!"

### III. THE CRYSTAL PALACE

The day came at last when the Queen of Sheba was to arrive in Jerusalem. King Solomon sent his bosom friend, Benaiah ben Yehudah, to meet her outside the city limits.

As the Queen of Sheba approached the Holy City, reclining in her litter, she saw at a distance a wondrous rose growing at the edge of the lake. But when she came near she saw to her astonishment the rose suddenly transformed into a flashing star. The closer she came the more dazzling was its light. She was enchanted with its beauty.

When she finally reached the lake's bank she saw, amidst a crowd of nobles dressed in magnificent raiment, a man of arresting beauty. So she said to her servants, "I will alight from my litter and prostrate myself in homage, because my eyes are now gazing upon the face of Solomon, King of Israel."

As she alighted, followed by her attendants, Benaiah ben Yehudah hastened to her and asked, "Why have you left your litter, O Queen of Sheba?"

"To pay homage to you, O King Solomon," she answered.

"Return to your litter, O Queen," said Benaiah. "I am not the King, only one of his servants."

At this the Queen turned to her nobles and said, "Before we may see the lion in his glory he wishes us first to admire his lair, Jerusalem. Before we may have the joy of beholding the King in all his splendor he has made us look upon one of his servants, the like of whose beauty I've never seen."

Benaiah then hastened to the King to inform him of the Queen of Sheba's arrival. Thereupon Solomon entered his crystal palace and seated himself upon his throne.

When the Queen entered and saw him seated on his wondrous throne looking as dazzling as the sun at noon, it appeared to her as though he was floating on water. So, in order not to wet her garments, she lifted up the hem of her skirt and came nearer.

When the King saw her he welcomed her and praised her beauty. Then he seated her on a throne at his right hand.

#### IV. THE QUEEN OF SHEBA ASKS RIDDLES

"I will ask you some riddles," said the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon. "If you answer them I will then know that it is true when people call you wise."

"Tell me your riddles," said the King.

And the Queen of Sheba asked, "What water does not fall from heaven nor does it gush from stones and the clefts of the rocks? Sometimes it is sweeter than honey and at other times more bitter than gall even though it has the same source."

And Solomon answered, "The tear comes neither from heaven nor from the clefts of the rock. It tastes sweet when man weeps for joy and bitter when he weeps in sorrow."

The Queen of Sheba asked him another riddle: "My loving mother gave me two gifts. One has a beautifully rounded hole in it; the other can cut glass. The first is found in the sea; the second in the depths of the earth."

And the King made answer: "The first gift is the ring with the pearl on your finger—the second is the pendant of diamonds at your throat."

"What," asked the Queen, "is that which you bury before it's dead, and the more it lies and rots the stronger it gets and more life issues from it?"

And Solomon answered, "You bury living seeds in the earth and they shoot forth golden heads of wheat."

"Tell me, O King," continued the Queen of Sheba, "what is it, which when it descends from heaven is pure and white but afterwards becomes sullied? In time it returns to heaven in the form of clouds and again becomes as pure as it first was."

And Solomon answered, "What can be whiter than snow when it descends from heaven and which turns into mud on the highway? The clouds gave birth to it and sent it down upon the earth and when it thaws in the sun it goes back again where it came from."

"Now I will put your wisdom to the supreme test," said the Queen of Sheba. And she ordered that the six hundred boys and girls she had presented as a gift to the King be brought in.

"Tell me, O wise King, which are the boys and which are the girls."

And the King issued a command to assemble them. And it was very difficult to distinguish between them for they were of the same height and were dressed alike. Then the King said to his servants. "Place before each a basin of water and ask them to wash their hands and faces but do not give them any towels."

And so it was done and the six hundred boys and girls began to wash. And when they were through and found that there were no towels, those who were girls dried their hands and faces with the hem of their skirts, and those who were boys, not knowing what to do, remained standing uncomfortably with wet hands and faces.

Afterwards the King ordered that great baskets of nuts, apples and pomegranates be brought. With his own hands he distributed them to the children. Those that put up their little skirts in which to gather the fruit the King placed at his right, and those who held the fruit in their hands he placed on his left. Then he said to the Queen, "Those on my right are girls; those on my left, boys."

Filled with wonder the Queen of Sheba said to her seers and magicians, "By means of your magic you were able to make these six hundred boys and girls look alike. I ask you then—is what the King has done true or false?"

"True!" cried the seers and magicians with one voice. "He is as wise as an angel of God!"

## V. THE LOCKED CASKET

Once the Queen of Sheba accompanied King Solomon on horseback outside Jerusalem. When they came near Mount Lebanon they dismounted and sat down on the grass to rest.

"Listen!" said the Queen. "Do you hear a woman singing? But I do not understand her words."

"This is a farmer's wife," answered the King. "She sings that her husband Abiezer works in the fields, that her son Ahiezer is grazing his flock in the pasture, and that she herself is doing the housework. She sings that, although so humble, she is happier than I, Solomon King of Israel, is in his palace."

"What a good woman!" cried the Queen, enchanted. "Just see how unjust you were when you wrote that among a thousand men one may find one who is good, but that among all women you have found not even one who is virtuous."

"I still hold to that opinion," answered King Solomon.

To this the Queen of Sheba replied, "I will not believe you until you have proven this woman."

"Very well," said King Solomon. "Let us now go to the house where this virtuous woman lives and we will test her."

So they went to the house of Abiezer and stood before the door. When the farmer's wife saw them she bowed low and invited them to enter her lowly home. When the royal guests had entered she placed before them a pitcher of cold water, milk, butter and sweet cakes. She begged them to eat and they ate. And the Queen of Sheba said to King Solomon, "See, I have found a virtuous woman, but where will you find a virtuous man among a thousand?"

King Solomon laughed and said, "Let us not keep this woman from her housework, for soon her husband and her son will return tired and hungry from their work in the fields, and she must prepare their noonday meal."

As they left the house King Solomon said, "As you wish me to test this woman's virtue I will do so, although I have no desire to disturb the tranquil life of this family."

Then the King went back to his horse and returned carrying a little casket. He unlocked it and asked the Queen of Sheba to look inside. She saw in it a little white mouse and a tiny dish of seeds. The King then locked the casket and said, "With this I will test the virtue of this woman. If she withstands the temptation I am placing before her then I will admit that I am in error."

At that King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba returned to the farmhouse where they met Abiezer and his son. The farmer immediately recognized the King, because he had seen him on several occasions when he had gone to Jerusalem on pilgrimages.

Then King Solomon said to the wife of Abiezer, "I am leaving this little casket with you for three days. Place it in that corner there, and under no circumstances must you move or open it. If you do as I bid you I will give you many fine gifts, but if you disobey me you, your husband and your son will have to pay with your lives."

The King then gave the key to the box to Abiezer. He blessed him, his wife and his son and returned to Jerusalem with the Queen of Sheba.

When they were eating their evening meal Abiezer's wife said to him, "The Lord only knows what's inside this little box! Maybe the King has filled it with gems. It also might be that it is an enchanted box."

"Better let us not think or speculate about this box," urged Abiezer. "Let it rest there in the corner until the King comes back for it in three days."

Abiezer then went to bed and early in the morning he arose for his daily labors. When he returned home for the noon meal his wife placed food before him, but she herself would not touch any of it. When he asked her whether she was ill or had received evil tidings from the home of her father she answered, "I have not slept all night long, dear husband, thinking about that little box. Even when I dozed off for a little while I had nightmares. Oh, if I only knew what is inside of that locked box!"

"Stop talking about that box!" Abiezer said angrily. "Remember what the King said, and don't trifle with our lives!"

Then he returned to his work.

When he came home in the evening he found his wife in bed groaning and moaning.

"What ails you?" cried Abiezer in a fright.

"Let me be!" wailed his wife. "Now I see that you think more of the little box than of me."

Abiezer tried to comfort and soothe her, but to no avail. She persisted: "If you love me truly and wish me to get well then let us both look through the keyhole of the box. I must confess that while you were at work I wished to get near the

box but a terrible fright came over me. I have no doubt that the King has hidden a little demon inside."

His wife tormented Abiezer so long with her nagging that finally he was obliged to give in to her, saying, "Very well. Get out of bed and come with me to the box, but remember, you must not touch it with your hands!"

"Have no anxiety on that score," his wife answered. "Even if I were to touch it no harm would come of it. What King Solomon meant was that we should not move it from the corner. He never said anything about not touching it."

And so she looked through the keyhole of the box, but she saw nothing. Thereupon she was filled with disappointment and said bitterly, "The King has concealed his secret only too well. We will never know what's inside that box unless we open it."

Hearing these words Abiezer began to tremble and cried out with fright, "What a terrible thought! Do not speak about opening that box unless you wish to forfeit our lives!"

Then he led her back to her bed, saying, "You must rest now and try to calm yourself. In the morning you will get up feeling better. You'll begin doing your housework again and will forget all about that box."

Then they went to bed.

When the morning star appeared in the sky Abiezer arose. He made his ablutions and said the morning prayers. Afterwards, he went to labor in the fields.

He had been at work only a short while when he saw his son Ahiezer hastening to him.

"Quick father, come home!" cried Ahiezer. "Mother is near death and she wants to see you before she dies!"

When Abiezer heard this he exclaimed. "Woe is me! All these years I have lived in peace and contentment, then the King had to come and bring this misfortune upon us!"

Abiezer hurried home and found his wife in bed. He said to her, "Take heart, my wife, and arise!"

But she answered, "It is already two days that I have taken neither food nor drink and my body is altogether weakened. I had a frightful dream last night. I quake even now when I think of it. In my dream I saw many demons and devils float out of this box until they filled the house. They danced and whirled about me, raised a great lamentation and gnashed their teeth with rage. One devil sprang upon my bed and said to me: 'If you do not open the box and liberate us we will

again come tomorrow night and choke you. We will tear you limb from limb. We will burn you, grind you to dust and cast you to all the seven winds!" And when the devil finished speaking he spat in my face and disappeared. I awoke trembling with fright. I called you but you did not answer."

And Abiezer's wife did not cease her weeping. "Soon," she said, "the devils will come and choke me. Therefore, I've sent for you that you should prepare my grave for me."

"Why do you tell me your foolish dreams?" Abiezer reproached her. "Don't you know that dreams are false and ridiculous? If there really were demons and devils in the box, as you say, then it wouldn't be but *me* that they would try to scare because the key to the box is in my possession. Therefore your dream has no meaning. You dreamed it because you were thinking about the box all the time."

When the wife of Abiezer saw that he was resolute not to open the box she got out of bed and fell weeping at his feet.

"Do me only one small favor," she pleaded. "Give me the key and I will open the box only the tiniest bit. I will peep into it for just one instant, then I will close it quickly and nobody will ever know about it."

"Dear wife!" Abiezer cried. "How drawn and pinched your face looks! Come and eat and you will feel better and calmer. Then you will recall what the King said to us and you will stop thinking about the box."

Abiezer then helped her out of bed. He placed food before her and urged her to eat. She ate, but no sooner had she finished when again she resumed her wailing, saying, "Oh Abiezer, my loving husband! Have pity on me! The King does not have to know anything about this. I will be very careful and I swear that I will take only one little peep."

And so she carried on until evening, until Abiezer could no longer endure her nagging. So he arose and said, "Very well, we will open the box. But remember—for only one instant, just as you promise."

So Abiezer inserted the key and no sooner did he turn it in the lock when the box sprang open and the little white mouse that was inside jumped out and disappeared.

Abiezer and his wife were congealed with terror. She rent her garments and cried bitterly, "It is you Abiezer who will be the cause of our death. Had you been careful the mouse would not have jumped out. How many times did I have to

tell you to open the lid just the tiniest bit, and you had to go and open it altogether!"

"Why do you reproach me?" replied Abiezer resentfully. "If you had not pestered me to open the box nothing would have happened."

"It was all your fault!" lamented his wife. "Had you only been a real man and had will-power you would not have allowed yourself to be governed by a woman. You would not have given in to me and we would have avoided misfortune."

But Abiezer said bitterly, "Of what use now are lamentations and tears! We cannot undo our mistake that way. Better let us pray to the Almighty to aid us."

On the third day, as Abiezer and his wife sat grieving, King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba arrived. The guilty woman fell at the feet of the King and cried, "By your life, O my Lord the King, know that it was I who opened the box! Have mercy and spare my life!"

"Why did you disobey me, Abiezer?" asked the King sternly.

And Abiezer answered, "It is I who am the guilty one, O King, because I allowed my wife to wheedle me into doing such a thing. Now I beseech you, have mercy on my wife and let her live. If you wish to punish us it is me you should kill!"

Gently King Solomon answered, "Peace be to you both, my children! Be assured I wish you no harm. I only wished to prove you."

The Queen of Sheba then asked Abiezer to tell her all that had happened, and when Abiezer had finished his story King Solomon exclaimed, "One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found."

### *The Origin of the Roman Empire<sup>29</sup>*

WHEN King Solomon took Pharaoh's daughter for a wife she brought with her from Egypt a thousand different musical instruments. She instructed him in the use of all of them, saying, "In this manner you play to honor this idol—in that manner you play to honor that idol."

No word of reproach ever passed Solomon's lips.

On that very day the Angel Gabriel stuck a rod into the sea and around the rod formed sand and seaweed. From

these arose an island and on the island was built the Empire of Rome which robbed the Jews of their land and drove them into exile.

### *The Downfall of King Solomon<sup>21</sup>*

KING SOLOMON ruled over all animals and birds as well as over the demons and devils, and all the earth was full of his glory. But in the eyes of God he was only a wretched sinner and braggart who deserved punishment for his misdeeds. Solomon had violated three of the precepts that the Torah prescribed for a ruler when he took to himself a thousand wives, when he raised horses without number, when he accumulated great treasures of gold and silver. Therefore, the Almighty smote him with the rod of His wrath and justice. And it happened this wise:

One day King Solomon took captive Ashmodai, King of all the Demons. He had him bound in iron chains so that he was powerless to do him harm. Whereupon Ashmodai said to King Solomon, "If you will lend me your magic ring I will confide to you a great secret."

Solomon trusted him and gave him his ring on which was engraved the Ineffable Name of God. But no sooner did the wily Ashmodai have the ring in his hand when he threw it into the sea where a fish swallowed it.

Deprived of his ring, the King lost all his supernatural powers. With glee, Ashmodai raised him up and cast him away to a distance of four hundred miles from Jerusalem and outside the boundaries of his kingdom.

The King looked about him and found that he was in a desert. Everywhere he saw nothing but a sea of sand and the sky overhead. This made him very despondent, for he understood what Ashmodai had done to him.

At last, taking courage, he arose and began looking for some place of shelter where he could hide from the beasts of prey prowling all around him. He sought in vain. The sun beat down upon him fiercely so that he grew parched with thirst. Then the pangs of hunger gripped him.

After a while he perceived a small oasis in the distance and he began running towards it. There he found some shepherds grazing their flocks. They took pity on him and hospitably gave him food and drink.

Having eaten, King Solomon asked, "How far is it to Jerusalem?"

"Jerusalem!" the shepherds exclaimed wonderingly. "In what country is Jerusalem? We have never heard of such a city."

King Solomon thought: "These are young shepherds, therefore they haven't heard of Jerusalem. I will ask their elders; no doubt they will be able to give me the right answer."

It was towards evening that Solomon met an old man returning from the fields, hobbling along on his stick. He greeted him courteously and asked, "Tell me, my good man, how far is it to Jerusalem, the famous capital of King Solomon, son of David?"

"Jerusalem? I never heard of such a city," answered the old man. "This is the first time I ever heard the name of such a king."

King Solomon fell into a great melancholy when he heard the old man's words, and began to reproach himself bitterly, "What a vain fool I have been! All along I have deceived myself with the notion that my name was great among all the peoples of the earth. Only now I see that it was only empty conceit that made me believe that."

The following morning King Solomon entered a village. He was a sorry sight—in tatters. His appearance only depressed him the more, for he noticed the pitying looks of the passersby.

Finally, he entered a house in which lived a Jew and his wife and he said to them, "Don't be deceived by my appearance, my good friends! I may be barefoot and in rags, but know that I am Solomon, son of David, the King of Jerusalem. I met with a misfortune, and, as you see, I now find myself cast away, a stranger in a foreign land. Have pity on me then and give me a crust of bread, for I am hungry!"

Hearing those astonishing words the Jew and his wife burst into laughter.

"Oh you poor lunatic!" they said commiseratingly. "Do you think we don't know that our King Solomon lives in Jerusalem?"

Then Solomon began to swear by all things holy that he had told them nothing but the truth. So they said to him gently, "We certainly are sorry that you have gone out of your mind, you poor, unfortunate man!"

When Solomon heard these terrible words he fell silent.

The woman gave him food which he ate. Then he thanked her and went his way.

After much wandering, footsore and weary, King Solomon came to a great city. Meeting with a man in rich garb on the street he said to him, "I beg you—take pity on me! Give me shoes, for my feet are bruised. Give me clothing, for I am naked. When I return to Jerusalem, the capital of my kingdom, I will repay you a hundredfold."

"Who are you?" asked the man in astonishment.

"I am Solomon, the son of David and King in Jerusalem," answered the King.

The rich man shook with laughter and said mockingly, "If you really are Solomon, the wisest of all men, why did you leave your royal throne to wander about as a beggar in a foreign land? Is that a wise thing to do, O wisest of mortals!"

Solomon then told the rich man all that had happened to him. The man listened attentively and was filled with wonder. Finally he took pity on him and said to his wife, "Give this man new clothes and shoes. Know that he is King Solomon of Jerusalem!"

Her husband's words filled the woman with amazement.

"O you fool!" she cried. "Do you have to believe everything you are told?"

But her husband called her aside and told her everything that had happened to Solomon. She then understood that what the beggar had said was true. Then she suddenly recalled something and grew angry. Without a word, she picked up a stick and began to belabor Solomon.

"What is it, woman?" cried Solomon. "What harm have I done you that you should treat me so?"

"Why did you say," cried the woman, "that among a thousand men you found one virtuous one but none among women?"

"Calm yourself, I beg you," pleaded King Solomon, "and don't be angry with me. If you will ponder well what I have said you will surely understand that I did not mean to defame women but to do them good."

But the woman remained unappeased.

"How dare you say that your intention was to do them good when you wrote about them with such contempt?"

King Solomon answered, "Had I written in my book that among a thousand women one could find a good and clever one it would have been a great calamity for all women. Men

would have done nothing but divorce their wives. Every man would have reasoned thus: 'The woman God gave me is wicked. She is an insufferable nag. Let me divorce her and look for another. Who knows—God in his goodness might bless me with a woman about whom Solomon had said that she was the one virtuous one among a thousand!' Therefore, my dear woman, because I wrote that there was not one good woman to be found, each man will say: 'What's the use of divorcing my wife and taking another since there isn't one good one in the whole lot? "

King Solomon's answer softened the woman. Her anger left her and, as she parted from him, it was with the blessing: "May God in His mercy restore you to the throne of David, O wise and good King!"

### *The Sorrow of Jeremiah<sup>22</sup>*

WHEN Jeremiah looked upon the Jewish captives he saw that the young men wore shackles on their hands and feet. He hastened to them and stood among them and asked that also his hands and feet be shackled with iron chains.

When Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian conqueror, saw this he took the chains away from him.

Then Jeremiah looked upon the old Jewish captives. When he saw that they wore halters around their necks he hastened to them and stood among them and also put a halter around his own neck.

When Nebuzaradan saw this he took the halter away from him and rebuked Jeremiah: "Either you are a false prophet, or you are incapable of feeling pain, or you wish for my death. Wasn't it you who foretold this disaster to your people? Yet you grieve over it as if it had come as a surprise to you! I have tried to spare you every pain, but out of your own free will you look for grief. You very well know that for my own sake I must guard your life in order not to anger your God. But you appear determined to destroy yourself, thus bringing the wrath of your God on me."

As the procession of the captives began to leave Jerusalem, Jeremiah walked with them. When he came to the graves of the Patriarchs in Hebron he called out to them:

"Oh our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—arise and come to our aid! Your children are being led into captivity!"

Then a voice sounded, saying: "It is a long time since I've turned my face away from this people!"

Jeremiah then ran to the graves of the Matriarchs.

"Oh our Mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah—arise and come to our aid!"

And a heavenly voice answered: "Rachel weeps without cease for her children."

Jeremiah then hastened to the graves of the Prophets and cried out: "Oh Moses! Oh Samuel!—arise and come to our aid! Your children are being led into captivity!"

And a voice answered: "Alas, neither Moses nor Samuel can help you any more!"

Jeremiah then ran into the houses of mourning, crying: "Give me the bread of sorrow! Give me the chalice of consolation! My children are being led into captivity."

And a voice answered: "Leave the house of mourning; it is too late!"

Jeremiah then hastened back to the captives and when they reached the River Euphrates, Nebuzaradan said to him: "If you wish you may come with us to Babylon; if not you are free to return to Jerusalem."

And God spoke to Jeremiah: "Go you to Babylon; I will remain in Judea. However, should you chose to remain in Judea then I will go to Babylon. One of us must remain with the people."

Jeremiah asked himself: "How can I help the captive Jews in Babylon? It is better that God stay with them for He is mighty and is able to protect His people."

And to Nebuzaradan he said: "I will not go with you to Babylon. I will return to Judea so that I may comfort those of my people who have remained behind."

When the captives saw that the Prophet was preparing to leave them they broke into loud lamentation.

"O Jeremiah, O Prophet of God!" they cried. "Why do you abandon us?"

And they wept most bitterly.

When Jeremiah heard this he was filled with sorrow.

"O my children!" he cried. "Woe is me! Had you but listened to my warnings in Jerusalem you would have been spared all these trials!"

And as he spoke two tears rolled down his cheeks.

When the Babylonian commanders saw the captives weep they cried out against them and beat them.

"Cease your weeping or we'll slay you all!" they cried.

Again the captives implored the Prophet to remain with them.

"See for yourself," they said to him, "we are not allowed to lament but you can do so freely. You are free to pray to God—we may only weep in the stillness of night when we lie down to sleep and no one sees us."

And Jeremiah spoke words of comfort to the people. He blessed them and said: "God will not abandon you even in exile. Have hope and put your trust in Him!"

Then Jeremiah went his way.

But the two tears that the Prophet had shed miraculously turned into two lakes.

Again Jeremiah returned to Jerusalem. On the way he saw a woman. She was dressed in black and her face was veiled. As he came near he heard her lament: "Woe is me, woe is me! Who will comfort me now? Who will stand by me now?"

"Why do you lament so, woman?" asked Jeremiah.

"O my master!" replied the woman. "Don't you recognize me any more? You know very well that I had a husband and seven children."

"What has happened to them?" asked Jeremiah. "Perhaps I can help you."

"O master, my husband has abandoned me!" sighed the woman. "I've gone forth to seek him but I have not found him. Sad at heart, I returned home to my children. My neighbors came towards me and cried: 'Unfortunate woman! Your house has fallen down and has crushed your seven children! And now, my master—who will comfort me? I'm alone in the world, without husband and children!'"

"Poor woman!" sighed the Prophet. "Your grief is indeed great, but, I implore you, turn your thoughts to poor unfortunate Mother Zion and be consoled. Your husband abandoned you—but God abandoned Zion. You lost only seven children, Zion has lost all her children! They are either dead or captives. How can Zion be comforted then?"

"I am Mother Zion, O Prophet!" cried the woman suddenly in a loud voice. "I am the mother of your people! O comfort me, for my grief is beyond endurance! Comfort me, comfort me if only you know how!"

Then Jeremiah prostrated himself before the woman and

cried out: "Rise up, poor unhappy mother! Shake the dust from your garments, for once more you shall be comforted!"

King Nebuchadnezzar, surrounded by the princes and satraps of his realm, sailed on the Euphrates River. The music of many plucked instruments was heard and the voices of singers sounded. Behind the bank on which the King sailed came a small boat. Four hundred beautiful Jewish boy and girl captives were in it. They were being led into captivity to Babylon, for King Nebuchadnezzar had commanded it so.

The children spread out their little hands and, weeping, prayed: "Protect us, O Lord! Have compassion, have mercy on us!"

When the Babylonian sailors heard this they said to them: "Do not fear. No evil will befall you. When you come to Babylon you will worship our gods and later you will marry our children."

No sooner did the sailors leave them when the children held counsel with one another. They came to a decision.

"Far better that we lie on the bottom of the Euphrates," they said, "than that we worship in luxury the idols in Babylon! We fear though that by our death we will anger God."

"God will understand and forgive us!" cried the eldest of the children.

Arm in arm the girl captives sprang into the River Euphrates.

"We will not abandon you!" cried the boys, and they leaped after them.

A storm arose and whipped up the waters so that a mighty wave carried to the ears of Jeremiah the sound of the weeping of the children. Thereupon he cried out: "They have given up their lives to glorify Your name, O Lord!"

When the Jewish captives in Babylon heard of the death of the children they spoke with pride: "Hail to them, the sons and daughters of our people, whose mighty hearts and spirits scorned the grave and despised death!"

And as they spoke thus their faces grew radiant. They raised their heads and lifted up their eyes and looked with disdain upon Nebuchadnezzar.

The king cried out in anger: "I will break your pride!" And to his slaves he said: "Up slaves! Fill sacks with sand and stones and lay them upon the necks of the Jews!"

The slaves did as the king bid them. Thenceforth the Jews

walked with bowed backs. They were beaten cruelly and tormented without end. Therefore they cried aloud to God.

And when God heard them, He said: "I will destroy the earth!"

When the angels heard this they implored: "If you do this, Lord, who will sing the praise of Your handiwork? If you must destroy the earth, then spare the Heavens."

"Then descend to earth," commanded God, "and bring peace to the Jews. Only then will My anger subside."

And as the angels spoke Moses and the Patriarchs came before God.

"Tell us," pleaded the Patriarchs to Moses, "how does it fare with our children in Babylon?"

Moses answered: "Many were killed, many are in chains, many die of thirst and are not fortunate enough to find a grave."

The Patriarchs then broke into lamentation, saying: "Orphans without a protector—naked you are, with stones to lie upon. The sun burns you by day and the cold freezes you by night!"

"Cursed by the sun!" cried Moses, "because it has aided the enemy in his work of destruction!"

"Is it my fault if God has commanded me to shine?" pleaded the sun.

Moses' eye then fell upon the Temple ruins.

"Woe! Woe! Where is your glory now? The torch of the enemy has burnt you to the ground. Where are your priests? Where are your children?"

Then Moses spoke to the captives.

"I beseech you, do not spill your own blood!"

"Why do you say this?" asked the Patriarchs.

And Moses answered: "When our men and women fall to the ground under their burdens their tormentors bring to them their children and command them to kill them with their own hands. When the parents refuse, then the taskmasters slay the children."

When Mother Rachel heard this she came before God and raised her voice in lamentation.

"I can no longer hold back my grief! It is a long time since I died. Great have been the sorrows I've borne for my children! Now I can no longer see their misery and hear their cries. Have mercy, Lord, on my children! Show it for the sake of the Patriarchs, show it for the sake of Moses and

Aaron, show it for the sake of the love You have implanted in all parents for their children!"

When God heard this He relented.

"Cease your weeping!" He said. "Your children will some-day be happy."

### *The Trials of Jonah<sup>28</sup>*

#### I. JONAH'S FLIGHT TO TARSHISH

"ARISE!" God bid Jonah. "Go to Nineveh and announce its destruction!"

Jonah thought: "Once before God sent me to threaten Jerusalem with the same fate. But the people there repented and the city still stands. They called me a lying prophet in Jerusalem. If I fare the same way in Nineveh then I'll end up by being despised both at home and abroad. No! I will not go there to carry out God's command!"

Jonah then went to the seashore and asked the sailors: "When does the next ship leave for Tarshish?"

"A ship left for Tarshish only the day before yesterday," they told him. "You'll have to wait for its return."

When Jonah heard this he felt sad indeed.

Immediately God made a strong wind to blow so the ship that was on its way to Tarshish was forced back to port.

"Now I am sure that my plan will be successful!" Jonah cried, overjoyed.

He now waited for the ship's return. When it started again he was on board, bound for Tarshish.

In the course of the voyage a great storm arose. It tossed the ship about and threatened to crush it. But the people on board saw with amazement that the other ships at sea were continuing serenely on their way, undisturbed by the storm. How could that be?

"The Gods rage against us alone!" cried the frightened sailors and passengers on board the ship to Tarshish. "The people on this ship belong to seventy separate nations. Let, therefore, every man pray to his god to come to our aid."

And this they did, each man praying to his god in his own tongue.

Yet no succor came.

All this while Jonah slept soundly, unaware of what was going on.

"How can you sleep and not pray at a time when we are in danger of perishing?" the captain cried, waking him. "To what nation do you belong?"

"I am a Jew," answered Jonah.

"A Jew!" exclaimed the captain. "Then you're one of those who worship the mighty God about whom I've heard so much. Pray to Him. Perhaps He'll cause a miracle to happen!"

"That cannot happen because God is angry with me," replied Jonah. "The storm will not subside until you will have cast me into the sea."

But the others would not believe his words. They cast lots in order to discover the sinner among them and it was Jonah who drew the fatal mark.

"Now we are convinced that the Jew's words were true!" they said. "Let him be cast into the sea so that we all may not die on account of one man!"

Still the captain would not consent to this.

"Hold!" he cried. "Let's not spill blood in haste! Perhaps there's another way out. We'll throw everything on board into the sea; maybe it will lighten the ship."

So they threw everything overboard and tried with all their might to steer the ship towards shore, but to no avail.

"Haven't I told you that you must cast me into the sea?" cried Jonah. "Otherwise the storm will not abate."

Thereupon, they all agreed to do what he asked of them and let him down into the sea. But barely were his knees under water when the storm subsided.

"Pull him back!" they all cried. "The danger is over now."

But no sooner was Jonah on board again when the storm began anew.

Once more they lowered Jonah into the sea, but this time up to his waist. And again the waters grew calm. So they pulled Jonah back into the ship. Yet, no sooner was he on board, when the storm resumed again.

For the third time they lowered him and again the waters grew calm. This time though they did not pull Jonah back again, and he sank into the sea.

## II. JONAH AND THE WHALE

When Jonah sank into the sea a great fish came and swallowed him. Nonetheless, the Prophet of God remained unharmed and was without fear, for overhead in the inside of the

fish, hung a stone that shone as brightly as the sun. This made it easy for Jonah to look through the eyes of the great fish as through two windows. He thus could see everything that went on in the sea.

Suddenly the fish began to tremble and cried out: "I'm sorry for you, Jonah—your end is near!"

"Why so?" asked Jonah. "What do you see that's so frightening?"

"Leviathan, the king of all the fish, is approaching!" cried the fish. "He will surely devour us both."

"In that case, bring me to him," asked Jonah. "He may relent and spare our lives."

The fish did as Jonah asked and swam up to Leviathan.

"I've come here to observe how you live," began Jonah to the king of the fish.

"What concern is it of yours?" asked Leviathan.

"You are the fish whom God will some day serve up as nourishment to the pious," answered Jonah.

When Leviathan heard this he grew frightened and hurried away.

"Since I've protected you," said Jonah to the fish, "show me all the interesting places around here."

"With pleasure," answered the fish, "but first tell me what it was that you and Leviathan spoke about."

Jonah consented and, while he told him all about it, the fish swam with him to the bottom of the sea.

Jonah noticed a great many mounds.

"What are these?" he asked the fish.

"Leviathan caused these mounds by spouting streams of water," answered the fish.

And, as the fish spoke, the air became hot and the water began to boil.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Jonah.

"Now Leviathan is hungry and snorts with rage," replied the fish. "His breath is so hot that it consumes both the air and the water."

Jonah was inside the fish for three days, yet he did not say his prayers even once.

"Verily," said God, "I meant to do Jonah only good and have preserved his life, yet he has not thanked Me for it. Because of this I'll have him swallowed up by another fish, and, inside that fish, it won't go so well with him. Then he'll surely begin to pray again."

And it happened as God willed it. Another fish swam up to the fish in whose belly Jonah was, and said, "God has commanded me to swallow up this man who is inside of you. Surrender him to me or I'll swallow both of you at once!"

"How do I know that you speak the truth?" asked Jonah's fish warily.

"Come with me to Leviathan," answered the other fish. "He'll tell you that what I say is true."

So both went to Leviathan and asked him.

"It is true," answered Leviathan. "I was present yesterday when God commanded this fish to come to you."

Jonah was then obliged to leave the inside of the first fish and allow himself to be swallowed by the second.

In the belly of the second fish Jonah did not find his quarters as pleasant as in the first. He found it pitch dark and very uncomfortable.

Jonah was suddenly filled with terror. What if the fish had decided to devour him? In his anguish he once more thought of God and he started to pray: "Almighty God! Even when I am in the depths of the sea You abide with me and watch over me. Verily, You are the Ruler of the Universe, and Your throne is in heaven and on the earth. I call on You, therefore, to aid me and to lead me out of the depths of the sea to dry land!"

And God graciously heard Jonah's prayer and commanded the fish to carry him to shore and let him go in peace.

