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An Obscure Apostle

A Dramatic Story

**TRANSLATED BY C.S. DE SOISSONS FROM THE ORIGINAL POLISH OF**

**MME. ORZESZKO**

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## **PREFACE**

**ELIZA ORZESZKO**

In Lord Palmerston's days, the English public naturally heard a great deal about Poland, for there were a goodly number of Poles, noblemen and others, residing in London, exiles after the unsuccessful revolution, who, believing that England would help them to recover their lost liberty, made every possible effort to that end through Count Vladislas Zamoyski, the prime minister's personal friend. But even in those times, when the English press was writing much about the political situation in Poland, little was said about that which constitutes the greatest glory of a nation, namely, its literature and art, which alone can be secure of immortality. Only lately, in fact, has any public attention been paid by English people to Polish literature. However, among the authors who have attracted considerable attention of late, is the writer of "By Fire and Sword," whose "Quo Vadis," has met with a phenomenal reception. Henryk Sienkiewicz has by his popularity proved that in unfortunate, almost forgotten, Poland, there is an abundance of literary talent and an important output of works of which few English readers have any conception. For instance, who has ever heard, in Great Britain, of Adam Michiewicz

the great Polish poet, who, critics declare, can be placed in the same category with Homer, Virgil, Dante, Tasso, Klopstock, Camoens, and Milton? Joseph Kraszewski as a novel writer occupies in Poland as high a position as Maurice Jokai does in Hungarian literature, while Mme. Eliza Orzeszko is considered to be the Polish Georges Sand, even by the Germans, who are in many respects the rivals of Slavs in politics and literature.

Henryk Sienkiewicz, asked by an interviewer what he thought about the contemporary Polish literary talents, replied: "At the head of all stand Waclaw Sieroszewski and Stefan Zeromski; they are young, and very promising writers. But Eliza Orzeszko still holds the sceptre as a novelist."

When the "Revue des Deux Mondes" asked the authors of different nationalities to furnish an essay on women of their respective countries, Mme. Orzeszko was chosen among the Polish writers to write about the Polish women. It may be stated that translations of her novels appeared in the same magazine more than twenty years ago. She is not only a talented but also a prolific writer. She has suffered much in her life, and her sufferings have brought out those sterling qualities of soul and heart, which make her books so intensely human, and characterise all her works, and place her high above contemporary Polish writers. The present volume may stand as a proof of her all-embracing talent.

**C.S. DE SOISSONS.**

## **AN OBSCURE APOSTLE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

On the summits of civilisation the various branches of the great tree of humanity are united and harmonised. Education is the best apostle of universal brotherhood. It polishes the roughness without and cuts the overgrowth within; it permits of the development, side by side and with mutual respect, of the natural characteristics of different individuals; it prunes even religious beliefs produced by the needs of the time, and reduces them to their simplest expression, the result being that people can live without antipathies.

Quite a different state of affairs exists in the social valley unlighted by the sun of knowledge. There people are the same to-day as they were in the remote centuries. Time, while making tombs for the dead people, has not buried with them the forms which, being continually regenerated, create among amazed societies unintelligible anachronisms. Here exist distinctions which, with sharp edges, push back everything which belongs not to them; here are crawling moral and physical miseries which are unknown, even by name, to those who have reached the summits; here is a gathering of dark figures, standing out against the background of the world, resembling vague outlines of sphinxes keeping guard over the graveyards; here are widely-spread petrifications of faiths, sentiment and customs, testifying by their presence that geniuses of many centuries can simultaneously rule the world. Patricians and plebeians changed their formal parts. The first became defenders and propagators of equality; the second stubbornly hold to distinctions. And if in times of yore oppression was directed by those who stood high against those who, in dust and humility, swarmed in the depths, in our times, from the depths arise unhealthy exhalations, which poison life and make the roads of civilisation difficult to the chosen ones.

Such unfortunate valleys, rendering many people unhappy, separating the rest of the world by a chain of high mountains, exist in Israelitic society, as well as in the society of other nations, and there they are even more numerous than elsewhere. Their too long existence is the result of many historical causes and characteristics of the race. To-day they constitute a phenomenon; attracting the thinker and the artist by their great influence and the originality of their colouring, composed of mysterious shadows and bright lights. But who is familiar with them and who studies them? Even those who, on account of the same blood and traditions, should be attracted toward these localities, plunged in darkness, send there neither painters nor apostles—sometimes they do not even believe in their existence. For instance, what a surprise it would be to Israelitic society, gathered in the largest city in the country, composed of cultivated men and of women, who by their beauty, refinement and wit are in no way inferior to the women of other nations: what a surprise it would be to this society, gowned in purple and fine linen, if somebody would all at once describe Szybow and what is transpiring there!

Szybow? On what planet is it, and if on ours, what population has it?  
The people there, are they white, black or brown?

Well then, readers, I am going to make you acquainted with that deep—very deep—social valley. Not long ago there was enacted there an interesting drama worthy of your kind glance—of your heart's strong throb and a moment of long, sad thought. But in order to bring out facts and figures they must be thrown against the background on which they have risen and developed, and in the deep perspectives of which there are elements which are the causes of their existence. Therefore you must permit me, before raising the curtain which hides the first scenes of the drama, to tell you in brief the history of the small town.

## CHAPTER I

Far, far from the line of the railroads which run through the Bialorus (a part of Poland around the city of Mohileff which now belongs to Russia), far from even the navigable River Dzwina, in one of the most remote corners of the country, amidst quiet, large, level fields—still existing in some parts of Europe—between two sandy roads which disappear into the depths of a great forest, there is a group of gray houses of different sizes standing so closely together that anyone looking at them would say that they had been seized by some great fright and had crowded together in order to be able to exchange whispers and tears.

This is Szybow, a town inhabited by Israelites, almost exclusively, with the exception of a small street at the end of the place in which, in a few houses, live a few very poor burghers and very quiet old retired officials.

It is the only street that is quiet, and the only street in which flowers bloom in summer. In the other streets no flowers bloom, and they are dreadfully noisy. There the people talk and move about continually, industriously, passionately, within the houses and in the narrow dark alleys called streets, and in the round, comparatively large market-place in the centre of the town, around which there are numerous doors of stinking small shops. In this market-place after a week of transactions by the people of the vicinity, there remains an inconceivable quantity of dirt and sweepings, and here is also the high, dusky, strangely-shaped meeting house.

This building is one of the specimens, rare to-day, of Hebrew architecture. A painter and an archeologist would look upon it with an equal amount of interest. At first glance it can be easily seen that it is a synagogue, although it does not look like other churches. Its four thick walls form a monotonous quadrangle, and its brown colour gives it a touch of dignity, sadness, and antiquity. These walls must be very old indeed, for they are covered with green strips of moss. The higher parts of the walls are cut with a row of long, narrow, deeply-set windows, recalling, by their shape, the loop-holes of a fortress. The whole building is covered by a roof whose three large heavy turrets, built one upon the other, look like three moss-covered gigantic mushrooms.

Every gathering, whether of greater importance or of common occurrence, was held here, sheltered beneath the brown walls and mushroom-like roof of the temple. Here in the large round courtyard are the heders (Hebrew schools), where the kahals (church committees) gather. Here stands a low black house with two windows, a real mud hovel, inhabited for several centuries and for many generations by Rabbis of the family of Todros, famous in the community and even far beyond it. Here at least everything is clean, and while in other parts of the place, in the spring especially, the people nearly sink into the mud, the school courtyard is always clean. It would be difficult to find on it even a wisp of straw, for as soon as anything is noticed, it is at once picked up by a passer-by, anxious to keep clean the place around the temple.

How important Szybow is to the Israelites living in Bialorus, and even in Lithuania, can be judged by an embarrassing incident which occurred to a merry but unwise nobleman while in conversation with a certain Jewish agent, more spiritual than humble.

The agent was standing at the door of the office of the noble, bent a little forward, smiling, always ready to please and serve the noble, and say a witty word to put him in good humour. The noble was feeling pretty good, and joked with the Jew.

"Chaimek," spoke he, "wert thou in Cracow?"

"I was not, serene lord."

"Then thou art stupid."

Chaimek bowed.

"Chaimek, wert thou in Rome?"

"I was not, serene lord."

"Then thou art very stupid."

Chaimek bowed again, but in the meanwhile he had made two steps forward. On his lips wandered one of those smiles common to the people of his race—clever, cunning, in which it is impossible to say whether there is humility or triumph, flattery or irony.

"Excuse me, your lordship," he said softly, "has your lordship been in Szybow?"

Szybow was situated about twenty miles from the place at which this conversation was held.

The nobleman answered, "I was not."

"And what now?" answered Chaimek still more softly.

The answer of the jolly nobleman to that embarrassing question is not recorded, but the use of Szybow as an argument against the insult shows that to the Jew Szybow was of the same relative importance as were Rome and Cracow to the nobleman, i.e., as the place which was the concentration of civil and religious authorities.

If someone were to have asked the Jew why he attributed such importance to a small, poor town, he would probably mention two families who had lived in Szybow for centuries—Ezofowichs and Todros. Between these two families there existed the difference that the Ezofowichs represented the concentration in the highest degree of the element of secular importance, i.e., large family, numerous relatives, riches, and keenness in the transaction of large business interests, and in increasing their wealth. On the other hand, the Todros family represented the spiritual element—piety, religious culture, and severe, almost ascetic, purity of life.

It is probable that if Chaimek were asked the reason for the importance given to the little town, he would forget to name the Ezofowichs because, although the Israelites were proud of the riches and influence of that family as one of their national glories, this lustre, purely worldly, paled in comparison with the rays of holiness which surrounded the name of Todros.

The Todros were for generations considered by the whole Hebrew population of Bialorus and Lithuania as the most accomplished example and enduring pillar of orthodoxy. Was it really so? Here and there could be found scholarly Talmudists, who smiled when a question arose in regard to the Talmudistic orthodoxy of the Todros, and when they gathered together the name of Todros was sadly whispered about. But although the celebrated orthodoxy of the Todros was much discussed by these scholars, they were greatly in the minority—only a score among the masses of believers. The crowd believed, worshipped, and went to Szybow as to a holy place, to make obeisance and ask for advice, consolation, and medicines.

Szybow had not always possessed such an attractive power of orthodoxy; on the contrary, its founders were schismatics, representing in Israel the spirit of opposition and division, Karaites. In the times of yore they had converted to their belief the powerful inhabitants of the rich land on the shores of Chersoneses, and they became their kings. Afterwards, in accordance with the traditions of that reign, they wandered into the world with their legislative book, the Bible, double exiles, from Palestine and Crimea, and a small part of them, brought to Lithuania by the Grand Duke Witold, went as far as Bialorus and settled there in a group of houses and mud-hovels called Szybow.

In those times, on Friday and Saturday evenings, great tranquillity and darkness was spread through the town, because Karaites, contrary to the Talmudists, did not celebrate the holy day of Sabbath with an abundance of light and noisy joy and copious feasts, but they greeted it with darkness, silence, sadness, and meditation upon the downfall of the national temple, and the glory and might of the people of Israel. Then, from the blackest houses, from behind the small dark windows, there flowed into the quiet without the sound of singing; the parents were sadly telling their children of the prophets who, on the shores of the rivers in Babylon, broke their harps and cut their fingers so that none could force them to sing in captivity, of the blessed country of Havili, situated somewhere in the south of Arabia, where the ten tribes of Israel lived in liberty, happiness, and peace, not knowing quarrels or the use of the sword. They talked of the holy river, Sabbation, hiding the Israelitic wanderers from the eyes of their toes. In time, however, lights began to shine in the windows on Fridays, and then, little by little, they began to talk and pray aloud. Rabbinitz arrived. The worshippers of Talmudistic authorities, representative of blind faith in oral traditions gathered and transmitted by Kohens, Tanaitz, and Gaons, came and pushed aside the handful of heretics and wrecks. Under the influence of the newcomers the community of Karaites began to melt away. The last blow was struck at it by a man well-known in the history of Polish Hebrews—Michael Ezofowich, Senior.

He was the first of his name to emerge from obscurity. His family, settled in Poland for a long time, was one of these which, during the reign of Jagiellons, under the influence of privileges and laws in Poland promulgated by a (for that time) high civilisation, was united by sympathetic ties to the aboriginal population, and Ezofowich was appointed Senior over all the Hebrew population of Lithuania and Bialorus, by King Zygmunt the First, by a document which read thus:

"We, Zygmunt, by God's grace, etc., make known to all Jews living on the estate, our Fatherland, having taken into consideration the faithful services of the Jew, Michael Ezofowich, and wishing you in your affairs not to meet with any obstacles and delays, according to the laws of justice, we constitute, that Michael Ezofowich shall settle all your affairs for US, and be your superior, and you must come to US through him, and be obedient to him in everything. He will judge you and rule over you according to the custom of our law, and punish the guilty ones by OUR permission, everyone according to his merit."

From the few historical notes about him, it can be seen that the Senior was a man of strong and energetic will. With a firm hand he seized the authority given him over his co-religionists, and he threw an anathema over those who would not obey him, especially on the Karaites, excluding them from the Hebrew community, and refusing them the friendship and help of their tribe. Under such a blow the existence of the inhabitants of Szybow, already poor, sad, and inactive, was made altogether unbearable. The descendants of Hazairan rulers, heretics, constituting, as always, a great minority of the population, exposed to aversion and hatred, oppressed and poor, left the place which had given them shelter for a certain time, carrying with them in their hearts their stubborn attachment to the Bible, and on their lips their poetical legends. They scattered in the broad and hostile world, leaving behind them in that little town where they had lived two hundred years only a few families, cherishing still more passionately their old graveyards, the hill now covered with the ruins of their temple, which the conquering Rabbinites had destroyed. The Rabbinites took possession of Szybow, and, if the truth be told, they changed, by their energy, industry, perfect harmony of action, the result of unusual mutual help, the quiet, gray, poor, sad little village into a town full of activity, noise, care, and riches.

In those times, under the Senior's rule, the Jews in general were prosperous. Besides material prosperity, there began to live in them the hope of a possibility of rising from their mental ignorance and social humiliation. The Senior must surely have had a superior and keen mind, for he was able to thoroughly understand the spirit of the time and the needs of his people, notwithstanding the ancient barriers and prejudices. He rejected the Karaites from the bosom of Israel, not because of religious fanaticism but for broader social reasons. Although he was a Rabbinit, and obliged to give to the religious authorities absolute faith and worship, his mind was sometimes visited by fits of scepticism—perhaps the best road to wisdom. In one of his reports to the King, refuting some objections which had been made to his sentences, he wrote, sadly and ironically:

"Our different books give us different laws. Very often we know not what to do when Gamaliel differs from Eliezer. In Babylon is one truth—in Jerusalem another (two editions of the Talmud). We obey the second Moses (Majmonides) and the new ones call him heretic. I encourage the savants to write such wise books that the clever and stupid can understand them." It was at the time when the Occidental Israelites, settled in France and Spain, raised the question as to whether the professors of the Talmud and Bible should be permitted to acquire a knowledge of the lay sciences. Many opinions were considered, but none was strong enough to prevail, because the partisans of absolute separation from mental work and human tendencies constituted a great majority among the Israelites. Every society has such moments of darkness. It happens especially when a nation is exhausted by a series of successful efforts, after having undergone tortures, and enfeebled by the streams of blood poured out. The Occidental Jews, after centuries of existence in abject fear, wandering through fire and blood, passed such a moment in the sixteenth century. The time was still far distant which gave birth to famous doctors of secular sciences beloved of the people, esteemed by Kings. The high ideas of Majmonides who, giving deserved credit to the legislation of Israel, admired also the Greek scholars, were also far from the—they were even forgotten. Majmonides, who wished to base the knowledge of the Bible and Talmud on a foundation of mathematical and astronomical truths, and make it durable; who openly expressed the desire to shorten the twenty-five hundred sheets of the Talmud into one chapter, clear as the day; who did not justify religious beliefs which were contrary to commonsense, and claimed that "the eyes are placed in the front, and not in the rear of man's head, in order that he may look before him," and prophesied that the whole world would one day be filled with knowledge, as the sea is filled with water—such a man was despised. Four centuries had passed since the dignified, sweet, highly sympathetic figure of the Israelitic thinker had disappeared from the face of the earth. He was one of the greatest thinkers of the middle ages. The giant with the eagle eye and fiery heart had been succeeded by dwarfs, whose weak breasts were saturated with bitterness, and whose eyes looked on the world sadly, suspiciously, narrow-mindedly. "Keep away from Greek knowledge," Joseph Ezobi cried to his son, "because it is like the wine-garden of Sodom, pouring into man's head drunkenness and sin."

"The strangers are pushing into the Gates of Zion!" lamented Abba-Mari, when he learned that the

Hebrew youths had begun to study with masters of other religions. And all the Rabbis and the Presidents of the Jewish communities in the West, ordered that no man under thirty years of age should study the lay sciences. "Because," said they, "he who has filled his mind with the Bible, and Talmud has the right to warm himself at the stranger's flame."

The bolder ones, while submitting to the decision of their superiors, cried, "Rabbi, how can we study lay sciences after our thirtieth year, when our minds will have become dulled and our memory tired, and we shall possess enthusiasm no longer and strength of youth."

The orders were obeyed. Their minds grew dull, tired memory fainted, and the strength and enthusiasm of youth left them. Majmonides, grave, silent, motionless, stood in the midst of the sea of darkness which covered the people who had been conducted by him toward the light. They cursed his memory, and a devastating hand rubbed off his tomb its grateful and glorious inscription, replacing it with stiff and cruel words, as fanatical as ignorant:

"Here lies Moses Majmonides, excommunicated heretic."

At the same time the same quarrels raged among the Hebrews settled in Poland, but being less tired by persecution, and because they were less tormented than their brothers in the West, and were freer and more sure of their privileges than their brothers in the West, their aversion to the 'stranger's flames' was less passionate. Nay, there was among them quite a numerous party which cried for secular sciences—for brotherhood with the rest of humanity in intellectual efforts and tendencies. One of these men who stood at the head of this party was the Lithuanian Senior, Ezofowich. Under his influence the Jewish Synod convoked in those times, issued a proclamation to all the Polish Jews. The principal paragraph of this was:

"Jehovah has numerous Sefirot, Adam has had numerous emanations of perfection. Therefore an Israelite must not be satisfied with one religious science only. Although it is a holy science the others must not on this account be neglected. The best fruit is a paradise apple, but shall we not eat less good apples? There were Jews in the courts of kings; Mordoheus was a savant, Esther was clever, Nehemias was a Persian counsellor, and they liberated the people from captivity. Study; be useful to the King and the nobles will respect you. The Jews are as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars in the sky; they do not shine like the stars, but everyone tramples on them as on the sand. The wind scatters the seeds of different trees, and none asks from where the most beautiful tree has its origin. Why, then, should there not rise among us a Cedar of Lebanon, instead of thorn-bushes?"

The man under whose inspiration the proclamation was written, calling the Polish Jews to turn their faces to where the light of the future was dawning, met, eye to eye, the man with his face set toward the past and darkness.

This man was a newcomer from Spain, and settled in Szybow. His name was Nehemias Todros, the descendant of the famous Todros Abulaffi Halevi who, famous for his Talmudistic learning and orthodoxy and knowledge, was afterwards carried away by the gloomy secrets of Kabalists, and helping it with his authority, was the cause of the most dreadful error among the Jews from which any nation can suffer. The tradition says that the same Nehemias Todros who had a princely title, Nassi, was the first to bring to Poland the book, Zohar, in which was explained the quintessence of the perilous doctrine, and from that day there comes from Poland the mixture of the Talmud with Kabalistic ideas which has influenced very badly the minds and the lives of the Polish Jews. History is silent regarding the quarrels and fights aroused by this innovation among the people who were in a fair way of emerging from the darkness which surrounded them, but the traditions, piously preserved in the families, tell, that in the fight, which lasted a long time and was very obstinate, between Michael Ezofowich, for a considerable period a Polish Jew, and Nehemias Todros, a Spanish newcomer, the first was vanquished. Consumed with grief caused by the sight of his people returning to the old false roads, crushed by intrigues set afoot against him by the gloomy adversary, he died in his prime. His name descended from generation to generation of Ezofowichs. They were all proud of his memory, although in time they understood less of its importance. From that time dated the great authority of the Todros and the gradual diminution of moral influence exerted by the Ezofowichs. The last ones being driven out by those fresh from the field of waste, social activity, they turned all their abilities in the direction of business, with the aim of increasing their material welfare. The navigable rivers were every year covered with vessels owned by them, and carrying to remote parts enormous quantities of merchandise. Their house, standing in the midst of the poor town, became more and more the centre of national riches and industry. To them, as to the modern Rothschilds, everyone went in need of gold to carry out their enterprises. The Ezofowichs were proud of their material might, and gave up entirely caring about the other—the might of spiritual influence and the fate of the people possessed by their grandfather, and of which they were robbed by Todros—by those Todros who, poor, almost beggars, living in the wretched little house which stood near the temple, disparaging everything which had the

appearance of comfort and beauty, but who were, nevertheless, famous all over the country, and were enveloped in the pious dreams and hopes of their people. And only once during two centuries did one of the Ezofowichs attempt to lay hold of not only material—but also moral dignity. It happened toward the end of the last century. The great Four-Year Parliament was in session at Warsaw. The reports of its discussions reached even the small town in Bialorus. The people living there listened and waited. From lips to lips rushed the news of hope and fear—the Jews were under discussion at this Parliament!

What do they say about us? What do they write about us? the long-bearded passers-by asked each other, as they walked through the narrow streets of Szybow, dressed in long halats and big fur caps. This curiosity increased each day to such an extent that it finally—extraordinary event—stopped the business transactions and money circulation. Some of them even undertook the long, difficult journey to Warsaw, in order to be near the source of news, and from there they sent their brethren who remained in the little town of Bialorus, long letters, rumped and spotted newspapers, and leaves torn from different pamphlets, and books.

Of those who remained in the town, two men were most attentive and most impatient—Nohim Todros, Rabbi, and Hersh Ezofowich, rich merchant. There was a muffled, secret antipathy between them. Apparently they were on good terms, but at every opportunity there burst forth the antagonism which existed between the great-grandson of Michael the Senior, the disciple of Majmonides, and the descendant of Nehemias Todros, Kabalistic fanatic.

Finally there came from Warsaw to Szybow a crumpled sheet of paper, which had turned yellow during the journey, and on it were the following words:

"All differences in dress, language, and customs existing between the Jews and early inhabitants must be abolished. Leave alone everything concerning religion. Tolerate even the sects if they work no moral injury. Do not baptise a Jew before he is twenty years old. Give to the Jews the right to acquire land, and do not collect any taxes from those who will take agriculture for five years. Supply them with farm stock. Forbid marriages before the age of twenty for men and eighteen for women."

This sheet was carried about and read hundreds of times in the houses, streets and squares. It was waved as a flag of triumph or mourning, until it went to pieces in those thousands of unhappy, trembling hands. But the population of Szybow did not express its opinion of that news. A smaller part of it turned their questioning eyes toward Hersh; others, more numerous, looked inquiringly into the face of Reb Nohim.

Reb Nohim appeared on the threshold of his hut, and raising his thin hands above his gray head, as a sign of indignation and despair, he cried several times:

"Assybe! assybe! dajde!"

"Misfortune! misfortune! woe!" repeated after him, the crowd gathered in the courtyard of the temple.

But, in the same moment, Hersh Ezofowich standing at the door of the meeting house, put his white hand into the pocket of his satin halat, raised his head, covered with a costly beaver cap, and not less loudly than the Rabbi, but in a different voice, he called:

"Hoffnung! Hoffnung! Frieden!"

"Hope! Hope! Happiness!" repeated after him, timidly, his not very numerous followers, with a sidelong glance at the Rabbi. But the old Rabbi's hearing was good, and he heard the cry. His white beard shook, and his dark eyes flashed lightning in Hersh's direction.

"They will order us to shave our beards and wear short dresses!" he exclaimed, painfully and angrily.

"They will make our minds longer and broaden our hearts!" answered Hersh's sonorous voice.

"They will put us to the plough and order us to cultivate the country of exile!" shouted Rabbi Nohim.

"They will open for us the treasures of the earth, and they will order her to be our fatherland!" screamed Hersh.

"They will forbid us kosher," cried Rabbi.

"They will make of Israel a cedar tree instead of a hawthorn!" answered Hersh.

"Our son's faces will be covered with beards before they may marry!"

"When they take their wives, their minds and strength will be already developed."

"They will order us to warm ourselves at strange fireplaces, and drink from the wine-garden of Sodom."

"They will bring near to us the Jobel-ha-Gabel—the festival of joy, during which the lamb may eat beside the tiger."

"Hersh Ezofowich! Hersh Ezofowich! Through your mouth speaks the soul of your great-grandfather, who wished to lead all Jews to foreign fireplaces."

"Reb Nohim! Reb Nohim! Through your eyes looks the soul of your great-grandfather, who plunged all Jews into great darkness."

Deep silence reigned in the crowd as the two men, standing far from each other, spoke thus. Nohim's voice grew thinner and sharper; Hersh's resounded with stronger and deeper tones. The Rabbi's yellow cheeks became covered with brick-red spots—Ezofowich's face grew pale. The Rabbi shook his thin hands, rocking his figure backward and forward, scattering his silvery beard over both shoulders. The merchant stood erect and motionless, and in his green eyes shone an angry sneer.

A couple of thousand eyes gazed in turn on the two adversaries—leaders of the people—and a couple of thousand mouths quivered, but were silent.

Finally, the long, sharp piercing cry of Reb Nohim resounded in the courtyard of the temple.

"Assybe! assybe! dajde!" moaned the old man, sobbing and crushing his hands.

"Hoffnung! Hoffnung! Frieden!" joyfully exclaimed Hersh, raising his white hand.

The crowd was still silent and motionless for a while. Then the heads began to move like waves and lips to murmur like waters, and at once a couple of thousands of hands were lifted with a gesture of pain and distress, and from a couple of thousand throats came the powerful shout.

"Assybe! assybe! dajde!"

Reb Nohim was victorious!