## 2

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*The World To Come*

## INTRODUCTION

It was but natural—believing in the immortality of the soul, in the reward of virtue and in the punishment of evil—that the Jews should have directed much thought to the *Olam ha-Ba*, the World-to-Come. Heaven and Hell, or Paradise and Gehenna, were two dual concepts borrowed from the Persians.

There was a wide variation in the popular conceptions of this World-to-Come. It ranged from the most spiritual—"The sages are not in Paradise—Paradise is in the sages"—to the following primitive visualization found in one of the minor *Midrashim*:

"The *Gan Eden* at the east measures 800,000 years (at ten miles per day or 3,650 miles per year). There are five chambers for various classes of the righteous. The first is built of cedar, with a ceiling of transparent crystal. This is the habitation of non-Jews who become true and devoted converts to Judaism. They are headed by Obadiah the prophet and Onkelos the proselyte, who teach them the Law. The second is built of cedar, with a ceiling of fine silver. This is the habitation of the penitents, headed by Manasseh, king of Israel, who teaches them the Law.

"The third chamber is built of silver and gold, ornamented with pearls. It is very spacious and contains the best of heaven and earth, with spices, fragrance and sweet odors. In the center of this chamber stands the Tree of Life, 500 years high. Under its shadow rest Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the tribes, those of the Egyptian exodus and those who died in the wilderness, headed by Moses and Aaron. There also are David and Solomon, crowned, and Chileab, as if living, attending on his father, David. Every generation of Israel is represented except that of Absalom and his confederates. Moses teaches them the Law, and Aaron gives his instruction to the priests. The Tree of Life is like a ladder on which the souls of the righteous may ascend and descend. In a conclave above are seated the Patriarchs, the Ten Martyrs, and those who sacrificed their lives for the cause of His Sacred Name. These souls descend daily to the *Gan Eden*, to join their families

and tribes, where they lounge on soft chairs studded with jewels. Everyone, according to his excellence, is received in audience to praise and thank the ever-living God; and all enjoy the brilliant light of the *Shekhina*. The flaming sword, changing from intense heat to icy cold and from ice to glowing coals, guards the entrance against living mortals. The size of the sword is ten years. The souls on entering paradise are bathed in the 248 rivulets of balsam and attar.

"The fourth chamber is made of olive wood and is inhabited by those who have suffered for the sake of their religion. Olives signify bitterness in taste and brilliancy in light (olive oil), symbolizing persecution and its reward.

"The fifth chamber is built of precious stones, gold and silver, surrounded by myrrh and aloes. In front of the chamber runs the River Gihon, on whose banks are planted shrubs affording perfume and aromatic incense. There are couches of gold and silver and fine drapery. This chamber is inhabited by the Messiah of David, Elijah, and the Messiah of Ephraim. In the center are a canopy made of the cedars of Lebanon, in the style of the Tabernacle, with posts and vessels of silver; and a settee of Lebanon wood with pillars of silver and a seat of gold, the covering thereof of purple. Within rests the Messiah, son of David, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isa. Liii. 3), suffering, and waiting to release Israel from the Exile. Elijah comforts and encourages him to be patient. Every Monday and Thursday, on Sabbaths and on holy days, the Patriarchs, Moses, Aaron and others, call on the Messiah and condole with him in the hope of the fast approaching end."

As if intending to dispel this literal, materialistic visualization of the World-to-Come, the illustrious Rabbi Rab wrote in the Talmud: "In Paradise there is no eating, no drinking, no cohabitation, no business, no hatred or ambition; but the righteous sit with crowned heads and enjoy the radiance of the *Shekhina*." The Eleventh Century philosopher, Maimonides, was even more emphatic in his impatience with the materialistic rewards expected by the righteous in Paradise. He wrote: "To believe so is to act like a schoolboy who expects nuts and confections as compensations for his studies. Celestial pleasures can be neither measured nor comprehended by a mortal being, any more than the blind can distinguish colors or the deaf appreciate music." Rather, he held forth the promise of a *Gan Eden* (Garden of Eden) on earth when the Messiah will come to usher in the millennium and mankind will become worthy of its joys.

N.A.

*A Worthy Companion<sup>24</sup>*

RABBI JOSHUA was very pious and learned in the Law. Once, in a dream, a voice spoke to him: "Rejoice, Joshua, because you and Nenes, the butcher, will sit side by side in Paradise and your reward will be the same."

When Rabbi Joshua awoke he cried, "Woe is me! Even since childhood I have devoted myself to the service of the Lord, studied the Torah without end and illumined the minds of eighty disciples. Now see the reward I will be getting for all my good deeds! It seems I'm no better than Nenes, the butcher!"

He then sent for his disciples and said to them, "I will not enter the House of Study with you until I find Nenes the butcher and learn from him what it is that he has done to deserve being my companion in Paradise."

From town to town Rabbi Joshua went with his disciples in search of Nenes the butcher, but no one had ever heard of him. At last, after much wandering, they came to the village where Nenes lived. Rabbi Joshua then began to make inquiries about him.

"O learned Rabbi!" the townsfolk asked him. "How is it that a man of your eminence should be asking after such an ignoramus and insignificant person?"

But Rabbi Joshua persisted: "Tell me what kind of man is he?"

"Don't ask us, Rabbi," they replied. "You'll see for yourself."

So they sent for the butcher, saying, "Rabbi Joshua is here and would like to see you."

Nenes was astonished.

"Who am I," he exclaimed, "that a great man like Rabbi Joshua should wish to see me? I'm afraid you've come to make sport of me! I will not go with you!"

Chagrined, the townsfolk returned to Rabbi Joshua and said, "O Light of Israel! Light of our eyes and crown of our head! Why have you sent us to such a boor? He has refused to come with us."

"I will not go from here," cried Rabbi Joshua, "until I have seen Nenes, the butcher! In fact, I will go to him myself."

When the butcher caught sight of Rabbi Joshua he became frightened.

"O Crown of Israel!" he exclaimed. "Why do you wish to see me?"

"I wish to put to you some questions," answered Rabbi Joshua. "Tell me, what good have you done in your life?"

"I am an ordinary butcher. I have a father and a mother who are old and weak. I've given up all my pleasures to attend to their needs. I wash and dress them and prepare their food with my own hands."

When Rabbi Joshua heard these words he bent down and kissed the butcher on the forehead, saying, "My son—blessed are you and blessed is your good fortune! How happy am I to have the distinction of being your companion in Paradise!"

### *The Piety of the Heard<sup>25</sup>*

RABBI SIMEON once prayed to the Almighty to show him the place reserved for him in Paradise. God answered his prayer, and he found out that his neighbor in the World-to-Come would be a butcher. Hearing this, Rabbi Simeon was filled with amazement.

"How can that be?" he asked himself in vexation. "All the days and nights of my life I have devoted to the study of the Torah—all my efforts I have directed to the greater glory of God. Why, then, do I deserve the humiliation of being placed next to a common butcher in Paradise?"

Rabbi Simeon thought: "I will call on this butcher and find out what manner of a man he is."

He did so and learned that he was very rich. The butcher was hospitable, and Rabbi Simeon lived in his house for eight days. He was accorded all the honors due his illustrious rank.

One day Rabbi Simeon invited him for a walk in the fields. On the way he asked him, "Pray tell me—to what ends have you devoted your life?"

And the butcher replied, "I know I am a sinner. I've neglected to study the Torah and have bent all my thoughts to the affairs of my shop. At first I was poor, but in time I began to prosper. However, in my good fortune I never forgot the needy. I distributed alms, and for every Sabbath I provided all the poor of the town, and even those of the surrounding towns, with goodly portions of meat."

Still Rabbi Simeon remained unconvinced. Was the giving of charity enough to place a common butcher on the same level with him, the Light of the Age?

"It seems to me you must have done something more meritorious than that!" he exclaimed.

"I really cannot think of anything," replied the butcher, "except one unusual thing that once happened to me."

"At the time I was the customs collector of this city. Whenever a ship arrived in the harbor I would go aboard to examine the cargo and to collect the customs.

"Once a ship arrived and I went aboard. The captain said to me, 'I am carrying a valuable cargo in the hold of my ship. Possibly you might wish to buy it.'"

"Show it to me," I replied.

"He then brought up on deck two hundred Jewish slaves in chains.

"How much do you want for them?" I asked.

"I want ten thousand gold pieces for them. If you won't buy them I'll cast them all into the sea and let them drown."

"I had compassion for my Jewish brothers. I bought them and led them ashore. I fed and clothed them and provided them with lodgings. Then I paired the marriageable youths and girls among them, provided dowries for them, and married them off according to the Laws of Moses.

"Now it happened that among them was a beautiful girl. She awakened the deepest sympathy in me, so I gave her as a wife to my son.

"I had invited to the wedding feast all the people of the town, among them the Jewish slaves I had redeemed. But I noticed an extraordinary thing: amidst all the rejoicing a youth, one of the former slaves, sat alone and shed tears.

"Why do you weep?" I asked him.

"But he did not answer.

"I then led him into a private room and this is what he told me:

"On the very day that he and his comrades had been seized as slaves he was to have married the beautiful girl who had now become my son's wife. So I said to him, 'Renounce all thought of her and I will give you a large sum of money!'

"He answered, 'Far better than all the gold and silver in the world would I have for my wife this girl whom I love! But now, alas! it is too late! She is already married to your son!'

"When I heard these words and saw his grief I went to my son and told him of all this.

"'I will divorce her,' cried my son, 'so that she can marry the youth she loves.'

"And this he did. I gave her a dowry and she married the youth."

When Rabbi Simeon heard the butcher's words he exclaimed, "Praise be the Lord on High who has decreed that I shall sit next to you in Paradise!"

### *What Tipped the Scales*

A POOR farmer hitched his horse to his wagon and drove to Lemberg to look for work so that he might have enough money to buy *matzos* and new clothes for his family for the Passover.

Night fell; there were no stars out, and he drove right into a ditch. The wagon turned over and he lay underneath it half smothered by the mud. Hearing his cries a rich man who chanced to pass by came to his rescue. He ordered his coachman to pull the farmer from underneath the wagon and to free his horse. Then, tying a rope from his coach to the shaft of the wagon, he whipped up his horses and pulled the wagon out of the mud. He then drove the farmer to his home and seeing the poverty of the family, he gave him a thaler.

The time arrived when God in His wisdom gathered the rich man to his forefathers. When he came up for judgment before the Heavenly Tribunal the Angelic Prosecutor indicted him for his many sins. It began to look very bad for him, for the Scales of Justice were tipping dangerously towards Gehenna. Suddenly, the Angel of Mercy entered and demanded of the Eternal Judge that the man's good deeds be weighed against his sins.

God agreed and the poor farmer and his family whom the accused had aided were placed in the Scales.

"Not enough!" cried the Accusing Angel.

"Let the poor farmer's horse and wagon be placed in the Scales!" asked the Angel of Mercy.

God agreed and it was so done.

"Not enough!" cried the Accusing Angel.

"Place in the Scales the mud which covered the poor farmer when the accused pulled him out of the ditch!" asked the Angel of Mercy.

The Supreme Judge gave his consent. And no sooner was

this done than lo and behold! the Scales of Justice tipped towards Paradise!

### *Tapers to Heaven*

A WIDOW once came to a rabbi. She was all in tears. Her daughter was being married but she had no candlesticks to place on the festive table. She was afraid of being humiliated before others.

So the rabbi gave her his best silver candlesticks.

When Friday dusk came around, the rabbi's wife went to light the Sabbath candles. What was her dismay to discover that her beautiful silver candlesticks were gone!

"Thieves must have carried off my candlesticks!" she told the rabbi, aghast.

"Sh! Don't get excited!" murmured the rabbi. "No one stole our candlesticks—they've gone to light our way into the World-to-Come."

### *Bontshe the Silent<sup>26</sup>*

HERE, in this world below, the death of Bontshe produced no impression whatever. In vain you will ask: "Who was Bontshe? How did he live? What did he die of? Was it his heart that burst, his strength that gave out, or his dorsal spine that broke under a burden too heavy for his shoulders?" No one knows. Maybe it was hunger that killed him.

Had a bus horse fallen down in the street, people would have displayed much more interest than they did in this case of a poor man. The newspapers would have reported the incident, and hundreds of us would have hurried to the spot from every street to look at the poor carcass and examine the place where the accident had occurred. But were there as many horses as there are men—a thousand millions—then even a horse would not have received such distinction.

Bontshe had lived quietly, and quietly died; like a shadow he passed over the face of the earth. At the ceremony of his circumcision no wine was drunk and no clinking of glasses was heard. When he celebrated his confirmation he made no brilliant speech. He lived like some dull grain of sand on the sea shore, disappearing among the millions of its kind. And when the wind at last carried him off to the other side, no one noticed it. In his life-time the soil of the roads never kept the impression of his footsteps, and after his death the wind

swept away the small board over his grave. The grave-digger's wife found it at some distance from the grave and made a fire with it to boil a pot of potatoes. Three days only have passed since Bontshe's death, but you would ask the grave-digger in vain to show you the spot where he had buried him.

Had there been a tombstone over Bontshe's grave, a learned archaeologist might have discovered it after a century, and once more the name of Bontshe would have been heard among us. He was only a shadow. No head or heart preserved his image, and no trace remained of his memory.

He left behind neither child nor property. He had lived miserably, and miserably he died. Had it not been for the noise of the crowd, someone might, by accident, have heard how Bontshe's vertebral column was snapping under a too heavy burden. Had the world had more time, someone might have noticed that during his life Bontshe's eyes were already dim and his cheeks terribly hollow. He might have noticed that even when he was not carrying loads on his shoulders his head was always bent to the ground, as if he were looking for his grave. Had there been as few poor people as there are horses in street buses someone might, perhaps, have asked: "What has become of Bontshe?"

When they took him to the hospital, Bontshe's corner in the basement did not for long remain unoccupied; ten people of his kind were already waiting for it, and they knocked it down among themselves to the highest bidder. When they carried him from his hospital bed to the mortuary chamber, twenty poor patients were already waiting for the place vacated. And scarcely had Bontshe left the morgue, when twenty corpses extricated from underneath the ruins of a house that had fallen down were brought in.

Who knows how long he will remain undisturbed in his grave? Who knows how many corpses are already waiting for the piece of ground he is buried in? Born quietly, he lived in silence, died in silence, and was buried in an even greater silence.

But it was not thus that things happened in the other world. There, the death of Bontshe produced a deep impression, a veritable sensation. The bugle-call of the Messiah, the sound of the ram's horn, was heard throughout the heavens: "Bontshe the Silent has died." Broad-winged archangels were flying about, announcing to each other that Bontshe had been summoned to appear before the Supreme

Judgment Seat. In Paradise there was a noise, an excitement, and one could hear the joyful shout: "Bontshe the Silent! Just think of it! Bontshe the Silent!"

Very young angels, with eyes of diamond, gold-threaded wings, wearing silver slippers, were rushing out, full of joy, to meet Bontshe. The buzzing of their wings, the clatter of their small slippers, and the merry laughter of those dainty, fresh, and rosy little mouths, filled the heavens and reached the throne of the Most High. God Himself knew that Bontshe was coming——

The Patriarch Abraham stationed himself at the gate of heaven, stretching out his right hand to Bontshe in cordial welcome: "Peace be with you," a sweet smile illuminating his delighted old countenance.

What means this rumbling and rolling here in heaven? Two angels were rolling an armchair of pure gold for Bontshe. Whence this luminous flash of light? It was a golden crown, set in with the most precious stones, that they were carrying—for Bontshe.

"But the Supreme Court has not yet pronounced judgment?" ask the astonished saints, not without a tinge of jealousy.

"Bah!" reply the angels, "that will only be a formality. Against Bontshe, even the attorney for the prosecution himself will not find a word to say. The case will not last five minutes. Don't you know who Bontshe is? He is of some importance, this Bontshe."

When the little angels seized Bontshe in mid-air and played a sweet tune to him; when the Patriarch Abraham shook hands with him as if he had been an old comrade; when he learned that his chair was ready for him in Paradise and that a crown was waiting for his head, that before the celestial tribunal not one superfluous word would be spoken in his case, Bontshe, as once upon earth, was frightened into silence. He was sure that it could only be a dream from which he would soon awake, or simply a mistake.

He was used to both. More than once, when he was still on earth, he had dreamed of picking up money from the floor. Veritable treasures were lying there!—and yet—when he awoke in the morning, he was more miserable and poorer than ever. More than once it had happened to him that someone in the street had smiled at him and spoken a kind word to him. But when he found out his mistake, the stranger

turned and spat out in disgust, full of contempt. "Just my luck," thought Bontshe, scarcely daring to raise his eyes, afraid lest the dream should disappear. He is trembling at the thought of suddenly waking up in some horrible cavern full of serpents and lizards. He is careful not to let the slightest sound escape his mouth, to stir or move a limb for fear of being recognized and hurled into the abyss. He trembles violently, and does not hear the compliments paid to him by the angels, nor does he notice how they are dancing around him. He pays no heed to the Patriarch's cordial "Peace be with you," nor does he even wish good-morning to the celestial court when he is at last brought in. He is simply beside himself with fear.

His fear increased greatly when his eyes involuntarily fell upon the flooring of the Supreme Court of Justice. It was of pure alabaster, inset with diamonds. "And my feet," thought Bontshe, "are treading such a floor!" He grew quite stiff. "Who knows," he thought, "what rich man, what Rabbi, what saint they are expecting? He will soon arrive and mine will be a sad end!"

Terror-stricken, he did not even hear the President of the Court call out in a loud voice: "The case of Bontshe the Silent!" He did not hear how, handing over a dossier to the counsel for the defence, he commanded: "Read, but briefly." All around Bontshe the whole hall seemed to be turning. A muffled noise reached his ears, but in the midst of the din he began to distinguish more clearly and sharply the voice of the angelic advocate—a voice as sweet as a violin:

"His name," the voice was saying, "suited him even as a gown made by an artist's hand suits a graceful body."

"What is he talking about?" Bontshe asks himself. And then he heard an impatient voice interrupting the speaker:

"No metaphors, please."

"Never," continues the advocate, "never has he uttered a complaint against God or men. Never has a spark of hatred flamed up in his eyes, never has he lifted his eyes with pretensions to heaven."

Again Bontshe fails to understand what it is all about, but once more the harsh voice interrupts the speaker:

"No rhetoric, please."

"Job succumbed, but Bontshe has suffered more than Job."

"Facts, dry facts, please," the President emphatically calls again.

"He was circumcised on the eighth day."

"Yes, yes, but no realism, please."

"The clumsy barber-surgeon could not stanch the blood——"

"Go on, go on."

"He was always silent," the advocate proceeds, "even when his mother died and at the age of thirteen there came a stepmother, a serpent, a wicked woman."

"Perhaps after all he means me," thinks Bontshe to himself.

"No insinuations, please, against third persons," angrily says the President.

"She used to begrudge him a piece of bread; threw him a few musty crusts three days old and a mouthful of tendons for meat, whilst she herself drank coffee with cream."

"Come to business!" cries the President.

"She never spared him her fingernails, blows, or cuffs, and through the holes of his miserable musty rags there peeped out the blue and black body of the child. Barefooted he used to chop wood for her in winter, in the biting frost. His hands were too young and too weak to wield the dull axe, and the blocks were too big. More than once did he sprain his wrists, more than once were his feet frozen, but he remained silent. He was silent even before his father——"

"Oh, yes, the drunkard," laughs the accusing attorney, and Bontshe feels cold all over.

"Even to his father he never complained," the advocate concludes.

"He was always miserable and alone, had no friends, no schooling, no religious instruction, no decent clothes and not a minute of respite."

"Facts, facts," the President once more interrupts.

"He was silent even later, when his own father, the worse for drink, seized him by the hair and threw him out of the house on a bitterly cold and snowy winter night. He picked himself up from the snow, without weeping, and ran whither his eyes carried him. He was silent during his lonely walk, and when the pangs of hunger began to torture him, he begged only with his eyes.

"On a wet and foggy spring night he reached a large town. He entered it like some drop of water that is falling into the ocean, but he nevertheless passed his first night in the police jail. He was silent, without asking the why or wherefore. Set

free, he started to look for work, for the hardest work possible; but he was silent. What was even harder than work itself, was the finding of it, and he was silent. He was always silent. Splashed by the mud thrown at him by strangers, spat upon by strangers, driven with his heavy load from the sidewalk into the midst of the road, among cabs, cars, coaches, and vehicles of every sort—at every instant looking death in the face, he remained silent. Bathed in a cold sweat, crushed under the heavy loads he was carrying, his stomach empty and tortured, he was silent.

"He never calculated how many pounds he was carrying for a farthing, how often he stumbled for a penny and how many errands he had to run, how many times he almost breathed his last when going to collect his pay. He was always silent. He never dared to raise his voice when asking for his pay, but like a beggar or a dog he stood at the door and his dumb and humble request could only be read in his eyes. 'Come later,' he was told, and he disappeared like a shadow until later, when he would ask even more quietly, nay *beg* for his due. He was silent even when people haggled for his pay, knocked off something from it, or slipped a counterfeit coin into his hand. He was always silent!"

"Then after all it is me that they mean," Bontshe consoles himself.

"One wonderful day Bontshe's fortune changed," proceeded the advocate, after taking a drink of water. "Two spirited, frightened, runaway horses were rushing by, dragging a rich coach with rubber wheels. With a broken skull the driver lay way back on the pavement. Foam was spurting from the mouths of the animals, sparks flew from their hoofs, and their eyes shone like glowing coals on a dark night. In the coach, there sat a man, more dead than alive. Bontshe stopped the runaway horses. The man whose life he had thus saved was a Jew; he proved to be of a charitable disposition and was grateful to Bontshe. He handed over to him the whip of his dead coachman, and Bontshe became a driver. The charitable man even found him a wife. He did more: he provided Bontshe with a child. And Bontshe always kept silent."

"They mean me; they mean me," thought Bontshe, strengthening himself in his belief; but nevertheless he dared not raise his eyes on the august tribunal. Still he listened to his angelic advocate.

"Bontshe was silent," continued the latter, "even when his

benefactor became bankrupt and neglected to pay Bontshe his wages. He was silent when his wife ran away from him, leaving him alone with an infant in arms. He was silent even fifteen years later, when the same child grew up till he was strong enough to throw the father out of his own house."

"They mean me; they mean me," Bontshe thinks joyfully.

"He was silent," continued the defending angel, as his voice grew still softer and more sad, "when his former benefactor paid all his creditors except Bontshe, to whom he did not give a penny. And when, riding again in his coach with rubber tires and with horses like lions, the benefactor one day ran him over, Bontshe still kept silent. He did not even tell the police. Even in the hospital where one is allowed to cry, he kept silent! He was silent even when the house physician refused to approach his bed unless he had paid him fifteen coppers, or when the attendant refused to change his bed linen unless he gave him five coppers.

"He was silent in his death agony, he was silent in his last hour. Never did he utter a word against God, never a word against man. I have spoken."

Bontshe began to tremble in his whole body. He knew that after the speech for the defence it was the turn of the prosecution. "What will the prosecuting counsel say now?" Bontshe did not remember his life. Down below he used to forget everything the moment it occurred. The angel advocate had recalled to his mind all his past. Who knows what the prosecuting angel will recall to his memory?

"Gentlemen judges," begins a strident, incisive, and stinging voice—but stops short.

"Gentlemen," he begins again, this time more softly, but once more he interrupts himself.

And at last, very soft, a voice issues from the throat of the accuser:

"Gentlemen judges! He was silent! I shall be silent too."

Profound silence fell over the assembly. Then from above a new soft, sweet, and trembling voice is heard:

"Bontshe, my child, Bontshe," said the voice, and it sounded like a harp; "Bontshe, my well-beloved child."

And Bontshe's heart begins to weep for joy. He would like to raise his eyes, but they are dimmed by tears. Never in his life had he felt such joy in weeping.

"My child, my well-beloved!" Since his mother's death he had never heard such a voice or such words.

"My child," continues the President of the Celestial Tribunal, "you have suffered everything in silence. There is not a limb in your body that is whole, not a bone that is intact, not a corner in your soul that is not bleeding—and you have always kept silent.

"Down below upon earth they never understood such things. You yourself were not aware of your power; you did not know that you could cry and that your cries would have caused the very walls of Jericho to tremble and tumble down. You yourself did not know what strength lay hidden in you. Down below your silence was not rewarded, but down below is the world of falsehood; whilst here in heaven in the world of truth, here you will reap your reward.

"The Supreme Tribunal will never pass sentence against you; it will never judge and condemn you, nor will it mete out to you such and such a reward. Everything here belongs to you; take whatever your heart desires."

For the first time Bontshe ventures to lift his eyes. He is dazzled by so much light and splendour. Everything is sparkling, everything around him is flashing, beams are issuing from all sides, and he droops his weary eyes once more.

"Really?" he asks, still doubting and embarrassed.

"Yes, really," replies the President of the Celestial Tribunal; "verily I tell you that it is so indeed, and that everything here is yours; everything in heaven belongs to you. All the brightness and the splendour you perceive is only the reflection of your own silent goodness of heart, the reflection of your own pure soul. You will only be drawing from your own source."

"Really?" Bontshe asks again, but this time his voice sounds more firm and assured.

"Certainly, certainly, certainly," he is assured on all sides.

"Then, if such is the case," says Bontshe with a happy smile, "I should like to have every morning a hot roll with fresh butter."

Abashed, angels and judges drooped their heads; whilst the accuser burst out into loud laughter.

### *The Fear of Death<sup>27</sup>*

RABBI SEORAM sat at the bedside of his brother Raba and saw that his eyes were closing in eternal sleep.

Raba said, "Brother, implore the Angel of Death not to cause me pain as he takes me away."

Rabbi Seoram answered, "Why do you ask me when you and the Angel of Death are such good friends?"

Raba sighed and said, "The Angel of Death has little respect for a dying man."

"In that case I will plead for you," answered Rabbi Seoram. "However, promise me that when you arrive in the next world you will appear to me in a dream and reveal to me the great secret of life and death."

When Raba died he kept his promise to his brother and appeared before him in a dream.

"Well, did you suffer any pains in the last moments of your life?" asked Rabbi Seoram.

"I felt no more pain than a man feels when a physician lets his blood."

It is also related that when Rabbi Nahman was at the point of death, Raba entered into a compact with him to reveal the great secret of life and death after he had passed away. Rabbi Nahman kept his word and appeared before him in a dream.

"Did you suffer any anguish?" asked Raba.

The spirit of the dead man answered, "The Angel of Death drew my soul away with as light a hand as one draws a hair out of a jug of milk. Nevertheless, I wish to assure you that, even if the Almighty were to order me back upon earth to live my life all over again, I would refuse because of my fear of death."

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## *Folk Tales*

### INTRODUCTION

The narrative art of Jewish folklore has the liveliness and color of all eastern storytelling. Jewish, Hindu and Arabic tales alike show ingenious plot invention; they use all the technical devices of suspense and the surprise ending with much skill. And yet there is a subtle difference that marks off Jewish tales and legends from the others. They are more cerebral, turned inward, as it were, and tirelessly pointing a moral for guidance of men.

This is the character of the didactic tales about *Alexander Mukdon* (Alexander the Macedonian). It is indeed surprising that Alexander the Great should have loomed so large and have been treated in such a favorable light by Jewish folklore. Historically speaking, he had but little personal contact with the Jewish people, except for a brief time during his whirlwind march through Palestine after subjugating Tyre in 332 B.C.

Cultural fusion was partly responsible for Alexander's popularity. Hellenism had been infiltrating steadily into Jewish life ever since the pre-Maccabean era, not only in Judea and Syria, but especially in Egypt where a great Jewish population of more than one million had developed a significant Graeco-Jewish culture by the Second Century B.C. Accordingly, Greek legends about Alexander found a wide and sympathetic acceptance among Hellenized Jews.

There was something in the personality of Alexander that readily appealed to the Jewish folk fancy. For one thing, his treatment of subjugated peoples was more humane and tolerant than that of other world conquerors; he also allowed the stream of Jewish life to flow on undisturbed so long as it did not resist his will to power during his brief world domination. Moreover, he was not only a military genius whose daring exploits filled mankind with astonishment, but he was a philosopher, personally educated by Aristotle for whom Jews always had the greatest reverence.

And it is precisely the intellectual side of Alexander that gave the unknown Talmudic narrators of the Alexander legends the necessary springboard for their moralizing. They depicted him as a confused but well-meaning ruler who showed more dash and insane drive to power than philosophical temper about which he was so inordinately proud.

The ethical question satirically raised in many of the Jewish Alexander stories was: how was it possible for a man claiming to be a philosopher to be so lacking in *chochma* and in virtue as to pursue such destructive and senseless ends as wars of conquest?

Many of the Alexander stories in the *Agada* and in later Jewish literature were derived from their well-known Greek originals, in Plutarch and in Callisthenes among others. Yet even these, in the transmuting process of Jewish didactic treatment, acquired a new character. The emphasis was transferred from the genius and splendor of the world-conqueror in Greek legend to his moral bankruptcy and to the vanity of vanities of strife and power, thus by contrast holding up to praise the gentle arts of peace and civilization.

The three Alexander legends included in this section are Jewish in origin, although *The Great Are Also Little* bears a similarity to a version by Callisthenes. *The Lord Helpeth Man and Beast*, which the English poet Coleridge adapted from the Talmud, was so popular that the Arab writer, Abu al Wafa ibn Fakih, included it in a work which was later translated into Latin by a Jew in 1053 under the title *Dicta Philosophorum*. This Latin version of the legend in turn was translated into English, Spanish and French, thus entering into the general legendary lore about Alexander during the Middle Ages, but without giving any indication of its Talmudic identity. A somewhat similar fate was in store for *The Acquisitive Eye*. It first appeared in the *Agada*, yet it entered into general folklore by means of the Twelfth Century compilation, *Alexandri Magni Iter ad Paradisum*. In this version, however, an old Jew, Pappas, is introduced to rebuke the insatiably acquisitive king.

N.A.

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### *The Great Are Also Little*<sup>28</sup>

NO MATTER how much he achieved in the world Alexander still remained dissatisfied.

"I would like to experience something most unusual, that no human being before me has ever experienced," he cried.

So he ordered his hunters to capture a number of eagles. He chose the largest among them and sat himself astride on

it. Then he speared a piece of flesh on his lance and raised it high.

As soon as the eagle smelled the flesh it rose up in the air, straining to reach it.

Purposely Alexander held the flesh out of the reach of the eagle who rose ever higher and higher into the air. Soon the towns and cities began to look like pin-points to the king.

Alexander was filled with vain-glory.

"Who can compare to me now?" he gloated. "I am now higher than all men; in my eyes now they look like insects!"

But suddenly fear gripped him. He thought: "If I am so high up how can people see me? Maybe I also look like a fly to them. Perhaps they don't see me at all, and if I am out of sight how can they do me honor? Soon they may even forget me!"

And all his pride burst, and his uniqueness seemed as nothing to him now.

And still the eagle kept soaring, farther and farther from the earth. Once more Alexander looked down and the earth now seemed to him like a little ball. The king grew frightened and he lowered his lance with the flesh on its point. Straining to reach it the eagle began to descend ever lower and lower. Soon objects became distinct, ever larger and larger, towns, trees and people. And the nearer he came people grew bigger and bigger to his eyes. And Alexander rejoiced and derived the right moral from it.

When he reached the ground again, he ordered a sculptor to fashion a portrait of him holding a small sphere in his hand.

"Let people know," spoke the king, "that even the mighty Alexander can look as insignificant as this tiny sphere."

### *The Lord Helpeth Man and Beast<sup>29</sup>*

DURING his march to conquer the world, Alexander, the Macedonian, came to a people in Africa who dwelt in a remote and secluded corner in peaceful huts, and knew neither war nor conqueror.

They led him to the hut of their chief, who received him hospitably and placed before him golden dates, golden figs, and bread of gold.

"Do you eat gold in this country?" said Alexander.

"I take it for granted," replied the chief, "that thou wert

able to find eatable food in thine own country. For what reason, then, art thou come amongst us?"

"Your gold has not tempted me hither," said Alexander, "but I would become acquainted with your manners and customs."

"So be it," rejoined the other. "Sojourn among us as long as it pleaseth thee."

At the close of this conversation two citizens entered, as to their court of justice.

The plaintiff said: "I bought of this man a piece of land and as I was making a deep drain through it, I found a treasure. This is not mine, for I only bargained for the land, and not for any treasure that might be concealed beneath it; and yet the former owner of the land will not receive it."

The defendant answered: "I hope I have a conscience, as well as my fellow-citizen. I sold him the land with all its contingent, as well as existing advantages, and consequently the treasure inclusively."

The chief, who was at the same time their supreme judge, recapitulated their words, in order that the parties might see whether or not he understood them aright. Then, after some reflection, he said, "Thou hast a son, friend, I believe?"

"Yes."

"And thou," addressing the other, "a daughter?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, let thy son marry *thy* daughter, and bestow the treasure on the young couple for a marriage portion."

Alexander seemed surprised and perplexed.

"You think my sentence unjust?" the chief asked him.

"O no!" replied Alexander. "But it astonishes me."

"And how, then," rejoined the chief, "would the case have been decided in your country?"

"To confess the truth," said Alexander, "we should have taken both parties into custody and have seized the treasure for the king's use."

"For the king's use!" exclaimed the chief. "Does the sun shine on your country?"

"Oh yes!"

"Does it rain there?"

"Assuredly."

"Wonderful! But are there tame animals in the country, that live on the grass and green herbs?"

"Very many and of many kinds."

"Aye, that must then be the cause," said the chief. "For the sake of those innocent animals the all-gracious Being continues to let the sun shine and the rain drop down on your own country, since its inhabitants are unworthy of such blessings."

### *The Acquisitive Eye<sup>80</sup>*

AFTER he had conquered the entire world, Alexander started back on his journey home to Macedonia. On the way he came to a stream. He dismounted and, taking out some salted fish he carried in his knapsack, he began to rinse them in the water before eating. At this a remarkable thing happened: upon touching the water the fish became alive.

Filled with amazement, Alexander threw himself into the stream and bathed in it.

"Now I understand," he cried overjoyed, "that the water in the stream flows from Paradise! I will wash my face quickly in it and then I'll follow the stream, for it's sure to lead me to Paradise."

Barely had he finished washing his face when his eyes began to shine like stars, his face became radiant, his energies renewed. Never before had he felt so happy. Quickly he went up to the Gates of Paradise, but he found them closed.

"Open up, Gates!" he cried out. "Alexander wants to enter!"

Instantly the answer came: "These are the Gates of the Eternal. Only the pious may enter here."

Seeing that the Gates would not open for him, he implored, "Give me some kind of token, O Heavenly Gates, so I can prove that I've been here."

At this the Gates of Paradise relented and opened for an instant. A human eye then rolled towards him. Amazed, Alexander picked it up and placed it in his knapsack. Then he made his way home to Macedonia.

No sooner had he reached home when he called all his wise men together. He told them everything that had happened to him.

"What signifies the strange gift I received?" he asked.

"O King," replied the wise men, "place the eye in the scales and weigh it."

"What for?" asked Alexander. "I can tell you beforehand that it weighs but little."

"Do it just the same!" the wise men urged. "In the other half of the scales place a gold piece. Then we will find out which is heavier."

Alexander did as they asked. To his surprise he found that the eye was heavier than the gold piece. He threw into the scales another gold coin—still the eye was heavier. He then threw in a whole handful of coins and ordered that all his gold and silver and jewels be thrown in. Still the eye outweighed the treasure.

"Even were you to take all your chariots and horses and palaces and place them in the scales, the eye will still be heavier," said the wise men.

"How do you explain this?" asked the king. "How is such a thing possible?"

"Learn a lesson from this, O King," said the wise man. "Know that the human eye is never satisfied with what it sees. No matter how much treasure you will show it, it will want more and still more."

"Your explanation doesn't satisfy me. Give me proof," insisted Alexander.

"Very well," agreed the wise men. "Have all your gold and treasure removed from the scales. Then place a pinch of dust in their place and observe what happens."

Barely had Alexander placed a little dust in the scales when they tipped to the other end, for the dust proved heavier than the eye.

"Now I understand the meaning of your words and of what was in your minds!" cried Alexander. "So long as a man is alive, his eye is never sated, but no sooner does he die when he is as dust! Then his eye loses its impulse and becomes powerless. It can no longer desire."

### *The Power of Hope<sup>81</sup>*

A KING was betrothed, and soon after he set forth on a long journey.

Days, months and years passed, without any word from him.

His intended waited for him sorrowfully but without abandoning hope for his return.

The girl's companions then said with pretended compassion and spiteful glee, "Poor girl! It seems your love has forgotten all about you and will never come back."

Disconsolate and stung by their gibes, the girl wrapped herself in her grief and wept much when she was alone. . . .

She then picked up the last letter the king had sent her, in which he swore that he would ever remain true and faithful to her. Rereading it her heart once more became serene, her spirits lifted and she continued to wait patiently for his return.

After many years the king came home. Amazed, he asked his intended, "How was it possible for you to remain faithful to me so long?"

"My King," she answered rejoicing, "I had your letter and I believed in you."

And thus too it has been with Israel and the nations of the earth. These say mockingly to the Jews, "Your God has abandoned you."

Israel, thereupon, yields himself to solitude. Sad and lamenting he reads in the godly pages of the Torah the sacred promise of redemption, consoles himself and derives new strength from it.

When the day of redemption comes God will surely turn His face to the abandoned and will ask, "How could you have remained true to me for so long?"

And Israel will answer, "Your commandment was your pledge to me."

### *The Test of a True Friend*<sup>82</sup>

WHEN the time came for Arvas, the philosopher, to die he called his son to his bedside and asked, "Tell me, my son, how many friends have you made in your life?"

"I have about a hundred friends," answered the son proudly.

"Whatever you do," Arvas admonished his son, "don't believe a man is your friend until you've proved him. Reflect that I, who am so much older than you, have found only half a friend in all my life. Isn't it rash of you to say that you have a hundred? Therefore, my son, go and prove your friends and find out if you have one real friend among them!"

"How shall I prove them?" the son asked.

Then Arvas instructed his son: "Slaughter a calf. Cut it up in pieces and put them in a sack. Also, dip the sack itself in blood. Then carry it to one of your friends and say to him:

'Dear friend, help me, I implore you! I've just killed a man! Please bury him in your yard and nobody need ever know about it! In this way you will save me from disaster.'"

The son did as his father counselled, and, bringing the sack to a friend, he pleaded with him to help conceal it.

His friend replied, "Remove that carcass from my house and be off with you! Bury it elsewhere yourself, and suffer the consequences of your crime! Furthermore, never darken my threshold again!"

The son went to a second friend and to a third, and even to the very last, the hundredth one! And each one drove him away. He then returned to his father and told him all that had happened.

"There is nothing unusual in your experience," his father comforted him. "When a man prospers, his friends are numerous, and when he falls on evil days they vanish like the mist. Therefore, my son, do as I now bid you. Go and call on that man who I have told you is only half a friend of mine and hear what his answer is."

The son went to call on his father's "half-friend." He begged him to bury the bloody sack secretly. His father's "half-friend" answered, "Come quickly into the house so that the neighbors won't see you!"

He also sent away his wife and children and, when they were alone, he began to dig a grave in his yard. When the grave was dug the son of Arvas the philosopher revealed the true contents of his sack.

"I came only to prove you as a friend of my father, and I know now that you are a true friend!" he cried.

The son then returned to his father and told him of the loving kindness his "half-friend" had shown him.

"But tell me, father," he asked, "do you think there is anybody in the world lucky enough to have a 'whole' friend?"

"I have never in my life seen a 'whole' friend," his father answered, "but I've heard a story about one."

"Tell me about it," begged the son.

His father then told him this story of true friendship.

"Once there were two young merchants: one lived in Egypt, the other in Babylon. They had never met but they knew of each other through the reports of travellers. They also sent each other merchandise with messengers.

"Once the merchant who lived in Babylon went to Egypt with a caravan of merchandise. When the Egyptian merchant

heard that his friend was coming he hurried out to welcome him, embraced him, and brought him to his home. He showed him all his treasure, and had all of his men-servants and women-servants wait upon him.

"On the eighth day of his stay the merchant of Babylon fell ill. His anxious friend then called the most eminent physicians of Egypt to examine the sick man. They examined him thoroughly, but they found no sign of illness. So they deduced that he was love-sick.

"Tell me, who is the woman you love?" his friend asked.

"Call all the women of your household and I will point out to you the woman my heart desires."

"The merchant of Egypt showed him all his female servants, but the sick man answered, 'No, she is not among them.'

"Then the Egyptian showed him a young girl, an orphan, whom he himself had raised and whom he had planned to marry because he was without a wife.

"When the sick man saw her he exclaimed, 'Behold! This girl holds the power of life and death over me!'

"When the Egyptian heard this he said to his friend, 'Take her and may she be a good wife to you!'

"He gave the bride a dowry and many gifts. Soon after the sick man became well again and journeyed back to Babylon with his bride.

"Years later the wheel of fortune turned, and the merchant of Egypt lost all his possessions and became destitute. In his despair he thought of his friend and said to himself, 'I will go to my friend in Babylon, for he will surely help me.'

"When he arrived in Babylon the merchant of Egypt was footsore from his long journey. His shoes were torn and his garments were in tatters. He trembled for fear that his friend would not recognize him, and that the servants would drive him away as a mere beggar.

"He spent the first night in an abandoned house at the city's outskirts. As he looked out on the street he saw two men quarreling. One of the two drew a knife and stabbed the other to death, and then ran away.

"A multitude soon gathered and began to hunt for the murderer. When they entered the abandoned house they found there the merchant from Egypt.

"Do you know who murdered this man?" they asked him.

"Now the destitute man felt sick of life and the thought of

death appeared sweet by comparison. So he cried, 'I am the murderer!'

"Thereupon, they took him and cast him into a dungeon. The next morning the judges sentenced him to be hanged.

"All the inhabitants of the city came to watch the execution. Among them was his friend, the merchant from Babylon, who recognized him.

"'You are hanging an innocent man!' he cried out to the judges. 'Know that not he but I am the murderer!'

"The judges then ordered the stranger released and substituted the merchant of Babylon for him on the scaffold.

"Now among the great multitude gathered around the scaffold stood the real murderer. The spectacle of such true devotion between two friends stirred him deeply.

"He said to himself, 'If I permit an innocent man to die for my crime I shall receive a terrible punishment in the next world!'

"So he cried to the judges, 'Release this man! Neither he nor his friend has committed this murder. The first took upon himself the blame because he found life insufferable. The other took upon himself the blame because of true friendship for the first. Know that I am the real murderer! Hang me and do justice!'"

### *Each Man to His Paradise<sup>83</sup>*

ONCE there was a scholar who was pious and upright, but he had a father who drank much wine. In fact, he drank so much that he used to roll in the gutter like a common sot. At this the street urchins would throw mud and stones at him. The good son felt great shame seeing his father's degradation, for he loved him. There were times when he even prayed for death.

One day the son said, "Father, I beg of you—don't go to the wine-house anymore because you bring only disgrace on yourself and me. I promise you instead that I will buy you the very finest wines obtainable—only do your drinking at home."

After much pleading the father finally agreed to his son's plan.

Every day thereafter the good son furnished his father with drink, then put him to bed himself and stayed at his side until he fell asleep.

One day it began to rain hard. The son went to the synagogue, and on his way he saw a drunkard lying in the gutter, drenched to the skin. Around him swarmed little street urchins pelting him with stones and mud. When the good son saw this he thought to himself: "I will go and bring my father here. When he sees this drunkard lying in the mud and being abused by these ragamuffins, shame will overcome him and he may give up drinking."

So the son went home to fetch his father, and then brought him to the spot where the drunkard lay.

For a moment the old man regarded the prostrate man, then he bent down to him and whispered, "Do tell me, brother, in which wine-house did you buy such wonderful drink to get you so good and drunk?"

"I didn't call you here for that," the son rebuked him bitterly. "I just wanted to show you what a disgraceful appearance a sot has, and you look the same way when you get drunk. So I beg you to take this to heart and give up going to the wine-house."

"My son," exclaimed the father, "I swear by my life that for me there is no greater pleasure than drink, and the wine-house is my Paradise! So do let me be!"

Hearing these words, the good and pious son turned sadly away, for he knew that all his efforts to reform his father were in vain.

#### *Pope Elhanan<sup>34</sup>*

RABBI SIMEON the Great dwelt in the city of Mayence, which is on the banks of the River Rhine, and he had three mirrors hanging up in his house, by which he perceived all that had happened and that which would happen; and after his death a fountain sprang forth from the head of his grave.

This Rabbi Simeon was a very eminent man, and he had a little son whose name was Elhanan. And it happened on one Sabbath day that the attendant came in to light the stove, as was her custom on every Sabbath, and she saw that R. Simeon and his wife were not at home, for they had gone to the Synagogue to pray; only the servant of the house was left with the child. Then the attendant took up the child in her arms and went out with it. The servant of the house saw what was done, but she never suspected that any evil was intended; for she said to herself, she is only playing with the

child, and will soon return and bring him back to the house. But the traitress never returned; for she took the child off at once, and placed it within the new covenant. And she congratulated herself that she had brought a good offering for acceptance before God, according to the notion of all the Christians in those days. When R. Simeon and his wife returned from the Synagogue, they did not find even their own maid-servant in the house, for when she saw that the attendant delayed to bring back the child, she went out to look for her and to follow her. But she found her not; therefore she returned to the house of R. Simeon in great distress, crying and lamenting greatly. R. Simeon said to her, "What is all this lamentation? Tell me what has happened." She answered, "Sir Rabbi, the attendant, who lights the fire on the Sabbath day, has come and stolen away your son and fled, and I do not know where she has hidden herself with him." Then R. Simeon hastened and went out, he and his wife and the maid-servant, and they sought and searched, but in vain, for the child was not to be found. Then the parents broke out into weeping and bitter lamentation, and cried out in the terrible anguish of their heart. After this R. Simeon fasted to afflict himself day and night, and prayed to the Lord that He would restore his son; but his prayer returned empty, for the Lord refused to reveal to him where the child was.

The child was taken to the priests, who brought him up and instructed him, and he became a great scholar, for his capacity was large, like the capacity of his father R. Simeon. And the boy went on and rose from one school to another, rising higher and higher, until his wisdom became exceedingly great, and he repaired to Rome. There he learned, in addition, many languages, and made a reputation for himself, and rose continually in position, until at last he attained the rank of Cardinal. His name went out into all the earth, and all men spoke in his honour, and exalted him in their sayings exceedingly for his learning, his grace, and his conduct in the priesthood.

At that time the Pope died, and no Cardinal was found so wise and learned as this new Cardinal to fill the place of the deceased. So they elected him, and placed him on the throne of the Popes. Now the new Pope had long been aware that he had sprung from the stock of Judah, and that his father was R. Simeon the Great, of Mayence. And though, when enjoying all prosperity and highly esteemed among the nations,

his heart would not allow him to leave all this honour and to return to his father, and his people, and his religion, yet now that he was raised to the head of all Christians, he longed greatly to see the face of his father, and his heart prompted him to bring his father to Rome by stratagem. So he wrote a letter to the Bishop of Mayence—for all the governors were subordinated to him—and commanded him that he should not permit the Jews to keep their holy Sabbath, nor to initiate their sons in the covenant, nor to observe the customary lustrations. The Pope reasoned thus: When the Jews hear this, and when fear and consternation fall upon them, they will hasten to send the chief men among them to entreat me to rescind my severe decree against them; and there can be no doubt that they will send my father at the head of the delegates. So he calculated from the first, and so it actually happened. When the Pope's letter reached the Bishop he summoned the Jews and commanded them on the authority of the Pope according to all that had been decreed against them, and required implicit obedience. Then the Jews were in great trouble, and entreated the Bishop to turn away this great calamity from them. But he answered and said, "Do not address your supplications to me, for it is not in my power to aid you. Here is the Pope's letter: read it and see that I am unable to protect you. But if it be in your minds to ask for indulgence, this is my advice to you: send learned and respected men from among you to the Pope at Rome, and let them present your supplication to him; perhaps he will be entreated by you, and remit this severe decree." Then the Jews of Mayence approached the Lord with repentance, and prayer, and alms; after which they chose two Rabbis, together with R. Simeon the Great, who was to be the chief of the delegation, to go to Rome; for they said, "Perhaps the Lord will do a great work for us, and turn the heart of the Pope to us for good." In the meantime they followed the precepts of their religion and did not conform to the decree; for thus the Bishop allowed them to do secretly and in privacy until the return of the delegates. The three who were chosen set forth on their journey and came to Rome, where they conferred with the Jews as to what was to be done in this most evil business. When the Jews of Rome heard the story, they were greatly astonished, and said, "Who would have believed such a thing? There never yet was a Pope so kind to the Jews as this Pope; he always associates with Jews; they

are his intimates and his councillors; besides which they continually play with him at the game of chess; in short, he does not live without them. How is it that his heart has suddenly been changed to hatred of them?" They said, moreover, they did not believe that the decree emanated from the Pope, and declared that the Bishop must have invented it himself to injure the Jews of Mayence. Then R. Simeon the Great showed them the letter which the Pope had sent, and his seal that was upon it. When the Jews of Rome saw this, and knew that the thing was true, they said, "It must be that the anger of the Lord was kindled against you, so that He moved the Pope to make this decree against you." Then they also appointed a fast, and multiplied their prayers and works of charity. And the wardens of the congregation of Rome went to the Cardinal, the chief Minister of the Pope, and entreated him for the Jews of Mayence. But the Cardinal said, "You know that this letter is the Pope's letter, and that he sent it to the Bishop of Mayence; and what am I? What can I do for you? I can be of no use to you." Yet he promised them that he would be among the supporters of their petition, and that he would speak in their favour, as a good intercessor. He bade them prepare a letter of petition, and said that he would present this written petition to the Pope; and they did so.

When the petition reached the hand of the Pope, and he read it, and knew who the delegates were that had come from Mayence, he gave orders that they should be admitted to his presence. Then R. Simeon the Great, with the two Rabbis who had been associated with him, came to the Chief Cardinal, who informed the Pope that the Jews had come according to his command, and that they desired to appear before him and have a personal interview. The Pope answered, "Let him who is the chief of the three come in and stand in my presence by himself." Accordingly R. Simeon, who was the chief and the elder of his two companions, came in, and his aspect was like an angel; and when he appeared before the Pope he knelt down and made obeisance. The Pope was then sitting and playing at the game of chess with a Cardinal, who sat opposite to him. When he saw R. Simeon the Great he trembled greatly, and bade him rise from his knees and sit on a chair until he had finished the game. For he had recognised his father the moment he appeared; but his father did not recognise him. When the Pope had finished his game he turned to R. Simeon and said to him, "What is thy petition?"

R. Simeon wept bitterly, and told the Pope his petition, and would have prostrated himself a second time, but the Pope would not permit him, and said to him, "I have duly heard thy request, and thy supplication has come to my ears; but many accusations against you came to me from Mayence; for this reason I issued the decree against you." In the course of the conversation the Pope began to discuss with R. Simeon in great argumentation, and R. Simeon was almost at a loss for a reply to one who questioned him with so great acumen. And he wondered much to see the great capacity of an alien, which would not be believed if it were reported. Half the day they sat and discussed. At last the Pope said, "My friend, I see that thou art a great scholar, and thy brethren who sent thee shall not be disappointed in the hope which they placed in thy eloquence. Behold, the Jews come to me every day to play chess with me; do thou also sit down with me and let us play once, and thy request shall not be left unheeded." Now R. Simeon was a wonderful player at this game, such that there was not to be found one like him in all the land. Notwithstanding this, the Pope beat him, at which R. Simeon wondered greatly. Then they returned to the discussion of religions, and R. Simeon heard from the mouth of the Pope things great and wonderful, and the Pope became a prodigy in his eyes. In the end R. Simeon renewed his petition and wept greatly. Then said the Pope, "Let all who are present go out from me." They went out, and the Pope then fell on the neck of R. Simeon and wept, and said to him, "My beloved father, do you not recognise me?" R. Simeon understood not what the words of the Pope meant, and he answered, "Whence should I have the honour to recognise your Holiness?" But the Pope continued, "My beloved father, did you not in your early days lose your son when he was yet a child?" R. Simeon was greatly troubled, and answered, "It was as you say." Then the Pope made himself known to him and cried, "I, I am he, that son of yours, whom the attendant stole away on the Sabbath day. I cannot tell through what sin this calamity came upon you; but I know and am convinced that the matter was from the Lord. And because I desired to see your face and disclose all this to you, since I had resolved in my heart to leave my new religion and to return to the God of my fathers, therefore I made this decree as a trick, since I knew from the first that the Jews would send you to request me to remove this persecution from them. And now I

abrogate the decree, and you shall be left in peace. But, my father, will you not tell me, is there any hope for the future of expiation in the sight of God?" R. Simeon answered, "My dear son, dispel this anxiety from your heart, since you acted under restraint, and while yet a child were stolen away from your parents and your religion." "But yet," answered the son, "I knew long since that I was born a Jew, yet I remained among the nations, and the great prosperity which I enjoyed restrained me from returning to the God of truth. Will God forgive me?" R. Simeon answered, "Nothing can withstand repentance: he that makes confession and quitteth sin shall receive mercy." Then said the son, "In that case return home in peace, in the name of the God of Israel, and deliver to the Bishop the letter which I shall give you, and he shall leave you alone. Let no one know anything of our conversation, and after no long time I will come to you to Mayence. But before I leave my place and my office I will do something for a memorial, and leave it after me for the good of the Jews."

R. Simeon returned to his companions and to the Jews of Rome, and showed them the letter of the Pope, abrogating the decree, and they rejoiced greatly. After that he returned to his city, and delivered the letter to the Bishop; and there was joy and gladness among the Jews in all the city. He disclosed to his wife the secret that their lost son was Pope, and when she heard the news she raised a great lamentation, and would not be comforted. But R. Simeon said to her, "Be quiet, and grieve not, for in a short time our son will be in our house."

The Pope composed a book containing heresy with regard to the faith, and left it to be preserved carefully, and instituted a rule that all the Popes should read it. Then he collected great treasure, and made his escape secretly, and came to Mayence, and returned to the God of Israel in truth and sincerity, and became a Jew greatly respected in the eyes of all the people. And at Rome no one could tell whither he had gone, or what had become of him.

On this subject R. Simeon wrote a *Yotzer* for the second day of *Rosh-hashanah*, in which he said, "God has shown favour (*El chanan*) to his inheritance."

Therefore, let no reader think that the words of this narrative are false and vain, for they are truthful and right, there is no falsehood in them.

But many say that it was by the game of chess that R. Si-

meon discovered the Pope to be of the seed of the Jews, because the Pope played as his father had taught him when yet a child, when he began to learn this game.

The Lord pardon us our transgressions, through the merit of R. Simeon the Great. Amen. Selah.

### *Caught in His Own Trap<sup>35</sup>*

IN A certain Polish village there lived a Jewish tenant-farmer. He was a plain man, had no learning, but he made up for it in piety and in good deeds. His father before him had worked the same little farm, and the landowner, a friendly old man, had lived on good terms with both father and son. Also the peasants of the countryside liked this upright tiller of the soil. They entrusted him with many of their affairs. When he went to town, which was often, they had him make purchases for them there.

One day a young nobleman arrived in the village. He had wasted his patrimony in wine, women, song and card-playing. Now he found himself without any means. Therefore, he fell upon the idea of displacing the Jew on his farm and to work it himself.

"It will be an easy matter to get rid of him," he told himself. "After all, he's a Jew and am I not a nobleman?"

But things didn't go as easily as he had expected. The landowner explained to him that he had no right to consider his proposal. Hadn't the Jew taken over the farm from his father? He paid his rent on time and in full. Why then should he take his farm away from him and leave him without bread? What the landowner didn't tell the nobleman was that he did not trust him, for he saw that he was lightheaded and irresponsible.

But the young nobleman didn't give up so easily. At first he tried to reach his goal in a friendly way by asking the Jew to leave the farm out of his own free will. When he saw that the Jew was stubborn and refused to oblige him, he began to threaten him with direst misfortunes. What wouldn't he do to him? He'd incite the peasants against him; that wouldn't be too hard. Wasn't he a Jew? He'd inform the authorities that certain things were not in order. He'd induce the village priest to forbid the peasants from having any dealings with him. And a lot of other things.

But all these threats had no effect. The Jew did not allow

himself to be intimidated. On the contrary, he went about telling everybody in the village of the nobleman's threats. Thereupon, both the peasants and the priest assured him that they would ignore the rascal.

Foiled in this the nobleman conceived a devilish plan. One day, as the Jew was on his way to town in his wagon, his enemy, by means of money, drink and wheedling, induced several peasant youths to wait in ambush for him in the forest through which he had to pass.

Unaware of the danger that awaited him the Jew got through with all his business in town and, as dusk descended, he started on his journey home.

The sky was overcast and it rained steadily. By the time the Jew reached the forest, night had descended. He allowed his horses free rein for he could not see one step ahead of him. Then an uneasiness fell on him. To drive away the gloom he began to recite the psalm:

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.

"Therefore we will not fear, though all the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

He repeated this psalm over and over again, yet the forest continued to stretch ominous and black all around him. The horses seemed to have lost their way and wandered aimlessly in the dark.

The Jew's uneasiness grew steadily. With increasing verve he chanted the psalm, ever louder, in order to still his fear. A thing like this had never happened to him before in his life. Times without number his horses had crossed the entire length of the forest, one could say almost blindfolded, so well they knew the way. How could he now explain the fact that they had lost their way?

At last the dawn broke. The Jew at last saw where he was and found the road back to his farm.

The young nobleman waited impatiently for the return of the peasants he had engaged to waylay the Jew. Hour after hour passed but no sign of them. When midnight came and still he had not heard from them he grew very uneasy. The devil alone knew what had happened! Who could tell—maybe the Jew had stood up to the peasants and got the better of them. Worse yet, he could have gone and revealed

everything to the authorities. Again, it was even conceivable that these rogues of peasants had betrayed him.

Stung to a frenzy by these thoughts he got a horse and wagon and galloped off into the woods.

A thick darkness, like that which fell on Egypt under Pharaoh, lay all about him. He couldn't find his way. Suddenly, he felt a rain of blows descending on him. Several dark figures had leaped upon him, gave him even no time to cry out. They belabored him so lustily that he lost his voice. When his attackers finally wearied of their exertions, he managed to find his tongue. It was then that they realized their mistake.

When the Jew finally reached home he found that all in the village had already heard what had happened and were splitting their sides laughing. The young nobleman was taken to a hospital. After that he didn't dare show his face in the village for fear of being laughed at.

### *The Three Daughters, or the Evil of Tale Bearing<sup>26</sup>*

ONCE upon a time there lived a pious man, who had three daughters. The first one was a thief, the second was a sluggard and the third was a liar who never spoke the truth and who slandered people whenever she had an opportunity. One day a pious man, who had three sons, came to the city and said: "You have three daughters and I have three sons. Let us make a match between them." But the father of the girls said: "Let me alone. My daughters are not good enough for your sons, for each one has a vice." The father of the boys asked: "What are their vices?" And the other replied: "One is a thief, the second is a sluggard, and the third is a liar." The father of the boys asked: "Have they no other vices than these? If so I will cure them. Leave it to me." So they were betrothed, and he took the damsels with him and married them to his sons.

As soon as the weddings were over, he gave to the thief the keys to all his money and satisfied her greed so that she had no reason to steal. To the second he gave menservants and maidservants in plenty so that she should have nothing to do. And as to the third, he fulfilled all her wishes, so that she should not tell lies or slander anybody. And whenever the father-in-law left her house, he embraced and kissed her, for he hoped that by being good to her he would cure her of her evil quality and she would not carry on slander any more.

One day the father came to see how his daughters were getting on. So he went to the first one and asked her how she was getting along with her husband, and how she was treated by her parents-in-law. She replied: "I thank you so much, father, for having given me in marriage to this man, for I have everything that my heart desires. And moreover, I have all the keys in my hand so that I do not have to steal." Then he went to the sluggard and asked her how she was getting on. And she also said: "I am so thankful to you, father, for having brought me here, for I need not lift a hand, I have men-servants and maid-servants in plenty, and my husband and parents-in-law all treat me very well." Then he came to the daughter who told lies to ask her how she was getting along, and she said: "You are a fine father! I thought you gave me one husband but it seems you gave me two, the father and the son. For no sooner does my husband leave the house than my father-in-law comes in and kisses me and hugs me and wants me to do his will. Dear father, if you do not believe it, come tomorrow morning and you will see it is true."

Next morning the father came and she put him in a room where he could see what was going on. Her father-in-law came as usual and kissed her and embraced her and said to her: "My dear daughter-in-law, how are you getting on? Is there anything you want?" He did all this with the good intention of curing her of her vice, but her father who saw it, grew furious and rushed out of his chamber and killed him. Then he tried to get away, but when her two brothers-in-law came home and found their father lying dead, they killed their father-in-law. Then the slanderer began to shout: "Murder! Murder!" and they understood it was through her that the tragedy had occurred. So they killed her too, and thus through slander three persons lost their lives. Therefore did Rabbi Huna say: "The sin of the evil tongue is greater than the three sins, murder, adultery and theft, combined."

### *The Faithful Neighbor<sup>87</sup>*

IN THE year 1311 King Philip of France issued a decree ordering all Jews, under penalty of death, to be gone from his kingdom within two days. But the unfortunate Jews were unable to sell their houses, fields, and household goods in such a short time. So they wandered forth without a *perutah* and empty-handed.

One of the exiles, a wealthy dealer in precious stones and jewels who was from Paris, greatly feared that his money and jewels would be taken from him, so he confided them to the care of one of his Christian neighbors. He thought: "Some day the king's decree against the Jews may be revoked. When that will happen I'll return and claim my treasure."

The Christian promised to guard well the money and the jewels, and so the Jew wandered forth together with all his brethren to seek an unknown refuge in the wide world.

Many years later King Philip died and his son, who inherited his throne, revoked his father's decree. He let it be known that the Jews who had been banished from the kingdom could safely return. And so the exiles returned, among them the dealer of precious gems from Paris.

The first thing the jeweller did was to call on his old neighbor to whom he had entrusted his treasure. But alas—the man was gone!

The Jew then inquired about the man among his neighbors. He learned that in recent years he had fared very badly, had lost all his possessions, and was obliged to give up his fine house. Now he was living outside the city in great poverty.

Hearing this the Jew began to grieve. He was sure of one thing: if his neighbor had lost everything he must have parted with the treasure he had entrusted to him.

Downcast, he went to look for the man outside of the city of Paris. He found him in a tiny bare hut that had neither bed nor bench. The unfortunate man was sitting on a chest, emaciated from hunger and trembling with cold.

When he saw the Jew he arose and greeted him. Then he opened the chest and drew forth a bag from it.

"Here is your treasure," he said. "I have guarded it well."

"How could you have done a thing like that?" cried the Jew taken aback. "You were cold and hungry and yet you did not touch these things!"

"How could I touch that which wasn't mine?" replied the Christian. "Many a time I grew weary of life and thought of death, for my suffering was too grievous to be endured. But I dared not die. Had I not faithfully promised to guard the treasure you placed in my care? I suffered and waited. It is good that you have returned now."

When the Jew heard this he was mightily moved.

"How fortunate that you waited and did not take your life," he said. "Know that the hard evil days are over for

you! You are my brother and half of my possessions belong to you."

So the Jew and his Christian neighbor lived side by side as of yore, in everlasting friendship and brotherly love.

### *King Ptolemy and the Seventy Wise Jews*

As PTOLEMY, the King of Egypt, heard that the Jews possessed an excellent Law he decided to have a Greek translation made of it. He therefore ordered the artificers of his kingdom to fashion for him a golden table, two golden and two silver jugs, as well as two golden chalices. They were also to beat figures on them in relief and to set them with five thousand gems. These vessels the king ordered to be placed in a chest and wrote to the High Priest in Jerusalem the following letter.

"Ptolemy, King of Egypt, sends Eleazer, the High Priest, peace!

"As I have heard that you Jews possess an excellent Law I therefore beg you to send to me seventy of your wise men who understand the Torah, in order that they may translate it for me into the Greek tongue. In gratitude for your friendly consideration, please accept the gifts that I am sending you with my servant Aristeas."

When the High Priest received the letter and presents from Aristeas he rejoiced exceedingly and said to him, "I beg you to remain here for several days while I choose the seventy wise men who are to return with you to Egypt."

In the meantime Aristeas went about Jerusalem viewing its sights. He was present at the service in the Temple when the priests officiated. And about that he wrote a long letter to Ptolemy.

First he informed the king of what the High Priest had said. He described to him with fidelity the appearance of the Holy City and of the Temple. He then added, "After the High Priest had selected the seventy wise men he summoned me and introduced me to them.

"'Listen to them,' he begged, 'do everything they ask you. After they are through with their translation let not the King detain them any longer.'

"When I had promised this to the High Priest, he continued, 'If I did not consider the blessings that the translation of the Torah can bring, I would not permit these sages to depart

from here. My soul hangs on theirs and only with the greatest reluctance do we part from each other.' "

When everything was ready for their departure, the sages and Aristeas bid the High Priest farewell and journeyed to Alexandria.

Upon their arrival there the wise men immediately went to the king. They greeted him and gave him their blessings.

"Have you brought along with you a Torah-scroll?" he asked.

"Here it is," they answered.

They then took a scroll of the Torah out of a chest and unrolled it for the king.

With amazement and awe Ptolemy regarded it. He blessed the seventy sages and also the High Priest and bowed before them seven times. He asked the sages to be seated, clasped the hand of each, and said, "Today is the happiest day of my life. I will never forget it!"

He ordered that a magnificent banquet be prepared. To it he invited all the princes and the great men of the kingdom.

Because they were strangers, the Jewish sages sat apart, for that was the custom in Egypt. Before they sat down to eat one of the sages arose and prayed.

"Eternal Father—bless King Ptolemy and may everything that he undertakes meet with success. Bless also his wife, his children and his friends."