Hersh looked around. His friends surrounded him closely. They were silent. They dropped their heads and cast timid looks on the ground.

Hersh smiled disdainfully, and when the crowd rushed to the temple, led by Reb Nohim continually shaking his yellow hands above his gray head, and while still before the threshold of the temple began the prayer habitually recited when some peril was imminent—when finally the brown walls of the temple resounded with the powerful sobbing cry, "Lord help thy people! Save from annihilation the sons of Israel!" The young merchant stood motionless, plunged in deep thought. Then he passed slowly down the square, and finally disappeared into a large house of fine outward appearance. It was the biggest and showiest house in the town, almost new, for it was built by Hersh himself, and shone with yellow walls and brilliant windows.

Hersh sat for a long time in a large, simply-furnished room. His look was gloomy. Then he raised his head and called:

"Freida! Freida!"

In answer to this call the door of the adjoining room opened, and in the golden light of the fireplace appeared a slender young woman. On her head was a large white turban, and a white kerchief fell from her neck, ornamented with several strings of pearls. Her big, dark eyes shone brightly and like flame from her gentle, oval face. She paused opposite her husband, and questioned him with her eyes only.

Hersh motioned her to a chair, in which she sat immediately.

"Freida," he began, "have you heard of what happened in the town to-day?"

"Yes, I have heard," she answered softly. "My brother Joseph came to see me, and told me that you had quarrelled with Reb Nohim."

"He wishes to eat me up as his great-grandfather ate up my great-grand father."

Freida's dark eyes became filled with fear.

"Hersh!" she exclaimed, "you must not quarrel with him. He is a great and saintly man. All will be



with him!"

"No," answered the husband, with a smile, "don't be afraid. Now other times are coming—he can't harm me. And as for me, I can't shut my mouth when my heart shouts within me that I must speak. I can no longer stand by to hear that man teaching that what is good is bad, and see the stupid people look into his eyes and shout, although they do not understand anything. No! And how can they understand? Has Todros ever taught them to distinguish good from evil, and separate that which was from that which shall be?"

After a few moments of silence, Hersh continued:

"Freida."

"What, Hersh?"

"Have you forgotten what I told you about Michael the Senior?"

The woman folded her hands devoutly.

"Why should I forget it?" she asked. "You told me beautiful things of him."

"He was a great—a very great man. Todros ate him up. If that family had not eaten him up he would have accomplished great things for the Jews. But no matter about that. I will ask him what he wished to do. He will teach me, and I will do it!"

Freida grew pale.

"But how will you ask him?" she whispered in fear, "he is dead a long time ago."

A mysterious smile played about the merchant's thin lips.

"I know how. Sometimes God permits those who have died to talk with and teach their grandchildren, Freida," he continued, after another pause, "do you know what the Senior did when he saw that Todros would eat him up, and that he would die before the good times would come?"

"No, what did he do?"

"He shut himself up in a room, and he sat there without eating or drinking or sleeping, and—he only wrote. And what did he write? That nobody yet knows, because he hid what he had written, and when he felt that his end was near, he said to his sons: 'I have written down everything that I have known and felt, and what I intended to do; but I have hidden my writings from you, because now such times are at hand that all is useless for the present. The Todros rule, and they will rule for a long time, and they will do this that neither you, nor your sons, nor your grandsons will care to see my writing, and even were they to see it, they would tear it into pieces, and scatter it to the winds for annihilation, and they would say that Michael the Senior was kofrim (heretic), and they would excommunicate him as they did the second Moses. But there will come a time when my great-grandson will wish for what I had written—to ask for guidance in his thoughts and actions in order to free the Jews from Todros' captivity, and to lead them to that sun from which the other nations receive the warmth. Thus, my great-grandson who desires to have my writings, will find the writings, and you have only to tell the eldest son of that family on your deathbed that it exists, and that there are many wise things written down. It must be thus from generation to generation. I command you thus. Remember to be obedient to this one, whose soul deserved to be immortal! (It was the teaching of Moses Majmonides, in regard to the immortality of the soul, that every man, according to the culture of his mind and moral perfection, could attain immortality, and that annihilation was the punishment for misdeeds)."

Hersh stopped speaking. Freida sat motionless looking into her husband's face with intense curiosity.

"Shall you search for that writing?" she asked softly.

"I shall search for it," said her husband, "and I shall find it, because I am that great-grandson of whom Michael Senior spoke when dying. I shall find that writing—you must help me to find it."

The woman stood erect, beaming with joy.

"Hersh, you are a good man!" she exclaimed. "You are kind to associate me, a woman, with such an important affair and great thoughts."

"Why should I not do it? Are you a bad housekeeper or a bad mother? You do everything well, and your soul is as beautiful as your eyes."

The white face of the young Hebrew woman became scarlet. She dropped her eyes, but her coral-like lips whispered some words of love and gratitude.

Hersh rose.

"Where shall we search for the writing?" said he thoughtfully.

"Where?" repeated the woman.

"Freida," said the husband, "Michael the Senior could not have hidden his writing in the earth, for he knew that there the worms would eat it, or that it would turn to dust. Is this writing in the earth?"

"No," answered the woman, "it is not there."

"He could not have hidden it in the walls of the house, for he knew that they would rot, and that they would be destroyed, and new ones built. These walls I have built myself, and I carefully searched the old ones, but there was no writing."

"There was not," repeated Freida sorrowfully.

"He could not have hidden it in the roof, because he knew it would not be safe there. When I was born there was perhaps the tenth roof built over our house, but it seems to me that the writing could not have been there. Where is it?"

Both were thoughtful. All at once, after a while, the woman exclaimed:

"Hersh, I know where the writing is!"

Her husband raised his head. His wife was pointing to the large library filled with books, which stood in a corner of the room.

"There?" said Hersh, hesitatingly.

"There," repeated the woman, with conviction. "Have you not told me that these are Michael Senior's books, and that all the Ezofowichs have preserved them, but no one has read them because Todros would not permit the reading of books."

Hersh passed his hand over his forehead, and the woman spoke further.

"Michael the Senior was a wise man, and he saw the future. He knew that for a long time no one would read those books, and that only the one who would read them would be that great-grandson who would find his writings."

"Freida, Freida," exclaimed Hersh, "you are a wise woman!"

She modestly dropped her dark eyes.

"Hersh, I am going to see why the baby is crying. I will give the servants their orders, and have them keep the fire, then I will come here and aid you in your work."

"Come!" said her husband, and when she had gone to the room from which came the sounds of children's voices, he said to himself:

"A wise woman is more precious than gold and pearls. Besides, her husband's heart is quiet."

After a while she returned, locked the door, and asked softly:

"Where is the key?"

Hersh found the key of his great-grandfather's library, and they began to take down the large books. They placed them on the floor, and having seated themselves, they began to turn slowly one leaf after the other. Clouds of dust rose from the piles of paper, which had remained untouched for centuries. The dust settled on Freida's snow-white turban in a gray layer, and covered also Hersh's golden hair. But they worked on indefatigably and with such a solemn expression on their faces that one would think that they were uncovering the grave of their great-grandfather in order to take therefrom his grand thoughts.

Evening was already approaching when Hersh exclaimed as people exclaim when they meet with victory and bliss. Freida said nothing, but she rose slowly and extended her hands above her head in a movement of gratitude.

Then Hersh prayed fervently near the window, through which could be seen the first stars appearing in the sky. During the whole night there was a light in that window, and seated at the table, his head resting on both hands, was Hersh, reading from large yellowish sheets of paper. At the break of day, when the eastern part of the sky had hardly begun to burn with pinkish light, he went out, dressed himself in a travelling mantle and large beaver cap, got into a carriage, and drove away. He was so deeply plunged in thought that he did not even bid good-bye to his children and servants, who crowded the hall of the house. He only nodded to Freida, who stood on the piazza, with the white turban on her head turning pink in the light of the dawn. Her eyes, which followed her husband, were filled with sadness and pride.

Where had Hersh gone? Beyond mountains, forests, and rivers, to a remote part of the country where, amidst swampy plains and black forests of Pinseyzna lived an eloquent partisan of the rights to civilisation of the Polish Jews, Butrymowicz. He was a karmaszyn—the higher, or rather richer, class of nobility in Poland were called by that name, which means a certain shade of red, because their national costumes were of that colour—and a thinker. He saw clearly and far. He was familiar with the necessities of the century.

When Hersh was introduced into the mansion of the nobleman and admitted to the presence of the great and wise member of parliament, he bowed profoundly, and began to speak thus:

"I am Hersh Ezofowich, a merchant from Szybow, and the great-grandson of Michael Ezofowich, who was superior over all the Jews, and was called Senior by the command of the king himself. I come here from afar. And why do I come? Because I wished to see the great member of the Diet, and talk with the famous author. The light with which his figure shines is so great that it made me blind. As a weak plant twines around the branch of a great oak, so I desire to twine my thoughts about yours, that they shall over-arch the people like the rainbow, and there shall be no more quarrels and darkness in this world."

When the great man answered encouragingly to this preface, Hersh continued:

"Serene lord, you have said that there must be an agreement between two nations, who, living on the same soil, are in continual conflict."

"Yes. I said so," answered the deputy.

"Serene lord, you said that the Jew ought to be equal in everything with the Christians, and in that way they would be no longer noxious."

"I said it."

"Serene lord, you have said that you consider the Jews as Polish citizens, and that it is necessary that they should send their children to the secular schools. They should have the right to purchase the land, and that among them certain things, which are neither good nor sensible, should be abolished."

"I said it," again affirmed the deputy.

Then the tall, stately figure of the Jew, with its proud head and intelligent look, bent swiftly, and before the deputy could resist Hersh had pressed his hand to his lips.

"I am a newcomer in this country," said he softly. "Younger brother—"

Then he drew himself up and pulled from the pocket of his halat a roll of yellowish papers.

"That which I have brought here," he said, "is more precious to me than gold, pearls, and diamonds."

"What is it?" asked the deputy.

Hersh answered in a solemn voice:

"It is the will of my ancestor, Michael Ezofowich, the Senior."

They both sat reading through the whole night by the light of two small wax candles. Then they began to talk. They spoke softly, with heads bent together and burning faces. Then toward day-break they rose, and simultaneously each stretched out and shook the hands of the other cordially.

What did they read the whole night, and of what were they talking? What sentiment of enthusiasm and hope united their hands as a sign of a pact? Nobody ever learned. It is sunk in the dark night of historical secrets, with many other desires and thoughts. Adversities plunged it there. It was hidden, but not lost. Sometimes we ask ourselves whence come the lightnings of those thoughts and desires which nobody has known before? And we do not know that their sources are the moments not written on the pages of the history by any writer.

The next day a coach driven by six horses stopped before the house of the nobleman. The noble, with his Jewish guest, got in, and together they went to the capital of the country.

A couple of months afterwards Hersh returned from Warsaw to Szybow. He was very active in the town and its environments, he spoke, explained, persuaded, trying to gain partisans for the changes which were in preparation for his people. Then he went away again, and again he returned—and went away. This lasted a couple of years.

When Hersh returned from his last journey he was very much changed. His looks were sad, and his forehead was lined with sorrow. He entered the house, sat on the bench, and began to pant heavily. Freida stood before him, sorrowful and uneasy, but quiet and patient. She did not dare to ask. She waited for her husband's words and look. Finally he looked at her sadly, and said:

"Everything is lost!"

"Why lost?" whispered Freida.

Hersh made a gesture, indicative of the downfall of something grand.

"When a building falls," he said, "the beams fall on the heads of those who are within, and the dust fills their eyes."

"It is true," affirmed the woman.

"A great building is in the mire. The beams have fallen on all the great problems and our great works, and the dust covers them—for a long time."

Then he rose, looked at Freida with eyes full of big tears, and said:

"We must hide the Senior's testament, because it will be useless again. Come, let us hide it carefully. If some great-grandson of ours will wish to get it, he will find it the same as we did."

From that day Hersh grew perceptibly older. His eyes dulled, and his back grew bent. He sat for hours on the bench, sighing deeply, and repeating:

"Assybe! assybe! assybe! dajde!" (Misfortune! Misfortune! Woe!)

Around this sad man moved softly and solicitously a slender woman dressed in a flowing gown and white turban. Her dark eyes often filled with tears, and her steps were so careful and quiet that even the pearls which ornamented her neck never made the slightest noise, and did not interrupt her husband's thoughtfulness.

Sometimes Freida looked sadly at her husband. His sadness made her sad also, but she did not clearly understand it. Why was he sorrowful? His riches did not diminish, the children grew healthy, and everything was as before that quarrel with Reb Nohim and the finding of those old papers. The loving and wise woman, whose whole world was contained between the four walls of her home, could not understand that her husband's spirit was carried into the sphere of broad ideas—that it was fond of the fiery world, and being driven out of it by the strength of events, could not be cured of its longing. She did not know that in this world there were griefs and longings which had no connection with either parents or with children, or with wife or with wealth, or with one's house, and that such griefs and longings of the human spirit are the most difficult to cure.

Todros was rejoicing, and he called his flock to rejoice with him, who believed in his wisdom and sanctity. He triumphed, but he desired to triumph still further. To destroy the Ezofowichs would mean to destroy the stream which flowed into the future, striving with that other stream which strove to congeal into ice—into the petrification of the past. Who knows what may happen in the future? Who knows but that that cursed family may not give rise to a man strong enough to destroy the centuries of work achieved by the Todros. If events had taken another turn, Hersh, with the aid of his friend Edomits, would already have accomplished this!

As in times of yore, his ancestor Michael was accused, so now Hersh was assailed with reproaches of all kinds. In the synagogue they shouted at him that he did not observe the Sabbath, that he was friendly with gojs (any man who does not follow Judaism is a goj), and that he sat at their tables and ate meat which is not kosher. That in contentious affairs he avoided Jewish courts, and went to the tribunals of the country; that he did not obey the superiors of kahal, and he even dared to criticise them that he did not respect Jewish authorities in general, and Reb Nohim in particular.

Hersh defended himself proudly, refuting some of the objections and acknowledging some of the

others, but justifying them by reasons, which, however, were not recognised as being right, either by his people or his superiors.

This lasted quite a long time, but finally it stopped. The accusations were discontinued, and intrigues ceased, because the object of these attacks became himself silent, and morally disappeared. Grown prematurely old, and tired of lights, Hersh shut himself up in the circle of private life, and occupied himself with business transactions, These, however, did not go as smoothly as did those of others, because he did not possess—as did others—the sympathy of his brethren. What he felt, and about what he thought, in those last years of his life, no one knew, for he told no one anything. Only before his death he had a long conversation with his wife.

The children were too small to be entrusted with the secret of his disappointed desires, wasted efforts, and smothered griefs. He left these as a legacy to his children through his wife. Did Freida understand and remember the words of her dying husband? Was she willing, and was she able, to remember them, and repeat them to his descendants? It is not known. Only this is certain—that only she knew the place where the Senior's will was hidden—the old writings which were the heritage not only of the Ezofowich family but of the whole Israelitic nation—a neglected and forgotten heritage, but in which—who knows!—were treasures a hundredfold richer than those which filled the chests of that wealthy family.

Therefore the Senior's last thoughts and wishes slept in some hiding-place, waiting for a bold descendant who would be courageous enough to bring them into life. But in the meantime there remained in the town not one soul longing for the light—not one heart which throbbed for something more than his own wife, his own children, and before all, his own riches.

There was plenty of noise arising from the care and haste whose only aim was to gain money; there was darkness because of mystic fears and dreams there was narrowness and suffocating because of merciless, grinding, dead orthodoxy.

The common people of the same faith throughout the whole country considered the people of Szybow as powerful, both materially and morally, wise, orthodox, almost holy.

Over the whole deep-sunk social valley hung a cloud. This cloud was composed of the darkest elements which exist in human kind, which are: respect for the letter from which the spirit has departed, dense ignorance, suspicious and hateful defence of self against everything which flows from broad, sunny, but 'foreign' worlds.

## CHAPTER II

It happened three years ago.

Damp fog was rising from the muddy streets of the town and made dark the transparency of a starry evening. A breath of March wind mingled with the odour of freshly ploughed fields, flew over low roofs, but could not drive out the suffocating exhalations coming in clouds from the doors and windows of the houses.

Notwithstanding the mists and exhalations which filled it, the town had a gay and festive appearance. From behind gray curtains thousands of windows shone with bright illuminations, and from lighted houses came the sounds of noisy conversation or collective prayers. Whoever passed through the streets and looked into this or that window of this or that house, would see all around bright family scenes. In the centre of larger or smaller rooms were long tables, covered with white cloths, and all prepared for a feast. Around them bustled women in variegated dresses, carrying and leaving contributions with a smile on their faces, and admiring their own work in the decoration of the tables. Bearded husbands, holding their children in their arms, pressed their lips to the pink cheeks, or kissed the on the mouth with a loud smack. They tossed them up to the low ceilings, to the great mirth of the older members of the family. Others sat in groups on benches and talked of affairs of the past week. Others still, covered with the folds of their white talliths, stood motionless, facing the walls, rocking their figures back and forward. These were preparing themselves by fervent prayer to meet the holy Sabbath day.

For it was Friday evening.

In the whole town there was but one house in which reigned darkness, emptiness, and sadness. It was a little gray hut which seemed to have been clapped on to a small hill at the other end of the town—it was the only elevation on the waste plain. And even this hill was not natural. Tradition said that it was made by Karaites, who built it on their temple. Today there remained no traces of that temple. The bare, sandy hill, protected the little hut from the winds and snow storms, and the hut humbly and gratefully nestled in its shelter. Over its roof, on the side of the hill, grew a large pear tree. Through its branches the wind rushed sweetly—over it shone a few stars. A large, cultivated field separated this spot from the town. A deep quiet reigned here, interrupted only by muffled echoes of the remote noise of the town. Over the black beds thick clouds of steam and mist, coming from the streets of the town, crept toward the hut.

The interior of the hut was dark as a precipice, and from behind its small windows resounded the trembling but vigorous voice of a man:

"Beyond far seas, beyond high mountains,"—spoke this voice amidst the darkness—"the river Sabbath flows. But it flows not with water, nor with milk and honey, but with yellow gravel and big stones."

The hoarse, trembling voice became silent, and in the dark room, seen from behind two small windows, there was deep silence for a while. This time it was interrupted by quite different sounds.

"Zeide! speak further."

These words were spoken in the voice of a girl—almost childish, but languid and dreamy.

Zeide (grandfather) asked, "Are they not coming yet?"

"I don't hear them," answered the girl.

In the dark room the hoarse trembling narrative began again:

"Beyond the holy river of Sabbath there live four Israelitic tribes; Gad, Assur, Dan and Naphtali. These tribes escaped there from great fears and oppressions, and Jehovah—may His holy name be blessed—has hidden them from their enemies, beyond the river of gravel and stones. And this gravel rises high as the waves of the sea and the stones are roaring and rushing like a big forest when it is shaken by a storm. And when the day of Sabbath comes—"

Here the old voice stopped suddenly, and after a while he asked softly:

"Are they not yet coming?"

There was no answer for a long time. It seemed as though the other was listening before replying.

"They are coming," she said finally.

In the dark interior was heard a long, muffled moaning.

"Zeide! speak further," said the girl's voice, sonorous and pure as before, only less childish—stronger this time.

Zeide did not speak any more.

From the direction of the town rushed, approaching the hut, a strange noise. This was caused by numerous human feet, by piercing exclamations and silvery laughter of the children. Soon in the distance appeared a big moving spot rolling on the surface of the fields. Soon the spot neared the hut, scattered into several groups and with irresistible shouting, screaming, laughing, rushed toward the bent walls and low windows of the hut.

They were children—boys of various ages. The oldest amongst them was perhaps fourteen years and the youngest five. It was difficult to see their dresses in the darkness, but from beneath their caps and long curls of hair, their eyes shone with the passionate fire of mischief and perhaps some other excited sentiment.

"Guten abend! karaime!" shouted at once the rabble, kicking at the locked door with their feet, and shaking the frames of the windows.

"Why don't you show some light on the Sabbath? Why are you sitting in a black hole like the devil? Kofrim, uberwerfer!" (You unbeliever! heretic!) shouted the older ones.

"Aliejdyk giejjer! oreman! mishugener!" (rascal, beggar, mad-man!) howled the young ones at the top of their voices.

The insults, laughter, and shaking of the door and windows increased every moment, when from within the hut resounded the girl's voice, quiet and sonorous as before, but so strong that it pierced the noise—"Zeide! speak further!"

"Aj! aj! aj!" answered the old voice, "how can I speak when they shout so loudly."

"Zeide! speak further!"

This time the girl's voice sounded almost imperatively. It was no longer childish. In it could be heard grief, contempt and struggle for the preservation of peace.

As sad singing is blended with the noise of stormy elements, so with the wild noise of the mob of children, insulting, mewling, howling, and laughing, the sobbing words were mingled.

"And during the day of Sabbath, Jehovah—may His name be blessed—gives rest to the holy river of Sabbath. The gravel ceases to flow, the big waves of stones do not roar like the forest—only from the river, which lies quiet and does not move, a thick mist rises—so great that it reaches the high clouds, and hides again from the enemies, the four tribes of Israel: Gad, Assur, Dan and Naphtali."

Alas! around the hut with bent walls and dark interior, the holy river of Sabbath did not flow; neither did high waves or gravel nor thick mists hide its inhabitants from the enemies.

These foes were small, but they were numerous. By a last effort of mischievous frolic several of them pulled at the frames of the windows so strongly that several panes broke. A shout of joy sounded far over the field. Through the openings the interior of the hut became strewn with small clods of earth and stones. The old voice, from the most remote part of the room, trembling, and still more hoarse, cried:

"Aj! Aj! Aj! Jehovah! Jehovah!"

The girl's voice, always sonorous, repeated:

"Zeide, keep quiet! Zeide, don't shout! Zeide, don't be afraid!"

All at once, from behind the crowd of children, someone exclaimed threateningly and imperatively:

"Shtyl Bube! What are you doing here, you rascals? Get out!"

The children at once became silent. The man who caused the tranquillity by his loud voice was tall and well built. His long dress was lined with fur. His face looked pale in the dusk, and his eyes shone as only young eyes can shine.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated, in an angry and decided voice. "Do you think that this house is inhabited by wolves, and that you can howl at them and break the windows?"

The boys, gathered in one compact body, were silent. After a while, however, one of them, the tallest, and evidently the boldest, said:

"Why do they not show some light on Sabbath?"

"That's none of your business," said the man.

"No! That's none of yours either," said the stubborn boy. "We come here every week and do the same—what then?"

"I know that you do the same every week. Therefore I watched to catch you here . . . now go home! quick!"

"And you, Meir, why don't you go yourself to your house? Your bobe and your zeide are eating the fish without you. Why do you drive us from here, and not observe the Sabbath yourself?"

The eyes of the young man became more fiery. He stamped the earth with his foot and shouted so angrily that the younger children dispersed immediately, and only the oldest boy, as though he would have revenge for the scolding, seized a clod of earth and wished to throw it into the little house.

But two strong hands seized him by the arms and the collar.

"Come," said the young man, "I will take you back home."

The boy shouted, and tried to escape. But the strong arm held him fast, and a quiet voice ordered him to be silent. He obeyed, dropping his head.

Around the hut it was now deep dusk. From the dark interior came the sound of heavy, hoarse sighing as from some very old breast, and near the broken window sounded the girl's voice:

"Thank you."

"Rest in peace," answered the young man, and went off, leading the little prisoner.

They passed silently through a few streets, and went toward a house situated at the square.

The house was low and long, with a piazza, and a long corridor ran through the whole building. All this announced an inn. The windows in the part of the house assigned to guests were dark. In the others, situated opposite the piazza, and not higher than half-an-ell from the ground, which was covered with straw and hay and all kinds of rubbish, the lights of Sabbath shone forth from behind the dirty panes.

The young man, still leading the boy—who, as it seems, was not only not afflicted by his situation, but was jumping joyfully—passed the rubbish-covered ground, entered the deep corridor, where in the darkness some horse was stamping with his feet, and, groping, found the door. Having half-opened it, he pushed the youngster into the room. Then he put his head in the door and said:

"Reb Jankiel, I have brought you Mendel. Scold him or punish him. He roams in the darkness around the town, and attacks innocent people."

This speech, delivered in a loud voice, remained without an answer. Only the continual and fervent murmuring of a prayer came from the interior of the room. Through the door, which still remained half-opened, could be seen the whole long room, with very dirty walls, and enormous stove, which was black with the dust. In the centre of the room was a table covered with a cloth of doubtful cleanliness, but lighted with a copious blaze of light from seven candles burning in a great branched candlestick hanging from the ceiling. The Sabbath feast had not yet begun, and although from the remote part of the house could be heard the voices of women and children, announcing that the family was numerous, there was only one man, his face turned toward the wall, in the room where stood the table ready for the Sabbath supper. This man was of medium size, and very thin and supple. It is not exact to say that he was standing, because that does not express the position of his figure, but, just the same, it would be hard to find another expression. He was neither walking nor jumping, but, nevertheless, he was in continual and violent motion. He threw his head—which was covered with red hair—backward and forward with great rapidity. With these swift movements, the sounds which came from his mouth were in perfect harmony; for he was murmuring, then shouting passionately, then pouring forth long plaintive songs.

The young man standing on the threshold looked for a long time at that figure, praying with all its soul, or, rather, with all its body. Evidently he was waiting for an interruption in the prayer. But it was known that the one who wished to see the end of Reb Jankiel's prayers would have to wait for some time. Apparently the young man was anxious to settle the mischief of the little Mendel quickly.

"Reb Jankiel," he said aloud, after quite a long time, "your son wanders about during the night and assaults innocent people!"

There was no answer.

"Reb Jankiel, your son insults people with bad words!"

Reb Jankiel continued to pray with the same fervour.

"Reb Jankiel, your son breaks the windows of poor people!"

Reb Jankiel turned a few leaves of a large book which he held in both hands, and sang triumphantly:

"Sing to the Lord a new song, because he has created all marvels! Sing! Play, play with a loud singing! Sound the trumpets and horns before the King, Lord!"