"Amen!" cried the other sages.

Then the king put questions to the Jewish sages in order that he might test their wisdom. Among the questions he asked and the answers he got were these:

"When can a king's rule be successful?"

"When he serves God, rewards the good and punishes the wicked," the sages replied.

"How can a man increase his possessions?"

"By giving to the poor."

"How should a ruler punish those who slander him?"

"By being merciful and patient with them."

"How can a ruler triumph over his enemies?"

"By striving for peace, by relying always on God and not upon his army."

"How can a ruler put fear into the hearts of his enemies?"

"By having his army ready, but always being discreet in using it."

"How should a man behave in misfortune?"

"He should pray to God and put his trust in Him. He should also reflect that there isn't a man on earth who doesn't meet with misfortune sometime."

"When do we reveal our true strength of character?"

"In misfortune."

"How can we always remain truthful?"

"We must reflect how disgraceful lying is."

"How can a man develop patience?"

"He must reflect that the life of man is full of suffering."

"How can a ruler avoid doing what is unworthy?"

"He must think of his good reputation and the example he must set for his people."

"What is the most difficult thing for a king?"

"To master himself."

"How can we silence those who slander us?"

"By doing good."

"How can one acquire a good name?"

"By dealing kindly with one's fellow men."

"To whom shall we do good?"

"First to our parents and friends, then to our fellow-men."

"How can the evil-doer regain his honor?"

"By doing good again."

"How can one drive away care?"

"One must look for social intercourse with people."

"Can one acquire righteousness through knowledge?"

"Indeed, one can, for the understanding man has his eyes open and knows how to distinguish between good and evil."

"Of what value are relatives?"

"One's kin give consolation in sorrow and aid in time of need."

"How can a ruler guard himself against idleness and evil desires?"

"He must reflect that God has made him the leader of his people. Much is expected of him to whom much is given."

"When is a ruler called 'the father of his people'?"

"When he loves his people without making distinction between stations and ranks."

"How can one guard oneself against anger?"

"When one reflects on the consequences."

"How can a stranger gain respect?"

"By being modest and upright."

"Which of our works endures forever?"

"The work of righteousness."

"What are the fruits of wisdom?"

"The joy of the heart and the peace of the soul."

"How can we guard ourselves against pride?"

"By thinking of man's final end."

"Whom should man bewail?"

"Not the dead because they will return no more. Let him lament over the living for they must experience much misfortune and it's not always possible for us to help them."

"When does a ruler derive comfort from war?"

"When he goes to battle, not out of lust for spoils, but only to defend his country."

"Why is it that so few people strive after wisdom?"

"Because most people regard the acquisition of riches as the highest good. The wise, however, know that riches alone cannot bring happiness."

"Who is best suited to be a general?"

"He who is determined to spill as little blood as possible and who knows the best way to surround the enemy and take him prisoner."

"What should we do in the days of good fortune?"

"We should reflect on what we have already achieved and what we still wish to accomplish. We should regard nothing with contempt because it has often turned out that the smallest means have achieved the greatest results."

King Ptolemy thanked the wise men for the answers they gave his questions. He gave them presents of gold and assigned to each a servant to wait upon him. On the following day he asked Aristead to conduct them to an island outside the city and to lodge each of them in a separate house.

When this was done, Ptolemy requested the wise men to begin their translation of the Torah and, after they had sat down to their labors, he left them and locked the doors behind him. As he departed he thought:

"I will know that the translation is correct if all versions of the seventy sages read alike."

And it happened exactly that way. After seventy days the king sent to inquire if the translation was ready.

"We have just finished it today," answered the seventy wise men.

Without delay they returned to King Ptolemy and handed

their translations to Aristeas. He compared them all and made certain that they agreed in every way. The king then ordered that all the translations be put away and preserved.

The following day he dismissed the wise men with many gifts and murmuring his gratitude.

# 4

## Demon Tales

### INTRODUCTION

According to primitive belief, demons or spirits animate all natural phenomena. Jews, too, believed in the reality of demons, devils, fiends, spectres, ghosts and spirits. *Shedim* (demons) and *dibbukim* (migrant spirits) inflicted illness upon the body, especially on the internal organs and the mind. Each illness had its own particular demon—special demons for blindness, deafness, epilepsy, headache, delirium, insanity, etc.

Despite that a belief in demons was not integral in the doctrines of Judaism, it, nonetheless, was widespread among the Jews of post-Biblical times. Yet, on account of their rationalistic conditioning and a higher level of literacy in the mass, it manifested itself among them to a lesser degree than among many other peoples. During their long Babylonian sojourn, as was to be expected, Jews fell under Chaldean and Persian cultural influences. Their dualistic angel-demon conception was directly borrowed from Zoroastrianism: "The Wise Lord," Ahuramazda, leading the angelic hosts against the hordes of fiends and demons of Ahri-man, "The Spiritual Enemy." This conflict of opposites became a fundamental part of cabalistic doctrine: God was pitted against Satan, Good against Evil, the pure against the impure, the angels against the demons. These supernatural powers, ruling over both animate and inanimate existence, worked their inscrutable designs, whether for weal or for woe, in the destinies of both individuals and nations.

The early Christians, being themselves Jews, naturally carried over Jewish demonology into their religion. The Gospel writer, Mark, for instance, has Jesus say: "In my name shall they cast out devils." *Acts 10:38* tells of Jesus "Healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him." It was not unnatural, therefore, that in this contemporary intellectual climate a moralist in the Talmud should have declared: "Every limb engaged in the fulfillment of a divine commandment is protected against the 'Strong One' [Satan]."

In medieval times, the Jewish conception of demons differed in some respects from that held by Christians. Not all denizens of the spirit world were regarded as being necessarily evil. Some even were considered to be benevolent and helpful to the pious and the deserving in time of need. The medieval Jew believed that demons resembled angels in three ways: they had wings; they could fly from one end of the world to another; they could foretell future events. The demons also resembled human beings in three ways: they had to eat and drink; they procreated like them; they also died like them. They subsisted on the natural elements: water, fire, wind and moisture. The only possible cause of death among them was when they got dry. In the hour of mating they acquired bodies like humans, but lost them immediately thereafter.

All these characteristics belonged to Lilith, later the wife of Samael—Angel of Death. She is the subject of distinctive portraiture in Jewish myth and legend. She had an interesting origin and equally as interesting was the persistence with which her fearful image plagued the superstitious folk through the centuries.

In ancient Assyria there were three female demons called Lilit, Lilu and Ardat Lilit. The first Jewish reference to Lilith is found in Isaiah 34.14:

"Yea, the night-monster (Lilith) shall repose there,  
And shall find her a place of rest."

In the *Midrash*, and in other post-Biblical writings, Lilith is also described as a demon of the night. Rashi, the imaginative medieval exegete of Worms, said that Lilith bore the human shape of a woman yet had the wings of an angel. She is usually described in legend as an irresistibly seductive woman with long hair. Like the Greek siren Circe she seduces unwary men, and then savagely kills the children she bears for them. This personification of Lilith as a demon of vengeance against the children of men finds a most curious explanation in *Midrash* literature.

When God created Adam, the first man felt very lonely in the newly fashioned world. So God, in His loving kindness, created Lilith from *Adamah*, the same dust from which Adam had been molded and whose name he bore. But before long they quarreled. For Adam, the proverbial domineering male, wished to rule over Lilith. The *Midrash* legend has him laying down the law for her and her sex: "I am your lord and master and it is your duty to obey me." But Lilith, a militant feminist, was equally proud and wilful. She retorted: "We are both equal, for we are both issued from dust [Adamah], therefore, I will not be submissive to you."

She then pronounced the Ineffable name of God and flew away.

No sooner had she left him when Adam felt lonely again. Aggrieved by her rebellion and desertion of him he complained to

God: "Oh Lord of the Universe, the woman Thou hast given me has fled from me."

God agreed that Adam had been unjustly treated and then sent three angels in pursuit of the fleeing wife. When they caught up with her over the Red Sea, they ordered her to return at once to Adam but she refused. At this the angels grew angry and threatened: "We will drown you in the sea!" Unaframed, Lilith answered: "Don't you know, I've been created for the purpose of weakening and punishing little children, infants and babes? I have power over them, from the day they are born until they are eight days old if they are boys, and until the twentieth day if they are girls."

Angered by her defiance, the three angels laid hold of her to drown her. Frightened now, Lilith pacified them with the promise that, if she entered the home where a woman was about to give birth, and she saw an amulet on each wall bearing the names or the images of the three angels, Senoi, Sansenoi and Sammange-lof, she would spare the infant. So they let her go, and God was obliged to create Eve to be Adam's mate. And ever since then Lilith has been roaming the world, flying at the head of her 480 hosts of evil spirits and destroying angels, howling her hatred of mankind through the night and vowed vengeance because of the shabby treatment she had received at the hands of Adam. For that reason she has been called in demonic legend—"The Howling One."

To guard themselves against her vengeance, superstitious Jews of former times would hang in the room of a new-born babe four coins, one on each wall, to serve as amulets against Lilith's wicked designs. Fixed to each coin was a label inscribed with the words: "Lilith—begone!" Some philologists even think that the English word "lullaby" is nothing but a corruption of "Lilla—abi! (Lilith—begone!)"

N.A.

### *King Solomon and the Worm<sup>39</sup>*

KING SOLOMON, the wisest of men, resolved to build a temple dedicated to the glory of the God of Israel. He remembered the sacred words of Scripture: "And if thou make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stones: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it." (Exod. XX. 25). The tools of iron symbolized the sword, the instrument of war and death; whilst the altar and temple were the symbols of peace and life. Solomon desired that not only the altar, but all the stone-work in the sacred edifice should be

made ready for the builders at the quarry without using any metal implement, so that in the course of building the temple no instrument of iron should be employed.

How was this wish to be realized? Even Solomon, the wisest of monarchs, did not know how to set about his task. Again and again he asked himself: "How is it possible to split the immense blocks of stone or to cut down the huge trees if the workmen are not allowed to use metal implements?" In despair the King summoned his great council of state, consisting of the wisest men in his kingdom. He told them his difficulty and asked them for their advice. The counsellors listened to the words of their beloved monarch in silence. After a while one of the most venerable of them arose and spoke as follows:

"Long live the King! Mighty Sovereign! Haven't you heard that among the countless creatures of the Most High there is one which can serve you as your heart desires? It can cut stone better than the sharpest tool of iron. I refer to the tiny but wonderful worm called the Shamir, or diamond insect. Don't you know, O wisest of rulers, how the Almighty created ten marvels in the twilight of the eve of the first Sabbath in the week of creation? Among these marvels was the worm Shamir. Its size is that of a grain of barley. It is endowed with miraculous power, for, behold! it can split the hardest stone by merely touching it. Moreover, iron is broken by its mere presence."

"You show excellent wisdom, beloved counsellor," cried Solomon with joy in his heart. "Now tell me, where is this marvellous little worm to be found?"

"May your days be as glorious as the days of David your father," replied the wise servant of the King, "but more than I have already told you I do not know. No mortal being has ever discovered the home of the Shamir. It is useless to seek the information you desire by consulting the sons of men! Hasn't God bestowed upon you knowledge and understanding more than He has given to any one else? Is it for naught that your wisdom exceeds that of all the children of men? Aren't you ruler of all the spirits and demons? Seek their aid, Sire! and you will find the Shamir. Invoke the wisest of the spirits who will reveal to you even the secrets of the heavens above, of the earth beneath, and of the waters under the earth."

The good advice of the counsellor appealed to Solomon's heart, and after thanking his wise minister, he dismissed his

council in order to carry out the suggested plan. He looked at the ring on his right hand and read the Holy Name of God engraved thereon. No sooner had he pronounced the Divine Name than a demon appeared before him and, making obeisance, cried, "What is your wish, Solomon, King of Israel?"

"I command you," said Solomon, "to tell me where the worm Shamir is to be found."

In trembling voice the demon replied, "Mighty King of man and spirits! I am your servant and I will always obey you if I have the power to do so. Be not angry with me, for I fear I cannot help you now. The secret you desire to know has not been revealed to any of the inferior demons. It is only Ashmodai our King who is in possession of the secret."

"Tell me," interrupted King Solomon, "where does Ashmodai, the King of the demons, dwell?"

"May it please your gracious Majesty," the demon replied, "Ashmodai lives far from the haunts of men. His palace is built on the top of a very high mountain. In this same mountain he has dug a very deep well. Daily he fetches his drinking water from this well. When he has obtained sufficient water for his needs, he closes up the mouth of the well with an enormous rock which he seals with his signet-ring. He then flies up to heaven to receive the orders of those who are his superiors. His tasks take him to the ends of the earth, even beyond the great sea. With the going down of the sun in the west, he returns to his own home. He examines very carefully the seal on the rock at the mouth of the well, in order to find out if it had been tampered with in his absence. He then proceeds to uncover the well and he drinks of the water. Having quenched his thirst he covers up again the mouth of the well and seals it afresh."

King Solomon sat on his wonderful throne of gold while the demon told his tale. Not a word escaped the memory of the wise King. He then dismissed the demon, who disappeared in an instant. Thereupon, Solomon summoned to his presence his brave captain and friend Benaiah, son of Jehodiah. He told him briefly the nature of the task he was chosen to undertake, saying, "Go, trusty servant Benaiah, and capture Ashmodai, the King of the demons, and bring him before my presence. To assist you in your perilous undertaking I give you this golden chain on the links of which the letters forming the Divine Name are engraved. I will also entrust to your care my signet-ring which is also engraved

with the Holy Name of the Most High. Take with you also this large bundle of white wool and these skins full of strong wine."

After giving him minute instructions about the journey and the way to overcome Ashmodai, he sent Benaiah on his way, wishing him success in his undertaking.

The brave warrior set out on his dangerous quest. After many days of hard riding across the great desert he finally reached his destination. Never had he seen such a desolate spot. Before him stood a towering mountain without sign of any human habitation. The mountain seemed to be the abode of silence and death. Undaunted, Benaiah began to climb the mountain. He feared neither man nor spirit, for he was wearing on his finger King Solomon's signet-ring. When half-way up he bored a hole in order to discover the whereabouts of Ashmodai's well. Great was his delight when he discovered the position of the well. He drew off the water and stopped up the hole with the wool which he had brought with him. Quite near to this hole, Benaiah made an opening into the well. Through it he poured all the wine in the skins. Then he concealed himself behind a large crag and waited impatiently for the arrival of the King of the Demons.

Soon after sunset Ashmodai drew nigh. He carefully examined the seal on the rock over the mouth of the well and found it intact, even as he had left it early in the morning. After he had rolled away the rock, he descended into the well to quench his thirst. The fragrant wine over-powered him so that he quickly returned to the mouth of the well to inhale the fresh mountain air. Realizing that the well had been tampered with, he again examined the seal, but it did not appear to have been touched. Meanwhile a burning thirst forced him to descend again in order to obtain something to drink. No sooner had he tasted the wine than he desired to drink more and more. After he had drunk freely of the wine, he felt drowsy. All his senses were overpowered. His head became heavy, his body staggered and his knees gave way. At last he fell to the ground and slept soundly.

Benaiah now came forth from his hiding place and crept very quietly to the sleeping demon. Without wasting a moment, he threw the golden chain around Ashmodai's neck and sealed it with the golden signet-ring engraved with the Divine Name. He then sat down on the ground close by waiting for the effects of the strong wine to wear off.

After a while Ashmodai awoke and found that he was no longer free, for he saw the golden chain around his neck and he beheld the Holy Name on the seal. He then groaned so loudly that the mountain shook. In vain Ashmodai struggled to rise. In his anger sparks of fire flew from his eyes and foam covered his mouth.

He continued to struggle, but all to no purpose. He could not rise. He looked at Benaiah and cried in bitter anger, "Is it you who has bewitched me?"

"Verily," replied Benaiah, "behold the Name of the Lord of lords is upon you!"

Ashmodai immediately subsided. Realizing that he was vanquished he told Benaiah that he was quite ready to obey his orders.

"Come then," cried Benaiah, "we will go at once to King Solomon, your master. Arise and follow me!"

Ashmodai arose and followed Benaiah, who was surprised at the behaviour of his captive on their way to the Holy City. Wherever they passed Ashmodai left behind him a trace of his might. In one village he brushed against a palm tree. After its foliage had been shaken off, he uprooted it with one hand. In another place he knocked his shoulder against a house and overturned it. In the market-place of a large town they met a happy bridal procession. When the bride and bridegroom passed Ashmodai began to weep.

"Why do you weep?" Benaiah asked in surprise.

"Alas," replied Ashmodai, "within three days the bridegroom will be a corpse!"

In the next town they overheard a farmer asking a boot-maker to make a pair of boots which were to last him for seven years. Ashmodai burst out laughing.

"Tell me," cried Benaiah, "why do you laugh?"

"Because the poor fellow will not wear his shoes for even seven days; behold within a week he will die—yet he asks for shoes to last him seven years!"

One day they met a blind man going astray. Ashmodai set him on the right path. He showed similar kindness to a drunkard whom they met at the crossroads. On another occasion they saw a magician who was exhibiting his skill. He claimed to be able to read the future and to disclose secrets. This made Ashmodai laugh and when Benaiah asked the reason, he answered, "Wouldn't you laugh also at a man who pretends to reveal secrets, while at the same moment he is

unaware of the fact that a treasure lies buried at his feet? We demons judge persons according to their true value and not according to their deceptive appearance in the eyes of man."

After many strange adventures they finally came to the Holy City. Benaiah conducted his captive to the royal presence. As soon as Ashmodai beheld King Solomon, fear seized him and he began to tremble violently in every limb. He held a long staff in his hand on which he supported himself. Ashmodai threw his staff before the King.

"Why do you do this?" asked Solomon.

"Mighty Sovereign," replied Ashmodai, "don't you know that in spite of all your splendour you will occupy after your death no more space in the earth than is measured by yonder staff, yet you are not satisfied with ruling the children of men, but must hold the spirits and demons in subjection."

"Don't be vexed," Solomon answered gently, "you won't find me a hard master. I merely demand one little service of you. I wish to build a great Temple to the glory of the Creator of heaven and earth, and for this purpose I require the services of the wonderful worm Shamir. Tell me now, where can I find this tiny creature?"

"O wisest of mortals," replied Ashmodai, "don't you know that the Shamir has not been placed in my charge?"

"Where is it?" thundered Solomon. "Speak, slave! and speak truly."

"Mighty master," replied Ashmodai, "since the days of Moses, who employed the Shamir when writing on the tablets of stone, the worm has been entrusted to the care of the Prince of the Sea who has given it into the charge of the woodcock. The woodcock has sworn to carry the Shamir with him at all times. He lives in a nest built on the top of a very high mountain. He uses the Shamir to split the rocks so as to plant seeds in the clefts, and the vegetation which grows there serves as his food. Whenever he goes from his nest he takes the Shamir with him, carrying it beneath his wing."

"Enough," cried Solomon. "You shall live with me until the Temple is built!"

Once again King Solomon summoned his trusty captain Benaiah, and sent him to look for the nest of the woodcock, to obtain the Shamir, and to bring it back to the Holy City.

"Take with you," said the King, "a glass cover, a little wool and a small leaden box. May your journey be as successful this time as your former one!"

Benaiah obeyed with a glad heart all the instructions which King Solomon gave him. He set out on his journey, crossing hill and dale, stream and desert. At last he discovered the nest of the bird he sought. The woodcock was away on one of his expeditions. In the nest were the fledglings. Benaiah now covered the nest with the glass cover which he had brought with him for this purpose. He then concealed himself and waited to see what would happen.

When the woodcock returned he tried to enter his nest but found he could not do so, for the glass was very hard and strong. He saw through the glass his helpless young, and flapping his wings and screeching loudly sought to break the glass. All his efforts were in vain. The young birds frightened by the noise also began to screech.

"What is to be done?" cried the woodcock in the language of the birds.

Again and again he tried to smash the glass, but without success. As a last resource, he decided to make use of the precious treasure entrusted to his care. He produced the Shamir from beneath his wing and put it on the glass, which split into pieces as soon as it was touched by the wonderful worm. At that instant Benaiah raised a lusty cry and frightened the woodcock so that he dropped the Shamir. It had barely fallen upon the ground when Benaiah seized it and carefully placed it in the wool and secured it by putting it in the small leaden box which he had brought for the special purpose.

Without lingering a moment, Benaiah set out on his homeward journey, rejoicing greatly at his success. In despair the woodcock killed himself, fearing the terrible vengeance the Prince of the Sea would bring on him when the disappearance of the Shamir became known. Benaiah reached the Holy City in safety and delivered to King Solomon the wonderful worm. With its help the wise King built the Temple; and thereafter the Shamir disappeared and to this very day no one knows where it is to be found.

### *The Witches of Ascalon<sup>40</sup>*

WHEN Rabbi Simon, the son of Shetah, was appointed a prince in Israel, people came to him and said, "In the city of Ascalon, there is a certain cave inhabited by eighty witches."

One rainy day, Rabbi Simon gathered together eighty stal-

wart young men and gave each one a new vessel, a clean robe being folded in each. The young men accompanied Rabbi Simon to Ascalon, bearing the vessels on their heads, so that their clothes should not be spoilt by the rain.

Rabbi Simon said to them: "I will enter the cave by myself. If I whistle once, put on your robes; and if I whistle a second time, all of you together rush into the cave and each of you seize a witch and lift her up from the ground, for such is the nature of witches that if you raise them from the ground they can do nothing."

When Rabbi Simon arrived at the entrance to the cave, he shouted, "Witches, witches, open for me, I am one of you!"

They said to him, "How is it your clothes are so dry in this time of rain?"

"I walked between the drops of rain!" he answered.

And they asked again, "What have you come for?"

And he replied, "To learn and to teach. Let each one of you show me what you can do, and I will show you what I can do."

One witch uttered an incantation and bread appeared. Another brought meat in a similar way; a third, dishes, and a fourth, wine. Then the witches said to him, "Now what can you do?"

To which he replied: "I can whistle twice and cause to appear eighty young men, clad in dry robes, who will make merry with you and you with them."

He whistled once and the boys donned their robes; he whistled a second time and they all rushed into the cave.

Simon said to them, "Let each one choose his partner!"

And according to their instructions each of the young men lifted up a witch and then they carried them away to be hanged.

Thus was Ascalon rid of its eighty witches.

#### INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO

#### *The Golem of Prague*

The mystery of "where do we come from and where do we go?" has always fascinated thinking men. As human control over the forces of Nature grew and man became increasingly conscious of his latent powers he began to speculate about his own capacity to equal and even to oppose the demi-urges of creation. There was no great conceptual leap from the Prometheus legend,

in which man, arrogant in his purposeful knowledge, tried to wrest the elemental secret of fire from the gods, to the "mechanical man," the ingenious Maelzel made in the early Nineteenth Century, or to the "mechanical heart" invented by Carrel and Lindbergh in our day.

Like all peoples, Jews too were intrigued by the idea of creation. Alien to all tenets of rationalistic Judaism, even sacrilegious in opposing itself to God, Jewish folklore nevertheless boasts a number of legends in which man superseded God as Creator. An astonishing piece of impudence from the pious, but breathtaking in its sheer daring!

The *golem*, or homunculus legend in Jewish folklore, is very ancient, dating back to Rabbinic times. In its literal meaning the word "golem" means lifeless, shapeless matter into which the one who has discovered the tetragrammaton (*Shem-Hamforesh* or God's Ineffable Name), can by its mystic means breathe the impulse of life. There is little doubt that the Talmudic speculations about the creation of the first man stimulated the growth of the *golem* legends. There is the following passage in the Talmud complete with all implied directives that were avidly taken up by the legendary *golem* creators.

"How was Adam created? In the first hour his dust was collected; in the second his form was created; in the third he became a shapeless mass (*golem*); in the fourth his members were joined; in the fifth his apertures opened; in the sixth he received his soul; in the seventh he stood up on his feet. . . ."

According to the *Agada* in the Talmud the celebrated Rabbi Raba had created a homunculus. This creature was a man like any other man, except that he lacked the power of speech which God alone could endow. When in a mood of egoism and vainglory Raba sent his *golem* to Rabbi Zeira, that sage quickly discovered the creature's magical origin and indignantly returned him to the dust from which he was fashioned. The creation of man was God's own business, he said.

There is also the legend in the Talmud about the two rabbis Hanina and Oshaga. Every Friday, by means of mystic formulæ from the *Book of Creation*, they would make a three-year-old calf which they ate on the Sabbath. The Eleventh Century Bible exegesis Rashi, being thoroughly saturated with Jewish Cabala and with the supernaturalism of the medieval Christian world, even tried to give the account a dubious religious sanction:

"They, Hanina and Oshaga, used to combine the letters of the name by which the universe was created. This is not to be considered forbidden magic, for the words of God were brought into being through His Holy Name."

Jewish legend even has Rashi's great contemporary, the poet-philosopher of Valencia, Solomon ibn Gabirol, create a maid-ser-

vant *golem*. When the King heard of it he wished to put the Jewish poet to death for practicing black magic, but Gabirol demonstrated to the King's royal satisfaction that the creature he made was not human, and forthwith he returned her to dust.

Another *golem* was alleged to have been created in the time of the Crusades in France by Rabbi Samuel, the father of the famous Judah Hasid. He fashioned a homunculus, but, like Raba in Bible times, he could not make it talk. Wherever he went this *golem* accompanied him as his servant and vigilant bodyguard.

Christian Europe too had its own versions of the homunculus. What else are the medieval legends of Doctor Faustus and the poet Vergil? Even as Rashi believed in the authenticity of the creation of the rabbinical calf so did the most advanced Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance believe in the legend of Vergil's statue into which the poet had breathed life and forced it to obey his will in various escapades.

By the time of the late Renaissance legends about *golems* were widespread among the Jews of Eastern Europe. The most popular folk tale was that of the *Golem of Chelm*, created by the redoubtable cabalist Rabbi Elijah of that town. He allegedly created it sometime during the middle of the Sixteenth Century by means of the *Shem-Hamforesh*, God's Ineffable Name. This mystical name he wrote on a piece of parchment and placed it in the earthen *golem*'s forehead. Little did he dream what a monster the creature would turn out to be! When he beheld its frightful aspect and its destructive tendencies, he began to repent his folly in making it: His *golem* could very well destroy the whole world! So he drew forth the *Shem-Hamforesh* from its forehead, and immediately the monster turned to dust. It would be interesting to investigate what Mary Shelley knew of this legend when she wrote her Frankenstein chiller.

In 1625 the eminent Italian-Jewish doctor, scientist, and encyclopedic scholar, Joseph Del Medigo, while journeying through Germany, Poland and Lithuania, observed that "many (*golem*) legends of this sort are current, particularly in Germany." The legend of the *Golem of Chelm* was undoubtedly one of those he heard.

The *Golem of Prague*, the most popular of all the Jewish *golem* stories, is without doubt merely a later-day variation of the older tales. How it happened to fix on the historical personality of Rabbi Yehuda Loew will always remain a fruitful source of speculation for the folklorist and the historian of Jewish culture. It is sufficient that it has been and still is one of the most alive as well as one of the liveliest among all Jewish folk legends.

This fact is not without its historical or national-cultural interest. The image of the *golem*, as it was already fully developed in the Sixteenth Century *Golem of Chelm*, was that of a Franken-

stein with frightful propensities for tearing up and smiting down. It remained for the later legend of the *Golem of Prague* to endow the terrifying figure with moral and social grandeur. The crude, shapeless lump of clay no longer was a figure symbolic of the genius of indiscriminate destruction. The *golem*, in the hands of the Maharal of Prague, became a national protector of the persecuted Jews, a God-sent Avenger of the wrongs done a helpless people.

It is precisely this aspect of the folk imagination and the historical forces that stimulated it that are of the most universal interest. For, as is well known, folk legends are not just accidental in their origin or fanciful fictions invented by the "childlike masses." They are a true record and mirror of the complicated historical and cultural experiences of a people.

The middle of the Seventeenth Century was a cataclysmic period for the Jewish people of Europe. It marked the most dreadful massacres of Jews in history, of course excepting those by the Nazis in World War II. The terrible ravages of the Thirty Years War and the revolt of the Cossacks under Bogdan Chmielnitzki against Polish rule left the Jews of Europe frightfully decimated and shattered. This was immediately followed by the Messianic fevers which tortured and racked the spirits of those Jews who survived the bloody holocaust, and finally left them spent and disenchanted. Darkness and superstition descended on the Jewish ghetto as it never had before.

Nowhere could Jews themselves cope with the problems of their survival. God, it seemed to them, had abandoned them to the sword and the persecution of the enemy without, and to the seduction and betrayal of the Messianic swindlers within, such as the Messiah of Smyrna, Sabbatai Zevi. So in its despair, the folk-mind, fed by the sickly cabalistic dreams and myths current at the time, created the magical figure of the *golem* to protect the Jews' puny weakness with his enormous physical strength, to discover by means of his supernatural powers the plotters against their peace and thus foil their wicked plans. It was the *golem* as Redeemer that, viewed within the historical frame of reference of the tormented Jewish life in the Seventeenth Century in Europe, lends the legend such haunting poignancy.—N. A.

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### *The Golem of Prague<sup>41</sup>*

RABBI YEHUDA LOEW, known to the pious as the "Maharal," came to Prague from Nikolsburg, Posen, in the year 5332 of the Creation (A.D. 1572) in order to become rabbi of the community there. The whole world resounded with his fame because he was deeply learned in all branches of knowledge

and knew many languages. Is it any wonder then that he was revered by the wise men among the Gentiles?<sup>42</sup> Even King Rudolf of Bohemia esteemed him highly. Because of these reasons the Maharal was able to wage war successfully against the enemies of Israel who tried to besmirch Jewish honor with their false blood accusations.

After much sad experience, in the course of which these frightful slanders were fully exposed in the brilliant light of truth, King Rudolf assured Rabbi Yehuda Loew that never again would he permit any blood accusations to be charged against the Jews in his kingdom. When the Maharal first came to Prague the blood accusation was a very common occurrence there and much innocent Jewish blood was spilled because of it. Immediately on his arrival, Rabbi Yehuda Loew announced that he would fight against this unholy calumny with all his power in order to silence the enemies of his people who so tirelessly plotted for its destruction.

One day, King Rudolf sent his carriage to fetch the Maharal for an audience with him. They talked together for a whole hour but what was said during their meeting nobody knows to this very day.

The Maharal returned home in a gay mood. He told his intimates: "I have already half destroyed the filthy myth of the blood accusation! With God's help I hope soon to wash away entirely this hideous stain from our innocent people."

And the Maharal's hope was soon fulfilled. To his joy, and to the joy of all the Jews of Bohemia, the King issued a decree ten days later announcing that no one, besides the particular individual charged in a blood accusation, had to stand trial. Prior to that *all* the Jews were collectively charged with the alleged crime. Furthermore, that the individual accused could not be condemned unless there was positive proof of his guilt in the crime. The King also ordered that, during any trial on such a charge, the Rabbi of Prague had to be present. Nor could the verdict be valid unless the King himself countersigned the judge's sentence.

One would have thought that the King's decree would put an end to the shameless slander that the Jews had a custom which required them to use Christian blood in the baking of the Passover *matzos*. But the enemies of Israel were endlessly resourceful that way. All that it required for a Christian who wished to destroy a Jew was stealthily to plant a dead child

in his house and the hue and cry of the blood accusation was on again. Only in rare cases was it possible for the Jew to extricate himself from the fine meshes of the net his enemies entangled him in.

There was one man in the kingdom of Bohemia of whom the Maharal stood in great dread. This was the priest Thaddeus. He was not only an implacable enemy of the Jews but a clever sorcerer besides. He was determined to carry on a war to the death against the Maharal. The Maharal too girded himself for battle against this enemy.

One night, the Maharal called upon Heaven to answer him in a dream how best he could wage successful war against his enemy Thaddeus. And the answer came to him in the alphabetically arranged words of the Cabala: "Create a Golem out of clay who will destroy all the enemies of Israel!"<sup>43</sup>

The Maharal knew that in the Hebrew words of this formula there were stored enough mystical secrets by means of whose powers he could create a Golem. He then confided his secret to Isaac ben Shimshon ha-Cohen, his son-in-law, and to his principal disciple, Jacob ben Chayyim ha-Levi. He told them that he would require their help because they were born under the constellation of Fire and Water respectively; the Maharal himself was born under the constellation of Air. To the making of the Golem all the four elements of Fire, Water, Air and Earth were necessary. He then cautioned the two against revealing his plan to anyone and instructed them that, during the next seven days, they were to purify their bodies and souls with ablutions, fasting, prayer and austeries.

It was on the second day in the month of Adar in the year 5340 of Creation (A.D. 1580) that the momentous event took place. At four in the morning the three made their way out of the city to the Moldau. There, on the clay bank of the river, they moulded the figure of a man three ells in length. They fashioned for him hands and feet and a head, and drew his features in clear human relief.

Having done this, the three stationed themselves at the feet of the prostrate Golem. The Maharal then ordered Isaac ben Shimshon ha-Cohen to encircle the figure seven times from right to left. He also revealed to him the cabalistic incantations he was to pronounce while doing so.

No sooner had the Maharal's son-in-law completed his task when the Golem began to glow like fire. Then the Maharal

asked Jacob ben Chayyim ha-Levi to do the same circling, but he instructed him to utter different cabalistic formulae and to encircle the figure from left to right. As soon as he was through, the fire in the Golem was quenched and a cloud of steam arose from its body. When it cleared, they saw that hair had grown on its head and that nails had appeared on its fingers and toes.

Next, the Maharal himself began to circle around the Golem seven times. Then with one voice, all three recited the Scriptural passage from Genesis II, 7: "And he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Immediately, the Golem opened his eyes and looked at the three men wonderingly.

"Get up on your feet!" commanded the Maharal.

The Golem stood up and they dressed him in clothes they had brought with them, clothes that were fitting for a *shammes*.

Most wonderful to relate—when they had left Prague two hours before they were only three, but when six o'clock struck there were four of them returning!

On the way home the Maharal said to the Golem: "Know that we have created you so that you may protect the defenseless Jews against their enemies. Your name is Joseph and you will serve me as *shammes* in the House of Judgment. You must obey me no matter what I tell you to do, even should I ask you to jump into fire and water!"

Although the Golem could not speak, for the power of speech is God's alone to give, he, nonetheless, understood what the Maharal said to him. He had a remarkable sense of hearing and could detect sounds from a very great distance.

To his two disciples the Maharal said that he had named the Golem Joseph because he had implanted in him the spirit of Joseph Shida, he who was half-man and half-demon, and who had saved the sages of the Talmud from many trials and dangers.

When the Maharal came home he told his wife, Perele the *Rebbitzin*, pointing to the Golem, that he had met the poor unfortunate (plainly a mute idiot) on the street, and that he felt very sorry for him, and so he brought him home with him.

"He will serve me as *shammes* in the House of Judgment," he said.

At the same time the Maharal forbade anyone to give the Golem any menial tasks to perform for he had not created him for that.

And so the Golem sat always in a corner of the House of Judgment, with expressionless face cupped in his hands, just like a clay Golem who has no thought in his head. Because he behaved like a mute idiot, people began to call him derisively "*Yosele Golem*." Others called him "Dumb Yosele."

Despite the Maharal's orders against giving Yosele Golem any tasks to perform, his wife, Perele the *Rebbitzin*, disobeyed him. One day, just before Passover, she motioned to him to fetch water from the well and to fill the two big barrels in the pantry with water for the holy day.

Yosele Golem quickly snatched two buckets and ran with them to the well. As the *Rebbitzin* was preoccupied with other matters she did not observe what he was doing.

To the well and back again he ran so many times that, without anyone noticing it, the barrels began to overflow and soon the water spread through the house. At this the servants raised a great outcry and ran to tell the Maharal.

When Rabbi Yehuda Loew came and saw what Yosele Golem had done he burst out laughing and said to the *Rebbitzin*: "My, my, what a wonderful water-carrier you got yourself for Passover!"

He then went and took away the buckets from the Golem and led him back into his corner in the House of Judgment.

From that time on the *Rebbitzin* never again asked Yosele Golem to do anything for her. But when the story got around in Prague everybody laughed. It even gave rise to a new saying: "You're as good a watchmaker as Yosele Golem is a water-carrier!"

The Maharal employed the Golem to protect the Jews of Prague against the dangers that threatened them. With his assistance he was able to perform many miracles. Most of all he used him in his war against the blood accusations which were again rife in the land and which caused so much sorrow to the Jews. In such cases, when the Maharal had to send Yosele Golem on a dangerous mission, he found it advisable to make him invisible by means of an amulet upon which was written a cabalistic word.

In the period before Passover, which coincides with the

Christian Easter, a time when the blood accusation was usually brought, the Maharal made Yosele Golem put on a disguise. He had him dress up like a Christian and made him wear a rope around his middle in order that he might look like any ordinary Gentile porter.

The Maharal ordered him to guard the Ghetto<sup>44</sup> of Prague like the apple of his eye, to roam all its streets at night and to be on the lookout against those who might wish to do evil to the Jews. He was to examine the contents of every passing wagon and of every bundle carried by a passerby. If he but suspected someone of making preparations for bringing a blood accusation against the Jews he was to bind the malefactor with his rope and bring him straightway to the city watch in the *Rathaus*.

It so happened that the leading Jew of Prague in communal matters was the wealthy *Reb* Mordchi Meisel. One of his debtors, a Christian who ran a slaughter-house, owed him five thousand crowns. Time and again *Reb* Mordchi demanded of the slaughterer that he return the money, but each time the latter declined to pay on some pretext or other.

Now the slaughter-house was situated outside the city, and the slaughterer was in the habit of conveying meat into the city through the Jewish ghetto. This put the idea into his head of accusing *Reb* Mordchi of having used Christian blood for the baking of *matzos*.

Several days before Passover, the child of a Christian neighbor of the slaughterer's died. It was buried in the Christian cemetery. Late that night, the slaughterer stole into the cemetery and dug up the child. He then killed a pig in the slaughter-house and cleaned out its insides. He cut the throat of the dead child and wrapping it in the folds of a *tallis*, he placed it inside the pig. Afterwards, he rode to town, intending to secrete the body in *Reb* Mordchi's house while he slept.

When the slaughterer was near *Reb* Mordchi's house, Yosele Golem, who was then roaming the streets, suddenly appeared and insisted on examining the contents of his wagon. When he saw the dead child in the pig's carcass, he quickly bound the slaughterer with his rope and carried him to the town watch right in the *Rathaus*. He dumped him in the courtyard and hurried away.

A great commotion was heard in the *Rathaus*. The watch was called out. They brought lights, and saw before them the

slaughterer, lying tied hand and foot and looking bruised and swollen. They examined the pig and found the dead child in its carcass. Seeing that it was wrapped in a Jewish *tallis*, the chief of the watch clearly saw that it was a blood accusation plot.

After close questioning the slaughterer confessed what he was up to. When he was asked who had brought him to the city watch he answered: "It was a Christian porter who was mute. He was an enormous fellow who looked more like a devil than a man!"

No one had any idea who this strange creature could be. A great terror fell upon all enemies of Israel. Only Thaddeus the priest understood from what quarter this secret power could have come. So he had the rumor spread in town that the Maharal was a sorcerer, in order to discredit him in the eyes of all upright Christians who respected him. And he intensified his struggle against him and all the Jews with a consuming hatred.

When King Rudolf saw that there was no foundation whatsoever for any of the blood accusations he became angry at the priest Thaddeus. The pleas and persuasion of the Maharal at last had their effect. The King issued a solemn decree under his own seal, forbidding anyone in his realm from ever raising the blood accusation against any Jew or group of Jews. Neither were the courts of the kingdom to honor such charges because the sin of accusing the innocent with crimes they had not committed always falls like a blight upon the entire nation.

Once again Passover came around but not one blood accusation was raised in the Kingdom of Bohemia that year. It seemed as if King Rudolf's decree had effectively silenced the enemy. Thereupon, the Maharal called his son-in-law and his disciple, both of whom had assisted in the creation of the Golem, and said to them: "I have called you to tell you that the Golem is no longer needed. The lie of the blood accusation will never be raised in this country again."

This took place on the night of *Lag Ba-Omer* in the year 5350 of the Creation (A.D. 1590).

That night, the Maharal said to Yosele Golem: "Don't sleep tonight in the House of Judgment but instead go up into the attic of the Synagogue and make your bed there!"

Ever-obedient, Yosele Golem did as the Maharal told him.

After midnight, accompanied by his son-in-law and his disciple, the Maharal ascended to the attic of the Synagogue and stationed himself before the sleeping giant. They now took their places in reverse position to that when they created him. They stood at his head and gazed into his face.

Then they began to circle around him, beginning from left to right. They did this seven times, intoning cabalistic incantations and formulae in the meantime.

All this time, the old *shammes*, Reb Abraham Chayyim, whom the Maharal had brought to assist him, stood at a discreet distance from the Golem, lighting him up with two waxen candles. Upon the completion of the seventh encirclement the Golem lay rigid in death. He looked again like a hunk of hardened clay.

The Maharal took the two candles from the *shammes* and had him divest the Golem of his clothes, except for the shirt. They then took some old discarded prayer shawls and wrapped them securely around him. Afterwards, they covered him with thousands upon thousands of discarded leaves from old prayer books so that he was altogether hidden from sight.

The Maharal also told the *shammes* not to breathe a word to any living soul of what he had seen that night and to burn the Golem's clothes when no one saw. Then they all descended from the attic. They washed their hands and uttered prayers of purification, as one usually does after being near a corpse.

In the morning, the Maharal had a report spread throughout Prague that his *shammes*, Yosele Golem, had quarreled with him and had left the city at night. Everybody accepted the report as true except the three who had the privilege of going up to the attic with the Maharal the previous night.

One week later, the Maharal had a proclamation posted and read in the *Altneuschul*, forbidding any Jew, on pain of excommunication, ever to go up to the Synagogue attic.

The reverence for Rabbi Yehuda Loew was so great that no one dared look for the Golem in the attic. It is believed that he is still lying there, buried deep under a heap of torn leaves from old prayer books, and only waiting for the coming of the Messiah, or for the time when new dangers appear to menace the existence of Israel, to rise again and smite the foe.

*The Miser's Transformation<sup>46</sup>*

IN A certain city there once lived a rich man. He possessed lands and gold and had chests full of costly vessels of silver inlaid with precious stones. Rich as he was he was also miserly. He never gave an alms to a poor man, helped no one in distress, and even kept away from the synagogue out of fear that he might be asked to make a donation. For this reason he was nicknamed "the Miser."

Nonetheless, this same tight-fisted man could also be unselfish. He served as voluntary *mohel* to the newly born boys of the neighborhood and consecrated them to the faith of Jehovah and to the Holy Torah. He fulfilled this obligation with such devotion that he never made any distinction between rich and poor, and was never deterred by time, effort and money to journey for this purpose to the most distant places.

One day, as he stood before his house, a stranger approached him and said, "My wife has just been delivered of a son. I would therefore like you to consecrate him."

The miser replied: "This is my duty. Wait a moment and I'll follow you. Tell me, where do you live?"

"I live far away," said the stranger, "but I'll drive fast; I've good horses and a light wagon."

The miser went into his house, looked carefully over the securely-locked chests that held his treasure, then he bolted door and gate and followed the stranger.

At first the man drove at a slow, unhurried pace. The miser, who knew the countryside well, could see where they were going. But suddenly the stranger started to whip up his horses that now tore away at a great speed. They sped by fields and woods, mountains and valleys, until a mist fell and night began to descend.

All this time the miser had not heard one single bird sing, or a bee hum, or a brook gurgle. When the moon rose at last, he looked fearfully around him. What was his terror to see that the horses cast no shadow! They sped at a breath-taking speed, neighing and pounding the road with their hooves. The journey seemed to come to no end. When he saw this he said to the driver with a quavering voice, "Where are you taking me?"

"We'll soon be at our destination," the stranger assured him.

And even as he spoke, the dawn began to break, the mist lifted and the sun shone dazzlingly upon a little hamlet.

It nestled in a verdant valley. Looking upon it, a peace, such as he had never known before, descended upon the frightened miser.

The stranger drove slowly to his home where he and the miser were soon surrounded by a group of men who greeted them with a hearty: "*Sholom Aleichem.*" The servants led the horses into the stable while the host escorted his guest into the house.

The miser stood mutely regarding everything with astonishment. The magnificence of every object dazzled him. The furniture was inlaid with gold, silver and gems. The doors were of carved ivory. Even the locks, bolts and nails in the house were fashioned of gold and silver.

When the host excused himself and went without the miser began to speculate in his mind which costly object he saw would be given him as a gift.

He wandered from one room into another and at last found himself in the room of the woman who had given birth. What splendor he found here! The woman lay in a bed made of silver and nearby, in a cradle of beaten gold, slept the new-born babe.

As soon as she noticed the miser the woman motioned him to approach.

"I am happy to see you here," she murmured. "You have it in your power to perform a great service for me. Believe me, I'll remain ever grateful to you for this. In repayment I will reveal to you a great secret. Know that you are not now among mortal men. Those who live here are demons; the one who brought you, my husband, is a demon. You have been snared here by lie and deception. The splendor and magnificence of gold and gems which you see all about you are nothing but dazzle and shimmer—and unreal as mist."

Thereupon, the miser's courage died in him.

"I'm a human being like you," continued the young mother. "I was caught in this evil net in my tender youth. The snare of my husband's gifts blinded my reason and thus, before I knew it, I became the wife of a demon! Although I'm already beyond saving there is still time to save you!"

"I'm lost!" wailed the frightened miser.

"Let me warn you betimes," cautioned the woman, "not to taste any food or drink while you're here. Neither must you

accept any present from my husband, regardless whether it's costly or trifling in value."

The miser left her, trembling in every limb. He thought regretfully of everything he had left behind him, of his lands and his gold. He was certain—everything was lost to him now, and he himself was at the mercy of the demons.

When night fell he heard a tremendous uproar outside. Horses and wagons, bearing demons, were arriving in a steady stream. No doubt they came as guests to the circumcision celebration.

Once again the miser was obliged to enter the chamber of the mother and child. Together with the demon-guests he intoned prayers and incantations to guard the child against evil spirits and ghosts who delight in harming new-born children.

At the festive board the demons waxed gay and hilarious. But the miser declined all food and drink. The bright candle-light illumined the magnificent interior, but in the soul of the miser reigned darkest gloom. He decided to hear nothing and see nothing. He thought only of the terrible things the unfortunate mother had told him.

That night he could not fall asleep, but lay awake, alert and watching.

When morning came his host conducted him to a synagogue which was already full of demon-worshippers. The miser was courteously invited to act as precentor. Full of anguish, he sang the service and, as the congregation of demons chanted with him, the dread chill of their voices congealed his blood.

After they were through praying, the child was fetched and the miser performed the rite of circumcision. According to custom, everyone present tasted refreshments; but the miser excused himself on the pretext that this was his special fast-day.

At this his host spoke up with cunning: "It is our duty to honor our guest and to postpone our feast until evening when he will be able to join us in eating and drinking."

The miser's heart sank. He only thought of how he could best save his soul from perdition.

The day passed quickly and night fell. Again, the host came and led the miser to the festive board around which sat the other demons. They ate and drank lustily and made merry. Only the miser sat silent and dejected. When he was pressed to eat and drink he excused himself this time with the

plea of illness. As the gaiety of the demons grew in intensity his own terror increased.

Suddenly his host arose and motioned to him to follow him into another room.

"This is my last hour on earth!" thought the miser in terror as he followed him.

As the demon opened the door, the miser's eye fell upon an astonishing array of beautiful and costly vessels.

"Since you have done me such a great service," said the demon, "I want you to accept a little token of appreciation from me. Choose what you like from among all that you see here."

The miser was filled with consternation.

"I have all the silver I want at home," he blurted. "Thank you just the same."

Without a word the demon led him into the next room. Here all the objects were made of gold.

"Do you like any of these things?" asked the demon.

"Thank you kindly," replied the miser hastily. "I have all the gold I want at home."

Without another word the demon then led him into the next room.

The miser stood speechless with excitement at what he saw. Here there was no magnificence, no sparkle of silver or glow of gold. All he saw were bunches of keys, of all sizes and shapes, hanging from nails on the wall.

"A strange thing!" muttered the demon. "When I showed you first my treasures of silver and then of gold you remained cold and indifferent. But now, when I show you just bunches of keys made of ordinary iron, you show astonishment!"

The amazement of the miser suddenly gave way before a deadly fear. Right before him on a nail in the wall hung a familiar bunch of keys. The demon stretched his hand out and took it off the wall.

"These are my keys!" cried the miser quaking. "Truly, these are the keys with which I've locked the chests in which I keep my treasures!"

"Don't be afraid, even if these are your keys!" said the demon in a cold voice. "Don't turn pale, don't tremble so! Since you did me a great service by coming here and have refused to accept any gift of me, I want to show my appreciation in some other way."

"Know that I am a demon! I am lord and master of all those evil spirits who have power over the riches and treasures in the possession of humans who are as miserly as you, and who, like you, never aid the needy when they cry out. Also know that neither you nor such as you are the actual owners of their wealth. We demons hold the keys to your strong-boxes and guard them well although we can never enjoy them.

"Here then is your bunch of keys! Take them and become sole master of your riches!"

The miser quickly snatched at the keys. His host called for a wagon. The miser got into it and was whirled away.

The wagon stopped before the miser's door and he alighted. But no sooner did his feet touch the ground when both the horses and the driver vanished.

The miser entered his house, but he was not the same man anymore. He opened his treasure chests and strong-boxes and took out their valuables. He distributed alms, clothed the poor, and did good to those in misfortune. A new and beautiful life began for him.

From this time on people stopped calling him "the Miser." Instead, they honored his noble example and, when he died, they followed him with blessings on their lips to his eternal rest.

### *No Privacy Anywhere<sup>47</sup>*

IT HAPPENED in a year of famine on the day before *Rosh Hashanah*. A kindhearted man who had a shrewish wife gave a gold-piece to a poor man. When his wife discovered this act of benevolence she nagged him so much for it that he left home. As he could find no lodgings he went to spend the night in the cemetery.

He had barely fallen asleep when he was awakened by the conversation between two girl spirits.

The first one said, "Come, my friend, let us fly over the world and eavesdrop on what is said under the curtain of Heaven. After all, today is *Rosh Hashanah* in the world below. Let us find out what misfortunes are in store for the living."

The second one answered, "I am sorry, but I cannot go with you. I was buried in a straw shroud and I am ashamed to show myself in Heaven in such a garment. Suppose you go

alone, and should you hear anything interesting let me know all about it."

And so the first spirit sped to Heaven alone, and, when she returned, her friend asked her, "Well, what have you learned?"

"I have heard it said that a hail storm will destroy the crops of those who sow their fields early."

Hearing this, the good man returned home and, when sowing time came, he waited until all his neighbors had sowed their fields. Then he began to plant. It happened just as he had heard the spirit say: the crops of all the neighbors failed and his own prospered.

The following year he went again to sleep in the cemetery. Again he heard the same two spirits conversing.

Said the first, "Let us fly over the world and eavesdrop under the curtain of Heaven so that we may learn what misfortunes await mankind."

"I have already told you that I have nothing on except a straw shroud!" remonstrated the other. "Better go alone and tell me later what you've heard."

And so the spirit went alone and when she returned her friend asked her, "Well, what have you learned?"

"I heard that he who sows his field in the summer will have his crops burned by the sun."

The man returned home and sowed his fields early in the spring before all his neighbors. When the hot weather arrived his crops were already well grown and firmly rooted, but the crops of his neighbors were scorched.

Mystified by her husband's continued good fortune his wife insisted that he reveal to her his secret. He then told her everything.

Several days later his wife had a quarrel with the mother of one of the dead girls.

"Come, and I'll show you that your daughter lies buried in a shroud of straw!" she said to her.

For the third time one year later the man went to spend the night in the cemetery. Again he heard the two spirits conversing. As on the two previous occasions he heard one of the spirits say, "Come, my friend, let us fly over the world and eavesdrop under the curtain of Heaven in order to learn what misfortunes await mankind."

"Heaven defend us!" cried her friend fearfully. "Let us keep our mouths shut! One cannot say anything even around

here. Everything we talk about is immediately carried to the living. Very likely at this moment someone is eavesdropping on us!"

### *The Man Who Married a She-Devil<sup>48</sup>*

THE man who fears the Lord will guard himself against the temptations of the flesh. But if he submits to them he is in imminent danger of losing his soul and of burning in the everlasting fires of Gehenna.

For instance, it could easily happen that Satan, like a cunning fisherman, will cast his net for him. He could make a she-devil take on the shape of an enticing woman and send her to corrupt him with her lecheries. And as the sins of the parents are visited upon their posterity, so the offspring of a man guilty of adultery remain forevermore tainted. Everybody knows that if a man make a compact with Lilith the Temptress or any other she-demon, he and his kind are torn up by the roots by a just, all-knowing God, and their very names are erased from the recollection of mankind.

In a certain large city stood a handsome stone house on a wide street. A clever goldsmith and his wife and children lived in it. Outwardly this man feigned piety, but secretly he lived in sin with a she-devil who, just as his wife, bore him offspring.

Now this she-devil was very beautiful. She was also very cunning and spun her web of seduction around the goldsmith with great skill. He soon found himself caught irrevocably in her toils. Many a time, while in the synagogue, he would interrupt his devotions and rush off to see her.

And so the years sped by one after another.

It happened once, that on the first night of the Passover, the goldsmith sat down amidst his household to chant in the time-honored fashion of all Jews the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt. Suddenly he felt desire overcome him. Its power over him was compelling. So he arose and left the house in haste.

The astonishment of the goldsmith's wife knew no bounds. Looking through the window she saw him enter his workshop. This excited her curiosity. She tiptoed after him and discreetly peered through a crack in the wall of the workshop.

The interior was brilliantly lighted with many tapers. In the

center stood a table set for two as for a feast. It was laden with gold and silver dishes and with the finest of food and wines. Then she saw something which caused her to tremble. On a magnificent couch lay a woman of great loveliness. Beside her reclined the goldsmith, her husband.

The virtuous wife was overwhelmed by what she saw. She turned hastily away and, with a troubled spirit, reentered her house. When her husband returned, she averted his eyes from him and did not utter a word.

The betrayed wife arose at dawn and hastened to the Rabbi for she felt the urgent need of unburdening her grief to him.

After he had heard her tale the Rabbi sent for the goldsmith who, under his persistent questioning, finally confessed that he had a concubine who did not belong to the human species. Hearing this, the Rabbi was moved to compassion. He gave him an amulet on which he wrote the Ineffable Name in the holy tongue.

"Go in peace," said the Rabbi. "From this day on the wiles of the she-devil will be powerless against you."

And it happened as the Rabbi said. The goldsmith felt no longer any sinful inclinations and he broke forever loose of the she-devil—or so he thought. . . .

Years later, as the goldsmith lay dying, the she-devil suddenly appeared before him. This time she appeared to him more enticing than she had ever been before. She wrung her hands and sobbed, and lamented that when he died she and their demon-children would remain unprovided for.

She gazed lovingly into his eyes and spun her web of seduction about him even more skilfully than at any previous time. Throwing her arms about him she kissed and embraced him, so that, although dying, he felt his ancient love return for her.

At last she succeeded in breaking down his will, although he struggled against her. She made him solemnly promise that she and her children would share equally in the inheritance with his human wife and children. He then assigned to her the cellar of his house as her and her children's dwelling in perpetuity.

Many years had passed since the death of the goldsmith. A bloody war had swept like a holocaust over the land. The human sons of the goldsmith were killed in that evil time. After that, the house passed into the hands of strangers.

All this time the cellar remained locked and heavily barred. The new owners never showed any curiosity to investigate below. One day, however, a venturesome youth tried to force his way in. Barely an hour had elapsed when he was found lying dead on the threshold, but no one knew what it was that had caused his death.

Two years later demons began to frequent the kitchen of the house. When food was being cooked at the hearth, earth and ashes were found in the caldron, making its contents inedible. It wasn't long before the kobolds penetrated into the interior rooms. They seized upon candlesticks and other decorative objects and smashed them upon the floor. While they worked no harm on the people of the house they so thoroughly frightened them that they were obliged to move into other quarters.

Soon the entire city was being plagued by the demons. Alarmed over the critical situation the elders of the community held urgent counsel with one another to devise ways and means to fight the demon-pestilence effectively. The holy men, wise in exorcism and magic, tried all manner of strong measures, but to no avail. The demons only mocked at them and played further pranks upon them. Finally, the elders decided to send for a certain seer of great renown in the land.

The seer arrived and forthwith commenced to drive out the demons by means of highly secret incantations in which figured the Ineffable Name. Immediately the demons declared themselves vanquished and with loud cries of fear swarmed out of their hiding-places.

On close questioning they told the seer how they came to live in the cellar. To this he replied that they had been occupying the premises illegally because no demons may dwell together with humans.

"You may only live in the wastelands, in the dark forest, and in the desert," he warned them sternly.

To which the demons heatedly replied that they held absolute title to the house according to the laws and teachings of Holy Scripture.

"We demand," they said, "that this case be brought before a proper tribunal for judgment!"

Since one may not ignore an appeal to justice from even a demon, a court of equity was convened two days later. The seer and the rabbinical judges took their judicial places. The

voices of the demon-plaintiffs were heard distinctly although no corporeal forms were visible.

They told the court about their late-lamented father, the goldsmith, of his last will and testament on his dying bed, and of the subsequent death of all his human descendants in the course of the war. They argued, that by virtue of all these reasons, they alone were the legitimate heirs to the estate left by their human father.

Opposed to the demons were the current owners of the house. They pleaded: "We paid a great sum for the property to the human descendants of the goldsmith. Those who bring the claim against us are demons. Since human law is not valid for demons, they cannot be considered the rightful heirs."

The judges then withdrew and after consultation issued their decision: that the kobolds held no legal title to the house of the goldsmith, that the law of God obliges them to shun the habitations of men and live in solitary places.

Then up rose the seer and in an awesome voice he pronounced incantations. The demons arose in terror and fled to the dark forest and the wasteland, never to molest man again.

# 5

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## *Animal Tales*

### INTRODUCTION

The invention of the fable—some believe by the wise men of India, others by the Greeks—marked a turning point in the popular instruction of the people in morals and wisdom. Animals, birds and fish, and even trees and plants, were endowed with human personality. They spoke, thought, felt and acted like people. Thus, by the subtle art of indirection and by epigrammatic condensation of both narrative and idea, the beast fables were able to project the normal situations in life and the lessons to be drawn from them with superb pedagogic skill. Their popularity among the common people was enormous.

While there are traces of the fable in Jewish Scriptures, it would be wrong to include the Jews among the innovators, or even significant developers, of this folk-art form. They were only skilful translators and adapters of the fables of India and Greece. A superficial comparison of fables in Jewish collections with those of other peoples reveals that, by and large, they borrowed freely from Hindu works, such as the *Panchatantra* and the *Mahabahratta*, and the numerous *jatakas* which deal with the nativity of Buddha, and from Greek sources, such as Aesop, Phaedrus, Avian, Kybises and Syntipas.

The outstanding Jewish fabulist of all time was Rabbi Meir, the most eminent pupil of Rabbi Akiba, who lived in Hellenic Asia Minor during the Second Century A.D. He was a great teacher of the people and, being well read in Greek and Latin literatures, discovered that the fable could be an effective aid to his instruction. The Talmud records that he was the collector of three hundred fables—certainly an astonishing number—yet there are altogether only about thirty fables to be found in both the Talmud and the *Midrash*. Meir's fables, whatever their national origin, were ingeniously adapted to the needs of Jewish life and understanding, as can be seen in his fable *The Fate of the Wicked*. The special talent he possessed in this genre helped win for him a legendary reputation among the people. There are

many anecdotes in the *Agada* concerning his skill as a teacher of ethics and his greatness as a man. Upon his death in Asia Minor, a writer in the *Mishna* commented sadly: "With the death of R. Meir fable-writers ceased to exist." To this day in many Jewish homes, in honor of R. Meir's memory, there hangs on the wall a coin-box (*Meir Baal ha-Ness pushkeh*) into which the pious woman of the household, before lighting the Sabbath candles, drops her modest donation for the support of the poor in the Holy Land.

The English folklorist, Joseph Jacobs, has remarked: "It has been conjectured that the chief additions to the fable literature of the Middle Ages were made through the intermediation of the Jews, Berechiah ha-Nakdan and John of Capua." Berechiah (known to Christians as Benedictus le Puncteur) was a Jewish grammarian who lived in Oxford in A.D. 1190. The 107 "Fox Fables" (*Mishle Shualim*) in his noted collection are witty and didactic. While a large number of the fables are Aesop's, and others are of Indian origin, quite a few are apparently Jewish in character and in moral point. Berechiah's foxes are amusingly Talmudical; they argue like expert casuists and quote Scripture with the ease of learned rabbis, and their laughter and irony have the traditional Jewish ingredients. In the opinion of Joseph Jacobs—". . . it is very possible that the first knowledge of Aesop gained in England was derived from a Latin translation of Berechiah." John of Capua, a Thirteenth Century Jewish convert, helped spread the great Bidpai cycle of Brahmin fables through Europe by means of his Latin translation, *Directorium Vite Humane*, from Rabbi Joel's Hebrew version of the Arabic version, *Kalilah wa-Dimnah*.

Another noted Jewish collection of fables was the *Sefer Shaashuum* (Book of Delight) by Joseph ibn Zabara (c.1200), a Hebrew poet of Spain. It too was modeled upon the Indian Bidpai fables, and, like a zoological park, abounded in lions, tigers, leopards and foxes. Zabara endowed his cunning psychological fox with all the male cynicism about women that was so fashionable during the Middle Ages among the sophisticated upper classes, Arabic, Christian, and Jewish alike. *The Book of Delight*, in more than one way, is a rare item in Thirteenth Century European folklore. Of the original narrative design employed by Zabara in binding together the series of fables reproduced in this section, *The Fox and the Leopard*, the Anglo-Jewish scholar, Israel Abrahams, has observed: "Here, in Zabara, we have an earlier instance than was previously known in Europe, of an intertwined series of fables and witticisms, partly Indian, partly Greek, partly Semitic in origin, welded together by the Hebrew poet by means of a framework." (*Book of Delight*, p. 26.)

N.A.

*The Fate of the Wicked<sup>49</sup>*  
(A Fable by Rabbi Meir)

ONCE a fox said to a wolf, "If you want to enjoy a good meal, take my advice: enter the courtyard of any Jew on Friday and help him in his preparations for the Sabbath. Rest assured that he will reward you for this by asking you to partake of the Sabbath feast."

The wolf was enchanted with the sage advice of the fox and decided to follow it.

But no sooner did he show his face in the courtyard of a Jew than the entire household fell upon him with sticks and trounced him so soundly that he barely managed to escape with his life.

Full of wrath the wolf went in search of the fox, and when he found him he wanted to tear him limb from limb. The fox tried to mollify him.

"Don't carry on so," he told him. "I'm not to blame because they beat you. Blame your father instead! Pay attention to what I'm going to tell you now.

"Once a Jew asked your father to help him in his preparations for the Sabbath, and for that he promised to invite him to the feast. But your father had no patience and devoured all the delicious courses and did not leave the Jew even one little chicken bone.

"Now, can you understand why the Jew beat you? But don't lose heart! Leave it to me. I'll lead you to a house where both of us can have our fill of a delicious feast."

The wolf gratefully agreed.

The fox then led the wolf to a well over which hung two buckets suspended from ropes. When one bucket went down the other one came up. The fox climbed into one bucket and quickly descended to the bottom of the well.

"What are you doing there?" asked the curious wolf from above.

"My! You've never seen anything like it!" the fox cried out with rapture. "I've found here meat and cheese and other good things to eat! Just look down—don't you see what a great big cheese is down here?"

The wolf looked down and, sure enough, saw the reflection of the moon mirrored in the water. But he believed that it was a cheese as the fox had told him.

His appetite whetted, the wolf could hardly control himself any longer.

"How can I get down?" he called to the fox.

"Very simply," said the fox, "get into the other bucket and join me."

The wolf climbed into the bucket with alacrity. But no sooner was he in than the weight of his body pulled him down to the bottom of the well, and at the same time pulled up the other bucket carrying the fox who jumped nimbly out.

Terror seized the wolf when he saw what had happened.

"How will I get up again?" he cried to the fox.

The fox merely answered him with the saying from the Book of Proverbs:

"The righteous is delivered out of trouble,  
And the wicked cometh in his stead."

### *The Advantage of Being a Scholar*

A FOX looked up into a tree and saw a crow sitting on the topmost branch. The crow looked mighty good to him, for he was hungry. He tried every wile to get him down but the wise old crow only leered contemptuously down at him.

"Foolish crow!" the fox said, banteringly. "Believe me, you have no reason to be afraid of me. Don't you know that the birds and the beasts will never have to fight again? Haven't you heard the Messiah is coming! If you were a Talmud scholar like me you'd surely know that the Prophet Isaiah has said that when the Messiah comes 'the lion shall lie down with the lamb and the fox with the crow and there shall be peace forevermore.'"

And as he stood thus speaking sweetly, the baying of hounds was heard. The fox began to tremble with fright and started to run for his life.

"Foolish fox," croaked the crow pleasantly from the tree. "You have no reason to be afraid since you're a Talmud scholar and know what the Prophet Isaiah has said."

"True, I know what the Prophet Isaiah said," cried the fox as he slunk into the bushes, "but you see—the trouble is the dogs don't!"

*King Leviathan and the Charitable Boy<sup>50</sup>*

IN A certain town there lived a man who brought up his son in the ways of righteousness. Daily he repeated to him the commandment: "Cast thy bread upon the waters; perhaps it will be returned to you a hundredfold some day."

And it came to pass that this man was gathered to his forefathers. Then the boy recalled what his father had taught him. Each day he would go to the edge of the sea and cast a piece of his bread into the water. And, on the spot where it fell, a fish appeared and swallowed it. From that day on, whenever the boy came to cast his bread into the water, the same fish waited for him. In time the fish became so big and strong that he began to tyrannize over all the other fish around him, so that they feared for their very lives.