The last words were accompanied by the closing of the door. The young man left the long dark corridor, wading once more through the rubbish. When he passed the last lighted window he heard the sound of soft singing. He stopped, and anyone would have done the same, for the voice was pure, young and soft as a murmuring of a complaint, full of prayer, sadness and longing. It was a man's voice.

"Eliezer!" whispered the passer-by, and stopped at the low window.



These windows had far cleaner panes than the others. Through them could be seen a small room, in which was only a bed, a table, a few chairs, and a library full of books. On the table burned a tallow candle, and at the table sat a young man holding his head between the palms of his hands. He was about twenty years old, and his face was white, and of a delicate oval shape. From his fresh lips came the beautiful singing which would have attracted the attention of a great master of music.

And no wonder. Eliezer, Jankiel's son, was the cantor of the community of Szybow—the singer of people and Jehovah.

"Eliezer!" was repeated from behind the window in a soft, friendly whisper.

The singer must have heard the whisper, for he sat near the window. He raised his eyes, and turned them toward the pane. They were blue, meek, and sad. But he did not interrupt his singing. On the contrary, he lifted his hands, white as alabaster, and in that ecstatic position, with an enthusiastic expression on his face, he sang still louder:

"My people, cast from thee the dust of heavy roads. Rise, and take the robe of thy beauty. Hasten, ah hasten, with help to your people, the Only, Incomprehensible! God of our fathers."

The young man at the window did not call any more to the singer praying for his people. He went off, stepping softly in careful respect, and walking through the dark, empty place toward the large house ablaze with lights; he looked at the few stars shining with their pale light through the fog, and he softly hummed, plunged in deep thankfulness:

"Hasten! ah, hasten! with help to your people the Only, Incomprehensible! God of our fathers!"

### CHAPTER III

The large house, blazing with light, which stood opposite the temple, separated from it by the whole width of the square, was the same house built by Hersh Ezofowich, in which he lived with his beautiful wife Freida. Its hundred year old walls had become black from the rains and dust, but the house stood straight, and by its height dominated all other dwelling-places in the town.

For the past hour the celebration of the Sabbath day had begun in the large room filled with old furniture.

There were numerous people of both sexes present, and others were coming. Saul Ezofowich, Hersh's son, the host of the house and chief of the family, rose and approached the big table, above which hung two heavy seven-branched candelabra of solid silver. The old man—whose bent, but strong figure, wrinkled face, and snow-white beard, proclaimed that he was over eighty—took from the hand of the eldest son—himself a gray-headed man—a long candle, and, raising it toward the other candles in the candelabra, exclaimed, in a voice strong, but aged:

"Be blessed God, Lord of the world, Thou who hast lighted us with Thy commandments, and ordered us to light the lights on the day of Sabbath."

As soon as he said these words, the numerous candles were lighted in the candelabra, and everyone present in the room exclaimed:

"Let us go! Let us meet the bride! Let us meet her with greeting on the day of Sabbath! Burn! burn! light of the King! Capital, rise from the mire! Thou hast lived long enough in the valley of tears!"

"My people, shake from thee the dust of heavy roads. Take on the robe of thy beauty. Hasten! ah, hasten! with help to Thy people! God of our fathers!"

"Let us go! Let us go to meet the bride! Let us greet her with the greeting of the song of the Sabbath!"

Loud singing, and the sound of fervent prayers following each other, filled the large room, and sounded far out on the large empty square. The young man, passing the square thoughtfully, heard it, and hastened his steps. When, after having passed the piazza and the long narrow corridor dividing the house in two parts, opened the door to the room filled with lights, the prayers had already changed to conversation, and the gathered company, with traces of solemnity in their faces, but yet mingled with joyful smiles, was standing around the table spread with abundant viands.

The company was composed of different faces and figures. There were two of Saul's sons living with

the father; Raphael and Abraham, already gray, dark-eyed, with severe and thoughtful faces. Then Saul's son-in-law, light-haired, pale, with soft eyes—Ber. There were also daughters, sons, and grandchildren of the host of the house; matured women, with stately figures and high caps on carefully-combed wigs; or young girls, with swarthy complexions and thick tresses, their young eyes, brightened by the feast, shone like live coals.

Several young men belonging to the family, and numerous children of different ages, gathered at the other end of the table. Saul stood at the head of it, looking at the door leading to the other rooms of the house, as though he were waiting. After a while, two women appeared in the doorway. One of them gleamed with rainbow-like, almost dazzling light. She was very, very old, but still erect, and looked strong. Her head was surmounted by a turban of bright colours, fastened with an enormous buckle of diamonds. Around her neck she wore a necklace composed of several strands of big pearls which fell on her breast, also fastened with diamonds. She wore a silk dress of bright colours. She also had diamond earrings, which were so long that they reached her shoulders, and so heavy that it was necessary to support them with threads attached to the turban; they gleamed with the dazzling light of diamonds, emeralds, and rubies, and at every movement they rustled, striking the pearls and a heavy gold chain beneath them.

This hundred-year-old woman, dressed in all the riches accumulated for centuries, was, it seemed, a relic of the family, much respected by all these people. When, led by her grand-daughter—a girl with a swarthy face and dark hair—she stopped on the threshold of the room, all eyes turned toward her, and all mouths smiled and whispered:

"Bobe! Elte Bobe!" (Grandmother! Great-grandmother!)

The majority of those present said the last words, because there were present more great-grandchildren than grandchildren. Only the host of the house, and the head of the whole family, said to the woman softly:

"Mamma!"

This word, suitable for little children, sounded strangely, softly, and solemnly from the withered, yellow lips of Saul, moving from the midst of his milk-white beard. While pronouncing that word, his wrinkled forehead, surmounted by equally white hair beneath a velvet skull-cap, became smooth.

But where were Freida's beautiful face, dark, fiery eyes, and slender figure? How changed was the quiet, industrious, intelligent wife and confidant of Hersh Ezofowich! She had outlived all her charms, as she had outlived her husband, lord and friend. With time, her delicate, slender figure increased in size, and took on the shape of the trunk of a tree, from which sprang many strong, fruit-bearing branches. Her face was now covered with such a quantity of fine wrinkles that it was impossible to find one smooth place. Her eyes were sunken, and had grown small, looking from beneath the bar of eyelashes with a pale, faded glow. But on her face, crumpled though it was by the hand of time, there was a sweet and imperturbable peace. The small eyes looked about with smiling tranquillity of the spirit, lulled to sleep by agreeable whispering, and the sweet smile of slumber surrounded her yellow, hardly perceptible lips, which for a long time had grown silent, opening more and more seldom for the pronunciation of shorter and shorter sentences. Now, having placed her arm about the neck of the pretty, young and strong girl by whose side she stood at the family table, and having looked on the faces of all present there, she whispered:

"Wo ist Meir?"

It was the great-grandmother who spoke, and at her words the whole assembly recoiled, as from the blow of a sudden gust of wind. Men, women, and children looked at each other, and through the room resounded the whisper:

"Wo ist Meir?"

Owing to the largeness of the family his absence had not been noticed. Old Saul did not repeat his mother's question, but his forehead frowned still more, and his eye was fixed on the door with a severe, almost angry expression.

At that moment the door opened and a tall, well-proportioned young man entered. His long dress was trimmed with costly fur. He closed the door after him and stood near it, as though shy or ashamed. He noticed that he was too late and that the common family prayers had been recited without him, that the eyes of his grandfather Saul, of two uncles and several women relatives were looking at him severely and inquisitively. Only the grandmother's golden eyes did not look at him angrily. On the contrary, they dilated and shone with joy. Her wrinkled eyelids ceased to tremble, and the thin lips moved and pronounced with the same soundless whisper as before:

"Ejnyklchen! Kleineskind!" (Grandson! Child!) When Saul heard that voice, resounding with joy and tenderness, he shut his lips, already opened to pronounce severe words of reproach and questioning. Both his sons dropped their eyes angrily to the table. The newcomer was greeted only by a general silence which, however, was interrupted by the great-grandmother repeating once more:

"Kleineskind!"

Saul stretched his hands over the table, and in a half-voice suggested the subject of a prayer to be recited before the Sabbath feast.

"The Lord may be blessed," began he.

"Blessed be," resounded in the room in a muffled whisper.

For a time they all stood around the table, blessing by the prayer the viands and drinks spread upon it.

The young man did not join the general choir, but, having retreated to a remote corner of the room, he recited the Kiddish prayers omitted by him. While praying he did not move his figure. He crossed his hands on his chest, and fixed his eyes steadily on the window, behind which was complete darkness.

His delicate oval face was pale—the sign of a nervous and passionate disposition. His abundant dark, flowing hair, which had shades of gold in it, was scattered on his white forehead. His deeply set, large gray eyes gazed thoughtfully and a little sadly. In the whole expression of the young man's face there were mingled characteristics of deep sadness and childish bashfulness. His forehead and eyes betrayed some painful thought, but the thin lips had lines of tenderness, and they quivered from time to time as though under the influence of some fear. His upper lip and cheeks were covered with golden down, indicating that the young man might be nineteen or twenty years old. It was the age at which the Hebrew men ripened and were not only allowed, but obliged to look after their family and other affairs.

When the young man had finished the prayers and approached the table to take his place, there was heard a voice from among those present, enouncing the words in such a way that they seemed sung:

"Meir, where have you been for such a long time? What were you doing in the town after the Sabbath had begun, and no one is allowed to work any longer? Why did you not celebrate Kiddish with your family to-day? Why is your forehead pale and your eyes sad, when to-day is the joyful Sabbath? In heaven the whole celestial family rejoices, and on earth all pious people should keep their souls mirthful."

All this was said by a strange-looking man. He was rather small and thin; he had a large head covered with thick, coarse hair. His face was swarthy and round, covered with abundant hair, which formed a long, coarse beard. His round eyes cast sharp glances from beneath their thick eyelids. The thinness of the man was increased by a strange dress—more strange than the man himself. It was a very simple costume, consisting of a bag made of rough gray linen, girded around the neck and waist with a hemp rope, and falling to the ground it covered his bare feet.

Who was the man in the dress of an ascetic, with fanatical eyes, with lips full of mystic, deep, almost intoxicated joyfulness?

It was Reb Moshe, melamed or teacher of religion and the Hebrew language. He was pious-perfect. No matter what the weather—wind, rain, cold, and heat—he always went barefooted, dressed in a bag made of rough linen. He lived as do the birds—nobody knew how—probably on some grain scattered here and there. He was the right hand and the right eye of the Rabbi of Szybow, Isaak Todros, and after the Rabbi he was the next object of reverence and admiration of the whole community.

Hearing those words pouring tumultuously from the melamed's mouth and directed towards himself, Meir Ezofowich, great-grandson of Hersh and the grandson of old Saul, did not sit at the table, but with eyes cast on the ground, and a voice muffled by timidity, he answered:

"Reb! I was not there where they are joyful and do good business. I was there where there is sorrow and where poor people sit in darkness and weep."

"Nu!" exclaimed the melamed, "and where today could there be sadness. To-day is Sabbath. Everywhere it is bright and joyful. . . . Where, today, could it be dark?"

A few older members of the family raised their heads and repeated the question:

"Where to-day could there be darkness?"

And then again they asked him:

"Meir, where have you been?"

Meir did not answer. His face expressed timidity and inward hesitation. At that moment one of the girls—the same who had introduced the old grand mother—the girl with the swarthy face and dark, frolicsome eyes, exclaimed mirthfully, clapping her hands:

"I know where it is dark to-day!"

All looks were directed toward her, and all lips asked:

"Where?"

Under the influence of the attracted attention, Lija blushed, and answered softly, with a certain amount of bashfulness:

"In the hut of Abel Karaim, standing on the hill of the Karaites."

"Meir, have you visited Karaites?"

The question was asked by several voices, dominated by the sharp, whining voice of the melamed.

On the bashful young man's face there appeared an expression of angry and sullen irritation.

"I did not visit them," he answered, more loudly than before, "but I defended them from an attack."

"From an attack? What attack? Who attacked them?" asked the melamed mockingly.

This time Meir raised his eyelids and his shining eyes looked sharply into the eyes of his questioner.

"Reb Moshe," he exclaimed, "you know who attacked them. They were your pupils—they do the same every Friday. And why should they not do it, knowing—"

He stopped and again dropped his eyes. Fear and anger were fighting within him.

"Nu, what do they know? Meir, why did you not finish? What do they know?" laughed Reb Moshe.

"They know that you, Reb Moshe, will praise them for so doing."

The melamed rose from his chair, his shining eyes opened widely. He stretched out his dark, thin hand, as though to say something, but the strong and already sonorous voice of the young man did not permit to do it.

"Reb Moshe," said Meir, bending his head slightly before the melamed—which he did, evidently not very willingly—"Reb Moshe, I respect you—you taught me. I do not ask you why you do not forbid your pupils to attack these poor people living in darkness—but I cannot look at such injustice. My heart aches when I see them, because I believe that from such bad children will grow bad men, and if they now shake the poor hut of an old man, and throw stones through the windows, afterward they will set fire to the houses and kill the people! To-day they would have destroyed that poor hut and killed the people if I had not prevented them."

As he said the last words, he took his place at the table. On his face there was no longer timidity and bashfulness. He was evidently deeply convinced of the righteousness of his cause. He looked boldly around, and only his lips quivered, as is always the case with young, sensitive people. At that moment old Saul and his two sons raised their arms and said:

"Sabbath."

Their voices were solemn, and the looks they turned on Meir were severe and almost angry.

"Sabbath! Sabbath!" shouted the melamed, jumping in his chair and gesticulating with his hands; "You, Meir, during the holy evening of Sabbath, instead of reciting Kiddish and filling your spirit with great joy and giving it into the hands of the angel Matatron, who defends Jacob's tribes before God, that he may give them into the hands of Sar-ha-Olama, who is the angel over angels and the prince of the world, that Sar-ha-Olama may give them to the ten serafits who are so strong in force that they crushed the whole world, in order that through the ten serafits your spirit may reach the great throne, on which is seated En-Sof himself, and join with him in a kiss of love—you, Meir, instead of doing all that, went to defend people from some attack—to watch their house and their life. Meir! Meir! You have violated the Sabbath! You must go to the school and accuse yourself before the people of having committed a great sin and scandal."

This speech made an immense impression on the whole assembly. Saul and his sons looked threatening. The women were surprised and frightened. The dark eyes of Lija—she who had first betrayed her cousin's secret—shone with tears. Only Saul's son-in-law, blue-eyed Ber, looked at the accused boy with sad sympathy, and several young men, Meir's playmates, gazed into his face with curiosity and friendly uneasiness.

Meir answered in a trembling voice:

"In our holy books, Reb Moshe, neither in the Torah nor in the Mishma is there any mention of Sefirots and En-Sof. But there it is stated plainly that Jehovah, although he has commanded us to keep the Sabbath, permitted twenty people to violate the Sabbath in order to save one man."

Such a thing as any one daring to answer the melamed—the perfect pious and Rabbi Todros's right hand—was unheard of and astonishing; it was more, because in the answer there was a negation of his judgment. Therefore the melamed's convex eyes nearly sprang from their sockets. They opened widely and covered Meir's pale face with deep hatred.

"Karaims!" he shouted, tossing himself in his chair, and tearing his beard and his hair—"You went to rescue the Karaims, heretics, infidels, accursed! Why should one rescue them? Why do they not light candles on Sabbath—why do they sit in darkness? Why do they not kill birds and animals as we do? Why do they not know Mishma, Gemara and Zahor?"

He choked with excitement and became silent, and in that interruption Meir's pure and sonorous voice resounded:

"Reb, they are very poor!"

"En-Sof is revengeful and merciless!"

"They are much persecuted!"

"The Incomprehensible persecutes them!" shouted Reb.

"The Eternal does not command us to persecute. Rabbi Huna said: 'Even if the persecution is righteous, the Eternal will take the part of the persecuted one!'"

Reb Moshe's cheeks were red as flame. His eyes seemed to devour the face of the young man, whose looks had now grown bold, and his lips quivered with the words that came rushing to them, but were not pronounced.

The whole gathering was astonished—frightened—depressed. Such a quarrel with the melamed seemed to some of them a sin, to others a danger for the bold young man, and even for the whole family. Therefore Saul looked up sharply from beneath his bushy gray eye-brows into his grandson's face, and hissed:

"Sh-a-a-a!"

Meir bent his head before his grandfather, in token of humility and obedience, and one of Saul's sons, in order to pacify Reb Moshe's anger, asked him:

"What is the difference between the authority of the books of Talmud, and Zahora, the Kabalistic book?"

Having heard this question, the melamed put his elbows on the table, and fixed his eyes motionlessly and with an expression of deep reflection on the opposite wall. Then he began to speak slowly, and in a solemn voice:

"Simon ben Jochai, the great Rabbi who lived a very great while ago and knew everything that happened in the heavens and on the earth, said, 'The Talmud is a vile slave, and the Kabala is a great queen.' With what is the Talmud filled? It is filled up with small, secondary things. It teaches what is clean and what is not clean. What is permitted and what is not permitted. What is decent and what is not decent. And with what is filled Zohar—the book of light, the book of Kabala? It is filled with great science; it tells what is God and his Sefirots. The author of it knows all their names, and he teaches what they do and how they built the world. There is said that God's name is En-Sof and his second name is Notarikon and his third name is Gomatria and fourth name Zirufh. The Sefirots are great heavenly forces called: human source, fiancée, fair sex, great visage, small face, mirror, celestial story, lily and apple orchard. And Israel is called Matron, and Israel's God is called Father, God, En-Sof. He did not create the world; the Sefirots, celestial forces, did it. The first Sefirot produced the strength of God; the second all angels and the Torah (Bible); the third all prophets. The fourth Sefirot produced God's

love; the fifth God's justice, and the sixth, a power which ruins everything. The seventh Sefirot produced beauty, the eighth magnificence, the ninth, eternal cause, and the tenth, an eye which watches Israel continually, and follows him on all his roads and takes care of his feet—that they are not wounded—and his head, that misfortune does not fall upon him. All this is taught by Zohar, the book of Kabala, and it is the first book for every Israelite. I know that many Israelites say that the Torah is the more important, but they are stupid, and they do not know that the earth shall tremble from great pains before God and Israel, Father and Matron, shall be united in a kiss of love, until the slave will not retreat before the queen—the Talmud before the Kabala. And when shall that time come? It shall come when the Messiah shall appear. Then for all pious and scholarly people will there be a great feast of joy. Then God will order the boiling of the fish Leviathan which is so great that the whole world rests on it. And everyone will sit down and eat that fish—the scholarly and pious people from the head, and the simple and ignorant from the tail!"

When the melamed finished his speech he breathed deeply, and having dropped his eyes on the table he suddenly fell from mystical heights to earthly realities. On the plate before him was an excellent fish—not Leviathan, but excellent nevertheless. The melamed, living ascetically was very fond of Sabbath feasts, because he believed that it was necessary, to celebrate the Sabbath properly, to keep joyful the body as well as the spirit. Therefore, with the remains of the ecstasy in his eyes, he began to put the delicious dish into his mouth. The whole assembly was silent for a while. His clever speech made a deep impression on almost everyone. Old Saul listened to it with great reverence. His sons cast their grateful eyes on the table and thought over Reb Moshe's scholarly instruction. The women piously placed their hands on their bosoms, inclined their heads in sign of admiration and with smiling lips they repeated:

"Great student—perfect-pious. A true pupil of the great Rabbi Isaak!"

The one looking attentively on the faces of those sitting around the table would have seen two looks which, swift as lightning and unperceived by all present, had been exchanged during the melamed's speech. They were the looks of Ber and Meir. The former looked sadly at the other, who answered him with a look full of restrained anger and irony. When the melamed spoke of the fish Leviathan, so large that the whole world stood on it, and which, in the day of the Messiah, the scholars would eat from the head and the ignorant from the tail, a smile appeared on Meir's thin lips. It was a smile similar to the stiletto. It pierced the one on whose lips it appeared, and it seemed as though it would like to pierce the one who caused it. Ber answered this smile by a sigh. But the four young men who sat opposite Meir noticed it, and on their faces Meir's smile was reflected. After a period of silence, interrupted only by the clatter of knives on the plates and the loud movements of the melamed's jaws, old Saul said:

"Those are great things, scholarly and dreadful, and we thank Reb Moshe for having told them to us. Listen to the learned men, who by their great knowledge sustain Israel's strength and glory, because it is written that the wise men are the world's foundation. 'Who respects them, and questions them often about obscure things with which they are familiar, to that one all sins shall be pardoned.'"

Reb Moshe raised his face from the plate, and stuttered with his mouth full of food:

"Good deeds bring upon man an inexhaustible stream of blessing and forgiveness. They open for him the secrets of the heavens and earth and carry his soul among the Sefirot!"

A silence full of respect was the only answer. But after a few seconds it was interrupted by the sonorous voice of the youth:

"Reb Moshe! what do you call a good deed? What must one do in order to save one's life from sin and draw upon one's self a great stream of grace?" asked Meir aloud.

The melamed raised his eyes at the question. Their looks met again. The melamed's gray eyes shone angrily and threateningly. The gray, transparent eyes of the youth contained silvery streams of hidden smiles.

"You, Meir, you were my pupil, and you can ask me about such things. Have I not told you a great many times that the best deed is acquiring depth in the holy science? To whom does that everything will be forgiven, and he who does not do that will be cursed and thrust out from the bosom of Israel, although his hands and heart are clean and white as the snow."

Having said this he turned to Saul and said, pointing at Meir with his brown finger:

"He don't know anything. He has forgotten everything I have taught him!"

The old man slightly bent his wrinkled forehead before the melamed and said in a conciliatory voice:

"Reb, forgive him! When wisdom shall come to him, then he will recognise that his mouth has been very daring, and I am sure he will be pious and scholarly, as were all the members of our family."

He drew himself up, and pride sparkled in the eyes which age had long dimmed.

"Listen to me, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Our family—the family of Ezofowich—is not a common family. We—thanks to God, whose holy name be blessed—have great riches in chests and on vessels. But we have still greater riches in the records of our family. Our ancestor was a Senior, a superior over all the Jews living in this country, and very much beloved by the king himself. And my father Hersh, the famous Hersh, had the friendship of the greatest lords, and they drove him in their carriages, and for his surprising wisdom they took him to the king to the diet which was then held in Warsaw."

The old man became silent and looked around with eyes brightened with pride and triumph. The whole gathering looked on him as on a rainbow. The melamed became gloomy, and slowly sipped the wine from a big glass. The old great-grandmother, who was already slumbering, awakened at once, and peered with her golden eyes from behind half-closed lids, exclaiming in her soundless voice:

"Hersh! Hersh! my Hersh!"

After a while. Saul began to talk again:

"We have in our family a great treasure—such a treasure as has no equal in all Israel. This treasure is a long document, written by our ancestor Michael the Senior, and left by him, and in which there are written noble and wise things. If we could get that document of wisdom we should be happy. The only trouble is that we don't know where it is."

From the time Saul began to talk of the document left by his ancestor, among the many eyes looking at him two pairs sparkled passionately, with, however, quite contradictory sentiments. They were the eyes of the melamed, who laughed softly and maliciously, and the eyes of Meir who drew himself up in his chair and looked into his grandfather's face with burning curiosity.

"This writing," Saul said further, "was hidden for two hundred years and nobody has touched it. And when the two hundred years were ended, my father, Hersh, found it. Where he found it no one but our old great-grandmother knows."

Here he pointed to his mother, and then finished:

"And she alone knows where he hid that writing, but as yet she has told no one."

"And why did she tell no one?" laughed maliciously and softly the melamed.

Saul answered in a sad voice:

"Reb Nohim Todros—may his memory be blessed—has forbidden her to speak of it."

"And you, Reb Saul, why have you not searched for that writing yourself?"

Saul answered still more sadly:

"Reb Baruch Todros, the son of Reb Nohim and Reb Isaak—may he live a hundred years—the son of Reb Baruch, have forbidden me to search for it!"

"And no one dare search for it!" exclaimed the melamed with all his might, raising his hand armed with a fork, "nobody dare search for that writing, because it is full of blasphemy and filth. Reb Saul! You must forbid your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to search for that writing, and in case they find it they must give it up to the fire to be destroyed! For the one who shall find that writing, and shall read it aloud to the people—upon that one shall the herem fall. He shall be cast out from the bosom of Israel. Thus spake Reb Nohim and Reb Baruch—may their memory be blessed! Thus spake Reb Isaak—may he live a hundred years. In that writing is excommunication and great misfortune to the one who shall find it."

A deep silence followed those words, spoken with the greatest enthusiasm by the melamed, and amidst this silence was heard a long, trembling passionate sighing. All looked around, desiring to learn from whose breast proceeded that noise as of the tearing out of desire, but no one could discover whence it came. They only perceived that Meir, with rigid figure, pale face and burning eyes was gazing into the great-grandmother's face. She, feeling the piercing look of her beloved child, raised her wrinkled eyelids and said:

"Meir?"

"Bobe?" answered the young man, in a voice filled with caressing tenderness.

"Kleineskind!" whispered the great-grandmother and, smiling sweetly, she began to slumber again.

The Sabbath feast was near its end when an incident occurred which would have appeared very strange to any foreign eye, but was an ordinary sight to those gathered there.

Reb Moshe, whose dark cheeks burned from the effects of several glasses of wine hospitably poured out for him by the hosts, suddenly jumped from his chair and rushed to the centre of the room.

"Sabbath! Sabbath! Sabbath!"—he shouted, shaking his head and arms violently. "Fried! Fried! Fried!" he repeated—"the whole celestial family rejoices and dances in the Heavens! David danced and jumped before the Arch—why then should not the perfect pious gladden his heart by dancing and jumping?"

Therefore he danced and jumped around the table.