In terror they assembled and went to complain to King Leviathan. "Lord," they said, "among us in the sea there is a fish who has become so big and powerful that we no longer feel safe with him. A day does not pass when he does not devour at least twenty of us."

When King Leviathan heard this he was filled with wrath. "Bring the culprit before me!" he commanded. And he sent a messenger to summon him. But, when the fish heard King Leviathan's request, he laughed and devoured the messenger. Seeing that the messenger did not return, Leviathan sent another one after him. But he too met with the same fate.

Enraged, Leviathan cried: "I myself will go after this criminal!" And, when he found him, Leviathan asked him: "How does it happen that there are so many fish in the sea and yet no one is as big as you?"

"You speak truly," replied the fish. "The secret of my strength lies in that daily a boy appears on the shore and throws bread to me. And I grow even stronger because every morning I devour twenty fish and at night, thirty."

"Why do you eat your own kind?" demanded Leviathan sternly.

"Can I help it if they come near me and thus tempt me?" answered the fish.

Thereupon, Leviathan grew impatient with the fish and commanded: "Begone! Bring to me the boy that feeds you!"

"I will bring him to you tomorrow," the fish replied. He then swam to the spot on the strand of the sea where the boy

came daily to feed him and he dug a hole on that spot and covered it with seaweed.

When the boy came the following day and stepped onto his accustomed place he fell into the sea, and the fish swallowed him and swam swiftly to King Leviathan.

"Spit out the boy!" commanded Leviathan. The fish then spat him out and into Leviathan's mouth.

"My son," demanded Leviathan of the boy, "why do you throw your bread into the water?"

The boy replied, "O King, my father taught me to do so ever since I was little."

Hearing him speak thus King Leviathan rejoiced. He spat him out and kissed him fondly. Then, because he found him worthy, he taught him all the seventy languages of mankind. He also studied Torah with him and made a great scholar of him.

Having taught him all he knew he then cast him three hundred miles onto the land. When the boy arose he found himself at a spot on which no human foot had ever trod. Feeling very tired, he lay down to rest. Suddenly he saw two ravens flying overhead and, having been taught by Leviathan the language of the birds, he understood what the two birds were saying.

He heard the younger bird say, "Father, just look at that boy below on the ground. Do you think he is dead or alive?"

"That I do not know, my son," replied the raven.

"How I long to eat human eyes!" exclaimed the young raven. "I'm going to swoop down on the boy and peck out his eyes!"

"Do not do so, my son," his parent warned him. "Should the boy be alive you might yet meet with misfortune."

But, being heedless, the young raven disobeyed his father and swooped down on the boy who had overheard all that was said and was feigning to be asleep. No sooner did the young raven alight on his forehead when the boy seized his legs and held him tight in his grasp.

"Father! Father!" shrilled the little raven. "Come and help me!"

And when his father saw his plight he lamented: "Woe to my son!" And to the boy he called out: "Boy, let my child go! If you understand my language, heed me! I promise to reward you if you will show mercy. Know that upon the very spot

upon which you lie is buried the vanished treasure of Solomon, King of Israel."

The boy then let the bird go free. He dug in the ground on that spot. He knew that the raven had spoken truly, for he found there King Solomon's treasure which consisted of priceless pearls and gems. And so he became rich and, when he died, he left his children untold wealth.

The son of Sira had this boy in mind when he wrote: "Break thy bread for the hungry, and share your repast with all who wish to partake of it."

### *The Sly Fox<sup>51</sup>*

A sick lion who had not eaten for a long time acquired a bad breath. In the forest he met an ass.

"Does my breath smell badly?" he asked him.

"It does," replied the simple-minded ass.

"How dare a common creature like you insult me, the King of the Beasts!" roared the lion, and forthwith he devoured the ass.

A while later he met a bear.

"Does my breath smell badly?" the lion asked him.

"Oh no!" exclaimed the bear. "Your breath is sweeter than honey."

"Flatterer!" roared the lion. "How dare you deceive me?"

And he devoured the bear, too.

At last he met a fox.

"Smell me, my friend," asked the lion, "and tell me whether my breath is sweet."

Now the sly fox saw the pitfall and was wary.

"Pardon me, O King of the Forest," said the fox most politely, "for I cannot smell at all! I have a bad cold."

### *The Price of Envy*

WHILE a poor woman stood in the market-place selling cheeses, a cat came along and carried off a cheese. A dog saw the pilferer and tried to take the cheese away from him. The cat stood up to the dog. So they pitched into each other. The dog barked and snapped; the cat spat and scratched, but they could bring the battle to no decision.

"Let's go to the fox and have him referee the matter," the cat finally suggested.

"Agreed," said the dog.

So they went to the fox.

The fox listened to their arguments with a judicious air.

"Foolish animals," he chided them, "why carry on like that? If both of you are willing, I'll divide the cheese in two and you'll both be satisfied."

"Agreed," said the cat and the dog.

So the fox took out his knife and cut the cheese in two, but, instead of cutting it lengthwise, he cut it in the width.

"My half is smaller!" protested the dog.

The fox looked judiciously through his spectacles at the dog's share.

"You're right, quite right!" he decided.

So he went and bit off a piece of the cat's share.

"That will make it even!" he said.

When the cat saw what the fox did she began to yowl:

"Just look! My part's smaller now!"

The fox again put on his spectacles and looked judiciously at the cat's share.

"Right you are!" said the fox. "Just a moment, and I'll make it right."

And he went and bit off a piece from the dog's cheese.

This went on so long, with the fox nibbling first at the dog's and then at the cat's share, that he finally ate up the whole cheese before their eyes.

### *Know Your Enemy*

A YOUNG inexperienced mouse went out to forage for food. Before he started out his wise old granddaddy cautioned him, "Watch out, dear child, for our enemies!"

The young mouse promised faithfully to do so and then dashed out into the barnyard.

The first one he met was a rooster who stretched out his wings and, looking fierce, cried out in a terrible voice, "Cock-a-doodle-do!"

Scared out of his wits, the little mouse scurried back into his hole.

"Grandpa, Grandpa!" he gasped breathlessly. "I've just met a terrible creature with a comb red as blood. When he saw me he threw back his head and screamed at me!"

Grandpa Mouse smiled indulgently and said, "Foolish child! This is no enemy of ours! This was a rooster who crowed. You have nothing to fear from him!"

Taking heart the little mouse went out again and the first one he met was a turkey. He got so frightened when he looked at him that pell-mell he ran back into the mouse-hole.

"Oh Grandpa!" he cried, trembling with fright. "I just saw a horrible black creature. He had yellow legs, a sharp beak and angry red eyes. When he saw me he shook his head fiercely and cried, 'Gobble, gobble!'"

Grandpa Mouse smiled indulgently.

"Foolish child!" he chided. "He isn't our enemy—he's only a turkey! You will be able to recognize our enemy by the humble way he carries himself. He keeps his head down and has beautiful golden eyes. His fur is smooth and he purrs ever so gently. When you meet him—run for your life!"

### *The Wise Bird and the Foolish Man<sup>52</sup>*

A BIRD-CATCHER once caught a bird. But it was an extraordinary creature that understood all the seventy languages of mankind. She therefore pleaded with her captor in his own tongue: "Set me free, and I will impart to you three useful teachings."

"Tell them to me first. Then I will release you," said the bird-catcher.

"First give me your solemn oath that you will keep your word," answered the bird.

"I swear to set you free," replied the man.

The bird then spoke: "Pay heed then! The first teaching is: 'Never regret what has already happened.' The second teaching is: 'Don't believe the incredible.' The third teaching is: 'Never try to achieve the unattainable.'"

Having taught the man her wisdom the bird pleaded: "Set me free now, as you promised."

And the bird-catcher agreed and set her free.

At that, the bird spread her wings and flew to the top of a high tree nearby and from there she mocked at the man below: "Fool that you are! You let me out of your grasp not knowing that I carry in my body a priceless pearl through whose magic power I have become wise."

When the bird-catcher heard this he regretted the folly that had led him to release the bird. To retrieve his loss he began to climb the tree upon which the bird was perched. But barely had he reached half-way when he lost his hold and fell

to the ground. There he lay with broken bones, moaning with pain.

The bird looked down upon him and laughed. "You stupid fool!" she chided him. "But a few moments have passed since I imparted to you my wisdom and already you have forgotten it! I told you never to regret anything that has happened, and almost immediately you regretted giving me my freedom. I taught you not to believe the incredible and, nevertheless, you accepted as truth my fairytale that I carry in my body a wonder-working pearl. Know that I am nothing but a common bird who has to forage for her nourishment from hour to hour! Lastly, I cautioned you against trying to achieve the unattainable and, nonetheless, you undertook to capture a bird on the wing with your bare hands. Because you did not heed me you now lie broken and bleeding. About such as you is the proverb: 'A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.' There are, unfortunately, many simpletons like you among men!"

### *The Fox and the Foolish Fishes<sup>58</sup>*

THE Holy One said to the Angel of Death: "Cast a pair of each species into the sea, and then thou shalt have dominion over all that remain of the species."

The Angel did so forthwith, and he cast a pair of each kind into the sea.

When the fox saw what he was about, what did he do? At once he stood and wept. Then said the Angel of Death unto him: "Why weepest thou?"

"For my companions, whom thou hast cast into the sea," answered the fox.

"Where, then, are thy companions?" said the Angel.

The fox ran to the sea-shore, and the Angel of Death beheld the reflection of the fox in the water, and he thought that he had already cast in a pair of foxes, so, addressing the fox by his side, he cried: "Be off with you!"

The fox at once fled and escaped.

The weasel met him, and the fox related what had happened, and what he had done. And so the weasel went and did likewise.

At the end of the year, the Leviathan assembled all the creatures in the sea, and lo! the fox and the weasel were missing, for they had not come into the sea. He sent to ask,

and he was told how the fox and the weasel had escaped through their wisdom. They taunted the Leviathan, saying: "The fox is exceedingly cunning."

The Leviathan felt uneasy and envious, and he sent a deputation of great fishes, with the order that they were to deceive the fox, and bring him before him.

They went, and found him by the sea-shore. When the fox saw the fishes disporting themselves near the bank, he was surprised, and he went among them. They beheld him, and asked: "Who art thou?"

"I am the fox," said he.

"Knowest thou not," continued the fishes, "that a great honor is in store for thee, and that we have come here on thy behalf?"

"What is it?" asked the fox.

"The Leviathan," they said, "is sick and likely to die. He has appointed thee to reign in his stead, for he has heard that thou art wiser and more prudent than all other animals. Come with us, for we are his messengers, and are here in thy honor."

"But," objected the fox, "how can I come into the sea without being drowned?"

"Nay," said the fishes, "ride upon one of us, and he will carry thee above the sea, so that not even a drop of water shall touch so much as the soles of thy feet, until thou reachest the kingdom. We will take thee down without thy knowing it. Come with us, and reign over us, and be king, and be joyful all thy days. No more wilt thou need to seek for food, nor will wild beasts, stronger than thou, meet thee and devour thee."

The fox heard and believed their words. He rode upon one of them, and they went with him into the sea. Soon, however, the waves dashed over him, and he began to perceive that he had been tricked.

"Woe is me!" wailed the fox. "What have I done? I have played many a trick on others, but these fishes have played one on me worth all mine put together. Now that I have fallen into their hands, how shall I free myself? Indeed," he said, turning to the fishes, "now that I am fully in your power, I shall speak the truth. What are you going to do with me?"

"To tell thee the truth," replied the fishes, "the Leviathan has heard thy fame, that thou art very wise, and he said, I

will rend the fox, and will eat his heart, and thus I shall become wise."

"Oh!" said the fox. "Why did you not tell me the truth at first? I should then have brought my heart with me, and I should have given it to King Leviathan, and he would have honored me; but now ye are in an evil plight."

"What! Thou hast not thy heart with thee?"

"Certainly not. It is our custom to leave our heart at home while we go about from place to place. When we need our heart, we take it; otherwise it remains at home."

"What must we do?" asked the bewildered fishes.

"My house and dwelling-place," replied the fox, "are by the sea-shore. If you like, carry me back to the place whence you brought me, I will fetch my heart, and will come again with you. I will present my heart to Leviathan, and he will reward me and you with honors. But if you take me thus, without my heart, he will be wroth with you, and will devour you. I have no fear for myself, for I shall say unto him: 'My lord, they did not tell me at first, and when they did tell me, I begged them to return for my heart, but they refused.' "

The fishes at once declared that he was speaking well. They conveyed him back to the spot on the sea-shore whence they had taken him.

Off jumped the fox, and he danced with joy. He threw himself on the sand, and laughed.

"Be quick," cried the fishes, "get thy heart, and come."

But the fox answered: "You fools! Begone! How could I have come with you without my heart? Have you any animals that go about without their hearts?"

"Thou hast tricked us!" they moaned.

"Fools! I tricked the Angel of Death, how much more easily a parcel of silly fishes."

The fish returned in shame, and related to their master what had happened.

"In truth," he said, "the fox is cunning, and ye are simple. Concerning you was it said: 'The turning away of the simple shall slay them'" (Prov. I:32).

Then the Leviathan ate the fishes.

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*The Proper Place for a Tail<sup>54</sup>*

A SNAKE went slithering down the road.

"How long will you insist on leading while I drag behind you!" cried the tail to the head. "Why shouldn't we change places for once? Let me lead now and you follow."

"Very well," agreed the head. "You go first."

So the tail began to lead and the head trailed after.

At last they came to a pit filled with water and the tail, not having any eyes, slid right into the pit, dragging the head down with it. It fell among sharp thorns and hurt itself as well as the head.

Now, I ask, who was to blame?

Didn't it serve the head right for being so weak that it allowed itself to be led by a brainless tail?

*The Curse of the Indolent<sup>55</sup>*

A HEATHEN farmer had a pig, a she-ass, and a little ass. He fed the pig a great deal, but the she-ass and her child were fed in limited measure.

"What a foolish man our master is!" said the little ass to his mother. "Don't you think it is unjust, mother, that we who work for him and pull his burdens should be fed so poorly? Why is it that pig who is lazy all day long and does nothing eats as much as she wants?"

"Just wait a while, my child," the she-ass comforted him. "A time is sure to come when you will see the pig in great misfortune. Know that the farmer is not stuffing her with fine food out of love for her but only to hasten her grief."

When the heathen celebrated the next feast day he slaughtered his pig. Ever after, whenever the little ass was given food he ate sparingly, remembering the sad fate of the pig.

When his mother saw this she tried to correct him: "It isn't eating a lot that brings death, my child, but going about the livelong day like the pig doing nothing!"

*The Fox and the Leopard<sup>56</sup>*

A LEOPARD once lived in content and plenty; ever he found easy sustenance for his wife and children. Hard by there dwelt his neighbor and friend, the fox. The fox felt in his heart that his life was safe only as long as the leopard could catch other prey, and he planned out a method for ridding

himself of this dangerous friendship. Before the evil cometh, say the wise, counsel is good.

"Let me get him out of the way," thought the fox. "I will lead him into the path of death, for the sages say: 'If one come to slay thee, be beforehand with him, and slay him instead.'"

Next day the fox went to the leopard, and told him of a spot he had seen, a spot of gardens and lilies, where fawns and does disported themselves, and everything was fair. The leopard went with him to behold this paradise, and rejoiced with exceeding joy.

"Ah," thought the fox, "many a smile ends in a tear."

But the leopard was charmed, and wished to move to this delightful abode.

"But first," said he, "I will go to consult my wife, my life-long comrade, the bride of my youth."

The fox was sadly disconcerted. Full well he knew the wisdom and the craft of the leopard's wife.

"Nay," said he, "trust not thy wife. A woman's counsel is evil and foolish, her heart hard like marble; she is a plague in the house. Yes, ask her advice and do the opposite."

The leopard told his wife that he was resolved to go.

"Beware of the fox!" she exclaimed. "Two small animals there are, the craftiest they, by far—the serpent and the fox. Hast thou not heard how the fox bound the lion and slew him with cunning?"

"How did the fox dare," asked the leopard, "to come near enough to the lion to do it?"

(The leopard's wife then takes up the parable, and cites the following incident:)

The lion loved the fox, but the fox had no faith in him, and plotted his death. One day the fox went to the lion whining that a pain had seized him in the head.

"I have heard," said the fox, "that physicians prescribe for a headache, that the patient shall be tied up hand and foot."

The lion assented, and bound up the fox with a cord.

"Ah," blithely said the fox, "my pain is gone."

Then the lion loosed him. Time passed and the lion's turn came to suffer in his head. In sore distress he went to the fox, fast as a bird to the snare, and exclaimed, "Bind me up, brother, that I, too, may be healed, as happened with thee."

The fox took fresh withes, and bound the lion up. Then he went to fetch great stones, which he cast on the lion's head, and thus crushed him.

"Therefore, my dear leopard," concluded his wife, "trust not the fox, for I fear him and his wiles. If the place he tells of be so fair, why does not the fox take it for himself?"

"Nay," said the leopard, "thou art a silly prattler. I have often proved my friend, and there is no dross in the silver of his love."

(The leopard would not hearken to his wife's advice, yet he was somewhat moved by her warning, and he told the fox of his misgiving, adding that his wife refused to accompany him. "Ah," replied the fox, "I fear your fate will be like the silversmith's; let me tell you his story, and you will know how silly it is to listen to a wife's counsel.")

A silversmith of Babylon, skillful in his craft, was one day at work.

"Listen to me," said his wife, "and I will make thee rich and honored. Our lord, the king, has an only daughter, and he loves her as his life. Fashion for her a silver image of herself, and I will bear it to her as a gift."

The statue was soon made, and the princess rejoiced at seeing it. She gave a cloak and earrings to the artist's wife, who showed them to her husband in triumph.

"But where is the wealth and the honor?" he asked. "The statue was worth much more than thou hast brought."

Next day the king saw the statue in his daughter's hand, and his anger was kindled.

"Is it not ordered," he cried, "that none should make an image? Cut off his right hand."

The king's command was carried out, and daily the smith wept, and exclaimed, "Take warning from me, ye husbands, and obey not the voice of your wives."

(The leopard shuddered when he heard this tale; but the fox went on:)

A hewer of wood in Damascus was cutting logs and his wife sat spinning by his side.

"My departed father," she said, "was a better workman

than thou. He could chop with both hands: when the right hand was tired, he used the left."

"Nay," said he, "no woodcutter does that, he uses the right hand, unless he be a left-handed man."

"Ah, my dear," she entreated, "try and do it as my father did."

The witless wight raised his left hand to hew the wood, but struck his right-hand thumb instead. Without a word he took the axe and smote his wife on the head, and she died.

His deed was noised about; the woodcutter was seized and stoned for his crimes.

"Therefore," continued the fox, "I say unto thee, all women are deceivers and trappers of souls. And let me tell you more of these wily stratagems."

(The fox reinforces his argument with the following tale:)

A king of the Arabs, wise and well-advised, was one day seated with his counsellors, who were loud in the praise of women, lauding their virtues and their wisdom.

"Cut short these words," said the king. "Never since the world began has there been a good woman. They love for their own ends."

"But," pleaded his sages, "O King, thou art hasty. Women there are, wise and faithful and spotless, who love their husbands and tend their children."

"Then," said the king, "here is my city before you: search it through, and find one of the good women of whom you speak."

They sought, and they found a woman, chaste and wise, fair as the moon and bright as the sun, the wife of a wealthy trader; and the counsellors reported about her to the king. He sent for her husband, and received him with favor.

"I have something for thy ear," said the king. "I have a good and desirable daughter: she is my only child; I will not give her to a king or a prince: let me find a simple, faithful man, who will love her and hold her in esteem. Thou art such a one; thou shalt have her. But thou art married; slay thy wife tonight, and tomorrow thou shalt wed my daughter."

"I am unworthy," pleaded the man, "to be the shepherd of thy flock, much less the husband of thy daughter."

But the king would take no denial.

"But how shall I kill my wife? For fifteen years she has

eaten of my bread and drunk of my cup. She is the joy of my heart; her love and esteem grow day by day."

"Slay her," said the king, "and be king hereafter."

The man went forth from the presence, downcast and sad, thinking over, and a little shaken by, the king's temptation. At home he saw his wife and his two babes.

"Better," he cried, "is my wife than a kingdom! Cursed be all kings who tempt men to sip sorrow, calling it joy."

The king waited his coming in vain; and then he sent messengers to the man's shop. When he found that the man's love had conquered his lust, he said, with a sneer, "Thou art no man; thy heart is a woman's."

In the evening the king summoned the woman secretly. She came, and the king praised her beauty and her wisdom. His heart, he said, was burning with love for her, but he would not wed another man's wife.

"Slay thy husband tonight," he said, "and tomorrow be my queen."

With a smile, the woman consented; and the king gave her a sword made of tin, for he knew the weak mind of woman.

"Strike once," he said to her. "The sword is sharp; you need not essay a second blow."

She gave her husband a choice repast, and wine to make him drunken. As he lay asleep, she grasped the sword and struck him on the head; and the tin bent, and he awoke. With some ado she quieted him, and he fell asleep again.

Next morning the king summoned her, and asked whether she had obeyed his orders.

"Yes," said she, "but thou didst frustrate thine own counsel."

Then the king assembled his sages, and bade her tell all that she had attempted; and the husband, too, was fetched, to tell his story.

"Did I not tell you to cease your praises of women?" asked the king triumphantly.

("So much," said the fox to the leopard, "I have told thee that thou mayest know how little women are to be trusted. They deceive men in life, and betray them in death."

"But," queried the leopard, "what could my wife do to harm me after I am dead?"

"Listen," rejoined the fox, "and I will tell thee of a deed viler than any I have narrated hitherto.")

The kings of Rome, when they hanged a man, denied him burial until the tenth day. That the friends and relatives of the victim might not steal the body, an officer of high rank was set to watch the tree by night. If the body was stolen, the officer was hung up in its place.

A knight of high degree once rebelled against the king, and he was hanged on a tree. The officer on guard was startled at midnight to hear a piercing shriek of anguish from a little distance; he mounted his horse, and rode towards the voice, to discover the meaning. He came to an open grave, where the common people were buried, and saw a weeping woman loud in laments for her departed spouse. He sent her home with words of comfort, accompanying her to the city gate. He then returned to his post.

Next night the same scene was repeated, and as the officer spoke his gentle soothings to her, a love for him was born in her heart, and her dead husband was forgotten. And as they spoke words of love, they neared the tree, and lo! the body that the officer was set to watch was gone.

"Begone," he said, "and I will fly, or my life must pay the penalty of my dalliance."

"Fear not, my lord," she said, "we can raise my husband from his grave and hang him instead of the stolen corpse."

"But I fear the Prince of Death. I cannot drag a man from his grave!" he cried.

"I alone will do it then," said the woman. "I will dig him out; it is lawful to cast a dead man from the grave, to keep a live man from being thrown in."

"Alas!" cried the officer, when she had done the fearsome deed, "the corpse I watched was bald, your husband has thick hair; the change will be detected."

"Nay," said the woman, "I will make him bald!"

And she tore his hair out, with execrations, and they hung him on the tree. But a few days passed and the pair were married.

(The fox reaches the end of his persuasion.)

The leopard's bones rattled while he listened to this tale. Angrily he addressed his wife:

"Come, get up and follow me, or I will slay thee."

Together they went with their young ones, and the fox was their guide and they reached the promised place, and en-

camped by the waters. The fox bade them farewell, his head laughing at his tail.

Seven days were gone, when the rains descended, and in the deep of the night the river rose and engulfed the leopard family in their beds.

"Woe is me," sighed the leopard, "that I did not listen to my wife!"

And he died before his time.



PART FIVE



Proverbs and Riddles

# 1

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## *Proverbs and Folk Sayings*

He is the right sort of pepper.

When the cat wears gloves she can't catch any mice.

The whiskey weeps out of the drunkard.

A daughter-in-law is always a bit of a mother-in-law.

If they give you—take; if they take from you—yell!

A lie one mustn't say—some truths you shouldn't say.

If grandma had wheels she'd be a wagon.

He's got to learn how to shave another's beard.

He crawls with a healthy head into a sick-bed.

Because he is angry at the cantor he doesn't say "*Amen!*"

If you look for *chaleh* you lose the black bread.

He's such a thief, he'll steal the crack of your whip if you  
don't look out!

If you deal in honey you have a chance for a lick.

When it falls it falls buttered side down.

The masses are no asses.

You must never show half-completed work to a fool.

Too great a modesty is half conceit.

If they say dead—you're buried.

A *Litvak* is so clever he repents even before he commits a  
sin.

The worst informer is the face.

You rebuke your daughter but mean your daughter-in-law.

Charge nothing and you'll get a lot of customers.

Don't spit into the well—you might drink from it later.

Jews are very charitable; when you say "good morning," they  
answer: "good year."

Somehow there's always money for *matzos* and shrouds.

- A boil is no trouble—under the other fellow's armpit.  
Cancer—shmancer! as long as you're healthy.  
Weep before God—laugh before people.  
You can never fill a sack full of holes.  
If a jug fall on a stone—woe to the jug! If a stone fall on the jug—woe to the jug!  
Silence is the fence around wisdom.  
Attend no auctions if you have no money.  
Do not worry about tomorrow, because you do not even know what may happen to you today.  
He who drinks much water after meals will never suffer from stomach trouble.  
The laziest man is he who does not seek to acquire friends; still lazier is the one who loses friends because he makes no effort to keep them.  
The sun will set without your assistance.  
Your friend has a friend, and your friend's friend has a friend; be discreet.  
A dream which has not been interpreted is like a letter unread.  
Approach the perfumer and you will be perfumed.  
If the arrow-maker is killed by his arrow, he is paid out of his own work.  
In a field where there are mounds, talk no secrets.  
If one person tells you that you have ass's ears, take no notice; should two tell you so, procure a saddle for yourself.  
Whatever you have to your discredit, be the first to tell it.  
Had you gotten up early, you would not have needed to stay up late.  
The heart and the eye are the agents of sin.  
When the kettle boils over, it overflows its own sides.  
Should the castle totter, its name is still castle; should the dunghill be raised, its name is still dunghill.  
In whom wisdom is, in him is everything; in whom it is not, what has he? He who has acquired it, what does he lack?  
In whom it is not, what has he acquired?  
You can't chew with somebody else's teeth.  
The luck of an ignoramus is that he doesn't know that he doesn't know.

- House-guests and fish spoil on the third day.  
A human being learns how to speak early, but to keep silent—late.  
The one who is incapable of love must learn how to flatter.  
The slanderer never wants to tell the truth, but there may be some truth in his slander.  
A man is no angel, yet he is fully capable of becoming The Angel of Death.  
Be a disciple of Aaron; a lover of peace, and a promoter thereof.  
He that uses the crown of learning as an instrument of gain, will perish.  
Strip a carcass of its hide, even in the marketplace, rather than have recourse to beg. Say not: "I am a priest . . . I am the son of a great man—how can I condescend to such low employment?" Degrading as these may appear, it is still more so to hold your hand out for charity.  
Glorious labor! It both warms and nourishes those that are engaged in it.  
The highest wisdom is kindness.  
He who acquires knowledge without imparting it to others, is like a flower in the desert where there is no one to enjoy it.  
When a thief has no opportunity for stealing he considers himself an honest man.  
He who devotes himself to the mere study of religion without engaging in works of love and mercy is like one who has no God.  
The deeper the sorrow the less tongue it has.  
Shrouds have no pockets.  
Enemies cannot do a man the harm that he does himself.  
Whether a person be Jew or Gentile. . . . according to his acts does the Divine Spirit rest upon him.  
To cheat a Gentile is even worse than cheating a Jew, for besides being a violation of the moral law, it brings Israel into contempt and desecrates the name of Israel's God.  
When trouble comes in the world Israel feels it first; when good fortune comes into the world Israel feels it last.  
As everyone treads on dust, so every nation treads on Israel,

and as dust outlasts metal, so shall Israel outlast its oppressors.

One fool makes many fools.

Sell the Holy Scrolls in the synagogue to give a poor girl a dowry.

Were the eyes not to see the hands would not take.

The whole world is one town.

Whatever one desires most one dreams about.

What is the use of good wine in a rotten barrel?

He who flatters you is your enemy—who rebukes you is your friend.

If you spit upwards you're bound to get it back in the face.

Drive your horse with oats—not with a whip.

If you can't afford chicken, herring will do.

If we didn't have to eat we'd all be rich.

An insincere peace is better than a sincere war.

All things grow with time except grief.

Do not swallow poison because you know an antidote.

An awl can't stay lost in a sack; the point will come out today or tomorrow.

Where there is too much, something is missing.

A half-truth is a whole lie.

One has no appetite for eating . . . the other has no eating for his appetite.

An ox has a long tongue, and yet cannot blow the *shofar*.

You can't get two skins off an ox.

To get in is always easier than to get out.

Poverty is no disgrace—but it's no great honor, either.

When is a pauper miserable? When he's invited to two weddings in one day!

At the baths, all are equal.

Lend a man money, and you buy yourself an enemy.

On someone else's beard it's good to practice barbering.

For *borsht* you don't need any teeth.

If you examine carefully enough, everything is *tref*.

Resent something, and your belly hurts.

The child of old parents is a ready-made orphan.

When a rogue kisses you, count your teeth.

- If the housewife is worthless, the cat is industrious.  
Better a good neighbor, than a bad relative.  
Better a Jew without a beard, than a beard without a Jew.  
Better to ask the way ten times, than to go astray once.  
Better to suffer an injustice, than to do an injustice.  
Better an honest slap, than a false kiss.  
Call me "bear"; just don't chase me into the woods.  
Brandy is a bad messenger: you send him into your belly,  
and he creeps into your head!  
An angry man sleeps alone.  
For bread you can always find a knife.  
You can get drowned close to shore, too.  
If there's a fire at your neighbor's you, too, are in danger.  
Good news is heard from afar.  
If God wills it, a broom can also shoot.  
If God lived on earth, people would break His windows.  
God is a father; luck is a stepfather.  
God sends the cure before the affliction.  
From a goose you can't buy any oats.  
Everywhere it's good, and at home it's even better.  
It's not as good with money, as it is bad without it.  
Good is long remembered; bad even longer.  
The tavern will not corrupt a good man, nor will the House  
of Study straighten out a bad one.  
Long as the Jewish Exile.  
From fortune to misfortune is just a span, but from misfor-  
tune to fortune is quite a distance.  
For luck you don't need any wisdom.  
Not the mouse is the thief; only the hole.  
Never mention rope in the house of a man who has been  
hanged.  
Where they like you, go infrequently; where they hate you,  
don't go at all.  
Promising and liking cost no money.  
"Lots of property, lots of headaches . . ."—but no property  
at all, that's even a greater headache.  
Someone else's worries don't take away your sleep.  
To a doctor and a surgeon you mustn't wish a good year.

If a man is destined to drown, he will drown in a spoonful of water.

One has no intent to give:

the other hasn't a cent to give.

You have? Hold! You know? Be silent! You can? Do!

What one has, he wants not; and what one wants, he has not.

If you have no hand, you can't make a fist.

When the heart is full, the eyes overflow.

The hat's all right, but the head's too small.

Whoever lies down to sleep with a dog, gets up with fleas.

To a beaten dog it is not permitted to show a stick.

Sit at home, and you won't tear your shoes.

If you can't help your friend with money, at least help him with a sympathetic groan.

It helps, the way cupping helps a corpse.

The wagon rests in winter; the sleigh rests in summer; the horse—never.

What is cheap, is dear.

A wolf loses his hair, but not his nature.

Better one word before, than two after.

Words should be weighed, not counted.

If his word were a bridge, I'd be afraid to cross.

A wife sets you on your feet, or knocks you off them.

With weeping you pay no debts.

If things aren't the way you like, you've got to like them the way they are.

What three know is no secret.

The greatest pain is the one you can't tell others about.

What he says he doesn't mean and what he means he doesn't say.

When a son gets married, he gives his bride a contract and his mother a divorce.

A clock that doesn't go at all, is better than one that goes wrong.

Don't be too sweet, or you'll be eaten up; too bitter, or you'll be spat out!

A lot of singing, and too few noodles!

What good can a lamp and spectacles be,  
when a man just doesn't want to see?

- A wise man eats to live; a fool lives to eat.  
Neither wisdom nor prayer will help when the cards aren't running.  
With wisdom alone one doesn't go to market.  
A dream is half a prophet.  
They don't flatter the rich—just his money!  
Roast pigeons don't fly into your mouth.  
A drowning man will grab even for the point of a sword.  
All brides are beautiful; all the dead are pious.  
Anger is a fool.  
More lovely is an ugly patch than a beautiful hole.  
Not that which is beautiful is loved, but rather that is beautiful which is loved.  
A liar believes no one.  
A liar must have a good memory.  
When the girl doesn't know how to dance, she says the musicians don't know how to play.  
A homely girl hates mirrors.  
One has fear in front of a goat, in back of a mule, and on every side of a fool.  
If luck is with you, even your ox will give birth to a calf.  
When the miller fights with the chimneysweep, the miller turns black and the 'sweep turns white.  
God gave man two ears and one mouth so he might hear much and say little.  
Every man has his own insanity.  
A fool throws a stone into the brook, and ten wise men can't recover it.  
When a fool is silent, he, too, is counted among the wise.  
The rich man's foolishness is more admired than the pauper's wisdom.  
If you could hang on a wall all the world's bags of woe, everyone would grab for his own.  
Troubles are to men what rust is to iron.  
A joke is a half-truth.  
If you cook with straw,  
your food stays raw.