It would have been interesting for an observer to watch the different sentiments reflected in the faces of those present who looked at the ecstatic dance. Old Saul and his sons looked at the dancing figure with the greatest gravity and attention. Not the slightest quiver of a smile appeared on their lips. It seemed as though they looked on the melamed's crazy leaps as the believers look on the performance of a mystic but holy ceremony. Tallow-haired Ber sat stiff and dignified also, but he knit his brows almost painfully, and his eyes were cast on the ground. Meir leaned his head in the palms of both hands, and it seemed that he neither heard nor saw—or at least tried not to notice anything. But the women wondered at Reb Moshe's dance; they moved their bodies to the time beaten by the bare-footed man, smacking their lips and making signs of admiration with their eyes. At the lower end of the table, where the boys and girls sat, could be heard a soft noise, as of gigglings suppressed with effort.

Finally Reb Moshe's strength was exhausted, his body shivering with enthusiasm, fell to the floor near the big green brick stove. After a while, however, he rose, laughed aloud, and wiped with the large sleeve of his shirt, the perspiration bathing his forehead and cheeks.

Sarah, Saul's daughter, left the table and carried around a large silver basin filled with water, in which everyone washed his fingers. Whispering prayers of thanksgiving, those present dipped their hands in the water and wiped them on a towel suspended from Sarah's shoulder. The Sabbath feast was ended.

A few moments afterward the table was cleared off. The whole company, dividing itself into small groups, filled the room with the noise of loud and animated conversation. Meir, who for a few moments had stood alone by the window gazing thoughtfully into the darkness of the evening, approached the group composed of the oldest people, gathered in the most luxurious part of the room which was ornamented by an antique sofa. Here Abraham and Raphael, Saul's sons, and Ber, his son-in-law, reported to the father in reference to the business transacted during the week, and asked his advice and help. Here old Saul was in his proper field, for, although the high and wise studies of mystic scholars aroused in him respect and fear, it seemed that secular business affairs were more suited to his mind—he was more familiar with them. In his eyes, which were now shining with keen and animated thought, there were no more signs of old age, and only his white hair and beard gave him the appearance of a patriarch and dignitary, distributing among the members of his family advice, praise and judgments.

Meir stood indifferent before that group of people talking of losses and profits. It was clear that in such affairs he did not yet take a part, and that his fresh nature was not yet touched by the biting fever of profit. He looked with some surprise at the usually phlegmatic Ber, who at that moment seemed to be changed into another man. Relating to his father-in-law his business projects, and explaining to him the necessity of contracting a considerable loan with his wife's brother, he became animated, eloquent—almost vehement. His eyes burned, his lips moved with great rapidity, and his hands trembled.

Meir went away and joined another group where the melamed was a central figure. As usual he was leaning his elbows on the table, and spoke solemnly to the attentive listeners.

"Everything in the world—every man, every animal, every blade of grass, and every stone—has its roots in the country where the spirits live. Therefore the whole world is like a gigantic tree, whose roots are among the spirits. And it is like a gigantic chain, whose last links are suspended where live the spirits. And it is like a gigantic sea, which never dries up, because an inexhaustible stream of spirits is always pouring in and filling it up."

Meir left the group listening to the melamed and approached the window. There two young men,



leaning their foreheads in their hands and in deep thought, were speaking of where it is written that a man who walks during a clear night and does not see his shadow will die the same year.

Meir looked around. In the next room the older women were speaking of their households, and how clever their children were. The young girls were seated in a corner, whispering, giggling, and humming.

From Meir's face it could be seen that he was not attracted by any of these groups of people filling the house. He was among his own people—among those who were nearest to him in blood and affection—but it might be said that he was in the desert, so lonely did he stand in the room, and so sorrowfully did he look around him. He went out. Descending the stairs leading from the piazza he passed the dark square, and entered the little house of Reb Jankiel.

After the large, clean, well-lighted, and comfortable rooms of his grandfather's home, the dwelling of Reb Jankiel, the possessor of the largest inn in Szybow, whisky merchant, and a member of kahal, seemed to Meir narrow, dark, dirty, and mean. The Sabbath feast was over. It never was long, for it was scanty and passed in gloomy silence, interrupted only by quarrelling and the biting remarks of the father of the family. It was known that Reb Jankiel was avaricious. He gathered much money, but he did not care for the comfort of the house, because he was seldom there, being busy with whisky distilleries, with dram-shops in the neighbouring villages, returning to the town only when religious affairs required his presence. His wife, Jenta, and two grown-up daughters conducted the business of the inn.

The appearance of riches in his house only occurred when Reb Jankiel received eminent guests, as the saintly Rabbi, with whom he was a great favourite, the colleagues of the kahal, or wealthy merchants. Cleanliness and gaiety were well-known virtues.

In the first room, which Meir entered through a door opening into the dark hall, only one little candle burned in a brass candlestick. The smell of the food, which was just cleared off the table, was here mingled with the mustiness of the dirty walls and the greasy exhalations from the smoky chimney. It was dark and dull here. From the other room, completely dark, sounded the loud snoring of the master of the house, who was already fast asleep. In the third small room, filled with beds and trunks, Meir perceived, by the light of a small lamp burning in the stove around which was suspended a quantity of cabbages, a woman who was rocking a cradle with her foot, and trying to lull to sleep a crying child. Meir greeted her, and she answered him in a friendly manner and continued to hum.

Behind the closed door could be heard the muffled sound of human voices. Meir opened that door and entered the room of Eliezer.

Eliezer the cantor and the possessor of that marvellous voice, was not alone. Around the table, lighted by a tallow candle, sat several young men, members of the Ezofowich family—the same who had eaten Supper with Meir. Meir breathed deeply, perhaps because the air was purer there than in the other apartments, or perhaps because he was among friendly figures, on which he liked to gaze, and which, seeing him, smiled in a friendly manner.

Eliezer raised his turquoise-like eyes to the face of the newcomer as he sat at the table.

"Meir!" he exclaimed in his musical voice. "Well?" answered his guest.

"You were impatient to-day, and said to the melamed things of which there was no necessity to speak. They told me of your dispute with him."

Meir looked sharply and a little ironically into the cantor's face.

"Eliezer, are you in earnest when you tell me that?" he asked slowly.

The cantor dropped his head.

"It was honest on your part, but it may cause you much trouble."

The young man laughed, but his laugh was empty and forced.

"Nu!" said he with determination, "Let it come. I can't stand it any longer. I can't be silent and look and listen, while we are being made fools of."

"Child! child what can you do?" sounded from behind them in a lazy, drawling voice.

They all turned. It was the phlegmatic Ber who had entered during the conversation. Having thus answered the angry exclamation of the young man, he stretched himself on Eliezer's bed. It seemed that those present were accustomed to see him among them, for they showed neither the slightest

impatience nor confusion. On the contrary, the conversation was continued. One of the young men, a relative of Meir's, half in doubt and in smiles, half in fear and seriously, began to repeat to the cantor the melamed's speech about En-Sof and the Sefirot, about the day of the Messiah, and the gigantic fish, Leviathan. Another asked Eliezer what he thought of a moral which taught that it was sufficient to study Mishna and Zohar in order to obtain pardon for evil deeds.

Eliezer listened silently. He did not answer for a long time; then he slowly raised his head and said:

"Read the Torah! There it is written: 'God is one, Jehovah! He is not satisfied with your sacrifices, singing, and incense, but he requires from you a love of the truth, to defend the oppressed, to teach the ignorant, and heal the sick, because these are your first duties.'"

The two young men opened their eyes. "Well!" they exclaimed, "then the melamed did not tell the truth!"

Eliezer was silent for a long time again. It was evident that he preferred not to answer, but the young impatient hands pulled him by the sleeve, asking for a reply.

"He did not tell the truth," he finally exclaimed timidly.

At that moment Meir put his hand on his shoulder. "Eliezer," said he, "you gave me the same answer two years ago, when you came back from the great city where you studied singing. Then you opened my eyes, which alone began to search for the truth, and you taught me that we are not true Israelites; that our faith was not the same that was given to us on Mount Sinai; that Judaism has grown muddy like water when a handful of earth is thrown into it—and that mud has blackened our heads and our hearts. Eliezer, you have told me this, and I have seen the light. Since that time I have loved you as a brother who helped me out of obscurity, but since that time, I feel in my heart a great oppression and a great loneliness."

"Meir, Eliezer taught you, and Eliezer is silent—you, his pupil, commence to talk," said he, whose lazy words were tinged with irony.

"I wish I knew how to talk," exclaimed the young man, with sparkling eyes, "and what to do!"

And after a while he added, more softly:

"But I know neither how to speak nor how to act—only in my heart I bear a great hatred toward those who deceive us, and a great love toward those who are deceived."

"And a great audacity," drawled Ber, negligently stretched on the bed.

"Until now I have not had the audacity, but—but if I knew what to do, I would have it."

There was a silence for a few moments which was finally broken by Meir.

"Eliezer, you are happier!"

"Why?"

"You have been out into the broad world—you have seen its wisdom—you have listened to clever people. Ah! if I could but go out into the world!"

"Eliezer, tell us something of the great world," said one of the young men.

And in the eyes watching the cantor there was curiosity and a strange longing.

Of the youth of Szybow, Eliezer alone had been out into the world. This was because of his marvellous voice, to cultivate which he had been sent to a large city. Everything he had to say had been told to his friends long ago. It was not much, but such as it was they were willing to listen to it every day. How does a large city appear? How high are the houses there? What kind of people live in those houses, and how many among them are Israelites? Who are rich, and wear beautiful dresses, and are greatly respected among the people? And why are they respected? Is it because they are rich? No—in Szybow there are also rich merchants, and the Purices (nobles) care for them only when they need their money, and when they do not need money they despise them. The Israelites in the great city are respected because they have a great deal of knowledge, and they have studied not only Mishna and Gemara, but other different, beautiful, and necessary things. And why in Szybow is there not such a school where these things could be studied, and why do Rabbi Isaak and Reb Moshe say that these sciences are the wine-garden of Sodom and infidel flames, and that every true Israelite should avoid them?

"Eliezer, how do those big carriages run without horses, and who invented them so cleverly?"

"Eliezer, do all Israelites there live kosher?"

"Eliezer, what is said there of the Rabbis Todros?"

"They speak ill of them."

A great surprise! The Israelites in the broad world speak ill of the Todros; and they believe neither in En-Sof nor in the Sefirots and the whole Kabbalistic science!

"And what do they say of the Talmud?"

"They say that this beautiful book, full of wisdom, was written by clever and saintly people, but it should be shortened and many things left out because these are quite different times, and that which was formerly necessary is now harmful."

Again great surprise! The Talmud should be shortened, because it is difficult to study Gemara, and it dulls the minds and memories of the children!

True! They remember how difficult it was for them to study Gemara, and how the melamed had cruelly beaten them because they could not remember it, and how on that account they grew weak physically and mentally, and the little Lejbele, the son of a poor tailor, remained forever stupid and sick for the same reason!

"And who shortened the Talmud, and made it easier to study?"

"It was done by the great and saintly Moses Majmonides, whom the Rabbis excommunicated."

The Rabbis excommunicated the great and saintly savant! Therefore the Rabbis could be unjust and bad. One must not always believe what they teach!

"What more has Moses Majmonides written?"

"He has written More Nebuchim a guide for lost ones—a wise and beautiful book, which, when one reads one is inclined to weep with tenderness and laugh with joy!"

"Eliezer, have you read that book?"

"Yes. I have it."

"Where did you get it?"

"A wise Israelite gave it to me. He is a lawyer in the large city."

"Eliezer, read us something from that book."

In that way was revealed to those naive minds, involuntarily longing for the sun and broad bosom of humanity,—even though the revelation was partial and chaotic—the phenomena and thoughts circulating in the waste spaces. The result of this was not the production of firm convictions, nor the spinning out of a guiding thread to another better life; but doubt entered their consciences and desire filled their breasts—the young eyes veiled with the sadness of the thought which began to feel its fetters.

It was quite late when, after a long conversation, the young men rose and stood opposite each other with pale faces and burning looks. After a time of silence, Meir said:

"Eliezer, when shall we stand up and cry with a powerful voice to the people, that they may open their eyes? Shall we always crawl in darkness, like the worms, covered with earth, and look on while the whole nation rots and chokes?"

Eliezer dropped his eyes, which were full of tears, and raising his white hands, he said in his harmonious voice:

"Every day before God I sing and cry for my people!"

Meir made a movement of impatience, and at that moment Ber, rising heavily from the bed, laughed in a gloomy manner.

"Sing and cry!" said he to Eliezer, "your dreadful father fills you with such fear that you will never be

able to do anything else!"

Then he put his hand on Meir's shoulder and said:

"Only he is daring and will swim against the stream. But the water is stronger than a man. Where will it carry him?"

Leaving Jankiel's house, Meir perceived again in one of the rooms, the same as before, a woman sitting at the cradle of a sleeping baby. Now she was bent over, and with both elbows resting on the edges of the cradle, was slumbering. The light of the small lamp, burning in the stove, fell upon her and threw a purple glimmer on the old caftan which covered her bosom and shoulders. On her head she still wore the holiday cap with crumpled flowers, its red colour contrasting strangely with the yellow, wrinkled face with its low forehead and withered cheeks. She was not yet old but worn out, overworked, spent with fatigue. One glance at her was sufficient to tell that her life lay in the midst of work and humiliation, and that she was not refreshed by even one drop of happiness. Looking at her, it was not difficult to guess that she would not live—like Freida, wife of the heretic Hersh—until her hundredth birthday, and that she would not fall into the eternal sleep little by little, amidst those dear to her heart—the noise made by numerous children and grandchildren. Jenta, the wife of the greedy Reb Jankiel, was slain in spirit and worn out in body.

When the steps of the departing guests, which had for some time mingled with the snoring of several people fast asleep, became silent, Eliezer stood in the low door of his room and looked for a few seconds at his sleeping mother.

"Mother!" he called softly, "why don't you go to bed? Little Hajka is sleeping for a long time, and she will not cry any more. Mother, go to bed and rest."

The whisper of her son reached the slumbering Jenta. She raised her eyelids, turned her sad glance toward the tall youth whose white face shone in the darkness like alabaster, and—what a wonder—her small, half-closed eyes opened, and from the colourless eyeballs shone a light of joy.

"Eliezer, come here!" she whispered. The young man approached and sat on the edge of the bed.

"How can I sleep?" the faded woman whispered to him, "when I feel so miserable! Hajka is sick and at any moment she may cry, and if she would cry Jankiel would waken and be very angry!"

"Sleep mother," whispered back the young man. "I will sit here and rock Hajka."

The yellow, wrinkled face, with the big red rose over the forehead, bent and rested—not on the high dirty pillows—but on the lap of the sitting youth.

Eliezer put his elbow on the edge of the cradle, leaned his forehead on the palm of his hand and sat in thought. From time to time he moved the cradle with his foot, and hummed.

"Oj! My head, my poor head!" whispered in her sleep the yellow-faced woman, slumbering with her head in her son's lap.

"Oh, Israel! how poor thou art!" thoughtfully whispered the red lips of the young man watching by the cradle.

While this was passing in Reb Jankiel's house, a small, lively human figure rushed through the darkness, across the large school-yard toward the small house of Rabbi Todros, where it disappeared behind a small door.

The creaking of the door was answered from the interior of the house by a low, but pure voice:

"Is that you, Moshe?"

"I, Nassi! your faithful servant! the miserable footstool of your feet! May the angel of peace visit your sleep! May every breath of your nostrils be agreeable to you, as the sweet oil mixed with myrrh! And while you sleep, may your soul bathe with great delight in the streams of the spirits!"

The deep voice coming from the interior of the room situated beyond the small dark hall, asked:

"Where were you so long, Moshe?"

The man, who remained in the little hall, answered:

"I ate the Sabbath supper in the house of the Ezofowich. In that house they celebrate the Sabbath with great magnificence, and I go there often to keep my soul in great joy!"

"You act wisely, Moshe, in keeping your soul joyful during the Sabbath. But what news have you?"

"Bad news, Nassi! Among the roses and lilies an ugly worm crawls!"

"What worm?"

"A worm which is eating into our holy faith, and which may make of the Israelitish people a people of goims and hazarniks."

"And in whose heart crawls that worm?"

"It is crawling in the heart of Meir Ezofowich—grandson of the rich Saul."

"Moshe, have you seen this worm with your own eyes, and have you heard with your own ears? Speak, Moshe! On my head rests the burden of all souls which are in this community, and I must know all."

There was silence for a moment in the little hall. The man who was humbly sitting there at the closed door of the saintly Rabbi was evidently gathering his thoughts and reminiscences. After a while he began to speak in his hoarse voice, in a sing-song manner.

"I have seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears. Meir Ezofowich has not celebrated today the Kiddish with the whole family, and he came home after Sabbath had already been with us for some time. And I asked him what he had been doing, and he told me that he had been defending the cabin of Abel Karaim and his grandchild, Golda, from assault."

He became silent, and the deep voice within the closed room said:

"He defended heretics, and violated the Sabbath!"

"He does not keep his soul joyful during the holy day of Sabbath."

"That teaching may be excommunicated! Israel must avoid it, and the Lord may not forgive it!" said the deep voice behind the door.

"He said that in the holy books of Israel there is nothing said of En-Sof and Sefirots, and that the Eternal does not command us to persecute heretics."

"Abominations pour from the mouth of that young man! Hersh Ezofowich's soul—his great-grandfather's soul—has passed into his body!"

"Nassi!" exclaimed Moshe, in a louder voice. An indistinct murmur from behind the door encouraged him to continue the conversation.

"He is going to search for the writing of Michael the Senior. I have seen that in his eyes. And he will find that writing, and when he finds it and reads it aloud to the people, the spirit of Israel will rise against your teaching."

There was a deep silence after those words, and then the bass voice resounded again:

"When he shall find that writing, then my heavy hand will rest on him and crush him into dust. Moshe, what did he do after supper?"

"He went to the house of Reb Jankiel, and talked with the cantor, Eliezer. I passed that way, and saw them through the window."

"Moshe, who else was there?"

"There were Haim, Mendel, Aryel, and Ber, Saul's son-in-law."

"About what were they talking?"

"Nassi, my soul entered into my ear as I stood by their window. They complained much that they are kept in great darkness, and that the true faith of Israel is troubled like water when a handful of mud is thrown into it. And Eliezer said that he complains of it before the Lord, singing and crying; and Meir said that it is not enough to sing and cry, but that one must shout with a great voice to the people, and

do something so that they will become something quite different from what they now are."

"A family of vipers!" hissed the voice from behind the door of the cabin.

"Nassi, who are a family of vipers?" asked Moshe humbly

After a moment of silence, the answer came from the darkness:

"Ezofowich's family."

## CHAPTER IV

A few months passed. A warm May day was ending in a bright, sweet-scented evening.

Not long before sunset two beings were walking through the narrow street surrounded by the poorest houses in town. One of these beings was a slender girl, the other was a snow-white she-goat. The she-goat went before, jumping at every moment in order to catch some herb growing here and there. She appeared to be adroit, full of pranks, and happy. The girl following was grave and thoughtful. It would be difficult to tell how old she was. She may have been anywhere from thirteen to seventeen. Although she was tall, she seemed childish, on account of the extreme thinness of her body. But her mien and the expression of her face denoted gravity and premature grief and sadness. At first glance she appeared to be homely. What charms she may have possessed were not enhanced by the poor dress made of faded calico, from beneath which appeared her feet, only half protected by heavy shoes. The flowing dress was buttoned at the neck, around which she wore a few strings of broken corals. Her face was thin and pale, contrasting sharply with the red colour of the beads. From beneath the thick eyebrows looked velvet-like eyes, and over the narrow forehead curled hair as black as ebony.

The whole person of this child, or woman, was a mixture of pride and wildness. Her walk was stiff, grave, and thoughtful, and she looked boldly into space. But at the more lively sound of human voices she stopped and dropped her eyes—not because she was afraid, but because it seemed that she much disliked meeting people. Only the presence of the she-goat did not cause her disgust; on the contrary, she looked after the animal attentively, and when the agile creature went too far, she called her with sharp, muffled exclamations. Reciprocally, it seemed that the goat understood her very well, and, obedient to her call, she returned to the girl with a questioning baa! At the end of the poor, narrow street, there appeared a small green meadow, fresh, pearled with the dew of May, and gilded with the sun. This was situated outside the town, surrounded on one side by a birch grove, the other side opening on large fields, beyond which, in the far distance, was seen a blue strip of the forest.

The girl slackened her steps, and having seized the animal by the horns, she stopped, and looked on the lively scene displayed on the meadow. At first the outlook appeared to be merely a tumultuous and chaotic mass of movement, composed of snow-white animals and variegated children on the green background. Only after a short while one could distinguish numbers of little girls driving from pasture several herds of goats.

The girls were full of play, and they hastened home. The goats were stubborn, and wished to remain on the meadow, so there was some fighting, in which the goats were victorious over the children. They escaped from the hands of their leaders, and jumped nimbly and quickly toward the hazel bushes.

The girls chased them, and, reaching them, they seized the animals by their long, rough hair, and then they were at a loss what to do next. Some of them called to their friends, busy and embarrassed also, for help; others crossed the way of their disobedient charges, and, when they were opposite them, they stretched out their arms; others shouted, and, falling on the ground, they rolled in the soft grass, bursting with laughter. These exclamations, calls, and laughter, mingling with the m-a-a-ing of the goats, were seized by the warm breeze blowing over the meadow, and carried through the gloomy streets of the town, over the large field, and in the remote depths of the grove. Through the golden air the small feet flitted and crossed each other, trampling the grass, and above them nodded the little heads covered with hair of all shades, from locks black as ebony to the curls of copper-red and flaxen-yellow.

The tall, grave girl, who passed with her frolicsome but obedient goat, looked indifferently at the noisy, animated scene. It was evident that neither the gaiety nor curiosity attracted her. As she had been walking, now she was standing grave and quiet. It seemed as though she was waiting for something. Maybe the disappearance from the meadow of these flitting heads and the exclamations of the children.

After a while the exclamations were united in one choir. It announced joy and universal triumph. At

the end of long fights, chases, and efforts, the goats were finally subdued by the girls, and were now gathered in one group. Some of the children were holding the stubborn and rebellious animals by their short horns, dragging them with all their strength; while others, clasping their necks with both hands, accompanied them in their jumps; others, more courageous and strong, sat on the goats' backs, and, carried by their strange chargers, holding fast by the longest hair, they went at full trot toward the town. This cavalcade, tumultuous and noisy, squeezed into one of the larger streets, and disappeared in clouds of dust.

Now the green meadow was silent and deserted. Only a light wind rustled among the branches of birches and hazel trees, and the setting sun veiled it in transparent pink clouds.

The girl set her goat at liberty, walked quicker than formerly, and after a while reached the edge of the meadow. Then she stopped and looked in one direction with a sudden amazement of joy. This point was a thick birch trunk lying at the foot of the grove, and on this trunk sat a young man with an open book in his lap. The girl's amazement was short. With her eyes fastened on the young man's face, which was bent over the book, she crossed the whole length of the meadow, straight and light, and having stopped near the trunk on which he was sitting, she bent, seized his hand in both her swarthy hands, and raised it to her mouth.

Absorbed in his reading the man swiftly raised his head and looked in astonishment at the girl, quickly withdrawing his hand from her embrace and growing red with a warm blush.

"You don't know me," said the girl, in a voice which was muffled, but which trembled not one whit.

"No," answered the young man.

"But I know you. You are Meir Ezofowich, rich Saul's grandson. I see you often when you sit on the piazza of your beautiful house, or when, with that book, you pass the hill of the Karaims."

All this she said in a grave, steady voice, her figure drawn erect. In her face there was not the slightest sign of embarrassment or timidity nor the slightest blush. Only her large eyes became darker and shone with a warm light, and her pale lips assumed a soft and gentle expression.

"And who are you?" asked Meir softly.

"I am Golda, the grand-daughter of Abel Karaim, despised and persecuted by all your people."

And now her mouth trembled and her voice took on a gloomy tone.

"All your people persecute Abel Karaim and his grand-daughter Golda, and you defend them. Long ago I wished to thank you."

Meir dropped his eyelids. His pale face flushed.

"Live in peace, you and your grandfather Abel," he said softly, "and may the hand of the Eternal be stretched over your poor house—the hand of Him who loves and defends those who suffer."

"I thank you for your good words," whispered the girl.

In the meanwhile she slipped down to the grass at the young man's feet, and raising her clasped hands she whispered further:

"Meir, you are good, wise, and beautiful. Your name signifies 'light,' and I have light before my eyes every time I see you. Long ago I wished to find you and talk with you, and tell you that although you are a grandson of a rich merchant and I am a grand-daughter of a poor Karaim, who makes baskets, yet we are equal in the eyes of the Eternal, and it is permitted to me to raise my eyes to you and looking on your light, to be happy."

And in fact she looked happy. Only now her thin, swarthy face burned with a flame-like blush, her lips were purple, and in her eyes raised to the young man's face and filled with passionate worship stood two silvery tears.

Meir listened to her with downcast eyes, and when she was silent he looked up and gazed at her for a while and whispered softly:

"Golda, how grateful and beautiful you are!"

For the first time during her conversation with Meir, Golda dropped her eyes and mechanically began to pluck the high grass growing around her. Meir looked at her silently. The innocence of her heart was plainly manifested in her confusion, which caused him to blush, and a timid joy shone with double light

from his gray eyes, which remained cast down.

"Sit beside me," said he finally, in a soft voice.

The girl rose from the ground and sat in the place indicated by him. She had recovered all her boldness and gravity. She was silent and looked at the youth who did not look at her. They were silent a long time. Silence was around them; only above their heads the tall birches rustled softly, and around the pond near by, which was grown up with osier, the whistling and carolling of the marsh-dwelling birds was heard.

Meir, who kept looking at the grass spread at his feet, was the first to speak:

"Why do you bring your goat so late to the pasture?"

Golda answered:

"Because I don't wish to meet the other girls here."

"Do they also persecute you?"

"They laugh at me when they see me, and call me ugly names, and drive me from them."

Meir raised his eyes to the girl, and in his glance there was deep pity.

"Golda, are you afraid of those girls?"

Golda gravely shook her head in negation.

"I have grown up together with fear," she answered. "It's my brother, and I am accustomed to it. But when I return home the old zeide asks: 'Have you met anybody? Have they annoyed you?' I can't lie, and if I tell the truth the old zeide is very sad and he weeps."

"Did zeide alone bring you up?"

She nodded her head affirmatively.

"My parents died when I was as small as that bush. Zeide didn't have any children, so he took me to his home and took care of me, and when I was ill he carried me in his arms and kissed me. When I was older he taught me to spin and read the Bible, and told me beautiful stories which the Karaims brought from the far world. Zeide is good; zeide is a dear old man—but so old—so old, and so poor. His hair is snow-white from great age and his eyes are red as corals from weeping. When he is making baskets I often lie at his feet and keep my head in his lap, and he caresses my hair with his old, trembling hand, and repeats: 'Josseyne! Josseyne!' (orphan)."

While thus speaking she sat a little bent over, with her elbow resting on her knee. She balanced herself softly, looking into space.

Meir was now gazing in her face as on a rainbow, and when she pronounced the last word, he repeated after her in a soft voice, filled with pity:

"Josseyne!"

At that moment, quite a distance behind them in the grove, was heard the bleating of the goat. Meir looked back.

"Your goat—will it not be lost in the forest?" he asked.

"No," answered the girl quietly. "She never goes too far, and when I call her she returns to me. She is my sister."

"Fear is your brother, and a she-goat your sister!" said the young man, smiling.

The girl turned her head toward the grove, and gave voice to a few short exclamations. Immediately there came from the thicket the sound of quick, racing steps, and among the green birch branches appeared the snow-white hairy animal. It stood still and looked at the two people sitting beside each other.

"Come here!" called Golda.

The goat approached and stood near her. Golda caressed the animal's neck, and Meir did the same smiling. The goat gave a short bleat, jumped aside, and in the twinkling of an eye was biting at one of



the birches.

"How obedient she is," said Meir.

"She is very fond of me," said Golda gravely. "I brought her up in the same way that zeide did me. She was a little kid when zeide brought her home and made me a present of her. I used to carry her in my arms and feed her with my hands, and when she was sick I sang to her, as zeide used to sing to me."

In speaking thus she smiled, and the smile gave her a childish appearance. She looked not more than fourteen years old.

"Would you like to have another little kid?" asked Meir.

"Why not?" she answered. "I would like it very much. When zeide shall sell a great many baskets, and I shall spin much wool we will buy another little kid."

"For whom do you spin the wool?"

"There are some good women who help me in that way. Hannah, Witebski's wife, your aunt Sarah, Ber's wife, give me wool to spin and then they pay me with copper—sometimes with silver money."

"Then you sometimes come to our house to take the wool for spinning from Sarah, Ber's wife?"

"Yes."

"And why have I never seen you?"

"Because they wish me to come secretly. Ber and his wife Sarah are very good-hearted people, but they don't wish anyone to know that they help us. I come to see them when there is nobody in the house except Lijka, your cousin, and I try to slip in in such a way that the black man could not see me."

"Whom do you mean by the 'black man'?" asked Meir in astonishment.

"Rabbi Isaak Todros!" answered Golda softly—almost in a whisper.

At the sound of that name pronounced by Golda, Meir's face, formerly beaming, full of pity, blushing with emotion, quivered nervously. He grew suddenly silent and looked into space with eyes filled with gloomy lights. He became so thoughtful that a deep line appeared on his white forehead. It seemed to him that he had forgotten that he was not alone.

"Meir," sounded in a soft voice, close to his shoulder, "of what are you thinking, and why have your eyes become so sad? Your name means 'light.' The sun of joy—does it not shine always for you?"

The young man, without changing the direction of his glance, shook his head.

"No," he answered, "there is a deep sorrow in my heart."

The girl bent toward him.

"Meir," she exclaimed, "and from where does this sorrow come to your heart?"

He was silent for a while, and then answered softly:

"From the fact that there are black people among us, and such darkness—such darkness!"

The girl dropped her head, and repeated like a sad echo:

"Ah! Such darkness!"

Meir continued to look into space, toward where a long strip of the forest separated the golden valley from the purple sky.

"Golda!" he said softly.

"What, Meir?"

"Did you never wish to see and know what there is beyond that thick, high forest—what is going on in the broad world?"

The girl was silent. From her attitude—her body bent toward the young man, her wide-open eyes full of fire—it could be seen that when she could look at him she did not wish to see anything else in the broad world.

But Meir spoke further:

"I would like to borrow wings from a bird, in order to go beyond that forest—to fly far away!"

"Don't you like the beautiful house of the rich Saul? Don't you like the faces of your brothers, relatives, and friends, that you wish for the wings of a bird to fly away?" whispered the girl, with stifled grief or fright.

"I like the home of Saul, my grandfather," whispered the thoughtful youth, "and I love my brothers and all my relatives; but I would like to fly beyond that forest in order to see everything and become very wise, and then return here and tell to those who are walking in darkness and wearing chains, what they should do in order to leave the darkness and throw off the chains."

After a time of silence he spoke further.

"I should like to know how the stars are fixed and how the planets grow, and how all the nations of the world live, and what kind of a sacred book they have. I would like to read their books, and learn from them God's thought and human lot, in order that my soul might become filled with science as the sea is filled with water."

Suddenly he stopped, and his voice broke with a sigh of inexpressible longing and insatiable desire. Again he was silent for a while, and then added softly:

"I would like to be as happy as was Rabbi Akiba."

"And who was Rabbi Akiba?" asked Golda shyly.

Meir's thoughtful eyes lit up and shone.

"He was a great man, Golda. I read his story often, and I was reading it again when you came."

"I know a great many beautiful stories," said Golda; "they grow in my soul, like red, fragrant roses! Meir, give me one more such rose that it may shine for me when I may not see you."

Their looks met and a soft smile played about Meir's mouth.

"Do you understand Hebrew?"

She hastily nodded in the affirmative.

"Yes, I understand. Zeide taught me." Meir turned a few pages of the book which his lap and read aloud:

"Kolba Sabua was a rich man. His palaces were high as mountains and his dresses shone with gold. In his gardens grew fragrant cedars, palms with large leaves, and there bloomed sweet scented roses of Sharon."

"But more beautiful than the high palaces, than the fragrant cedars and crimson roses, more beautiful than all the maidens in Israel was his daughter, young Rachel."

"Kolba Sabua had as many herds as there were stars in the heavens, and these herds were watched by a poor youth who was tall, like a young cedar, and his face was pale and sad, as it is with a man who wishes to free his soul from the darkness, but cannot."

"The name of that youth was Joseph Akiba, and he lived on a high mountain on which the herds of his master grazed."

"And it happened once upon a time, that the beautiful Rachel came to her father, threw herself on the ground before him, kissed his feet, and wept bitterly; then she spoke: 'I want to marry Akiba and live in that little cabin which stands on the summit of the mountain, and in which he lives.'"

"Kolba Sabua was a proud man, and his heart was hard. He became very angry with his daughter, the beautiful Rachel, and forbade her to think of that young man."

"But the beautiful Rachel left the high palace, and taking with her only her dark eyes, which shone like big diamonds, and her dark tresses, which were raised over her head like a crown. And she went on the high mountain to the little cabin, and said, 'Akiba, behold your wife, who enters into your house!'"

"Akiba was joyful, and he drank from Rachel's eyes her diamond-like tears, and then began to tell her many beautiful things. Wise words poured like honey from his lips, and she listened and was happy, and

said, 'Akiba, you shall be a great star, which shall shine over Israel's roads.'"

"Kolba Sabua was a proud man, and his heart was hard. He sent to his daughter on the high mountain neither food nor clothing, and said, 'Let her become acquainted with hunger, and let her see misery.'"

"And the beautiful Rachel saw misery, and became acquainted with hunger. There were days when she had nothing to put into Akiba's mouth, and thought that her husband must go hungry."

"Akiba spoke, 'No matter that I am hungry,' and then he told her wise things, but she descended the high mountains, went to the town, and cried, 'Who will give me a measure of millet-seed for the dark crown which I wear on my head?' And they gave her a measure of millet-seed, and took her dark crown from her forehead, which was more beautiful than diamonds."

"She returned to the mountains, to the little cabin, and said, 'Akiba, I have some food for your mouth, but your soul is hungry, and for it I cannot get food! Go into the world and nourish your soul with great wisdom which flows from the mouths of wise people. I will remain here. I will sit at the threshold of the house; I will spin wool, and take care of the herds, and look on the road by which you will return, like the sun which returns to the sky to chase away the darkness of the night.'"

"And Akiba went."

Here the voice of the young man became silent, and he cast his eyes on the leaves of the book, for near his shoulder was heard a voice full of astonishment.

"Akiba went?" asked Golda, and her eyes were widely opened, and the breath seemed to stop in her breast.

"Akiba went," repeated Meir, and began to read farther.

"The beautiful Rachel sat at the threshold of the house, spun the wool, took care of the herds, and looked at the road by which he must return, shining with great wisdom."

"Seven years passed, and there came an evening when the moon at her full pours on the earth a sea of silvery light, and the trees and herbs stand still and do not move, as though the spirit of the Eternal breathed on them, and brought to the world peace and tranquillity."

"That evening, from behind the mountains, a tall pale man appeared. His feet trembled like leaves when the wind shakes them, and his hands from time to time were raised to the heavens. And when he saw the small, poor cabin, a stream of tears flowed from his eyes—for it was Akiba, the husband of the beautiful Rachel."

"Akiba stopped at the open window, and listened to the talk that was going on within. His wife, Rachel, was talking with her brother, whom her father sent to her. 'Return to Kolba Sabua's house,' spoke her brother, and she answered, 'I am waiting for Akiba, and taking care of his house.' The brother spoke, 'Akiba will never return—he has left you, and he is a disgrace to you.' She answered, 'Akiba has not left me. I, myself, sent him to the fountain of wisdom, that he might drink from it.' 'He drinks from the fountain of wisdom, and you bathe yourself in tears, and your flesh dries from misery!' 'Let my eyes flow out with my tears, let my flesh be eaten with misery, I shall watch the house of my husband. And if that man, for whom I fed love in my heart, shall come back to me and say, 'Rachel, I come back to you that you may not weep any more, but I have not drunk enough from the fountain of wisdom,' I would say to him, 'Go and drink more.'"

"The pale traveller, who stood at the window, which was open, became still paler, and trembled still more when he heard what Rachel said. He left the small cabin, and returned whence he came."

"Again seven years passed by. And there came a day when the sun pours streams of golden brightness, and the trees rustle, and the flowers blossom, and the birds sing, and the people laugh, as though the spirit of the Eternal breathed on them, and brought to them life and joy."

"On the road which led up the mountain to the shepherd's little cabin a great crowd of people was roaring. Amidst them a tall man was walking. His face shone like the sun with great wisdom, and from his mouth fell words sweet as honey and fragrant as myrrh. People bowed low before him, seizing every word, and crying with great love to him, 'Oh, Rabbi!'"

"But through the crowd of people a woman rushed, and falling on the ground, she seized the master's knees. She still held a spindle in her hand. She was covered with rags; her face was thin and her eyes deeply sunken, for during fourteen years they had flowed with tears."

"Go away, you beggar!" the people shouted to her, but the master raised her from the ground and pressed her to his breast; for the man was Joseph Akiba, and the woman was his wife Rachel."

"Behold the fountain which supplied my sad heart with the drink of hope, when my head was in the depths of great loneliness and work."

"Thus spake the master to the people, and wished to place on Rachel's head a crown of gold and pearls."

"Thou, Rachel," said he, "hast taken from thy head thy beautiful hair, in order to nourish my hungry mouth. Now I will ornament thy forehead with a rich garland."

"But she stopped his arm, and raising to him her eyes, which had again become as beautiful as of yore, she said to him, 'Rabbi, your glory is my crown.'"

The young man finished the story, and turned his eyes on the girl sitting beside him.

Golda's face was all aflame, and her eyes were full of tears.

"Do you find my story beautiful?" asked Meir. "Yes; beautiful indeed!" she answered, and with her head leaning on the palm of her hand she balanced her slender figure to and fro for a while, as if under the influence of ecstasy and drowsiness. Suddenly she grew pale, and drew herself up.

"Meir," she exclaimed, "if you were Akiba, and I the daughter of the rich Kolba Sabua, I would do for you the same as the beautiful Rachel did for him!"

She seized her superb tresses, black as ebony, which hung carelessly down her back, and twisting it around her head, she said:

"I have exactly the same black crown as Rachel!" Then she raised her deep, fiery eyes to Meir, and said boldly, gravely, without a smile, blush, or exaltation:

"Meir, for you I would take my eyes out of my head! I would not have any use for them if I could not look at you."

A strong flush covered the young man's face, but it was not mere bashfulness, but emotion. The girl was so naive—so wild, and at the same time so beautiful, with her luxuriant, dishevelled tresses piled above her forehead, and with passionate words on her grave and daring lips.

"Golda," said Meir, "I will come to your house and pay a visit to your old grandfather."

"Come," said she; "with you there will enter into our house a great light."

The sun had almost set behind the high scarlet and purple clouds. A little pond shone from beyond the high osiers. In that direction Golda's looks went, and stopped at the water and surrounding bushes.

"Why are you looking at the pond?" asked Meir, who could no longer keep his eyes from the girl's face.

"I would like to get as many as I could of those branches growing over there," answered the girl.

"What for?"

"I would carry them home. Zeide makes baskets of them, then he sells them in the market and buys bread, and sometimes fish. For a long time zeide has had no willow to make baskets, and he grieves."

"Why don't you take them if you need them?"

I am not permitted.

"Why not? Everyone from the town may cut the branches. This meadow and that grove belong to the whole community of Szybow."

"It doesn't matter; I am not permitted. We don't believe in the Talmud; we don't light candles on the Sabbath—nothing is allowed us."

Meir rose suddenly.

"Come," said he to Golda, "I will be with you, and you may cut as many branches as you like. Don't be afraid of anything."

Golda's face shown with joy. She took from Meir's hand a jack-knife and rushed toward the pond. Now, when she felt safe under the protection of a strong arm, when there was hope of giving pleasure to the old grandfathers she lost the gravity which gave her the appearance of a matured woman. She ran along, looking from time to time at Meir who followed her, calling her she-goat, who turned toward her from the opposite side of the meadow. They stopped on the shore. The most flexible willow grass grew in the water, a few steps from the bank. In the twinkling of an eye Golda threw off her low shoes, and rolling up her dress she entered the water. Meir remained on the shore and watched the girl, as raising her arms, she began to swiftly cut the pliable branches. In the mean time she laughed, and her parted lips disclosed rows of teeth as white and beautiful as pearls. The glare of the last dazzling rays bathed her swarthy face with a pinkish light, and gilded the black crown of hair twined above her brow.

Meir did not lose sight of her, and smiled also. Suddenly Golda set up a cry.

"What is the matter?" asked Meir.

From the green thicket, in which the girl's figure was hidden, a joyful voice resounded.

"Meir, what beautiful flowers are here!"

"What flowers?"

The tall figure thrust aside the green bushes, bent toward the shore, and stretching out her arm handed the young man a broad-leaved yellow pond lily. Meir bent over a little in order to reach the flower, but all at once Golda's arm trembled, her pink face grew pale, and her eyes dilated with dread.

"The black man!" she whispered, dropping the flower, and with a soft exclamation of fear she retreated and hid herself in the willow copse.

Meir looked behind him. Some distance off he saw emerging from the grove, and passing swiftly across the meadow, a strange figure walked swiftly. It was a medium-sized man, very thin, with a dark face, gray hair and a dark, dullish beard falling to his waist. He was robed in a long dress made of rough woven cloth, and his yellow, bare neck was thrust from an open shirt of rough material. He stooped in the shoulders and his steps were noiseless, as he wore low, woven slippers. In either hand he carried a big bunch of variegated herbs. When that man, without looking at Meir, passed him at a distance, the youth mechanically bent low his head in sign of humility and reverence. Soon, however, he raised it. His face was pale, and expressed suppressed grief. He looked gloomily at the black figure passing swiftly across the meadow, and through his teeth set in either grief or anger, he said:

"Rabbi Isaak Todros!"

## CHAPTER V

Rabbi Isaak Todros' appearance, and also his spiritual development, perhaps, were expressive characteristics of several centuries of long sojourn of his ancestors in Spain.

Wandering people, although astonishingly perseverant and conservative of marks distinguishing them from other nations, still by the inevitable influence of nature, draw here and there something from the different skies under which the lot of the exile scattered them.

Among the common characteristics of Israelites, however, there can be seen great differences. There are among them people but recently arrived from the South and West, and again there are others over whose head a pale sky has stretched and a cold wind has blown for centuries. There are among them phlegmatic natures, and also ardent mystical ones, and others redolent of reality. Some of them have hair black as the darkest raven wing—others have eyes the colour of the sky. There are among them white and also swarthy foreheads; strong, hardy natures, and others nervous, quivering with passion, imbued with dreaming, and consumed with fanciful ideals.

The swarthiest among the swarthy faces, the darkest of dark hair, the most passionate among the fiery spirits belonged to Isaak Todros.

What precise position did he occupy in the community, and on what was it based? He was not a priest; rabbis are not priests, and perhaps there is no other nation, as distant by its nature from theocratic government as are the Israelites. Neither was he the administrator of the community, because the members of the kahal took charge of its civil affairs; rabbis, while being members of the kahal, possessed only the role of warden of religion in respect to its rules and rites. He possessed a dignity higher than that, however. He was the descendant of an old princely house and among his

ancestors he counted many scholars, pious and revered rabbis, and he was perfectly pious himself—consequently *cadek* and *hahamen*, ascetic, almost a miracle-worker, and a deeply, supernaturally learned man. Of course, saying that he was a learned man refers only to religious erudition, but in the eyes of the community of Szybow this was the only learning.

This scholarship embraced the incomparable knowledge of sacred books; Torah or the Bible, as little as possible—more of the Talmud, and most of Kabala.

Isaak Todros was the most able Kabalist of modern times, and it constituted the corner-stone upon which was built his greatness. Someone not familiar with the faith of the plebeian Israelites would suppose that the population of Szybow was a branch of a numerous gloomy sect of Hassid, which puts at the head of all religious and secular learning, the Kabala. No; the inhabitants of Szybow did not consider themselves heretics. On the contrary, they were proud of being orthodox Talmudists and Rabbinites. But they belonged to those, numerous in the lowest stratum of Talmudists, who joined Kabala to the Torah and Talmud, recognised it as a holy book, and became passionately fond of it, setting it in the shadow of the two first books.

And then Hassidism touched the Hebrew population of Szybow and left deep traces. In fact the greater part of the population was Hassidish without knowing it. Tradition said that Isaak Todros' ancestor, that Reb Nohim who had waged a battle of ideas with Hersh Ezofowich, was for some time a pupil of Besht, the founder of that curious sect. He saw him often, and although he did not join the sect entirely, he grafted some of its ideas into the community of which he was the spiritual leader.

The principal characteristics of the sect were: a boundless respect for Kabala, an almost idolatrous worship of *Cadeks* and a deep, pious and unshakeable aversion toward Edomites (foreign nations) and their lores.

These principles multiplied and branched out under the teaching of Nohim's son, Baruch, and his grandson Isaak seized the dignity held by his ancestors during the period of their rule. Therefore the religion of the inhabitants was neither Mosaism, nor Talmudism, nor Hassidism, but it was a chaotic mixture of all three which prevailed for the space of a number of miles around Szybow, and the highest expression of which was found in the person of the Rabbi of Szybow.

Rabbi Isaak had a swarthy forehead, furrowed deeply by lines of strained thought in trying to penetrate the mystery of Heaven and earth by a combination of letters, composed of the name of God and the Angels. Therefore in his coal-black eyes were gloomy lights which sometimes became ecstatic when they contemplated the incomparable delights of the supernatural world. His back was bent from the continual reading of books, arid his hand shook with excitement caused by the perpetual state of emotion in which his mind was kept; his body was thin from spiritual torments and physical mortifications.

Celibacy, fasting and sleepless nights were written in the dark face of the man, as well as his mystical ecstasies, secret dread and merciless hatred of everyone who lived, believed and desired differently from himself.

When he was young he had married—or rather they had married him—before the slightest sign of a beard had appeared on his cheeks, but he soon divorced his wife, because, by her continual bustling activity she troubled his pious thought and spiritual raptures. His three children were brought up in his brother's house, and he himself lived the life of an anchorite in the little cabin—a life of fancy strained to the utmost, of passionate prayers and unfathomable mystic contemplations. Such was his spiritual life.

His physical life was sustained by gifts sent him by his zealous admirers. But those gifts were small and common. Rabbi Isaak did not accept great and costly presents—he even refused to accept remuneration for the advice, medicines and prophecies which he gave to the faithful who came to him.

But every day before sunrise some bashful figures glided through the school-yard, and placed on the wooden bench standing near the window of the house some earthen dishes with food—slices of bread or holiday cake.

At that time the Rabbi usually recited his morning prayers, for it was that moment at which white could be distinguished from blue, which is the time that every faithful Israelite should recite the morning Tefils and Shems.

Then he opened his window and contemplated the pink glow of the dawn. In one direction was the far Orient, Jerusalem, the invisible ruins of Solomon's Temple, Palestine weeping for her sons and the withering palms of Zion.

Sometimes the fire shining in the Rabbi's eyes was quenched by a tear, cooling his cheeks which burned with the heat of interior fires. Sometimes they were cooled also by the cold winds and misty fogs, but Isaak Todros looked every morning through the mists and fogs, toward the Orient. Then he bent and took from the bench the food prepared for him by pious hands. He did not eat it alone. He broke the bread and cake into crumbs and threw it in handfuls to the birds which came to his window in great flocks. Some of them seized the food and carried it to their nests, chirping joyfully. Others after having eaten enough flew in through the window and perched on the bent shoulders of their friend. Then the Rabbi's dark face grew a little less dark, and sometimes—though very seldom—a smile played about his close shut lips. He was very well known, not only to the birds living in the town, but also to those who filled the birch grove.

Isaak Todros often went to the grove, and sometimes penetrated the neighbouring pine forest. What did he do there? He fed the birds, who, on seeing him, immediately flew to him, and accompanied him in his walk. Sometimes he prayed in a loud voice, raising his trembling hands, and awakening by the sounds of his passionate cries the choir of wood echoes. He also gathered different herbs and plants, which he brought in great bunches to his hut. These plants possessed curative properties, whose knowledge was a heritage in the Todros family. All the members of this family belonged to that class of primitive physicians with which the Middle Ages was filled, and who learned their art of healing not from academies, but from wild nature, studied more with fantastical inquiring, than with learned thought. One of Isaak Todros' ancestors was, however, a very learned physician in Spain at the time when there was a short interval in prosperity in the bad fortunes of the Hebrew nation, and they were permitted to draw with the other nations all possible good from every source. However, the interval was but a short one, and after it the world-famous and really scholarly Hebrew physicians disappeared from the world; but one, by the name of Todros Halevi, transmitted his knowledge to his sons, and so it passed from generation to generation.

Isaak Todros searched for diligently, and gathered carefully, these precious plants of the ancient knowledge and traditions of his family. He carried them with him, and laid them on the dirty floor of his cabin in order to dry them.

On this account the air of his cabin was saturated during the summer and fall with the pungent, choking scent of drying herbs and wild flowers.

His cell was a vivid reminder of the bare cells of anchorites and hermits. Its only furniture consisted of a hard bed, a white table, standing near one of the windows, a couple of chairs, and a few planks fastened to the wall piled up with books. Among these books were twelve enormous volumes bound in parchment. They constituted the Talmud. There were also the "Ozarha-Kabod," a work written by one of Isaak's ancestors—that Todros Halevi who was the first Talmudist to believe in the Kabala; "Toldot-Adam," an epic poem, telling the history of the first man and his exile; "Sefer-Jezira," (Book of Creation), telling by pictures of the origin of the world; "Ka-arat Kezef," in which Ezobi warns the Israelites against the pernicious influence of secular science; "Schiur-Koma," a plastic description of God, instructing the reader regarding his physical appearance—the gigantic size of the head, feet, hands, and especially God's beard, which, according to the book, is ten thousand five hundred parasangs long. But the place of honour was occupied by a book showing much thumbing. It was the Book of Light—Zohar—the greatest, and, at the same time, the deepest dissertation on Hohma-Nistar (Kabala), which was published in the thirteenth century by Moses Leon, in the name of Symeon-ben-Jochai, who lived several centuries before.

Such was the library of Isaak Todros, in the reading of which he spent his nights, drawing from it all his learning and wisdom, consuming in its perusal all the forces of his body. From that library emanated an odour which intoxicated his mind with mystical emotions and the bitter, sharp venom of aversion to everything which was a stranger to, or bore ill-will to the world, shut up in those books, filled with supernatural lights and shadows. In reading them, he exhausted many hours a week—even holy days and nights. But through the holy nights there sat at his feet his pupil and favourite, Reb Moshe, the melamed, who snuffed the yellow candle, for a pious man reading Holy Books during holy nights was not permitted to snuff the candle, and he must have beside him some attentive person to perform this office.

During the holy nights the Rabbi read Schiur-Koma and Zohar, and the little man, sitting beside him, raised himself from time to time in his low chair, reviving the flame of the dying candle, and with his round eyes looking into the face of his master, waiting for the moment when his hand would arrange a word from the names of God, Notarikon and Gomatria, which would perform great miracles, and disclose to the people all the secrets of the heavens and of the earth.

Returning home after sunset one day with a big bunch of herbs, Isaak Todros found his faithful worshipper seated in a corner of the dark hall, plunged in deep thought.

"Moshe," said the Rabbi, passing swiftly and quietly through the hall.

"What is your order, Nassi?" humbly asked Moshe.

"Go at once to old Saul, and tell him that Rabbi Isaak Todros will visit his house to-morrow."

The cramped, gray figure in the dark corner jumped as though moved by a spring, and rushed across the square to the house of Saul. Passing quickly the piazza and long hall, the melamed opened the door, and, thrusting his head into the room, he exclaimed triumphantly:

"Reb Saul, a great honour and happiness is coming to you! Rabbi Isaak Todros, the perfect pious, and the first scholar in the world, will visit your house to-morrow!"