What's the good of a good head, if the feet can't carry it?

When a miser becomes extravagant, he eats borscht with honeycake.

Whoever is a child at 20, stays a fool till 100.

The wise man conceals his intelligence; the fool displays his foolishness.

If the storekeeper doesn't figure out his accounts, his accounts will figure him out.

Rich relations are close relations; poor relations are distant relations.

If one can crawl well, he crawls up on top.

Nine rabbis can't make a *minyan*, but ten cobblers, yes.

For dying, you always have time.

One gets out of the way of a drunk, a fool, and a load of hay.

One who has the reputation of an early riser may safely lie abed till noon.

You can't dance at two weddings at the same time; nor can you sit on two horses with one behind.

Too good is unhealthy.

# 2

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## *Folkquips*

A man said to a sage, "You brag of your wisdom, but it came from me."

"Yes," replied the sage, "and it forgot its way back."

Said a king to a sage, "Sweet would be a king's reign if it lasted forever."

"Had such been your predecessor's lot," replied the wise man, "how would you have reached the throne?"

A man laid a complaint before the king; the latter drove the suppliant out with violence.

"I entered with one complaint," sighed the man. "I leave with two."

The king once visited a nobleman's house, and asked the latter's son,

"Whose house is better, your father's or mine?"

"My father's," said the boy, "while the king is in it."

To one who reviled the wise man for his lack of noble ancestry, he retorted,

"Your noble line ends with you, with me mine begins."

A philosopher sat by the target at which the archers were shooting.

"'Tis the safest spot," said he.

An Arab's brother died.

"Why did he die?" one asked.

"Because he lived," was the answer.

"What have you laid up for the cold weather?" they asked a poor fellow.

"Shivering," he answered.

A page had weak eyes.

"Heal them," they said.

"To see what?" he rejoined.

A fool quarrelled with a sage.

Said the fool, "For every word of abuse I hear from you, I will retort ten."

"No," replied the other, "for every ten words of abuse I hear from you,

I will not retort one."

# 3

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## *Riddles*

**Q.** It's not a shirt—

Yet it's sewed;

It's not a tree—

Yet it's full of leaves;

It's not a person

Yet it talks sensibly.

**A.** A book.

**Q.** What is it? A deaf man has heard how a dumb man had said that a blind man had seen a running rabbit; that a lame man pursued it and that a naked man had put it in his pocket and brought it home?

**A.** A lie.

**Q.** One dreamed that he was on a ship at sea with his father and mother and that the ship had begun to sink. It was, however, possible to save himself and one other person only—either his father or mother—not both. What should he do?

**A.** He should wake up.

**Q.** Three merchants and three robbers had to cross a lake. However, only one rowboat was available and it could safely carry only two people at a time. How could they all manage to get across since one merchant was afraid to be left alone with two robbers?

**A.** First of all two robbers crossed. One robber then brought the boat back and rowed across the third robber. Afterwards he returned once more and remained on shore. Then two merchants got into the boat and rowed across. One merchant in company with one robber returned with the boat. The robber got out of the boat and then two

merchants rowed across. After that a robber returned to fetch the last robber.

"What is it that hangs on the wall, is green, and whistles?"

"A herring."

"A herring?! Does a herring hang on a wall?"

"Who stops you from hanging it?"

"Is a herring green?"

"It could be painted green."

"But who ever heard of a herring that whistles?"

"Nu, so it doesn't whistle!"

## 4

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*Conundrums*

Why did Adam live so long?—Because he had no mother-in-law.

Who, with one blow, annihilated a quarter of the world's population?—Cain.

What is man's best means of concealment?—Speech.

On what occasion did all the people in the world hear the crowing of the cock?—In Noah's Ark.

Which is the place where you can find no Jew?—In a Christian cemetery.

What does the king see but rarely, the shepherd all the time, but God never?—His equal.

Who walks on four feet in the morning, on two feet at noon, and on three in the evening?—Man. As a child he crawls on all fours; as an adult he walks on two; and in his old age he walks leaning on a stick, i.e., three feet.

Who can speak in all languages?—Echo.

What causes us neither pain nor sorrow yet makes us weep?—Onions.

Who is lesser, poorer and utterly unsignificant compared to his brothers, nonetheless he makes them greater and richer?—The cipher(0).

What has twelve branches and on every branch four twigs and on every twig seven leaves?—The year.

What live creatures were not in Noah's Ark?—Fish.

What does a pious Jew do before he drinks tea?—He opens his mouth.

Can you tell me what the comparative and superlative of the word "nice" is?—Nice, nicer, m-m-m!

Which king is the best in the world?—A dead one.

What kind of water can you carry in a sieve?—Frozen water.

What is it that everybody would like and when they get it  
they don't like it?—Old age.

Why is it our luck that Moses stuttered?—Had he been normal  
in his speech he would have doubled the number of  
commandments, laws and regulations.

What do you do to get rid of some one?—If he's rich you ask  
him for a loan, if he's poor you give him a loan.

How many sides has a bagel?—Two: one inside, one outside.

When our teacher Moses didn't feel well what did God give  
him?—Two tablets.



## Notes

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### Part One: JEWISH SALT

1. WHY ONLY ONE ADAM?: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
2. HIS FAULT: Adapted from Bar-Hebraeus (13th Century, Syria).
3. IT WAS OBVIOUS: Adapted and translated from *Royte Pomerantsen*, a collection of Jewish folk humor, by Immanuel Olsvanger. By permission of Schocken Books. New York, 1947.
4. WORLD-WEARY: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
5. WHAT IS GREATNESS?: Adapted from the *Parables of the Preacher of Dubno*.
6. THE SECRET OF POWER: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
7. WHY THE HAIR ON THE HEAD TURNS GRAY BEFORE THE BEARD: Adapted from the *Yiddishe Folksmaisses*, compiled by Judah Loeb Cahan. Ferlag Yiddishe Folklore-Bibliothek. New York and Vilna, 1931.
8. THE WAY ANTI-SEMITES REASON: Adapted from the *Midrash*.

### Part Two: HEROES

1. THE ROMANCE OF AKIBA: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
2. SHALLOW JUDGEMENT: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
3. THE VANITY OF THE RABBI MAR ZUTRA: *Ibid.*
4. GRIEF IN MODERATION: *Ibid.*
5. WHY GOD GAVE NO WISDOM TO FOOLS: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
6. LEARNING KNOWS NO CLASS: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
7. LEARNING THAT LEADS TO ACTION: *Ibid.*
8. THE PARABLE OF THE TWO GEMS: From *Liber Shebet Yahuda* (The Book of the Rod of Judah) by Solomon ibn Verga (16th Century). Adapted from the German translation in *Der Born Judas*, compiled by M. J. bin Gorion. Insel-Verlag. Leipzig, 1919.

Ephraim ben Sancho, Twelfth Century Talmudic scholar of Aragon, was ordered by Pedro the Great, King of Aragon, to engage in a public disputation with the Christian troubadour, Nicholas de Valencia, in which each was to prove the superiority of his faith. Although learned religious disputations between Christians and Jews were usually of a harmless nature in early Christian times, during the later Middle Ages they took on an ominous character, for the spirit of the Inquisition had begun to enter the Church. The public disputation, particularly under Dominican auspices, became a Christian weapon of conversion and invariably the Jewish debater was declared the loser in this joust of theological wits. It was used by Christian rulers and clerics as a great public spectacle, Jewish apostates being employed to bring against their former coreligion-

ists false accusations of blasphemy against the name of Christ, of the desecration of the Host, and of ridiculing Christian doctrines. The direst consequences to the Jews resulted from some of these disputations, such as forced conversion, being expelled from a city or kingdom, the payment of an enormous collective fine, and the banning or the burning of the Talmud.—N.A.

9. Lessing effectively adapted this story for the parable of the three rings in *Nathar the Wise*.
10. THE BEST AND THE WORST THINGS: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
11. GOD'S DELICACY: *Ibid.*
12. THE MOST VALUABLE MERCHANDISE: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
13. A REASON FOR EVERY CUSTOM: Adapted from the *Parables of the Preacher of Dubno*.
14. WHY JERUSALEM WAS DESTROYED: Reprinted from *Legends of Palestine*, by Zev Vilnay. With the permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1932.
15. MAN UNDERSTANDS BUT LITTLE: Adapted from the *Parables of the Preacher of Dubno*.
16. THE POOR MAN'S MIRACLE: *Ibid.*
17. THE GIANT AND THE CRIPPLE: Adapted from the *Parables of the Preacher of Dubno*.
18. THE LAST TROUBLE IS THE WORST: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
19. THE PARABLE OF THE WISE FISHES: *Ibid.*
20. THE ROSEBUSH AND THE APPLE TREE: Adapted from Rabbi Hillel's Parables in the *Midrash*.
21. THE PARABLE OF THE OLD CLOAK: *Ibid.*
22. WISHES MUST NEVER BE VAGUE: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
23. LOVE OF PERFECTION: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
24. THE OLD MAN AND THE SNAKE AND THE JUDGEMENT OF SOLOMON: Reprinted from the *Ma'aseh Book*, edited by Moses Gaster. With the permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1934.
25. WHOSE WAS TO BLAME: From *And It Came To Pass*; legends and stories about King David and King Solomon, told by Hayyim Nahman Bialik. Translated by Herbert Danby. Hebrew Publishing Co. New York, 1938.

The legendary aspect of Solomon's wisdom took on a supernatural and semi-divine character. According to the Rabbis, before Solomon's fall from grace, he held dominion over the angels, over all humans, demons and spirits, the beasts of the forest and of the field, the fowls in the barnyard and the reptiles that crawled. King Solomon could speak the language of animals and birds and they frequently came to his aid when he needed it in time of danger or to furnish him with sorely needed information when he judged his subjects. The eagle particularly served him best acting as his messenger and as his fastest means of conveyance. In fact, the animals so loved him that of themselves they entered his palace kitchens to be served up as food for him and his thousand wives.—N.A.

26. THE DISCERNING JUDGE: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
27. ALEXANDER'S INSTRUCTION: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.

28. THE WISDOM OF THE JEWS: *Ibid.*
29. HOW TO REPLENISH A TREASURY: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
30. THE REAL SON: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
31. THE INNKEEPER'S CLEVER DAUGHTER: Adapted from *Yiddishe Folksmaisses*, collected by Judah Loeb Cahan. Ferlag Yiddishe Folklore-Bibliothek. New York and Vilna, 1931.
32. THE FARMER'S DAUGHTER: Adapted from *The Book of Delight*, by Joseph ibn Zabara, Spanish-Jewish satirist and poet of the 13th Century.
33. THE STORY OF KUNZ AND HIS SHEPHERD: Reprinted from the *Ma'aseh Book*, edited by Moses Gaster. With the permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1934.
34. WHY RABBI ISRAEL LAUGHED THREE TIMES: Adapted from *Sippuri Tzaddikim* (a collection of wonder stories about Rabbi Israel Baal-Shem and his disciples). Vilna, 1905.
35. THE BOOK OF MYSTERIES: *Ibid.*
36. THE TRIAL OF RABBI GERSHON: *Ibid.*
37. THE POOR WAYFARER: Adapted from *Sefer Gevurath Israel*. Warsaw, 1924.
38. THE CABBALLISTS: From *Bontshe the Silent*, by I. L. Peretz. Translated from the Yiddish by Angelo S. Rappoport. Stanley Paul & Co., Ltd. London, 1927.

The *yeshiva-bocher*, the Talmudic college student, was a traditional type in Jewish life. There was an unbroken continuity in the pattern of his values for almost twenty-five hundred years. The ideals of learning that animated him in the time of Rabbi Hillel during King Herod's reign were handed down like a precarious legacy from generation to generation to our own days. To the *yeshiva-bocher* the study of the Torah was not merely an intellectual pursuit but a religious-ethical way of life. He was deliberately conditioned by his teachers to avoid the snares of riches and pleasure, and single-mindedly to devote his waking hours to study and to strivings of self-perfection. The Talmud itself vividly describes his hard lot in ancient times: "A morsel of bread with salt you must eat, and water by measure you must drink. You must sleep upon the ground, and live a life of trouble, the while you toil in the Torah."

Beginning with the Middle Ages the ordeals of the student and scholar increased, rather than diminished. The material circumstances of Jewish life, strangulated by ghetto hopelessness and lack of economic opportunity, made the tribulations of the *yeshiva-bocherim* well-nigh intolerable. Sons of poor parents, who made excessive sacrifices to keep them at their studies, and having no trade or calling to help support themselves by their own efforts, they were frequently reduced to pauperism. For that reason it was considered to be an act of supreme merit (*mitzvoh*) for Jews to contribute to the support of these scholarly youths who constituted the most talented element in the community. This support, however, because of the widespread penury of the Jewish population, proved inadequate, to say the least.

From necessity the institution of *essen teg* ("eating days") arose.

The unfortunate youth, struggling with his own pride, would be invited to make a circuit of a number of the kitchens of the pious and the well-to-do in the town, receiving his humble fare for one day a week in each of them. Often he was given only the table-leavings and he would suffer the pangs of hunger. He would sleep on the unyielding wooden benches in the House of Study with nothing but his threadbare *kapote* to cover him on cold winter nights. The song *Mykomashmalon* has superbly caught the hopelessness and gloom of the *yeshiva-bocher's* existence.

There were, of course, a few bright prospects in store for the *yeshiva-bocher*. One was that eventually his piety and learning would lead him to the respected rabbinate. He was also buoyed up by the hope that he might possibly become a communal dignitary of ecclesiastical status, such as *dayyan* or a *shochet*. At the very worst he could be a humble *melamed* and, for all the poverty of that calling, he would at least have the satisfaction of teaching the word of God to children. Better yet, the outstanding *yeshiva-bocherim* were in great demand as sons-in-laws by the well-to-do. Under such favorable circumstances the young scholar would live on *kest* (he, his wife, and the family they might raise would be supported by his wife's father for several years or even permanently). This would enable him to devote most of his time to his Torah studies.

No other people has given such rise to a type quite like the *yeshiva-bocher*. Jewish folklore has created a rich body of literature in which he figures, usually as the unworldly idealistic *schlimazl*. He is portrayed as being partly comical and partly pathetic, a bewildered misfit unable to adjust himself to a hurly-burly life in which his virtues prove his biggest stumbling-block.—N.A.

39. THE RABBI WHO WISHED TO ABOLISH DEATH: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow retold this Talmudic tale in the poem, *The Legend of Rabbi Ben Levi*, in *Tales of a Wayside Inn*.

40. ASKING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE: Adapted from the *Maaseh Nissim Shel-ha-Ari* (Story of the Miracles of the Ari). 1720.

41. RASHI AND GODFREY OF BOUILLON: Adapted from the *Shalshelet ha-Cabala* (Chain of the Cabala), by Gedaliah ben Yacha (1515-87).

42. RABBI AMRAM'S RHINE JOURNEY: *Ibid.*

The medieval Amram legend is undoubtedly an analogue of the legend about St. Emmeram. The Seventh Century German saint, upon his death in Munich, had been placed in an unattended barge and the tide, with incredible speed, carried it from the Isar River up the Danube to the town of Regensburg. In commemoration of this miracle, Emmeram was canonized and a church, bearing his name, was erected outside the town. The transformation of the name Emmeram to Amram was not a too difficult matter to effect. It is also significant to note that in several Jewish versions, Amram is referred to as "Rabbi Amram of Regensburg." But, except for the legend, nothing is known of him bearing on his historicity.—N.A.

43. THE HIDDEN SAINT: Adapted from a Yiddish groschen chapbook.

44. The thirty-six hidden saints, referred to in Hebrew as *Lamed-Vav-Tzaddikim* and in Yiddish as *Lamedvoyniks*. This widely-held belief among pious Jews is based on the opinion stated by Rabbi Abaye in the Talmud: "There are in the world not less than thirty-

six righteous persons in every generation upon whom the *Shekhina* (God's radiance) rests." This became a popular theme for folk-legends among the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century cabalists and, beginning in the second half of the Eighteenth Century, with the *Hasidim* of Eastern Europe as well.

The *lamedvovniks* are described by legend as being so modest and upright that they invariably conceal their virtue behind a mask of boorishness, poverty and ignorance. They live humbly and unobtrusively and, following the example of the Talmudic sages and saints of Israel, they earn their livelihood by the sweat of their brow, as tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, etc. The Jews in whose midst they live never suspect their true identity and whenever this is accidentally exposed, the *lamedvovniks* rudely deny it. However, when danger threatens the Jewish people, the *lamedvovnik* emerges from his self-imposed concealment and, by cabalistic powers he possesses, averts the threatened misfortune to the discomfiture of all of Israel's plotting enemies. That accomplished, he returns once more to his humble anonymity, but elsewhere, in a Jewish community where he is unknown.—N.A.

45. JOSEPH DELLA REYNA STORMS HEAVEN: Adapted from a Yiddish groschen chapbook.
46. God's radiance, or emanation, a neo-platonic concept.
47. Cabalistic cryptographs which give, instead of the intended words, their numerical value. According to cabalistic theory, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet possess dynamic and supernatural powers. Since the essence of things is number, the cabalist seeks the reduction of everything—objects, names, even ideas—to number.
48. WHY THE MESSIAH DOESN'T COME: Adapted from a Yiddish groschen chapbook.

### Part Three: THE HUMAN COMEDY

1. THE KING OF SCHNORRERS: From *The King of Schnorrers*, by Israel Zangwill. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1893. With the permission of the present copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America.
2. A Spanish Jew.
3. A German Jew.
4. TIT FOR TAT: From *The Old Country* by Sholom Aleichem. Translated by Julius and Frances Butwin. Copyright, 1946, by Crown Publishers. New York.
5. THE CHELM GOAT MYSTERY: A brilliant literary treatment of this folktale has been given by the Yiddish humorist Sholom Aleichem in this story: *The Enchanted Tailor*. An English translation of it has been made by Julius and Frances Butwin in *The Old Country*, by Sholom Aleichem. Crown Publishers, New York, 1946.
6. The popular name for Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides), great philosopher and physician during the Jewish Golden Age in Spain.
7. THE THIEF WHO WAS TOO CLEVER: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
8. YOU CAN'T POOL GOD: *Ibid.*
9. THE WISE ROGUE: From *The Exempla* of the Rabbis, by Moses Gaster. The Asia Publishing Co. London and Leipzig, 1924.
10. JUSTICE IN SODOM: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
11. SODOM'S BED FOR STRANGERS: *Ibid.*

- There is the identical tale in Greek mythology of Procrustes the Stretcher and his iron bedstead.
12. CHARITY IN SODOM: *Ibid.*
  13. EXAMPLE IN SODOM: *Ibid.*
  14. CUNNING AGAINST GREED: Adapted from the *Parables of the Preacher of Dubno*.
  15. THE BIRDS THAT TURNED TO STONE: Reprinted from *Legends of Palestine*, by Zev Vilnay. With the permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1932.
  16. SAINT AND SINNER: Adapted from the *Parables of the Preacher of Dubno*.
  17. FILIAL LOVE: From *The Exempla of the Rabbis*, by Moses Gaster. The Asia Publishing Co. London and Leipzig, 1924.
  18. A FATHER WITH FORESIGHT: Adapted from the *Parables of the Preacher of Dubno*.
  19. NAPOLEON AND THE JEWISH TAILOR: Translated and adapted from *Royte Pomerantsen*, a collection of Jewish folk humor, by Immanuel Olsvanger. By permission of Schocken Books. New York, 1947.
  20. THE OVER-ENTHUSIASTIC SHADCHAN: Translated and adapted from *Royte Pomerantsen*, a collection of Jewish folk humor, by Immanuel Olsvanger. By permission of Schocken Books. New York, 1947.
  21. IN HASTE: From *The Old Country*, by Sholom Aleichem. Translated by Julius and Frances Butwin. Copyright, 1946, by Crown Publishers, New York.
  22. It means: "I don't know."

#### Part Four: TALES AND LEGENDS

1. THE MAKING OF ADAM: From *Myths and Legends of Ancient Israel*, by Angelo S. Rappoport. The Gresham Publishing Co. Ltd. London, 1928. Reprinted by permission of the present copyright holders, Messrs. Blackie & Son Ltd., Glasgow.
2. THE FIRST TEAR: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
3. FALSEHOOD AND WICKEDNESS: From the *Midrash*. In *Jewish Fairy Tales*, selected and translated by Gerald Friedlander. Robert Scott. London, 1917.
4. ABRAHAM AND THE IDOLS: From the Talmud. Translated from the adaptation by Leo Tolstoy.
5. ABRAHAM BEFORE NIMROD: *Ibid.*
6. GOD PROTECTS THE HEATHEN TOO: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
7. MOSES THE SHEPHERD: *Ibid.*
8. ISRAEL UNDYING: *Ibid.*
9. THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA: Reprinted from *The Legends of the Jews*, by Louis Ginzberg. With the permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1913.
10. WIDOW AND THE LAW: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
11. THE ANGELS JEALOUS OF MOSES: Reprinted from the *Ma'aseh Book*, edited by Moses Gaster. With the permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1934.
12. THE DEATH OF MOSES: From the *Midrash*. In *Book of Legends*, by Hyman Goldin. Jordan Publishing Co. New York, 1929. Reprinted

by permission of the present copyright holders, Hebrew Publishing Co.

13. WHY GOD FORGIVES MAN: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
14. KING DAVID BOWS BEFORE AN IDOL: *Ibid.*
15. BETTER THAN A DEAD LION: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
16. THE WALL OF THE POOR: Reprinted from *Legends of Palestine*, by Zev Vilnay. With the permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1932.
17. GATES OF BEAUTY: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
18. THE BEAUTY OF SIMPLE THINGS: *Ibid.*
19. KING SOLOMON AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
20. THE ORIGIN OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
21. THE DOWNFALL OF KING SOLOMON: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
22. THE SORROW OF JEREMIAH: *Ibid.*
23. THE TRIALS OF JONAH: *Ibid.*

While Jonah was evidently an historical personage—a Prophet who lived in the days of Jeroboam II—his fame to posterity has not been due to his exalted calling but to the fact that he is the hero of the Biblical fairy tale of *Jonah and the Whale* as told in the *Book of Jonah*. The *Midrashic* version, elaborately recounting his ocean journey and his adventures in the belly of the great fish, has proved one of the most diverting legends in Jewish folklore.—N.A.

24. A WORTHY COMPANION: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
25. THE PIETY OF THE HEART: *Ibid.*
26. BONTSHE THE SILENT: From *Bontshe the Silent*, by I. L. Peretz. Translated from the Yiddish by Angelo S. Rappoport. Stanley Paul & Co., Ltd. London, 1927.
27. THE FEAR OF DEATH: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
28. THE GREAT ARE ALSO LITTLE: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
29. THE LORD HELPETH MAN AND BEAST: From the Talmud. Translated by Samuel T. Coleridge. In *Hebrew Tales*, by Hyman Hurwitz. Printed for Morrison and Watt. London, 1826.
30. THE ACQUISITIVE EYE: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
31. THE POWER OF HOPE: From the Talmud. Translated from the adaptation by Leo Tolstoy.
32. THE TEST OF A TRUE FRIEND: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
33. EACH MAN TO HIS PARADISE: *Ibid.*
34. POPE ELHANAN: From *Miscellany of Hebrew Literature*, edited by the Rev. A. Lowy. London: N. Trubner and Co. 1872-77.

The legend of Elhanan the Pope enjoyed great popularity among Jews of medieval times. Some scholars attribute it to the Thirteenth Century. As in many other Jewish legends, there are in it elements of historical fact. It has been well established that Anacletus II (Pietro Pierlioni), who was Pope in Rome from 1130-1138, was of Jewish descent, leading his enemies to call him *Judeo-pontifex* (the Jewish pope). Because of this ancestry and his striking Jewish features, he was the victim of much anti-semitic abuse. Even the usually tolerant Bernard of Clairvaux, who led the opposition to him in France, wrote in an epistle bristling with hatred: "To the

shame of Christ a man of Jewish origin was come to occupy the chair of St. Peter."

Edward Gibbon traces the Jewish ancestry of Anacletus to his grandfather: "In the time of Leo the Ninth, a wealthy and learned Jew was converted to Christianity, and honored at his baptism with the name of his godfather, the reigning pope (Leo). The zeal and courage of Peter the son of (the convert) Leo were signalized in the cause of Gregory the Seventh, who intrusted his faithful adherent with the government of Adrian's mole . . . or, as it is now called, the castle of St. Angelo. Both the father and the son were parents of a numerous progeny . . . and so extensive was their alliance that the grandson of the proselyte was exalted by the weight of his kindred to the throne of St. Peter. A majority of the clergy and the people supported his cause: he reigned several years in the Vatican."

There is little question that the historic memory concerning Anacletus and his friendly attitude toward the Jews furnished the raw material from which popular Jewish fancy created the legend of Pope Elhanan of which there exist a number of variants.—N.A.

35. CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP: Adapted from an old Yiddish groschen chapbook.
36. THE THREE DAUGHTERS, OR THE EVIL OF TALE BEARING: Reprinted from the *Ma'aseh Book*, by Moses Gaster. With the permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1934.
37. THE FAITHFUL NEIGHBOR: Adapted from *Yiddishe Legenden*, by Eliezer Shindler. Ferlag "Grininke Beimelach." Vilna, 1936.
38. KING PTOLEMY AND THE SEVENTY WISE JEWS: Adapted from the version of J. Lewner in *Agada-Sammlung*, by B. Gottschalk. Verlag M. Poppelauer. Berlin, 1920.
39. KING SOLOMON AND THE WORM: From *Jewish Fairy Tales*, selected and translated by Gerald Friedlander. Robert Scott. London, 1917.
40. THE WITCHES OF ASCALON: From the *Agada* in the Talmud. In *Legends of Palestine*, by Zev Vilnay. Reprinted by permission of the copyright owners. The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1932.
41. THE GOLEM OF PRAGUE: Adapted from *Niflout Maharal* (Miracles of the Maharal, 17th Century).
42. Tyco Brahe and Johann Kepler were among his intimate friends.
43. *Ato Bra Golem Devuk Hachomer V'tigzar Zedim Chevel Torfe Yisroel*.
44. The etymology of few words concerning Jews has aroused so much discussion and disagreement as the word *ghetto*. Some see the word as derived from the Hebrew *gett* (divorce, separation), others, from the Talmudic Hebrew root *gedad guda* (wall). There also is the Tuscan *guitto* and the Modenese *ghitto*, both meaning "sordid." There are also the Italian words *ghetta* (flock, herd), and *borghetto* (small burg or quarter). And lastly, there are the two German words *gitter* (bars) and *geheckte orte* (hedged place) derived from the Latin *gehectus*.

As is well known, the systematic persecution of the Jews in Europe began with the first Crusades in the Eleventh Century. However, their segregation (physical as well as social) did not begin

until 1215 when the Fourth Lateran Council issued a decree compelling Jews to wear the yellow badge in order to mark them off from Christians. Previously Jews had lived in their own quarters largely from choice and from social and religious convenience. Before the Middle Ages their separate quarters were referred to in Latin as *vicus Judaeorum*. Later on, among the Germanic peoples, they variously became known as *Judengasse*, *Judenstrasse* or *Judenviertel*. In Portugal these quarters were called *Judiaria*, in England, *Jew Street*, and in France, *Juiverie*.

But it was not until the terrible anti-Jewish excesses during the Black Plague in 1348-9—when Jews were falsely accused of having poisoned Christian wells—that those Jews, who did not take flight eastward into the Polish Provinces, were ordered locked up within walled enclosures in the sections or streets where they lived. These then became known as *ghettos*.

At night the ghetto gates were closed and locked like a prison with bolts and chains, with a Christian watch standing without. The hostile attitude toward the Jews in those days made plain in the inscription found on the ghetto gate in Padua: "The people, the inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven, shall have no communion with the disinherited."

Jews were not only forbidden, under pain of severe punishment, to leave the ghetto gates after dark, but they were kept locked up on Sundays, on every Christian holy day, and on carnival days.

The confined ghetto, on the medieval pattern, lasted in Europe for more than four hundred years, and, in modified form, until the fall of Czardom in 1917. The word "ghetto" is of course inexactly applied today to those slum localities of a city where Jews live in large numbers such as the East Side of New York or Whitechapel in London.—N.A.

45. The famous *Almeuschul*.
46. THE MISER: Adapted from the *Kav Hayashar* (Moral Code), by Zevi Hirsch Kaidanover. Frankfort, 1705.
47. NO PRIVACY ANYWHERE: Adapted from the *Agada* in the Talmud.
48. THE MAN WHO MARRIED A SHE-DEVIL: Adapted from a medieval tale in *Der Born Judas*, by M. J. Bin Gorion. Insel-Verlag. Leipzig, 1916.
49. THE FATE OF THE WICKED: Adapted from the *Agada* of the Talmud.
50. KING LEVIATHAN AND THE CHARITABLE BOY: From *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*. Adapted from the German translation *Vom Levjathan* in *Der Born Judas*, compiled by M. J. bin Gorion. Insel-Verlag. Leipzig, 1919.
51. THE SLY FOX: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
52. THE WISE BIRD AND THE FOOLISH MAN: Adapted from the German translation *Drei Lehren* in *Der Born Judas*, compiled by M. J. bin Gorion. Insel-Verlag. Leipzig, 1919.

A striking similarity to *The Wise Bird and the Foolish Man* related above is to be found in the *Gesta Romanorum*, No. 167.—N.A.

53. THE FOX AND THE FOOLISH FISHES: From the *Alphabet* of (pseudo) Ben Sira (7th or 8th Century A.D.). Reprinted from *The Book of Delight*, edited by Israel Abrahams. With the permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1912.
54. THE PROPER PLACE FOR A TALE: Adapted from the *Midrash*.
55. THE CURSE OF THE INDOLENT: *Ibid.*
56. THE FOX AND THE LEOPARD: From *The Book of Delight*, by Joseph Zabara (circa A.D. 1200). Translation by Israel Abrahams. With the permission of the copyright owners, The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1912.

## Glossary

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*Agada:* (See main introduction for explanation.)

*Ai:* A Yiddish exclamation equivalent to the English Oh!

*aleph-bess (bet):* The first two letters of the Hebrew-Yiddish alphabet, i.e. learning how to read.

*alelchem sholom:* "To you be peace," which is the inverted Hebrew response to the customary salutation: *sholom alelchem*— "peace be to you."

*Amoraim* (s. *Amora*): The builders of the Talmud.

*apikoiros* (pl. *apikorsim*): From the ancient Greek word *Epikoureios*. In the *Mishna* and Talmud the *apikoiros* is described as a Jewish adherent of the Greek philosopher Epicurus. In the course of time the Greek origin of the word was forgotten and in Yiddish meant a heretic or free-thinker.

*baal-tefilah:* The leader of prayer, the precentor.

*bagel:* Hard circular roll with hole in the center like a doughnut but boiled and then baked; adapted from the Russian *bub-litchki*.

*bahelper:* Assistant to a *melamed* or Scripture-teacher.

*Bar-Mitzvah:* A thirteen-year-old Jewish boy who is confirmed; the confirmation ceremony itself.

*blintzes:* Cheese or *kasha* (groats) rolled in thin dough.

*borsht:* A beet or cabbage soup, of Russian origin.

*bris:* Circumcision ceremony; performed on the eighth day after birth of boy.

*bronfin:* Whisky.

*chacham* (pl. *chachamim*): Hebrew for wise man, sage.

*chalef:* Slaughterer's knife, also that of the Angel of Death.

*chaleh:* White Sabbath or holy day bread.

*chalutz (halutz):* A Jewish pioneer in the land of Israel.

*Channukah (Hannukah):* Described variously as "The Festival of Lights," "The Feast of Dedication," and "The Feast of the Maccabees." It is celebrated for eight days from the 25th day of *Kislev* (December). It was instituted by Judas Maccabeus and the elders of Israel in 165 B.C. to commemorate the rout of the invader Antiochus Epiphanes, and the purification of the Temple sanctuary.

*chochem:* Yiddish adaptation of Hebrew word *chacham*.

*chochma:* Wisdom.