From the depths of the large parlour the voice of the old merchant, dried by age, but still strong, answered:

"I, Saul Ezofowich, my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will await Rabbi Isaak's visit with great joy and great desire in our hearts. May he live a hundred years!"

"May he live a hundred years!" repeated the dark figure, and disappeared.

The door was closed. Old Saul was sitting on the sofa, reading from Zohar, but he could not understand its deep explanations in spite of the utmost mental strain, for his mind was accustomed to secular business affairs. Suddenly his wrinkled forehead became gloomy and uneasiness shone in his eyes. He turned to his elder son, Raphael, who sat at a table near by, balancing his books, and asked:

"Why is he coming here?"

Raphael shrugged his shoulders, as a sign that he did not know.

"Has he any reason for picking a quarrel?" asked the old man again.

Raphael, raising his face from his books, said:

"He has."

Saul shivered.

"Nu!" he exclaimed, "And what reason can he have? Has someone of the family sinned?"

Raphael answered shortly:

"Meir."

The faces of both father and son grew sad and disquieted. Isaak Todros visited the members of the sect very seldom—only when there was a question of some important religious matter or transgression of rules. And even such rare calls were only paid to the most prominent and influential members of the community. Poor people surrounded the Rabbi's cabin, ready to rush in at a sign from him in inexpressible joy or fear.

Rabbi Isaak Todros was an ascetic and he despised mammon, but he did not reject all possible signs of respect the people desired to show him, and they who were familiar with his thoughts and sentiments knew that he was very fond of these signs, and would even demand them imperiously in case anyone thought to dispense with or diminish them. For that reason all the poor population, and everyone who wished to win his special favour, called him "Prince," addressing him as "Nassi." Therefore his passage through the town on all occasions was an important and curious event for the population, and was performed with quiet, dignified ceremony. A couple of hours before noon Saul Ezofowich, standing before the window of his parlour, looked with a certain amount of trouble at the retinue passing slowly across the square. All the members of his family, robed in holiday dresses, with a solemn expression on their faces, looked also, holding themselves in readiness to welcome this high dignitary of the community at the threshold of their residence. Through the square, from the school, a throng of people dressed in black advanced toward the house of the Ezofowich. In the middle, bent as always, in shabby clothes, with his rough shirt unbuttoned showing the yellow neck, marched Isaak Todros, with his usual swift, noiseless quiet pace.

On either side was an official of the Kahal—the small, lithe Reb Jankiel, with his white, freckled face and fiery red beard, and David Calman, one of the dignitaries of the town. Morejne, a rich cattle merchant, tall, stiff, and dignified, with hands in the pockets of his satin halat and a sweet smile of satisfaction on his fat lips, walked near. Behind these three people, and on both sides, were several others more or less humble and smiling. The whole crowd was preceded by Reb Moshe, in such a way



that he faced the Rabbi and had his back in the direction in which they walked. Consequently he could not be said to walk, but draw back, in the meantime jumping and clapping his hands, bending low to the ground, stumbling, and jumping again, raising his face to the sky and shouting for joy. Finally, a certain distance behind, a throng of children followed them and looked with great curiosity at the retinue, and on seeing the melamed's jumping and dancing, they began to imitate him, jumping and gesticulating also and filling the air with wild noise.

After a while the door of the Ezofowich house was violently opened and through it rushed the melamed—he was red, out of breath, bathed in perspiration and beaming with great joy. He rejoiced heartily, loudly, passionately. What for? Poor melamed!

"Reb Saul!" he said with a hoarse voice, "meet the great happiness the great honour coming to you."

From Saul's face it would be seen that a secret fear was fighting with the great joy within him. But his family evidently rejoiced exceedingly, for their faces beamed with pride and satisfaction except Ber, who was always silent and apathetic if the question was not one of business and money. Old Saul stood near the threshold of the parlour. On the piazza Rob Jankiel and Morejne Calman seized the Rabbi under either arm, lifted his thin body above the ground, and having carried him through the hall and over the threshold they placed him opposite Saul. Then they bowed profoundly, left the house, sat on the piazza waiting for the moment to reconduct the Rabbi.

In the meanwhile Saul bent before the guest his grave and reverent head. Everyone present followed his example.

"He who greets a sage greets the Eternal," said he.

"He who greets a sage . . ." the choir of male and female voices began to repeat after Saul, but at that moment Isaak Todros raised his index finger, looked around with his fiery eyes, and said:

"Sh-a-a-a!"

In the room there was the silence of the tomb.

The finger of the guest made a large circle, taking in the row of people standing near the wall.

"Weg!" (get out) shouted he.

Within the room the rustling of dresses and the sound of swift steps were heard; faces grew frightened and sorrowful, and crowding together the inmates squeezed through the door leading to the interior of the house, and disappeared.

In the larger room only two men remained—the silver-haired, broad-shouldered patriarch, and the thin, fiery-looking sage.

When the Rabbi imperatively drove out his host's family—the gray-headed sons, dignified matrons, and beautiful girls, Saul's gray eyebrows quivered and bristled for a moment. Evidently his pride rose within him.

"Rabbi," said he, in a muffled voice, and with a bow that was not as low as the first one, "deign to take under my roof the place you think the most comfortable."

He did not call his guest "prince"; he did not give him the name of Nassi.

Rabbi Isaak looked at him gloomily, crossed the room, and sat on the sofa. At that moment he was not bent; on the contrary, he sat bolt upright, looking sharply into the face of the old man who sat opposite to him.

"I have driven them out," said he, pointing to the door through which the patriarch's family had made their exit. "Why did you gather them? I wished to talk with you alone."

Saul was silent.

"I bring you news," again said the Rabbi quickly and gloomily. "Your grandson Meir has not a clean soul. He is a kofrim (infidel)."

Saul still sat silent, only his frowning brows quivered nervously above his faded eyes.

"He is a kofrim!" the Rabbi repeated loudly. "He speaks ugly words of our religion, and he does not respect the sages. He violates the Sabbath, and is friendly with the heretics."

"Rabbi!" began Saul.

"You must listen when I speak," interrupted the Rabbi.

The old man tightened his lips so that they disappeared under his gray moustache.

"I came to tell you," continued Todros, "that it's your fault that your grandson is bad. Why did you not permit the melamed to whip him when he was in the heder, and did not want to study German, and laughed at the melamed, and instigated the others to laugh at him? Why did you send him to Edomita, living there among the gardens to make him study the reading of the Gojs and also their writing and the other abominations of the Edomites? Why did you not punish him when he violated the Sabbath, and contradicted the melamed at your table? Why did you spoil his soul with your sinful love? Why don't you force him to study holy science? And why do you look on all his abominations as though you were a blind man?"

This vehement speech tired the Rabbi, and panting, he rested.

Then old Saul began to talk:

"Rabbi, your soul must not be angry with me. I could not act otherwise. This child is the son of my son—the youngest among my children, and who disappeared very quickly from my eyes. When his parents died I took this child to my home, and I wished that he might never remember that he was an orphan. I was then already a widower, and I carried him in my own arms. His old great-grandmother took care of him also, and she would give her soul for the happiness of his soul. In her crown he is the first jewel, and now her old mouth opens only for him. These are, Rabbi, the reasons why I have been more indulgent with him than with my other children; these are the reasons why my soul was ill when the melamed scolded and whipped him in the heder, as the other children. I sinned then. I rushed into the heder like a madman, spoke ugly words to the melamed, and took the boy away with me. Rabbi, I sinned, because the melamed is a wise and saintly man; but this sin will disappear from your mind, Rabbi, if you will but think that I could not bear to look at the bruises on the body of the son of my son. When such bruises appeared on the bodies of the children of my son Raphael, and my son Abraham, and my son Ephraim, I was silent, for their fathers were living—thanks be to God!—and could look after their children. But when I saw the black-and-blue marks on the back and shoulders of the orphan, Rabbi, then I cried—then I shouted, and I sinned."

"That is not your only sin," said the Rabbi, who listened to Saul's speech with the motionless severity of a judge, "and why did you send him to Edomit?"

"Rabbi," answered Saul, "and how could he go through the world if he did not understand the tongue of the people of this country, and could not write his name to a contract or a note? Rabbi, my sons and grandsons conduct large business transactions, and he will do the same when he is married. His father's wealth belongs to him. He will be rich and will have to talk with great lords, and how could he so talk if I had not sent him to study with an Edomit?"

"May Edom perish with his abominable learning, and may the Lord not forgive him!" grumbled the Rabbi, and after a while he added: "and why did you not make of him a scholar instead of a merchant?"

"Rabbi," answered Saul, "the Ezofowich family is a family of merchants. We are merchants from father to son—that is our custom."

Saying this, he raised his bent head. The mention of his family caused him to grow proud and bold. But nothing could be compared with the disdain with which, repeating after Saul, the Rabbi hissed:

"The Ezofowich family! It was always a grain of pepper in Israel's palate!"

Saul raised his head higher.

"Rabbi!" he exclaimed, "in that family there were diamonds which caused the Edomites themselves, in looking on them, to respect the whole of Israel."

The ancient hatred between the Ezofowichs and Todros began to bubble up.

"In your family," spoke the Rabbi, "there is one ugly soul which passes from one Ezofowich to another, and cannot be cleansed. For it is written that all souls which flow from the Seraphim flow like drops of water from an inclined bottle, carrying Ibur-Gilgul—travel through bodies, from one to another, until they are cleansed from all sin, when they return to the Seraphim. If a man is pious and saintly his soul returns to the Seraphim, and when the soul returns there another soul goes into the world and enters a body. Misery and sadness, sorrow and sin will dwell upon the earth as long as all souls taken from the Seraphim have not fulfilled the Ibur-Gilgul and pass through the bodies. And how

will they be able to pass all the bodies if on the earth there are many which are abominable, unclean, and do not respect the holy teachings? These unwholesome ones keep the souls in their bodies, and there above the other souls are waiting. And they must wait, because there are not as many bodies in the world as there are souls among the Seraphim. And the Messiah himself is waiting, because he will not come until the last soul enters the body and Ibur-Gilgul begins. These abominable ones, occupying one body after another, do not permit the waiting souls to enter in, and postponing to a remote period the Jobelha-Gabel, the day of the Messiah,—the great festival of joy! In your family there is such an abominable soul. It entered first into the body of Michael the Senior, then it entered Hersh's body, and now it sits in the body of your grandson Meir! I recognised the proud and rebellious soul in his eyes and face, therefore my heart turned from him!"

While Todros explained to the old man sitting opposite him this doctrine of the migration of souls, and its consequences, in the old man a striking change took place. Before he had grown bolder, and even raised his head with a certain pride and dignity. Now he bent it low, and sorrow and fear appeared among the wrinkles of his face.

"Rabbi!" said he humbly, "be blessed for having disclosed to my eyes your holy learning. Your words are true and your eyes can recognise the souls which dwell in bodies. Rabbi, I will tell you something. When my son Raphael brought little Meir, I took the child and began to kiss him, for it seemed to me that he looked like my son Benjamin, his father; but the old great-grandmother took him from me, put him opposite her on the floor and began to look at him very attentively, and then she exclaimed: 'He does not look like Benjamin, but like my Hersh!' The tears flowed from her old eyes and her lips repeated: 'Hersh, Hersh! my Hersh!' and she pressed the child to her bosom and said: 'He is my dearest Kleineskind! He is the eyes of my head and the diamond in my crown, made for me by my grandsons and great-grandson, for he looks like my Hersh.' And she is fond of him. Now she knows only him and calls him to her because he looks like her husband, Hersh."

"Michael's soul entered Hersh's body, and from his body it passed into your grandsons Meir's," repeated the Rabbi, and added: "It's a proud rebellious soul! There is no peace and humility in it."

It seemed that Todros was softened by Saul's submissiveness, and the respect shown in his words.

"Why don't you marry him? He has already long hair on his face," said the Rabbi.

"Rabbi, I wished to marry him to the daughter of the pious Jankiel, but the child lay at my feet and begged me not to force him."

"Why then did you not put your feet on his back, and make him obey you?"

Saul dropped his eyes and was silent. He felt that he was guilty. Love for the orphan made him sin always.

Todros spoke further:

"Marry him as soon as you can, because it is written that when on a young man's face the hair is growing, and he has not a wife, then he will fall into uncleanness. Your grandson's soul has already fallen into uncleanness. Yesterday I saw him with a girl—"

Saul raised his eyes.

"I saw him," continued the Rabbi, "talking with Karaim's girl."

"Karaim's girl?" repeated Saul, in a voice full of surprise and fright.

"He was standing on the edge of the pond and took from her hand some flowers, and I read in their faces that the unclean fire was embracing them."

"With Karaim's girl," repeated Saul once more.

"With a heretic!" said the Rabbi.

"With a beggar!" said Saul energetically, raising his head.

"Rabbi," continued he, "now I will act differently with him! I don't wish to have shame eat up my eyes in my old age, because my grandson has an unclean friendship with a beggar. I shall marry him!"

"You must punish him," said the Rabbi, "I came here to tell you to put your foot on his neck and bend his pride. Don't spare him, for your indulgence will be a sin which the Lord will not forgive you. And if you will not punish him, I will lay my hand on his head and there will be great shame for you, and for him such misfortune that he will grovel in the dirt, like a miserable worm!"

Under the influence of these words, pronounced in a threatening voice, Saul trembled. Different emotions fought continually within the old man; a secret hatred for Todros and a great respect for his learning, pride and fear, fierce anger toward his grandson and tender love for him. The Rabbi's threat touched that last chord.

"Rabbi," he said, "forgive him. He is still a mere child. When he is married and starts in business he will be different. When he was born his father wrote to me: 'Father, what name do you wish your grandson to be given?' and I answered, 'Give him the name of Meir, which means light, that it may be a light before me and all Israel!'"

Here emotion choked his voice and he was silent. Two tears rolled slowly down his cheeks.

The Rabbi rose from the sofa, lifted his index finger and said:

"You must remember my commands. I order you to set your foot on his neck, and you must listen to my orders, because it is written that 'the sages are the world's foundation.'"

Having said this, he advanced toward the door, at which Reb Jankiel and Morejne Calman seized him again, and carried him through the hall and across the threshold and set him on the ground.

And again the black throng of people advanced through the square toward the school-yard; again the melamed, retreating before the Rabbi, jumped, clapped his hands, danced and shouted; and again the crowd of children, following the retinue at a distance, imitated their teacher, jumping, howling, Clapping their hands. And in Ezofowich's parlour old Saul sat with his face covered with his hands, while at the opposite door Freida appeared. The sun rays, falling through the window, kindled into rainbow colours the diamonds with which she was covered. She looked around the room with her half-closed eyes, and pronounced, in her customary soundless whisper:

"Wo ist Meir?"

## CHAPTER VI

Meir was absent during the Rabbi's visit. He left the house early in the morning and went in the direction of the poorest quarter of the town. The houses there were very small and very low and exceedingly dismal, none of them having more than two windows. In front of the houses were evil-smelling sloughs. From the black chimneys of the tenements arose thin streaks of smoke, indicating by their thinness the scarcity of fuel, and the food cooked by it. Fences, rotten and tumble-down, surrounded the small courtyards, which were covered with sweepings. Here and there could be seen in the rear of the houses, tiny tracts of land with meagre vegetables growing in them. At the low doors, miserable looking women with dark sickly faces, wearing blue caftans and carrot wigs, washed their gray, coarse linen in buckets. The old and bent women sat on the benches, knitting blue or black wool stockings, while young sunburned girls, in dirty dresses and dishevelled hair, milked the goats.

It was the quarter of the town inhabited by the poorest population of Szybow, the nursery of poverty—even of misery, dirt, and disease. The houses of the Ezofowichs, Calmans, Witebskis and Kamionkers, standing at the square, were luxurious palaces when compared with those human dwellings, the mere exterior aspect of which made one think of earthly purgatory. And no wonder. There, on the square, lived merchants and learned men, the aristocracy of every Jewish community; here lived the population of working men and tradesmen—the plebeians earning their daily bread with their hands and not with brains.

In spite of the fact that it was yet early morning, the daily work had generally begun. From behind the dirty windows could be seen the rising and falling arms of the tailors and cobblers. Through the thin walls resounded the tools of tinsmiths and the hammers of blacksmiths, and from the houses of the manufacturers of tallow candles rose unbearable, greasy exhalations. Some of the inhabitants, taking advantage of the sunrise, looked into the street, opened their windows and a passer-by could see the interior of, the small rooms with black walls, crowded with occupants which swarmed like ants. Through the windows came the mixed noise of singing and praying in male voices, the quarrelling of women and the screaming of children. All the smaller children rent the sultry air of the black, crowded rooms with their cries, while the older ones trooped out into the street in great crowds, chasing each other noisily or rolling on the ground. Growing boys, dressed not in sleeveless jackets like the children, but in long, grey halats, stood on the thresholds of the huts leaning against the walls, pale, thin, drowsy, with widely opened mouths, as though they wished to breathe into their sickly, cold breasts the warm rays of the sun and the fresh breeze of the morning.

Meir approached one of these youths.

"Nu, Lejbele," said he, "I have come to see you. Are you always sick and looking like an owl?"

It was evident that Lejbele was ill and moping, for, with hands folded in the sleeves of his miserable halat, and pressed to his chest, he was shivering with cold, although the morning was warm; he did not answer Meir, but opened his mouth and great, dull, dark eyes more widely, and looked idiotically at the young man.

Meir laid his hand on the boy's head.

"Were you in the heder yesterday?" he asked. The boy began to tremble still more, and answered in a hoarse voice:

"Aha."

This meant an affirmative.

"Were you beaten again?"

Tears filled the boy's dark eyes, which remained raised to the face of the tall young man.

"They beat me," he said.

His breast began to heave with sobs under the sleeves of the halat, which were still pressed by the boy's folded hands.

"Have you breakfasted?"

The boy shook his head in the negative.

Meir took from the nearest huckster's stand a big hala (loaf of bread), for which he threw a copper coin to the old woman. He then gave the bread to the child. Lejbele seized it in both hands, and began to devour it rapaciously. At that moment a tall, thin, lithe man rushed out from the cabin. He wore a black beard, and had an old, sorrowful face. He threw himself toward Meir. First he seized his hand and raised it to his lips, and then began to reproach him.

"Morejne!" he exclaimed, "why did you give him that hala? He is a stupid, nasty child. He don't want to study, and brings shame upon me. The melamed—may he live a hundred years—takes a great deal of trouble to teach him; but he has a head which does not understand anything. The melamed beats him, and I beat him, too, in order that the learning shall enter his head, but it does not help at all. He is an alejdyc gejer (lazy)—a donkey!"

Meir looked at the boy, who was still devouring the bread.

"Schmul," said he, "he is neither lazy nor a donkey, but he is sick."

Schmul waved his hand contemptuously.

"He is sick," shouted he. "He began to be sick when he was told to study. Before that he was healthy, gay, and intelligent. Ah, what an intelligent and pretty child he was! Could I expect such a misfortune? What is he now?"

Meir continued to smooth the dishevelled hair of the pale child with his hand. The tall, thin Schmul bent again and kissed his hand.

"Morejne," said he, "you are very good if you pity such a stupid child."

"Schmul, why do you call me Morejne?" asked Meir.

Schmul interrupted him hastily.

"The fathers of your father were Morejnes; your zeide and your uncles are Morejnes, and you, Meir, you will soon be Morejne also."

Meir shook his head with a peculiar smile.

"I shall never be a Morejne!" said he. "They will not confer such an honour upon me, and I—don't wish for it!"

Schmul thought for a while, and then said:

"I heard that you have quarrelled with the great Rabbi and the members of the kahal."

Meir, without answering, looked at the horrible proofs of deep destitution around him.

"How poor you are," said he, not answering Schmul directly.

These words touched the very sensitive string of Schmul's life. His hands trembled, and his eyes glared.

"Aj, how poor we are," he moaned; "but the poorest of all living on this street is the hajet (tailor) Schmul. He must support an old, blind mother, and wife, and eight children. And how can I support them? I have no means except these two hands, which sew day and night if there is something to sew."

Speaking thus, he stretched toward Meir his two hands—true beggar's hands, dark, dirty, pricked with the needle, covered with scars made by scissors, and now trembling from grief.

"Morejne," he said more softly, bending toward the listener, "our life is hard—very hard. Everything is very expensive for us, and we have so much to pay. The Czar's officers take taxes, we must pay more for our kosher meat, and for the candles for Sabbath, we must pay to the funeral society, pay to the officers of the kahal, and for what do we not pay? Aj, vaj! From these poor houses flow rivers of money—and where does it come from? From the sweat of our brows, from our blood and the entrails of our children who grow thin from hunger! Not a long time ago you asked me, Morejne, why my room was dirty. And how can we help it when eleven of us must live in one room, and in the passages there are two goats, which nourish us with their milk. Morejne, you asked me why my wife is so thin and old, although she has not yet lived many years, and why my children are always sick! Morejne, kosher meat costs us so much that we never eat it. We eat bread with onion, and we drink goat's-milk. On Sabbath we have fish only when you, Morejne, come to see us and leave us a silver coin. All in this street are poor—very poor, but the poorest is hajet Schmul, with his blind mother, thin wife and eight children."

He shook his head piteously and looked into Meir's face with his dark eyes which expressed stupefied astonishment at his own misery. Meir, with his hand still on the head of the sickly child, who was finishing his bread, listened to the speech of the miserable fellow. His mouth expressed pity, but the frowning brows and drooped eyelids gave to his face the expression of angry reverie.

"Schmul," he said, "and why are you so often out of work?"

Schmul became plainly confused, and raised his hand to his head, disarranging his skull cap which covered his long dishevelled hair.

"I will tell you," continued Meir; "they don't give you work because from the stuff which they give you to make dresses you cut large pieces and keep them."

Schmul seized his skull cap in both hands.

"My poor head," he groaned. "Morejne, what have you told me? Your mouth said a very ugly thing against me."

He jumped, bent nearly to the ground, and then jumped again.

"Nu, it's true, Morejne, I will open my heart to you I used to cut off and keep pieces of the stuff, and why did I do it? Because my children were naked. I clothed them with it. And when my blind mother was sick I sold it and bought a piece of meat for her. Morejne, your eye must not look angrily on me! Were I as rich as Reb Jankiel and Morejne Calman—had I as much money as they make from the work of our hands and the sweat of our brows, I would not steal!"

"And for what are Reb Jankiel and Morejne Calman taking your money?" began Meir thoughtfully, and he wished to continue, but Schmul stretched himself and interrupted suddenly:

"Nu, they have a right to it. They are elders over us. What they do is sacred. When one listens to them it is as if one listened to God himself."

Meir smiled sadly and put his hand into his pocket.

Schmul followed the movement with his eyes, which were animated with cupidity.

Meir placed on the open window a few silver coins. Schmul seized his hand and began to kiss it.

"Morejne, you are good. You always help poor people. You pity my stupid child."

When the enthusiasm of his gratitude had cooled a little, he stretched himself and began to whisper

in Meir's ear.

"Morejne, you are good and generous and the grandson of a very rich man, and I am a poor and stupid hajat, but you are as honey in my mouth, and I must open my heart to you. You are wrong in quarrelling with our great Rabbi and with the members of the kahal. Our Rabbi is a great Rabbi and there is no other like him in the whole world. God revealed to him great things. He alone understands the Kabala Mashjat (the highest part of the Kabala, teaching how, by a combination of letters and words, miracles are performed and the mysteries penetrated). All the birds fly after him when he calls them. He knows how to cure all human diseases and all human hearts open to him. Every breath of his mouth is holy, and when he prays then his soul kisses God himself. And you, Morejne, you have turned away your heart from him."

Thus gravely spoke poor Schmul, raising in solemn gesture his black, needle-pricked index finger.

"And the members of the kahal," continued he, "they are very pious men and very rich. One should respect them and listen to them also, and even close one's eyes if they do something wrong. They could accuse one before God and the people. God will be angry if he hears their complaint, and will punish you, and the people will say that you are very bold, and will turn away their faces from you."

It would be difficult to guess the impression made on Meir by Schmul's humble and at the same time grave, warning. He continually kept his hand on little Lejbele's head, and looked into the beautiful fine-featured face of the pale, sick, idiotic and trembling child, where he saw the personification of that portion of Israel, which, devoured by misery and disease, nevertheless believed blindly and worshipped humbly, timidly, and everlastingly.

Then he gave Schmul a slow and friendly nod, and went away. Schmul followed him several steps.

"Morejne," he moaned, "don't be angry with me for having opened my heart to you. Be wise. May the learned and rich not complain of you to God, for the man who is under the ground is better off than he on whom they shall turn their angry hands."

Then he returned to his hut, and did not notice that Lejbele was not standing at the wall of the house. When Meir departed, the pale child followed him. With hands still muffled in the sleeves of his ragged gown, and with wide opened mouth, the child of Schmul the tailor followed the tall, beautiful man. At the end of the street only, as a being afraid to go further, the poor boy said, in a hoarse, guttural voice:

"Morejne!"

Meir looked back. A friendly smile brightened his face when he saw the boy. The dark, dull eyes of the child were raised to his face, and from the gray sleeve a small, thin hand was stretched toward him.

"Hala," said Lejbele.

Meir looked around for a huckster's stand. Along the street stood several miserable barrows, by which the women, their thin bodies scantily clad in rags, were selling loaves of bread, hard as stone, and some heads of onion, as well as a black, unappetising preparation made of honey and poppy-seed.

From Meir's white hand to the dark, thin hand of the child again passed a big hala. Lejbele raised it to his mouth with both hands, and, turning, he walked slowly and gravely down the middle of the street toward his home.

After a while Meir reached the square of the town. It seemed to him that he came back to the light of day from a dark cavern. The sunlight flooded everything around, dried the mud, and kindled golden sparks in the windows of the houses. In the yard of the pious. Reb Jankiel, some large, new structure was being erected. The red-haired owner inspected the workmen personally, evidently satisfied with the increase of his wealth. The noise of axes and the gnashing of the saws filled the air, and in front of the low inn stood a couple of carriages belonging to passing guests. Further along the street stood Morejne Calman in the piazza of his house, shining in his satin halat. With one hand he held to his smiling mouth a cigar, and with the other he caressed the golden hair of a two-year-old child, who sat on a bench holding a loaf of bread abundantly spread with honey, which he had smeared all over his plump face, casting the while admiring glances at his magnificent father.

In the court-yard of the Ezofowich mansion there was plenty of noise, sunlight, and gaiety. In the centre two broad-shouldered workmen were sawing wood for the winter, and in the soft sawdust several cleanly-dressed children were playing. At the well a buxom and merry servant girl was drawing water, joking with the workmen, and through the open windows of the house could be seen Raphael's and Abraham's grave heads—they were talking over business affairs with great animation—and Sarah, standing by the fireplace, and pretty Lija, who stood before a mirror smoothing her luxuriant tresses.

When Meir entered the gate, the workmen stopped sawing, and smiled and nodded to him. They came from the same poor, dirty street he had just left, and evidently knew him very well.

"Scholem Alejhem!" (peace to you) they exclaimed.

"Alejhem & Scholem!" answered Meir, merrily.

"Will you not help us to-day?" asked one of the workmen jokingly.

"Why not?" answered Meir, approaching them.

Meir was fond of physical work. He practised it very often, and his grandfather's workmen were accustomed to it. One of them was about to give him his place at the log of wood, but at that moment. Lija appeared in the open window. She was just finishing braiding her hair, and said.

"Meir! Meir! where have you been so long? Zeide wishes to see you."

Hardly a quarter of an hour had passed since the Rabbi's visit. Saul still sat with his head between his hands, lost in half angry and half sad musing. A few steps from him sat Freida, bathed in golden sunlight and sparkling with diamonds. A very complicated process was going on in Saul's old breast. He disliked Isaak Todros. Without having deeply understood the real meaning of the action and position of either his ancestor Michael, or his father Hersh, he knew that they had great influence among their "own people," and enjoyed the general esteem of the mighty, although 'stranger' people. Therefore he was proud of these reminiscences of his family, and the knowledge of the wrong done to these two stars of his family by ancestors of Isaak Todros excited toward the latter a mute and not very well-defined dislike. Besides this, being rich, and proud of so being, he resented the misery and—as he said at the bottom of his soul—the sluttishness of the Todros. But all this was as nothing compared with the respect felt for the holy, wise, and deeply-learned man, who was the representative of all that was holiest, wisest, and most learned. Saul himself read with great zeal the holy books, but he could not become familiar with them, because for a long time his brain had been occupied with quite different matters. He read them, but understood very little of their obscure and secret sense, and the less he understood the more he respected them, and the deeper was his humility and dread. And now that dread and humility stood opposed to the true, tender love for his grandson, and he struggled between them.

"What profit can he draw from it?" thought Saul, and he met his grandson with angry looks.

Meir entered the parlour timidly. He already knew of the Rabbi's visit, and he guessed at the aim of it; he was afraid of his grandfather's anger and grief.

"Nu," said the old man, "come nearer. I am going to tell you beautiful things, at which you will rejoice greatly."

And when Meir had come to within a couple of steps from him, Saul looked at him sharply from beneath his bushy eyebrows, and said:

"I am going to betroth you, and in two months you must be married."

Meir grew pale, but was silent.

"I am going to betroth you to Jankiel Kamionker's daughter."

After these words there was quite a long silence, which Meir at last interrupted.

"Zeide," said he, in a low but determined voice, "I am not going to marry Kamionker's daughter."

"Why?" asked Saul, smothering his anger.

"Because, zeide," growing bolder and bolder, "Kamionker is a bad and unjust man, and I don't wish to have anything to do with him!"

Then Saul's anger burst out. He reproached his grandson for the audacity of this judgment, and praised Rob Jankiel's piety.

"Zeide," interrupted Meir, "he wrongs the poor!"

"Is that any of your business?" exclaimed the grandfather.

This time the young man's eyes shone warmly. "Zeide," he said, "he pockets a great deal of the money produced by the sweat and work of these miserable people who live at the other end of the town, and



through him they are thieves. While their children are naked, Reb Jankiel builds new houses! In the dram-shops and distilleries which he rents from the nobility he carries on evil acts. His dram-shop keepers make the peasants drunk, and cheat them, and his distilleries produce more vodka than is permitted by the Government. Zeide, you must not look at the way he prays, but the way he acts, for it is written: 'I do not need prayers, nor your sacrifices! The one who wrongs the poor man wrongs the Creator Himself!'"

Saul was very angry, but his grandson's quotation mollified him, for he very much desired to see him a scholar, and expert in the knowledge of the holy books.

"Well," muttered he angrily, but without vehemence, "it does not matter that Jankiel makes the peasants drunk, and that he produces more vodka than the law permits. You don't know yet that business is business! When you are married to Reb Jankiel's daughter, and go into partnership with him, you will do the same."

"Zeide," answered Meir quickly, "I shall neither produce nor sell vodka. I have no inclination for it."

"And what are you going to do—"

He did not finish, for Meir bent forward and seized his knees with his hands, and pressing his lips to them, he began to talk.

"Zeide, let me go hence! Let me go into the broad world! I will study! I wish to study, and here my eyes wander in darkness. Two years ago I made the same request, but you became angry, and ordered me to remain. I remained, zeide, because I respect you, and your commands are sacred to me. But now, zeide, let me go hence! If I go into the world with your permission and blessing, I shall become a learned man. I shall come back here and take my stand against the great Rabbi, and I shall know how to show him that he is a small man. Now—"

Saul did not permit him to speak further.

"Sha-a-a!" he exclaimed.

He was seized with fear at the mere mention of a strife between his grandson and the great Rabbi.

But Meir drew himself up, and with fire in his face and tears on his eyelashes, he spoke again:

"Zeide, remember the history of Rabbi Eliezer. When he was young his father did not let him go into the world. He ploughed the field, and looked into the dark forest which hid him from the world, and curiosity and longing ate into his heart as now they are eating into mine. He could not stand that yearning, and he escaped. He went to Jerusalem, to a great, world-famed scholar, and said to him: 'Let me be your pupil, and you shall be my master!' And it was as he said. And when, several years after, his father Hyrkanos came to Jerusalem, he saw there on the square a beautiful youth, who talked with the people, and the people listened to him, and their souls melted like wax before the great sweetness of his words, and all heads bent low before the youth and shouted: 'Behold our master!' Hyrkanos wondered much at the wise words of the man who stood on the heights, and at the great love which all the people bore him. And he asked of the man who stood beside him: 'What is the name of the youth who stands on the heights, and where does his father live? for I wish to bow before him, whose entrails have brought into the world such a son.' And the man whom he questioned made answer: 'That youth's name is Eliezer, a star over Israel's head, and his father's name is Hyrkanos.' When Hyrkanos heard this he shouted with a great voice, rushed toward the youth, and opened his arms. And then there was ecstatic joy in the hearts of both father and son, and the whole nation bowed before Hyrkanos, because his entrails brought into the world such a son."

Saul listened attentively to the story, half gloomy and half joyful. He cherished the traditions of his nation, and was delighted to listen to them, especially when they were spoken by the mouth of his much-loved grandson. He did not hesitate, however, in his answer. He half closed his eyes and began:

"If in Jerusalem there was to-day teaching such a famous learned man of Israel, I would send you to him at once, but the avenging hand of the Lord is laid on Jerusalem—she is no longer ours. When the day of the great Messiah shall come, she will again be ours. It is pleasant and sweet for a son of Israel to die there, but there is no one there to teach him. And I shall not send you into a foreign world to learn strange sciences. They are useless to an Israelite. From Edomit you have already learned as much as it is necessary for you to transact business in the foreign world, and even for that the great Rabbi has reproached me. And his reproaches are a shame and a sorrow, for, although the Rabbi is a wise man, my soul suffers when he comes to my house to scold me like the melamed scolds the little children in the heder."

Speaking thus, the old man became morose, and looked gloomily on the ground. Meir stood before him as though petrified, but in his eyes, looking into space, there was reflected a bottomless precipice of sad and rebellious sentiments.

"Zeide," he said finally, half in prayer and half abruptly, "then permit me to be an artisan. I will live in the same street with the poor. I will work with them and guard their souls from sin, And when they ask me something I will always answer them 'Yes' or 'No' When they lack bread I will divide with them all the bread I have in my house!"

Again his face burned and the tears shone on his eyelids. But Saul looked at him in the intensest amazement, and after a while he said:

"When you are two or three years older you will see how stupid you are in telling me such things. There has been no artisan in the Ezofowich family and, please God, there never shall be. We are merchants, from father to son; we have enough money, and each generation brings more. You shall be a merchant also, because every Ezofowich must be one."

The last words he spoke in an imperative voice, but after a while he continued a little more softly:

"I want to show you my favour. If you do not wish to marry Reb Jankiel's daughter, I will permit you not to marry her. But I shall betroth you to the daughter of Eli Witebski, the great merchant. You are longing for learning—flu! I am going to give you a very well educated wife. Her parents keep her in a boarding school at Wilno; she speaks French and plays the piano. Nu! if you are so difficult to please, that girl ought to suit you. She is sixteen years old. Her father will give her a big dowry, and immediately after the wedding will make you his partner."

From the expression of Meir's face it could be seen that his blood was boiling.

"I don't know Witebski's daughter. I never saw her," said he gloomily.

"Why do you need to know her?" exclaimed Saul; "I give her to you! In a month she will be back from Wilno and in two months you will be married! That is what I am telling you, and you, be silent and obey my commands. Up to the present I have given you too much liberty, but from now on it will be different. Isaak Todros told me to set my foot on your neck."

A flush appeared on Meir's pale face and his eyes flashed.

"Rabbi Isaak may put his feet on the necks of those who, like dogs, lick his feet!" he exclaimed. "I am an Israelite, as he is. I am no one's slave, I."

The words died on his quivering lips, for old Saul stood before him, drawn up to his full height, powerful, inflamed with anger, and raised his hand to strike him. But at that moment between the old man's thin hand and the burning face of the younger man, appeared a small hand, dried, wrinkled, trembling with old age, separating them. It was the hand of Freida, who was present during the whole conversation between the grandfather and grandson, and had seemed to doze in the sun and not hear anything. But when the room resounded with Meir's passionate exclamation, and Saul had risen, angry and threatening, she rose also, and silently advanced a few steps, until with her poor old hand she shielded her great-grandson. Saul's hand dropped. Having exclaimed to Meir in an already softened voice, "Weg!" (Get out) he fell into a chair, panting deeply.

The great-grandmother again sat down by the window in the sunlight. Meir left the room.

He went out with bent head and a gloomy expression on his face. At that moment he felt all the impotency of youth against age, influence, and authority. He felt that the fetters of the patriarchal organisation of his family were growing heavy on him. And the mere thought of that small, thin, trembling woman's hand, which had shielded him from a rough act of force, caused a touching smile of tenderness to appear on his lips. It was also a smile of hope.

"If I could only get that writing," he said to himself, passing his hand over his forehead.

He was thinking of the writing of Michael the Senior, of which the old great-grandmother alone knew the whereabouts. He thought also that if he could only find it he would know what to say and how to act.

In the meantime Saul sat for a long time, breathing heavily from weariness, and sighing from grief. He looked several times at his mother and smiled. The intervention of this silent, continually dozing, hundred-year-old-woman for her great-grandson, seemed strange to him, and perhaps in the bottom of his heart he was grateful to her for not permitting him to wrong his orphan grandson in a moment of

anger.

After a while he called: "Raphael."

The call was answered by a dignified dark-eyed man, already growing gray—his oldest son. After Saul he was the oldest of the family. He himself had grown-up grandchildren and was doing a very large business. On hearing his father call him he left his office and came to him immediately.

"Do you know if Eli Witebski is home?" asked Saul.

"Yes, he returned home yesterday," answered his son.

"Someone must go there at once and tell him that I wish to see him, and talk with him about an important matter."

"I will go myself," said Raphael; "I know about what you are going to talk with Witebski. You have an excellent idea, and it must be executed immediately. Meir may go astray if he is not married soon."

Saul's eyes searched his son's face inquiringly. "Raphael, do you think he will change when he is married?"

Raphael nodded his head affirmatively.

"Father," said he, "remember Ber. He was on the same road which Meir is travelling, but then he married Sarah, and you, father, took him into partnership and when the children began to come, one after another, all these stupid ideas left his head."

"Go! Call Witebski to me," concluded Saul.

Raphael left the room, and was soon walking in the direction of the house which stood at the corner of the two largest streets. On the piazza sat a plump woman in a silk gown, and a mantilla buckled with a gold brooch. On her ears were long earrings, and a carefully-combed wig was on her head. She was about forty, and looked fresh and healthy. Her mouth wore a smile of satisfaction and pride, and in her hands she held some fancy embroidery. When Raphael ascended the stairs she rose, and with the most exquisite bow ever made in Szybow, she extended her hand in welcome to the guest. Except Pani (Mrs.) Hannah Witebska, there was not another woman in Szybow who shook hands with a man. The English hand-shake, popular in the whole civilised world, evidently did not meet with the approval of the dignified Raphael, for he touched the plump Pani Hannah's hand a little reluctantly, and after a short greeting he asked for her husband.

"He is home," answered the woman, smiling continually, with chronic satisfaction and equally chronic pride; "he came back yesterday, and is now taking a rest."

"I came to talk with him," said Raphael

"Come in! come in!" exclaimed the woman, opening with hasty amiability the door leading into the house. "My husband will be much pleased to receive such a guest."

Raphael answered Pani Hannah's fashionable civilities by a swift nod of the head, and entered the house. Pani Hannah again sat down on the bench, and half closed her eyes disdainfully, whispering to herself:

"Nu! what people there are in this Szybow! They don't want to talk with women. They are like wild bears."

She sighed, moved her head several times, and added:

"Am I accustomed to such people? In our city of Wilno the people are civil and educated, not savages as here. Pfe!"

She sighed once more, continued her work mechanically, looking on the town and swarming people with the same smile of satisfaction and pride. Soon two men appeared in the door of the house. They were in conversation, and passed swiftly by the piazza and without looking at Pani Hannah they went in the direction of the Ezofowich house. Eli Witebski, walking with Raphael across the square, did not at all resemble his companion. Although a merchant, he represented quite a different type of the Hebrew trader. He was evidently fashionable and a dandy. His coat, although not entirely short, was a great deal shorter than the halat which Raphael wore, and it was cut quite differently. Across his silk waistcoat shone a thick gold chain, and he wore a big diamond ring on his finger. His face was serene, his eyes keen and penetrating. He had a small, yellowish beard to which he often raised his diamond-ornamented hand by a slow and deliberate movement.

He walked beside Raphael rapidly and with evident pleasure. At any rate, there was not a merchant in all Szybow who would not make equal haste if he were called by Saul Ezofowich. For ten years Saul had retired from business, and, except to go to the synagogue, he never left his house. But everyone who wished to draw from the treasures of his great experience and equal keenness in business transactions came to see him. Saul never refused advice, and even help, as far as he was able to give it, without wronging his children. And when he wished to speak to some dignitary of the community, he called them to him through his sons or grandsons and they hastened to him willingly. Therefore, on being called by the old patriarch, Eli Witebski hastened naturally. Smiling and radiant he entered the parlour, and greeted the host:

"Scholem Alejhem!" (Peace to you). He did not greet anyone outside of Szybow in such an old-fashioned way. On the contrary, he could say very correctly, Gut morgen (Good morning), but his unshaken rule was to accommodate himself to those with whom he had to deal.

Raphael wished to leave them, but Saul signed him to remain. They carefully closed all the doors, and spoke together for quite a while. But no matter how low they spoke, the frolicsome Lija, Raphael's daughter, put her little nose to the closed door, and her dark eye to the keyhole, and often heard repeated the names of Meir and Mera, Witebski's daughter first, and then her own name and that of a certain Leopold, Pani Hannah's cousin. She sprang from the door covered with blushes, half-confused, and half-seized with a secret joy, and then she constantly looked through the window to see as soon as possible when her cousin returned.

The sun had begun to set when Witebski left the Ezofowich's house, beaming, smiling, and evidently very much pleased with the transaction, or, perhaps, two transactions closed at the same time.

Almost at the same moment Meir returned home. Lija rushed to meet him, and, in the gate of the court-yard, placing her arm about his neck, she whispered in his ear:

"Do you know, Meir, a great thing has happened to-day in our house. Our zeide and my father spoke a long time with Eli Witebski, and they came to an agreement about us. Witebski has promised his daughter to you, and my father has promised me to Paul Hannah's nephew, who is very well educated."

She whispered all this, blushing, and too confused to dare to raise her eyes to her cousin's face. At once she felt that, by a sudden movement, he slipped from her embrace, and, when she raised her eyes, she saw Meir again leaving the gate of the house.

"Meir!" exclaimed the girl, in surprise, "where are you going? Are you not going to have supper with us?"

The departing young man did not answer the girl's voice calling him to the family table. A deep wrinkle angrily cut his forehead. Now he understood the nothingness of his exclamation in the presence of his grandfather: "I am no one's slave!" They disposed, without the slightest regard for his will, of his future, of his family, and he knew that the commands of the elders must be obeyed.

No! He shuddered to think that it must be so. Why? He did not know the young girl Mera, who, somewhere in the world, was studying the same things which he himself desired so much. But, walking through the town and the empty fields separating it from the Karaim's Hill, walking slowly, with hands behind him, and bent head, he thought obstinately, almost mechanically, and incessantly, "I am no one's slave!" Pride and the desire for freedom boiled in his heart, aroused by some unknown source, probably those secret breaths of nature sown in the fields by noble and strong spirits thirsting for liberty, righteousness, and knowledge.

At the foot of the Karaim's Hill, in the hut which clung closely to its sandy side, there burned a small, yellow light. Over it, through the forked branches of the willow tree, shone many small stars, and further on, over the great fields, lay the gray shadows of the dusk.

In the interior of the hut, against the low wall, was seated an old man, working with the flexible willow branches. His figure was gray in the dusk of the hut, and the features of the bent face could not be seen. The tall, straight figure of a girl, with a thin face, sat in a wooden chair near the flame of the candle. In one dropped hand a spindle was softly twirling, and over her head was a board with a big bunch of wool fastened to it. From the wall, where the old man sat, came a hoarse, trembling voice:

"In the midst of the desert, so large that one could not see its end, rose two mountains so high that their summits were hidden in the clouds. The names of these mountains were Horeb and Sinai."

The voice became silent, and the girl, who listened gravely while she spun, said:

"Zeide, speak further."

But at that moment a manly voice was heard at the open window.

"Golda!"

The spinner was neither frightened nor surprised at this sudden pronunciation of her name by a strange voice. It might almost be said that at any moment she expected to hear that voice, so gravely, and with so little emotion did she rise and go to the window. Only her eyes shone warmly under: the dark lashes, and her voice was inexpressibly sweet when, standing at the lattice, she said softly:

"Meir! I knew that you would keep your promise and come."

"Golda," said the muffled voice from behind the window, "I came to see you because to-day there is a great darkness before my eyes, and I wished to look at you, that the world might become brighter to me."

"And why is it so dark to-day before your eyes?" asked the girl.

"A great sorrow has befallen me. Rabbi Todros has accused me of wrongdoing before my zeide, and my zeide wishes to marry me."

He became silent and dropped his eyes. The girl did not move. Not the slightest movement of her face or figure betrayed emotion—only her swarthy and sun-burned face grew white.

"To whom does your zeide wish to marry you?" she asked, and her voice had a gloomy sound.

"To Mera, the daughter of the merchant Witebski."

She shook her head.

"I don't know her."

Then she asked suddenly:

"Meir, are you going to marry her?"

The young man did not answer. Golda, however, did not ask him again. Her swarthy forehead was bathed in a blush and an expression of great bliss filled her eyes, for Meir's sweet, deep and at the same time fiery look, rested on her face.

Both were silent, and amidst the tranquillity, interrupted only by the rustling of the branches overhanging the roof, there was heard again the hoarse and trembling voice of the old man sitting by the wall.

"When Moses descended Mount Sinai, the thunders were silenced, the lightning was quenched, the wind lay down, and all Israel rose as one man and exclaimed with a great voice: 'Moses, repeat to us the words of the Eternal!'"

Meir listened attentively to the old voice relating the history of Israel. Golda looked at her grandfather.

"He always tells the different stories," she said. "I spin or lie at his feet and listen."

"Meir," she added, with gravity in her look and her voice, "enter our house and greet my grandfather."

In a few moments the door of the small hall creaked. Old Abel raised his head from the willow branches, which his trembling but active hand continually plaited, and seeing in the dark, the handsome figure of the young man, he said:

"Who is there?"

"Zeide," said Golda, "Meir Ezofowich, son of the rich Saul, has come to our house to greet you."

At the sound of that name pronounced by Golda, he shrunk against the wall, suddenly raised himself and leaning with both hands on the straw sheaf on which he sat, he stretched forward his yellow neck, swathed in rags. This brought near the flame a head covered with long, abundant white hair, and a small shrivelled face which was almost hidden by an enormous beard. Golda spoke the truth when she stated that her grandfather's hair had become white as snow from old age, and coral-like red were his eyes from weeping. Now, from beneath these swollen eyelids, the quenched pupils looked with an

amazement of fear at first, and then with a sudden lighting of indignation or hatred.

"Ezofowich!" he exclaimed in a voice which was neither so hoarse nor so trembling as before, "why have you come here and passed the threshold of my house? You are a Rabbinit—foe—persecutor. Your great-grandfather cast an anathema at my ancestors and turned their temple into dust. Go from here. My old eyes shall not be poisoned by looking at you."

While speaking the last words he stretched his trembling hand toward the door through which the young man had entered.

But Meir stepped forward slowly, and bending his head before the angry old man said:

"Peace to you!"

Under the influence of those sweet words, pronounced with sonority and expressing a prayer for a blessing and concord, the old man became silent, fell back on his seat, and only after a long while did he begin to speak in a plaintive, pitiful voice:

"Why did you come here? You are a Rabbinit, and the great-grandson of the powerful Senior. Your people will curse you if they see you pass my threshold, for I am the last Karaite who remained here to watch the ruins of our temple and the ashes of our ancestors. I am a beggar! I am cursed by your people! I am the last of the Karaites!"

Meir listened to the old man's words in respectful silence.

"Reb," said he after a while, "I bend my head low before you because it is necessary that justice be done in the world, and that the great-grandson of the one who cursed should bow before the great-grandson of the accursed."

Abel Karait listened attentively to these words. Then he was silent for a while, as though he was pondering in his tired mind, over the meaning of them. Finally he understood them entirely, and whispered:

"Peace be to you!"

Golda stood with her arms crossed on her bosom, looking on Meir as pious people look on a holy image. Having heard the words of peace from her grandfather's lips, she pushed toward Meir one of two chairs, took a small, shining pitcher and went into the hall.

Meir sat near the old man who was again busy with his work and whispered something. After a while this whispering became louder until it changed into a hoarse and trembling narrative. It seemed that was his habit. He had plenty of stories in his head and heart, and with them he brightened his miserable life.

Meir could not hear the first whispers, and only understood their meaning when the old man began to speak louder:

"On the shores of Babylon they sat weeping, and the wind moaned in their lutes, brought by them from their country, and in sadness they hung them on the trees."

"And their masters came to them, and said: 'Take to your hands your harps; play, and sing!' And they answered: 'How can we play and sing in the land of exile, when our tongues are dried with great bitterness and our hearts only know how to cry! Palestine! Palestine!' But unto them their masters said: 'Take from the trees your harps. Play and sing!'"

"Then Israel's prophets looked at one another and said: 'Who of us is sure? Who will stand torture that we may not be made to play and sing in the land of exile!'"

"And when their masters came to them the next day and said: 'Take from the trees your harps; play and sing!' the prophets of Israel raised their bloody hands and exclaimed: 'How can we take them, when our hands are cut in two, and we have no fingers!'"

"The rivers of Babylon rustled aloud with great amazement and the wind cried in the harps hanging on the trees, because the prophets of Israel had cut their hands in two rather than be forced to sing in the land of exile."

When Abel finished the last words of the old legend, Golda entered the room. In one hand she held a tray made of straw, on which there were two earthen cups. In the other hand she held a shining pitcher filled with milk. In the door, which remained open behind her, appeared the goat, whose whiteness stood out against the blackness of the hall. The girl was dressed in a faded skirt, and her long black

tresses were thrown over the shoulders of the gray shirt which she wore. She poured the milk into the cups and handed it to the guest and her grandfather. She walked into the room quietly and lightly, with a smile on her lips. Then she sat down and began to spin. The room was in complete silence, and old Abel began to whisper some old story. But soon his mouth closed, his hands dropped on the sheaf of willow branches and his head rested motionlessly against the wall. The goat disappeared from the threshold and for a while could be heard her tramping in the little hall. Then everything became quiet. The young people remained alone in the presence of the slumbering old man and the stars which looked in through the low window, The girl was spinning, gazing into the face of the young man who sat opposite to her. He, with dropped eyelids was thinking.

"Golda," said he, after a long while, "the prophets of Israel, who cut their hands in two rather than be forced to play and be the slaves of their masters, were great men."

"They did not wish to act against their hearts," answered the girl gravely.

They were silent again. The spindle still turned in Golda's hand, but less and less swiftly and more quietly. Gusts of wind blew through the chinks in the wall and caused the yellow flame of the candle to flicker.

"Golda," said Meir, "is it not frightful for you in this solitary cabin, when the long fall and winter drop black darkness over the earth, and great winds enter through the walls and moan about the house?"

"No," answered the girl, "it is not frightful for me, because the Eternal watches the poor huts standing in the darkness, and when the winds enter here and moan, I listen to the stories zeide tells me, and I do not hear their moaning."

Meir gazed pityingly into the face of the grave child. Golda looked at him with motionless eyes, which shone like black, fiery stars.

"Golda," said Meir again, "do you remember the story of Rabbi Akiba?"

"I shall never forget it to the end of my life," she answered.

"Golda, could you wait fourteen years, like the beautiful Rachel?"