- cholent (shalet):* Potted meat and vegetables cooked on Friday and simmered overnight for the Sabbath noonday meal.
- chupeh:* Marriage canopy under which bride and groom stand during the wedding ceremony.
- chutzpah:* Impudence, unmitigated gall.
- datcha:* A summer home in the country or seashore; in both Russian and Yiddish.
- dayyan:* A rabbinical judge.
- Diaspora:* The lands of the Jewish dispersion collectively.
- dreydlach* (s. *dreydel*): From the German *drehen*, "to turn." These are small metal tops, having four sides, and are spun with the fingers. Jewish children in East European countries traditionally play with them on *Channukah*.
- fisnoga:* Comical word-combination of the Yiddish *fis* (feet) and the Russian *noga* (feet).
- gabbai* (pl. *gabbaim*): Synagogue treasurer.
- Gaon* (pl. *Geonim*): The title given to the rectors of the two famous Talmudic academies of Sura and Pumbeditha in Babylon beginning with the Sixth Century. But the word also signifies "a genius." It was the title of honor given to Rabbi Elijah of Vilna, the 18th Century scholar.
- gefilte fish:* Stuffed fish seasoned with spices and eaten on the Sabbath.
- Gehenna* (Hebr. *Gehinnom*): Hell.
- Gemara:* The Aramaic name for the Talmud.
- gesundheit:* Good health!
- gewalt:* Help!
- goniff:* Thief.
- goyish*, derived from *goy* (pl. *goyim*): Gentile.
- gribbenes:* Small crisp pieces left from rendered poultry fat, eaten as a delicacy.
- groschen:* Small German silver coin whose old value was about two cents.
- gulden:* Austrian silver florin whose former worth was about forty-eight cents.
- guten tog:* Good-day; good-bye.
- Habdalalah:* The benedictions and prayers recited at the conclusion of the Sabbath over a cup of wine, spices and a freshly kindled light.
- Haggadah* (*Hagadah*): The book containing the Passover home service of the *Seder*, consisting in large part of the narrative of the Jewish exodus from Egypt led by Moses.
- Hasid* (pl. *Hasidim*, adj. *Hasidic*): Literally "the pious one." Refers to a devotee of *Hasidism*, the mystic sect founded in the middle of the 18th Century by the Ukrainian Rabbi Israel Baal-Schm. There were sectarians in the days of the Maccabees who were also called *Hasidim*, but the two must not be confused.

*hazzan (chazzan):* A cantor.

*Kaddish:* The mourner's prayer recited in synagogue twice daily for one year by the immediate male relatives, above thirteen years of age, of the deceased; a son who recites the *Kaddish* for a parent.

*kaleh:* Bride.

*kapote:* Taken from the old French word *capote*, meaning coat.

*kazatzkale:* Lively Russian dance.

*Kedushah:* Literally "holiness," but refers to the Third Benediction called "Holiness of the Name" which is recited by the *baal-tefilah* leading the synagogue service, with the responses given by the congregation.

*kest:* The old ghetto practice whereby the young bride's parents supported, in their own home, their daughter and son-in-law for a specified period of time after their marriage.

*kopek:* Small Russian copper coin, there being 100 *kopeks* in a *ruble*.

*kosher:* Food permitted and prepared according to Jewish dietary laws.

*kreplach:* Small pockets of dough filled with chopped meat, usually boiled and eaten with chicken broth.

*kreutzer (kreuzer):* Austrian copper coin, the hundredth part of a *gulden*, and formerly worth about one-half of a cent.

*kugel:* Noodle or bread suet pudding, frequently cooked with raisins.

*lamdan:* A scholar.

*lox:* Smoked salmon.

*luftmensch:* Literally "air man," but refers to the person who has neither trade, calling, nor income and is forced to live by improvisation, drawing his livelihood "from the air" as it were.

*Maimon, Rabbi Moses ben (1135-1204):* The famed physician and philosopher of Spain, known generally as Maimonides and among the Jews as the *Rambam*, derived from the first four letters of his Hebrew name—RMBM.

*mamellige:* Roumanian corn porridge eaten with sour cream.

*matzos:* Unleavened bread eaten during Passover week in recollection of the Jewish Exodus from Egypt.

*mazel (mazl):* Luck.

*mazel-tov:* Good luck, congratulatory greeting especially used at weddings.

*melamed:* Old style orthodox Scripture and Hebrew teacher.

*meshuggener:* A crazy man.

*mezuzah:* Small rectangular piece of parchment inscribed with the passages Deut. VI. 4-9 and XI. 13-21, and written in 22 lines. The parchment is rolled up and inserted in a wooden or metal case and nailed in a slanting position to the right-hand doorpost of every orthodox Jewish residence as a talisman against evil.

*Midrash*: Literally "to study," "to investigate." A body of exegetical literature, devotional and ethical in character, which attempts to illuminate the literal text of the Bible with its inner meanings. The *Midrash* is constantly cited by pious and learned Jews in Scriptural and Talmudic disputation. (For full explanation see main introduction and introduction to the section *Biblical Sidelights*.)

*mikveh*: Indoor bath or pool required for Jewish ritual purification.

*milchig*: All dairy foods; refers to cutlery, dishes and cooking utensils used exclusively for dairy foods according to Jewish ritual regulations.

*min* (pl. *minim*): Term used in Talmud and *Midrash* for "heretic."

*Mincha (Minha)*: Afternoon or twilight devotional service of the Jewish liturgy.

*Mishna*: A compilation of oral laws and Rabbinic teachings, edited by Judah ha-Nasi in the early 3rd Century A.D., which forms the text of the *Talmud*. It is obligatory for pious Jews to study it constantly. (For full explanation see main introduction.)

*minyan*: The quorum of ten men necessary for holding public worship; young boys can also be included, provided they are over thirteen.

*misnagdim* (s. *misnagid*): Literally "opponents"; since the advent of the *Hasidic* sect in the 18th Century the term is applied to all non-*Hasidic* Jews.

*mohel*: The religious functionary who performs circumcisions according to Rabbinic rite and regulation.

*Nasi*: Literally "prince"; the president of the Sanhedrin. The title was first applied in the days of the Maccabees.

*nebich*: A Yiddish exclamatory word used as an expression of pity.

*nu*: Yiddish exclamatory question equivalent to "well?"—"so what?"

*nudnik*: A bore.

*oy*: The Yiddish exclamation to denote pain, astonishment or rapture.

*Pans* (s. *Pan*): Polish gentry, nobility.

*Passover*: English for *Pesach*, the festival commemorating the liberation of the Jews from their bondage in Egypt. It lasts seven days, beginning with the 15th of *Nisan* (March-April).

*pfennig*: German coin of smallest value, there being 100 to the mark.

*Purim*: Festival of Lots, celebrating the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's plot to exterminate them, as recounted in the *Book of Esther*. It is celebrated on the 14th and 15th of *Adar*, the 12th Jewish lunar month (March).

*Rambam:* (See *Maimon*).

*Reb:* Mister.

*rebbe:* Rabbi; frequently applied only to a *Hasidic* rabbi.

*rebbiniu:* "Rabbi dear!"—term of endearment for a rabbi.

*rebbitzin:* The rabbi's wife.

*Rosh Hashanah* (*Hashana*, *Hashono*, *Hashoneh*): The Jewish New Year, celebrated on the 1st of *Tishri* (in September), is the most solemn day next to *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement).

*Rosh Yeshiva* (*Yeshiba*): Principal or rector of a *yeshiva*, an orthodox Talmudic college.

*ruble:* Silver coin of Russia, having had the value in Czarist times of fifty-one cents.

*samovar:* A brass urn, used in Russia for boiling water for tea, which is heated by means of a tube filled with hot charcoal which passes through the hollow center.

*Sanhedrin* (from the Greek *synhedrion*): The assembly of seventy-one in Jerusalem, established during the Second Temple period, which constituted the parliament and highest judicial body in the nation.

*schlemihl:* A clumsy, inept person; the etymology of the word is obscure. (See introduction to *Schlemihs and Schlimazls*.)

*schlimazl:* A luckless fellow. (See introduction to *Schlemihs and Schlimazls*.)

*schmaltz:* Animal fat.

*schnapps:* Whisky.

*schnorrer:* A beggar who shows wit, brass and resourcefulness in getting money from others as though it were his right.

*scholrah:* Merchandise.

*Seder:* The religious home service recounting the liberation from Egyptian bondage, and celebrated amidst festivity on the first and second nights of Passover; the reformed rite observes only the first night.

*selichos*. (*selichot*): Penitential prayers, supplicating for God's mercy, are recited in orthodox synagogues after midnight on "the ten days of repentance" during the *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* time-interval.

*s'forim* (s. *sefer*): A book; usually is applied to Jewish religious books.

*Shabbes:* The Sabbath, i.e., Saturday.

*shadchan* (pl. *shadchonim*): A marriage broker. (See introduction to *Traditional Types*.)

*shammes* (pl. *shamosim*): A synagogue sexton.

*Shekhina* (*Shekinah*, *Shechina*): God's radiance or presence.

*Shema:* The first word in the confession of the Jewish faith: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God the Lord is One!"

*Shem-hamforesh* (*ha-Meforash*): The name first used by the sages of the *Mishna* for the *tetragrammaton*, the secret preemi-

- nent and Ineffable Name of God. To discover this name was the principal preoccupation of the later cabalists, for by its supernatural power they hoped to bring the Messiah.
- shochet* (pl. *shochtim*): Ritual slaughter.
- shofar*: Ram's horn blown during the synagogue services on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*.
- sholom aleichem*: Peace be unto you! It is equivalent to the more prosaic greeting—"hello!"
- shul*: Synagogue.
- Shvuous* (*Shevuoth*, *Shabuot*): Variously known as "The Festival of Weeks" and "Pentecost." It originally was a harvest festival and is celebrated seven weeks after Passover.
- Simchas Torah*: "Rejoicing over the Torah," the last day of *Succoth* (Feast of Tabernacles), celebrating the completion of the reading of the Torah.
- sofer* (pl. *soferim*): A scribe, a copyist; one who writes out, with a goose-quill in the traditional manner, the Scrolls of the Torah and who also copies *mezuzahs* and other Hebrew religious writings.
- tallis* (*tallith*): Prayer-shawl.
- Talmud*: (See main introduction for detailed explanation.)
- Talmud Torah*: Hebrew school for children.
- Tannaim*: The architects of the *Mishna*.
- tateniu*: Father dear—the suffix *niu* in Yiddish is added for endearing intimacy; also, God is addressed this way by the pious.
- tefillin*: Phylacteries.
- Thaler*: Large silver coin formerly in the currency of some German states, including Austria, and once having the value of seventy-two cents.
- Tisha Ba'Ab*: Ninth day of the month of *Ab* (August) set aside by Jewish tradition for fasting and mourning to commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. and by Titus in A.D. 70.
- Torah*: "Doctrine" or "law"; the name is applied to the five books of Moses (Pentateuch), and in a wider sense to all sacred Jewish literature.
- treif* (*terefa*): Food forbidden by dietary laws or not prepared according to their regulations.
- tzaddik* (pl. *tzaddikim*): *Hasidic* rabbis and wonder-workers.
- tzimmes*: Dessert made of sweetened carrots or noodles.
- vey*: Woe! Usually appears in Yiddish as *oy vey!* (woe is me!)
- yeshiva*: Talmudic college.
- yeshiva-bocher*: Student in a *yeshiva*.
- yiches*: Good ancestry; pride of ancestry.
- yiddena*: Yiddish for a Jewish woman.
- Zemirots* (*Zemiroth*): Devotional "table-songs" for the Sabbath and holy days.
- zloty*: Large silver Polish coin.
- Zohar*: (See introduction to *Cabalists* for detailed explanation.)

# *Index*

Aaron, 341–42, 374, 378–79  
Abaye, Rabbi, 488–89  
Abba Hilkiah, Rabbi, 34  
Abraham, the Patriarch, 76, 104, 248,  
330–32, 348, 378  
Abrahams, Israel, 450  
Absalom, 378  
Abu al Wafa ibn Fakih, 394  
*Acquisitive Eye, The*, 394  
Adam, 6, 47–48, 104, 322–23, 326–28,  
420–21  
Aesop, 449–50  
*Agada*, xxviii, xxix, xxxi, xxxii, 53–54,  
324, 326, 394, 429, 450  
Ahriman, 419  
Ahuramazda, 419  
Akiba, Rabbi, 36–40, 45, 58, 449  
Alexander the Great, 80, 393–98  
Alexandria, 35, 415  
Alkabze, Rabbi, 97  
*Alphabet of Ben Sira, The*, 493, 494  
Altneuschul, 438  
Amenenmope, 35  
*Amoraim*, xxx, 34  
Amos, 150  
Amram, Rabbi, 120–22  
Angel of Death, 60, 116–17, 137–38,  
141, 348–49, 391–92, 420, 658  
angels, 421  
animal tales, 449–67  
anti-Hasidic jokes, 139  
Antoninus Pius, Emperor, 83  
*Apocrypha*, 53  
Arab folklore, 80, 393, 394, 450  
Arabic civilization, 96  
*Art Hakodesh*. *See Luria, Rabbi Isaac*  
Aristeas, Letter of, 414  
Aristobulus, 35  
*Aristocracy of Talent, The*, xxv  
Ashmodai, 423–26  
Assyria, 420  
Avian, 449  
*Baal-Shem, Rabbi Israel*, xxxii, 97,  
98–103, 109–10, 174  
Babylonia, xxviii, xxx–xxxii, 35, 370,  
419  
Banna'ah, Rabbi, 84  
Bar-Hebraeus, 150  
Bar Kochba, 30  
Barlaam, xxxi  
bar Yohai, Simon, 96  
Beerbohm, Max, 149  
beggars, 152–53, 170, 259

Benaiah ben Yehudah, 358–59, 423–  
27  
Ben Sira, 35, 70  
Berechiah ha-Nakdan, 450  
Berger, Abraham, xxvi  
*BESHT*. *See Baal-Shem, Rabbi Israel*  
*Best and the Worst Things, The*, 36  
Bible, 248, 322–26  
Bidpal fables, xxxi, 450  
bitter jests, 315–16  
*Book of Adam*, 104  
*Book of Creation*, 96, 429  
*Book of Delight*, 450  
*Book of Lamentations*, 326  
Boruch, Rabbi, 174, 194, 208  
Bossuet, Jacques Bénigne, xxix  
braggart, 260  
*Brantspiegel*, xxxii  
Brod, Max, 99  
Brodsky, the millionaire, 372, 275–76  
Browning, Robert, 236  
Buher, Martin, 99  
Buddhists, 31  
Bunam, Rabbi, 238  
Byzantines, 236  
*Cabala*, xxxii, 95–97, 103, 105, 123,  
125–26, 128, 429  
caballists, xxiii, 31, 124  
*Cabalists, The*, 96  
Callisthenes, 394  
cantor, 271–72  
Carlyle, Thomas, xxv  
carpenters, 189, 256  
Cave of Machpelah, 104  
Chabad, Motke, 173  
*chacham*, 33  
Chagall, Marc, 99  
Chaldea, 419  
Chamisso, Adelbert, von, 235  
Chelm, 3, 210  
Chelm stories, 210–11, 215–35  
Chileah, 378  
Chmelinitzki, Hetman Bogdan, 98,  
431  
*chochma*, 35–36  
Christians, 35, 420, 429–30, 450  
Circe, 420  
circumcision, 21  
Coleridge, Samuel T., 394  
Cordovero, Rabbi Moses, 97  
Cossacks, 431  
Crusades, 290, 322, 430

- "Dark Ages", Jewish, 96, 290  
 David, King, 30, 70-72, 352-53, 378, 379  
 demons, 419-21  
*dibukim*, 97, 419  
*Dicta Philosophorum*, 394  
*Directorum Vite Humane*, 450  
 disputations, 43  
 doctors and patients, 76-77, 213, 246, 286-88, 313  
 Dovid, Rabbi, 148  
 drunkards, 11-12, 16, 66-67, 265-66, 268, 282  
*Dubner Maggid* (Rabbi Jacob Krantz). *See Preacher of Dubno*
- East European Jews, 33-34, 430  
*Ecclesiastes*, Book of, 35, 325  
 Egypt, 35, 393  
 Einstein, Albert, 244  
 Eleazar, the High-Priest, 414  
 Eleazar ben Arak, Rabbi, 47  
 Eleazar ben Simeon, Rabbi, 126-27  
 Elhanan, Pope, 403-9  
 Eliezer ben Hyrkanos, Rabbi, 38, 47  
 Elijah, Prophet, 127-28, 142, 135-36, 150, 324-25, 351, 379  
 Elijah, Rabbi, 430  
 Elijah, Rabbi (Gaon of Vilna), 4, 48, 73-74, 245  
 "Elijah's Chair," 325  
 Emeram, Saint, 488  
 Ephraim, 379  
 Esau, 30, 43, 46  
 Eve, 328-29, 421  
 Exile, the Jewish, 125, 130  
 Ezra, the Scribe, xxv
- fables, 449-50  
 farmers, 260  
*Fate of the Wicked, The*, 449  
 Feifer, Sheike, 173  
 Figaro, 290  
*First Tear, The*, 323  
 fools, 209-11  
*Fox and the Leopard*, 450  
*Fox Fables*, 450  
*Fra Giovanni* (France), 210  
 France, Anatole, 210  
 Freud, Sigmund, 149
- Gabriel, the Angel, 138, 347-48  
 Galicia, 99  
 Gamaliel, Rabbi, 47  
*Gan Eden*. *See Garden of Eden*  
 Gaon of Vilna. *See Elijah, Rabbi (Gaon of Vilna)*  
 Garden of Eden, 378-79  
 Gehenna, 132, 378, 445  
*Gemara*. *See Talmud*  
*gematriot*, 127  
 Gersbon, Rabbi, 109-10  
*Gesta Romanorum*, 493  
 ghetto, 33, 98, 237, 431, 436  
 Godfrey de Bouillon, 119-20  
*God's Mercy*, 316  
 Goldin, Hyman, 490  
*Golem of Cheim*, 430-31  
*Golem of Prague*, 428-31  
 Goliath, 30  
 Gomorrah, 248  
 Gospels, 53, 419  
 Gotham, Wise Men of, 210-11  
*Great Are Also Little, The*, 394  
 Greeks, 33, 35, 96, 393-94, 449, 450  
 Greidinger, Froyim, 173, 191, 192  
 Grobstock, Joseph, 153  
*Guide to the Perplexed* (Maimonides), 59, 246  
 Gutenberg, Johann, xxxii
- Habdalah*, 100  
 Hadrian, Emperor, 26  
*Haggadah*. *See Passover*  
 Hail the Great, Rabbi, 123  
*Halacha*, xxxi  
 Hanina, Rabbi, 54, 429  
*Hasidim*, 97, 139, 148, 174, 324  
*Hasidism*, xxxii, 97, 99  
*Heavenly Justice*, 265  
*Hebrew teachers*. *See Scripture teachers*  
*He Didn't Deserve His Fee*, 70  
 Heilenists, 35, 393  
*Hero and Hero Worship*, xxv  
 Hillel, Rabbi, 13, 34, 487  
 Hindu tales, 393, 449  
 Hitler, Adolf, xxix, 2, 236, 301, 319  
*Huler's Circus*, 316  
 Hiyya, Rabbi, 237  
 humor, Jewish, 148-50  
 Huneker, James Gibbons, 149  
 Hungary, 99
- Ibn Ezra, Abraham, 236, 244  
 Ibn Gabirol, Solomon, 430  
 Ibn Zabara, Joseph, 450, 494  
*Independent Chicken*, 316  
 India, 449, 450  
 Inquisition, 485-86  
 Isaac, Patriarch, 76, 378  
 Isaac Nappaha, Rabbi, 34  
 Isaiah, Prophet, 150, 420  
 Israel ben Eliezer, Rabbi. *See Baal-Shem, Rabbi Israel*
- Jacob, Patriarch, 30, 43, 46, 378  
 Jacob Isaac, Rabbi, 237-38  
 Jacobs, Joseph, 450  
*jatakas*, 449  
 Jeremiah, Prophet, 209, 326  
 Jerusalem, 31, 36, 52, 80, 120, 124  
 Jesus, 53, 419  
*Job*, 35  
 Joel, Rabbi, 450  
 John of Capua, 450  
 Joseph, 104  
 Joshua ben Hananiah, Rabbi, 34, 38, 41, 42-43, 47  
 Joshua ben Korba, Rabbi, 210  
 Joshua ben Levi, Rabbi, 116-17, 342, 380-81  
 Joshua ben Nun, 104  
 Judah, ha Nasi, Rabbi, xxx, 83  
 Judah Hasid, Rabbi, xxxii, 430  
 Judea, 393  
 judges, 69-70  
 Justinian, Emperor, 236
- Kafka, Franz, 99  
 Kahn, Otto, 257  
 Kalba Sabua, 36

- Kallah wa-Dimnah*, 450  
*Kapoir, Moishe*, 235  
*Kav Hayashar*, 493  
*Kharkover, Mordchi*, 173  
*King John and the Abbott*, 80  
*King of the Schnorrers, The*, 153  
*Kitzes, Rabbi*, 100  
*Krantz, Rabbi Jacob (Dubno Maggid)*. See Preacher of Dubno  
*Kyibses*, 449
- lamdan*. See scholar  
*Lamed-vav Tzaddikim*, 122, 210, 324  
*Lamevovniks*. See *Lamed-vav-Tzaddikim*  
*Last Trouble is the Worst, The*, 54  
*Laughable Stories*, 150  
*Learning That Leads to Action*, 36  
*Leb-Tov*, xxxii  
*Leib, Rabbi Moses*, 76  
*Leibnitz, Gottfried Wilhelm, Baron von*, xxix  
*Leon, Moses Shem-Tob de*, 96  
*Levi of Mayence, Rabbi*, 290  
*Levi-Yitzchok, Rabbi*, 32  
*liars*, 259–60  
*Life of a Jew, The*, 315  
*Lilith*, 132, 420–21, 445  
*Lithuania*, 53, 99  
*Loew, Rabbi Yehuda*, 430–38  
*Lord Helpeth Man and Beast, The*, 394  
*Ludmirl, Reb Shloime*, 173  
*luftmensch*, 17, 236  
*Luria, Rabbi Isaac*, 97, 117–19, 122–23
- Ma'aseh Book*, xxxii, 80  
*Maccabees*, xxix, 30, 393  
*Mahabhratta*, 449  
*Maharal of Prague*. See Loew, Rabbi Yehuda  
*Maimonides*, 59–60, 244, 257, 379  
*Malachi, Prophet*, 324  
*Manasseh, King*, 378  
*Mark*, 419  
*marriage brokers*, 201, 289–98  
*Marshaliq, Yossef*, 173  
*Mar Zutra, Rabbi*, 42  
*marshal*. See parables  
*Medigo, Joseph del*, 430  
*Meier Primishlaner, Rabbi*, 110–11  
*Meir, Rabbi*, 449–50, 451–52  
*melamed*. See Scripture teachers  
*Menachem Mendel*, 149, 236–37  
*merchants*, 60–61, 227–28, 260, 276, 283–86, 301, 309  
*Messiah*, 98, 123–39, 229, 324, 379, 431  
*Metatron*, 131  
*Michael*, 138, 348  
*Midrash*, xviii, xxiv, xxvi, xxviii, xxix–xxxii, 30, 34, 35, 68, 150, 153, 322–26, 378, 420, 449  
*Mincha*, 110, 127, 129  
*Mishle Shualim*, 450  
*Mishna*, xxvi, xxix–xxx, xxxi, 34, 96, 450  
*Mimadrim*, 97, 139  
*Modena, Leone da, Rabbi*, 290  
*Moishe Kapotz*, 235  
*Molir, Rabbi Jacob*, 290
- Monasticism*, 96  
*Montefiore, Sir Moses*, 272, 275, 312–13  
*Montefiore's Buttons*, 272  
*Moses*, 33, 35, 59, 238, 323, 326, 333, 334–35, 341–51, 370, 373, 378–79  
*Moses ben Maimon, Rabbi*. See Maimonides  
*Most Valuable Merchandise, The*, 35
- Nachman, Rabbi*, 54  
*Nahman, Rabbi*, 392  
*Nahum Ish Gamzu, Rabbi*, 38  
*Napoleon*, 2–3, 279–81  
*Nasreddin*, 173  
*Nazis*, 18, 98, 316, 431  
*Nebuchadnezzar, King*, 326, 372–73  
*Nebuzaradan*, 369  
*neo-Hasidism*, 99  
*Nicholas II, Czar*, 12, 19, 237  
*Nissim, Gaon of Kairwan*, xxxii  
*Noah*, 328–29  
*Nordau, Max*, 236  
*Nuremberg Laws*, 236
- Obadiah*, 378  
*olives*, 379  
*Onkelos bar Kelonikos*, 378  
*Oshaga, Rabbi*, 429  
*Ostropolia*, 174, 192  
*Ostropoliher, Hershel*, 16, 173–74, 192–209
- Pahlen, Count*, 237  
*Palestine*, xxx–xxxii, 393  
*Panchatantra*, 449  
*Pappus ben Yehuda, Rabbi*, 58  
*parables*, 53–62; see also Parables of the Preacher of Dubno  
*Parables of the Preacher of Dubno*, 4–5, 13, 54, 56–57, 265  
*Paradise*, 53, 99, 116–17, 324, 378, 379, 381  
*Passover*, 30, 122–23, 325  
*Patriarchs*, xxviii, 373, 378–79  
*peddlers*, 17, 283–84, 286  
*Pentateuch*, xxix, 53  
*Peretz, I.L.*, 96  
*Peripatetics*, 35  
*Persia*, xxviii, 378, 419  
*Peter Schlemihl*, 235  
*Phaedrus*, 449  
*Pharisees*, 42–43  
*Philip, King*, 412  
*Philistines*, 30  
*Plato*, 35  
*Plutarch*, 394  
*Poland*, 53, 99, 237, 431  
*Poor Man's Miracle*, 54  
*Preacher of Dubno (Rabbi Jacob Krantz)*, 4–5, 13, 22–23, 53, 265; see also Parables of the Preacher of Dubno  
*Preacher of Kozenitz*, 103  
*preachers*, 60–61, 307  
*Prophets*, xxviii, 31, 33, 58–59, 150  
*Proverbs, Book of*, 35, 248, 315, 325  
*Psalms of Solomon*, 325  
*Ptolemy, King*, 414–18
- Rab, Rabbi*, 379

- Raba, Rabbi, 42, 74–75, 392, 429  
*Rabbinical Arithmetic*, 80  
 Rabbis, xxvi, xxviii, xxx, xxxi, 5, 8–9, 11, 14–15, 16–17, 23, 40–44, 48–49, 53, 63–69, 75, 77, 78, 84, 99, 136, 140, 145, 199, 238, 258–59, 269–70, 312, 384  
 Rabbis (cabalists), 116–23, 124  
 Rabbis (Hasidic), 15, 19–20, 32, 68, 75–76, 97, 99–111, 123, 139–45, 148, 174, 222–23, 262  
 Rachel, 36–40  
 Rachel, Mother, 373–74  
*Rambam*. See Maimonides  
 Rashi, 20, 119–20, 244, 420, 429–30  
 reasoning, 62  
*Resh Lakish*. See Simeon ben Lakish, Rabbi  
 Reyna, Joseph della, Rabbi, 32, 97, 124–36  
*Rich Man's Folly*, 272  
 riddles, 80  
 Rockefeller, John D., 272  
 Romans, 65, 236  
 Rome, 58  
 Rothschild, 3, 272, 273–75  
 Rothschild, Reb Amshel, 274  
 Rudolf, King, 432  
 Russia, 237  
 Sabbathai Zevi, 98, 431  
 "Sabbataian" Controversy, 98  
*Saboraim*, xxx  
 Safed, 97, 117–18, 122  
 Safris, Rabbi, 42  
 Sages of Mishna, Midrash and Talmud, 13, 34–35, 37–39, 41, 43, 44–45, 47, 48, 69, 74, 84, 119, 379, 380, 391  
*Saint and Sinner*, 265  
 Sammael. See Angel of Death  
 Samson, 30  
 Samuel, Rabbi, 430  
 Sancho Panza, 149  
 Sandalfon, 129  
 Saphir, Moritz, 274  
 Satan, 128  
*Saving Voice*, The, 70  
 Schildburg, Fools of, 210–11  
*schiemihl*, 235–37, 240, 243  
*schlimazl*, 79, 196, 232, 235–37, 238, 239, 241–42, 291  
*schnorrer*, 152–72, 272, 308  
 scholar, xxv–xxvi, xxxi, 3, 7–8, 10, 21, 33–36, 48, 49–51, 59, 63, 68–69, 74, 78, 244–46, 255, 281–83, 299–300, 305, 307  
 Scribes, xix–xxx  
 Scripture teachers, 18, 66, 232–34, 238, 282  
 Sea of Galilee, 127, 128  
 Second Law, xxx  
 Secret of Power, The, 323  
*Seder*, 30, 123, 325  
*Sefer Hasidim*, xxxii  
*Sefer Shaashuim*. See Book of Delight  
*Sefer Yetzira*. See Book of Creation  
*Sefrot*, 127  
 Seoram, Rabbi, 591–92  
 sextons, 16, 17–18, 231, 318  
*shadchan*. See marriage brokers  
*Shalshelet ha-Cabala*, 488  
 Shamir, 325, 422–23  
 Shammai, Rahhi, 13, 34  
*shammes*. See sextons  
 Sheba, Queen of, 357–62, 365  
*Shekhina*, 124, 125, 128, 325, 379  
 Shelley, Mary, 430  
*Shelumiel*, 235  
*Shem-hamforesh*, 31, 429, 430  
 Shida, Joseph, 434  
*Shnaitkover, Shmeri*, 173  
 Sholom Aleichem, 54, 149, 236, 313  
 shopkeepers, 239, 285  
 shrews, 194, 196, 237, 242  
 Simeon, Rabbi, 47  
 Simeon, the Great, Rabbi, 403–9  
 Simeon bar Kosiha. See Bar Kochba  
 Simeon bar Yohai, Rabbi, 96, 126  
 Simeon ben Gamaliel, Rabbi, 69  
 Simeon ben Halafta, Rabbi, 123  
 Simeon ben Lakish, Rabbi, 34, 44  
 Simeon ben Yohai. See Simeon bar Yohai, Rabbi  
 Simon ben Shetah, Rabbi, 427–28  
 sinners, 51, 265–70  
*Sippuri Tzaddikim*, 487  
 Slonimsky, H., xxiv, xxxin  
 Sodom, 70, 74, 249, 252–53  
*Soferim*, xxix  
 Solomon, King, 35, 54, 70, 71–72, 104, 261–62, 325–26, 353–54, 356–62, 365–69, 378, 421–27  
 Solomon ben Isaac, Rabbi. See Rashi  
*Song of Songs*, 325  
*Sorrow of Jeremiah*, The, 326  
*Story of Kunz and His Shepherd*, The, 80  
 Syntipas, 449  
 Syria, 393  
 tailors, 254–55, 279–81, 299–300  
 Talmud, xxiv, xxvi, xxix–xxx, 34, 48, 53, 62, 148, 150, 209, 248, 380, 394, 419, 449  
*Tannaim*, xxx, xxxi, 34  
 Tarfon, Rabbi, 44–45  
 Temple, 42–43, 128, 261, 325, 354–55, 373  
 Ten Commandments, 238  
 Ten Martyrs, 378  
 Terah, 330–31  
*Testament of Solomon*, The, 325  
*Tetragrammaton*. See *Shem-hamforesh*  
 Tevye the Dairyman, 149, 236–37  
*They Shoot First*, 316  
 Thirty-six Hidden Saints. See *Lamed-vav-Tzaddikim*  
 Thirty Years War, 97, 431  
*Tisha Ba'Ab*, 145  
 Titus, 31, 42  
 Tolstoy, Leo, xxviii, 210  
 Torah, xxix, 54, 104, 110, 111, 148, 380  
 Tree of Life, 378  
*Truth in Gay Clothes*, 54  
 Tyl Eulenspiegel, 173  
 Tyre, 393  
*tzaddikim*. See Rabbis (Hasidic)  
 Ukraine, 98, 99

- Vergil, 430  
*Vilner Gaon*. See Elijah, Rabbi  
(Gaon of Vilna)  
Vital, Chayyim, 97
- Werfel, Franz, 99  
*Whose Was the Blame?*, 70  
*Wisdom of Solomon, The*, 325  
*Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, 149  
Wolf, Rabbi, 76  
Wonder-Workers. See Rabbis (Hasidic)  
World-to-Come, 259, 324, 378, 384
- Yehuda ha-Nasi, Rabbi. See Judah ha-Nasi, Rabbi
- Yichezkel Halberstam, Rabbi, 148  
Yohanan ben Nappaha, Rabbi, 44  
Yohanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi, 34-35, 47  
Yohanan ha-Sandler, Rabbi, 34  
Yose, Rabbi, 47  
Yose bar Halaftah, Rabbi, 43-44  
Yossele Golem. See Golem of Prague, 435
- Zaggagel, 348  
Zangwill, Israel, 153  
Ze'era, Rabbi, 429  
Zevi Elimelech, Rabbi, 148  
Zohar, 96, 124, 126  
Zoroastrianism, 419  
Zweig, Arnold, 99

## ABOUT THE EDITOR

NATHAN AUSUBEL originally edited this anthology, which has gone back to press thirty-two times in hardcover since its initial publication in 1948. Mr. Ausubel has also compiled *The Book of Jewish Knowledge* and *Pictorial History of the Jewish People*. Nathan Ausubel is in his early eighties and lives in Calicoon, New York.

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