"I could wait until the end of my life."

She said this quietly and gravely, but the spindle slipped from her hand and dropped.

"Meir," said she, so softly that the whispering of the wind almost deafened her words, "you must promise me one thing. When you have a sorrow in your heart, then come to our house. Let me know your every grief, let zeide console you with his beautiful stories."

"Golda," said Meir, in a strong voice, "I would rather cut my hand in two, as did the prophets of Israel, than act against my heart."

Having said this he rose and nodded to the girl.

"Peace to you!" he said.

"Peace to you," she answered softly, nodding to him slowly.

He went out, and after a while the girl rose, blew out the yellow flame of the burned-out candle, and having wrapped herself in some gray cloth, she lay down on the straw beside the sleeping old man. She lay down, but for a long time she watched the shining stars.

## CHAPTER VII

Eli Witebski possessed in his mind and character many diplomatic qualities. He was neither born nor brought up in Szybow, as were without exception all the inhabitants of the town; but three years ago had settled there on account of business matters as well as for various family reasons. Among the population who lived there for generations he was therefore almost a stranger, and in addition to that, having spent his whole life in a large city, he brought with him many new customs which astonished and shocked the ultra-conservative inhabitants of this lost corner of the world. Among these differences were the different cut and material of his clothing, the wearing of the diamond ring, the rejection of the skull cap on his head, the short clipping of his beard, and the absolute lack in his house of Talmudistic and Kabalistic books, and, principally, the possession of such a wife as Pani Hannah, of a daughter who was studying somewhere in a boarding school, and besides this daughter Mera, only two more children.

These innovations, never seen nor heard of before, should have been the cause of drawing on the elegant merchant a general dislike of the population of Szybow. But they did not. It is true that at first so-and-so whispered to so-and-so that he was a misnagdim, progressive and indifferent in matters of religion. But these suspicious notions soon disappeared, stopped chiefly by Eli's extraordinary affability, amiability, and the power of adapting himself to any and all circumstances. Always good-natured smiling, and serene, he never argued with anybody, stood out of the way for everybody, affirmed nothing, avoided quarrels in order not to be obliged to take sides with the participants and thus offend the other, and when he could not avoid so doing, spoke so sweetly and convincingly that the antagonists, enraptured with his eloquence, became reconciled, bearing in their hearts gratitude and admiration for him, and speaking of him with enthusiasm. Ein kluger Mensch! As to rites and religious rules, Witebski proved to be perfectly orthodox. He observed the Sabbath, and kept kosher house with the minutest punctuality. Every time he met the great Rabbi he bowed very low, and he as no other before could make bright the eyes of the learned man, by telling him merry stories—taken no one knew whence, and he always told them in such a way that they possessed something of a mystic and patriotic character, and pleased even the most severely religious listeners. He did not spend much time at home, but continually travelled for business purposes, but every time he was seen in Szybow he was seen in the Bet-ha-Midrash, listening with due respect to the learned preaching of Rabbi Todros, or smiling when numbers of old and young scholars of the community passionately discussed Pilpul, or spoke of different commentaries, or commentaries on commentaries, with which twenty-five hundred printed sheets of Helaha, Hagada and Gemara were filled. He was also always to be seen in the synagogue, whenever there was occasion for a general attendance, and although he could not be counted among the most zealously praying ones, nor the most vehemently swaying ones, his attitude and the expression of his face were perfectly decent.

But it must not be thought that Witebski was a hypocrite; not at all—he was sincerely fond of peace and good understanding, and did not wish them disturbed for himself nor for others. He was successful in life; he felt happy and satisfied, and consequently he loved everybody, and it was a matter of absolute indifference to him whether the man with whom he had to deal was a Talmudist, a Kabbalist, Hassyd, orthodox, heretic, or even Edomit, provided he was not obnoxious to him. He learned of the Edomits for the first time in his life when he came to Szybow, for in the circle in which he lived Christians were called gojem and that only seldom, and under the influence of exceptional sentiments of anger or offence. But when he came to Szybow and learned of the Edomits, he thought, "Let them be Edomits!" and from that time he spoke of Christians by that name when in conversation with the inhabitants of Szybow. But in the use of that name he felt not the slightest hatred nor even dislike. Until now the Edomits had done him no wrong—then why should he dislike them? Outside of Szybow he was friendly with them—he was even very fond of them—but in Szybow he did as everyone else did. He had received his religious education when he was young, but he afterward forgot everything amidst entirely secular occupations and cares. He believed in Jehovah and worshipped him profoundly; he knew the history of Moses and also something about the Babylonian captivity and the later history of the Jewish people, but he did not know much of the deeper meaning of these things. In the main he did not care what Tanait or some Rabbi said or commanded. But he did not contradict anything either by word or deed—not even by thought. He did everything that was commanded, thinking to himself: "There is no harm in it. Maybe it's only a human invention, but again it may be God's command—why should I anger Him against me." Thus, acting diplomatically with the people and with God, he was not afraid of anything, and he was happy. He would have been completely happy if he had not brought with him to Szybow that greatest and, for the inhabitants of Szybow, most astonishing novelty, his wife Hannah. In the same degree that it was his object while living in the small town to act as did everyone else there, it was the greatest desire of Pani Hannah to act differently from everyone else. When they had lived in a large city there was celestial harmony between them based on mutual attachment and similarity of taste. Here, however, Pani Hannah became to her husband the cause of perpetual embarrassment and occasional fear.

Pani Hannah was in love with civilisation, which for her assumed the form of beautiful dresses, her own hair on her head, elegantly furnished rooms, polite relations with her fellow-men, the French language and music. Music was her craze. When they dwelt in a large city she went to the public gardens to listen to it, where, walking with her friends, clad in a rustling silk gown and plumed hat, gazing at handsome men and chatting with amiable women, she felt perfectly happy, and still more proud of her social position. Certain products of civilisation especially caused her rapture. Once, perceiving in a public garden a fountain, she admired it for a couple of hours with inexpressible delight, and on returning to her city, which did not possess a fountain, she talked to her friends during the whole year of that beautiful phenomenon. She was also very fond of mirrors, and when she found herself opposite a large mirror she could not tear her eyes away from it, and especially from the reflected image of herself, which she found very handsome, with her big golden earrings, a hat with flowers on it, and a charming gown. As for religion, she knew still less about it than her husband. She believed in God, and at the bottom of her heart she was even very much afraid of Him, and she believed



also in the devil, fearing him even more than God. She also believed that a person who did not see his shadow on a holiday night would die within a year, and even that a person who moved a candle on the Sabbath table would meet with a great misfortune. On the other hand, however, she did not believe many similar things—calling them superstitions. Being a good housekeeper, she acknowledged in the depths of her soul that it would be better if the Jews ate the same meat as the Christians, both because it would be a great deal cheaper, and because there would not be the need in the household of having so many kitchen dishes, which every orthodox household must have in order to keep the food properly kosher. As for the woven stuffs containing a mixture of wool and flax, Pani Hannah closed her eyes and ears to all interdictions, and used them without hesitation, because they were pretty and cheap. When she came to Szybow she was perfectly horrified. There was not one sign of civilisation—no public garden no music, no fountain, not even the shadow of beautiful women and handsome men chatting amiably, no echo of the French language. Good Heavens! Pani Hannah betook herself to bed, and buried herself in feather bolsters for two whole days and nights, lamenting and screaming that she could not stand it, that she would die and make orphans of her children. She did not die, however. She left the bed, because it was necessary to unpack things, to look after the household and dress the children prettily so that when they went into the streets they should astonish by their beauty and fine clothes that—as Pani Hannah expressed it, with a gesture of contempt—"rabble." The children were dressed, went out, and in truth they did astonish everyone. It was the first consolation which the unhappy exile from civilisation received in her place of banishment. Then came other similar consolations. Pani Hannah tried to amaze in everything she was able—dresses, furniture, manners, speech—and in doing so, she felt extremely happy. In the main, perhaps she was happier than in a large city. There she only looked on civilisation and its products and was proud of being one particle of it. Here she was civilisation itself—the whole sum of the civilisation existing in Szybow.

This love for amazing the people which, after the care of the children and the household, was the first occupation of Pani Hannah's mind, and the source of her greatest happiness caused her husband considerable uneasiness and fear. In the beginning he had heard some murmurs that he was a misnagdim he learned that the popular indignation had been aroused against his wife for wearing woven stuff of mixed flax and wool, and for using a samovar on Sabbath, and for saying that; "Szybow was not on the earth, but under it." When he learned of all these things he quaked with fear, and began to war with his better-half about the stuff of flax and wool, about the use of the samovar on the Sabbath, and about the situation of Szybow. His better-half fought for a long time, but the diplomatic husband was finally victorious regarding the samovar and the stuff. But he could do nothing regarding the situation of Szybow, because Pani Hannah could not but respect the place where she herself lived, in spite of all efforts of her will. Even if she was silent, her disdainfully half-closed eyes, her proudly smiling mouth, always elaborate dress, and her manners full of such exquisite courtesy, made it impossible to find anyone in the whole world more civil than she was, all that was protesting. In the main, Pani Hannah was perfectly happy with her meek, though at times decided husband, with pretty, always beautifully dressed children, and with the sentiment always in her soul that she was superior to everything surrounding her. She had only one great sorrow, and that; was the thought that she would never be able to amaze the inhabitants of Szybow by wearing her own hair; in the first place, because it was too late to make it grow now, and then Eli would never permit such a public scandal. Therefore she was obliged to wear a very pretty wig on her sorrowful head, and she consoled herself with the thought that the occasion of her daughter Mera's return from Wilno would be her greatest triumph. Eli was very uneasy about this, for he feared that he would be accused of being quite different from all the fathers in Szybow. As for Pani Hannah, she was beside herself with joy at the thought that she would be considered a quite different mother from all the other mothers in Szybow.

Finally it was accomplished. In a month after Eli's conversation with Saul there were assembled in Witebski's parlour five persons—two men and three women. And it was not a common parlour! it was ornamented with a sofa, having springs and upholstered in green rep—the only sofa of its kind in Szybow—several armchairs to match it, and a piano. It is true, it was not very new. In several places the varnish had been rubbed off, and the narrowness of the keys and the yellowness of the ivory betrayed its great antiquity. In fact, it was the only piano in the whole of Szybow. When a year ago it had been bought for the exclusive use of Mera, it caused a small revolution in the town and Pani Hannah's heart filled with joy and great pride. This parlour was also not lacking in lace curtains and several jardinieres in which grew several—to tell the truth—very ugly and badly kept cacti and geraniums. But it happened that a year ago one of the cacti had by some accident bloomed. Pani Hannah immediately placed it in the window looking on the street, and all the children in town came to her house to look at the red flower.

So, then, on the green sofa with springs, sat Pani Hannah and her sister, the wife of a merchant in Wilno, in whose house Mera had boarded during her three years of study at the college. She escorted her niece home personally, bringing with her, in the meanwhile, her son Leopold. Her figure was imposingly like Pani Hannah's. She wore a velvet mantilla, much gold jewellery and her own hair. On

either side of the table which stood opposite the sofa, sat the host and Pani Hannah's young nephew Leopold. Mera, a pretty girl, with yellow hair and pale complexion, was hovering about the piano, wishing to touch the keys as soon as possible, and fill the whole house with merry music, but not daring to because it was Sabbath.

Mera knew that it was forbidden to play any musical instrument on Sabbath, but she would not have minded such prohibition had it not been for the glance of her father which followed her and warned her against committing a sin. Neither was it allowed to smoke on the Sabbath, but Leopold, a good-looking, slender youth of about twenty years, sat in the armchair in a very careless position smoking a cigarette, from which thin threads of smoke arose and floated through the open window; Eli rose and shut the window. On Leopold's lips a disdainful smile appeared, Mera shrugged her shoulders, and Pani Hannah blushed with shame.

On a table, on a silver tray, were different dainties prepared from honey—gingerbread, made with honey and poppy-seeds, sweet wine, and various other things. Pani Hannah served her guests with these tit-bits, which completed the dinner, composed of fish cooked the day before, and a cake also baked the day before. But her sister, the wife of the merchant from Wilno, was busy with something quite different from eating sweetmeats. With great admiration she was looking at the beautiful and precious brooches, rings, bracelets, and earrings, shining in their satin boxes. All these jewels were presents of betrothal sent by Saul, in Meir's name, to Mera, immediately following her home-coming. For two days the mother and aunt of the betrothed girl had been looking at them, and they were not yet satisfied. But Leopold's mother was sorry that her son had brought to Lija, his promised wife, presents which were a great deal more modest than those received by Mera from Meir.

"Nu! She is a lucky girl!" she said, tossing her head. "God-gives her true happiness. Such presents! Such nice people. But why does he not come here?" she asked her sister.

"Iii!" exclaimed Pani Hannah, with a disdainful smile, "they are common people. It is not customary that the bridegroom should visit his fiancée!"

"He is young," said Eli, "he is bashful." At that moment Mera sat down by the table, and leaning her head on her hand became sadly thoughtful. Leopold, on the contrary, laughed loudly.

"To be sure, I will not send my presents of betrothal before I have seen the girl," he said.

"Nu, you shall see her," said his mother. "We are all going to pay them a visit."

"What kind of a girl is she?" asked Pani Hannah's sister.

"Iii!" answered Pani Hannah, as before, "she is a common girl."

"Her father, Raphael, gives her fifteen thousand roubles as dowry," said Eli.

Leopold frowned.

"That's not much," he said. "I cannot live on fifteen thousand."

"You will start some business," remarked the merchant.

But the mother of the good looking boy turned angrily to her brother-in-law.

"Business!" she exclaimed, "he is not brought up for business! Did we give him a fine education for business? He was through five classes in the gymnasium (college) and he is now an official. It is true that he has as yet only a small salary, but who knows what may happen! He may be appointed to a governorship! Who can tell?"

Leopold raised his eyebrows significantly, indicating that he was satisfied at having been born for such honours and that he did not object to the likelihood of receiving a governorship.

Eli nodded and said nothing. "It does not matter," he thought, "that they talk nonsense. Let them talk!" At that moment pretty Mera raised her head and said to her cousin.

"Cousin! comme c'est ennuyant ici!"

"Oui, cousine! cette vilaine petite ville est une place tres ennuyante!" answered he, whistling.

The two mothers, seated on the sofa, did not understand a word, but they looked at each other and blushed for joy, and Pani Hannah stretched her plump hand across the table and caressed her daughter's hair.

"Fischele!" (little fish) said she, with an indescribable smile of beauty and love on her lips.

Even on Eli the French language made some impression. His face, which had been a little sorrowful, became serene again. He rose and said cheerfully:

"Nu, let us be going. It's time."

In a few minutes they descended from the piazza into the street. Eli's face had again become sorrowful. Nothing could be more unorthodox than the dress of his relative. It consisted of a short, fashionable coat, shining shoes and very widely-open waistcoat, which showed the entire snowy shirtfront. On his head he wore a small cap, with the official star, and before going out he had lighted a cigarette.

It was a hard thing for Eli to contradict anyone—much more his guest and the pet of the two women whom he at any rate respected. But when he went out on the piazza and saw the crowds of people—whom the Sabbath day brought out in swarms—he could not refrain from warning the lad.

"Leopold, listen!" said he, quietly and gently, "you had better throw that cigarette away. The people are stupid here, but you had better not irritate them. And perhaps," he added immediately, "God himself forbids smoking on the Sabbath. Who can tell?"

Leopold laughed aloud.

"I am not afraid of anything!" said he, and springing down the steps of the piazza he offered Mera his arm.

Leopold and Mera then walked ahead arm in arm. They were followed by the magnificent mothers in balloon-like dresses, velvet mantillas, and enormous hats covered with flowers. Eli brought up the retinue, walking slowly and with a conspicuously sorrowful face and hands folded behind him.

If attracting the attention of the numerous crowd could be called a triumph, the march of the Witebski family across the square of the town was certainly a triumphal one. In the twinkling of an eye a crowd of children of all ages and both sexes were following them, and, in the beginning with muffled exclamation, but finally with loud shouting, they began to run after them. Soon older people joined the children, and even more prominent families appeared on the piazzas of their houses surrounding the square. In the gate of the school-yard stood the melamed, in his usual primitive dress and as though he could not believe the evidence of his own widely-open eyes. He looked at the astonishing show passing the square.

The greatest attention was drawn by the young couple walking ahead; Leopold, clad in his elegant coat, and with a cigarette in his mouth, and Mera, in her very balloon-like bright dress, leaning on her cousin's arm and drawing herself up in order to show off to advantage her society manners.

Eli walked as though on live coals, but Pani Hannah strode forward as though crowned with laurels. Her sister looked around the dark crowd with half-closed eyes and head carried high.

"Zi! Zi! a shejne puryc! a shejne panienkies!" shouted the children, running, jumping, pointing with their fingers, and raising clouds of dust with their feet.

"Who are they? Are they Jews?" asked the older people, pointing at Leopold's short coat and Cigarette.

"Misnagdim!" suddenly shouted some voice in the crowd, and a small stone, thrown by an unknown hand, passed close to Leopold's head. The young man grew pale and threw away the cigarette—the cause of the general scandal. Eli frowned. But Pani Hannah raised her head still higher and said quite loudly to her sister:

"Nu, we must forgive them. They are so ignorant!"

Leopold, however, did not forgive the stone thrown at him. This could be seen by his frightened eyes and tightened lips when he entered the Ezofowichs' parlour.

There on the sofa—the place of honour—sat old Saul surrounded by his sons, sons-in-law, and several older grandchildren. At one of the windows, as usual, sat the always slumbering great-grandmother. At the other window stood Meir.

When Witebski's family entered the parlour, Meir merely glanced at Mera, as though she was perfectly indifferent to him, but he looked sharply, inquisitively, at Leopold. He evidently desired to approach as soon as possible the man who came from the broad world, and penetrate him through and

through.

For a while only preliminary conversation and loud greetings were heard. Saul did not leave his place on the sofa. His daughter Sarah, Ber's wife, received the guests, serving them with dainties, loudly admiring the beauty of the hats and dresses of the ladies.

Mera sat graciously on the edge of a chair, amused by the bashful, embarrassed, and at the same time joyful Lija, and glancing askance at the young man standing at the window, guessing that he must be her intended husband. But she did not once meet his glance. Meir seemingly ignored her existence. He looked constantly at Leopold. Pani Hannah was telling with great animation, and still greater pride to the women surrounding her, of the fountain which she had once seen in a large city, and about the music which was played every Sunday in the public garden in Wilno. In the meantime she was examining the Ezofowichs' parlour. In fact, the large, clean room with its simple furniture, possessed an air of thrift and riches, which was a great deal more attractive than Pani Hannah's speckled salon. There was also a library filled with large volumes, which, according to the traditions of the Ezofowich family, were formerly the property of Michael the Senior. There was a cupboard filled with silver and china, and on the top of it stood a large samovar, shining like gold. When Pani Hannah saw this a blush of shame appeared on her face. A samovar in the parlour of the family of her future son-in-law! It was contrary to all rules of civilisation of which she knew anything. Soon, however, from this highly indecent object her glance passed on to the great-grandmother slumbering in her arm-chair. At that moment a ray of the setting sun fell on the motionless figure, lighting up the jewels with which she was covered. Like fiery stars over her forehead shone the rich gems ornamenting her turban, while her earrings threw out thousands of sparks, and the pearls on her bosom took on a faint pink glow.

Pani Hannah elbowed her sister slightly.

"Zi," whispered she, indicating the old women by a motion of her head, "what splendid diamonds!"

The wife of the merchant of Wilno half closed her eyes in admiration.

"Aj! Aj!" exclaimed she, "a true treasure. But why does such an old woman wear so many precious stones?"

Saul heard the exclamation, and with dignified civility he said, bending toward his guests:

"She deserves our respect, and to be covered by us with all the precious stones in the possession of our family. She was her husband's crown, and all of us as branches from a tree, take our life from her."

He closed his eyes a little and continued:

"Now she is very old, but she once was young and very beautiful, And where has her beauty disappeared to? It was erased by the years—by months and days passing over her like birds flying one after the other, pick one berry after another, until they have picked them all. It is true, she has now many wrinkles on her face. But whence come these wrinkles? I know; for looking at her I see some picture in each one. When I look at the wrinkles in her eyelids, and around her eyes, I remember that when I was small, and was ill she sat by my cradle and sang to lull me to sleep, and the tears poured from her eyes. And when I look at the wrinkles so numerous on her cheeks, I remember all the sorrows and griefs she has passed through, when she became a widow, refused to marry again, conducting business affairs personally and increasing the wealth of her children. And when I look at the wrinkle which appears in the middle of her forehead, it seems that I live again the moment that my father's soul left its body, and my mother fell to the floor like one dead. She did not cry nor moan, but only sobbed sweetly, 'Hersh! Hersh! My Hersh!' It was the greatest sorrow of her life, and left on her forehead that deep line."

Thus spoke old Saul, with his index finger raised solemnly and a thoughtful smile on his yellow lips. The women listening to him shook their heads, half sadly, half affirmatively, and looking at each other they repeated softly:

"Hohr! Hohr!" (Listen! Listen!)

Pani Hannah was moved to tears. She dried them with a lace handkerchief which she held in her hand, and stretching this hand toward Saul she said:

"Danke! Danke!" with a smile of gratitude on her lips.

"Danke!" (Thanks!) the majority of those present repeated after her. Then Pani Hannah's sister, Witebski, and two or three other people not belonging to the family, said in a hushed voice:

"Ein kluger mensch! Ein ehrlicher mensch!" (A clever man! An honest man!)

The filial love and respect manifested by Saul, and his picturesque narrative, made a pleasant impression on all hearts and minds.

Only young Leopold, who until now sat silent and gloomy, or spoke in French with Mera, rose from his chair and went toward the window where Meir stood. Around the sofa a lively conversation had been recommenced by Pani Hannah, who expressed a regret that it was Sabbath, and that there was no piano, for her daughter was thus prevented from playing such music as melted all hearts, and brought before the mind's eye the botanical garden of Wilno, where the band of music played, and different other things which belonged to her lost paradise of civilisation.

The two young men remained completely isolated. No one could hear their conversation. It seemed that Leopold had no intention of starting a conversation with Meir. He went toward the window with quite a different motive, which was betrayed by his taking from his pocket a silver cigarette case. But Meir, when he saw the young man approach him, advanced a few steps. His face beamed with joy.

"I am Meir, Saul's grandson," said he, extending his hand to the guest. "I wish very much to make your acquaintance, to tell you many things, and ask you many things."

Leopold bowed to him elegantly but ceremoniously, and barely touched Meir's warm hand. Meir's eyes, which had been bright with joy, now saddened.

"You don't care to know me," said he, "and I don't wonder at it. You are an educated man, and I—am a simple Jew, who knows the Bible and Talmud well, but nothing more. But listen to me, at any rate! I have thoughts of many things, but they are not yet in order. Perhaps you can tell me how to become wise?"

Leopold listened to these words, vibrating first with youthful enthusiasm, with anxiety in which there was a shade of irony.

"Willingly," said he, "if you wish to learn something from me I will be glad to tell you. Why not? I can tell you many things, sir!"

"Leopold, don't call me 'sir.' It hurts me, for I love you very much."

Leopold was surprised at this simplicity of sentiment.

"I am glad of it!" said he; "but it's the first time we have met."

"It doesn't matter!" exclaimed Meir; "for a long time I have wished to meet such an Israelite as you are, and say to him, as Rabbi Eliezer said to the sage in Jerusalem, 'Let me be your pupil, and be you my teacher.'"

This time surprise was clearly expressed in the face of the young fashionable, and his irony increased. It was evident that he did not at all understand Meir's speech, and that he considered him as being half a savage. Meir, absorbed in his enthusiasm, did not notice the impression he had made.

"Leopold," he began, "how many years did you study in that foreign school?"

"What foreign school?" asked Leopold.

"Nu, in that school where they do not teach Jewish studies."

Leopold understood now. He half closed his eyes, pursed his mouth, and answered:

"Well, I went to the gymnasium for five years."

"Five years!" exclaimed Meir, "then you must be a very learned man, if you have gone to school for such a long time."

"Well," answered the guest, with an indulgent smile, "there are people in the world who are more learned than I."

Meir approached his companion still nearer, and his eyes shone more brightly.

"What do they teach in the school?" he asked.

"Different things."

"What are those different things?"

Leopold, with an ironical smile, began to enumerate all the subjects taught in public schools.

Meir interrupted him, saying with animation:

"And you know all these subjects?"

"Yes, I do," answered the guest.

"And what are you doing now?"

This question was asked with great anxiety, and astounded the good-looking chap.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Nu, I wish to know, I wish to know the thoughts with which these studies have filled your head, and what you are doing in the world."

"What I am doing? I am an official in the office of the governor himself, and I copy important papers."

Meir thought for a while.

"That is not what I wished to know about. You copy those papers for money. Every man must earn. But I wish to know what you think about when you are sometimes alone, and what those thoughts impel you to accomplish in the world."

Leopold opened widely his eyes.

"Well," he exclaimed impatiently, "what should I think about? When I leave my office I return home, smoke a cigarette, and think of the time when I shall marry and get a dowry, and my father will give me my share, and I shall purchase a house. On the ground floor I shall fix pretty stores, the second floor I shall let to some rich people, and I shall live on the third floor."

This time it was Meir's turn to be amazed. "And you, Leopold, don't you think of anything else?"

"Well, of what else should I think? Thank God I have no sorrows. I live and board with my parents and my salary is sufficient to buy my clothes."

Meir looked at the floor, and a deep wrinkle appeared on his forehead, as was customary with him when he was hurt.

"Leopold, listen," he said, after a few moments of deep thought, "are there not many poor and ignorant Jews in your great city?"

Leopold laughed.

"There are plenty of them everywhere."

"And what are your thoughts when you see them?" asked Meir violently.

"What should they be? I think they are very stupid and very dirty!"

"And looking at them, do you think of nothing else?" asked Meir, almost in a whisper.

Leopold opened his cigarette case, and selected a cigarette. Meir, plunged in thought, did not notice this.

"Leopold," he began again, with awakened energy, "you had better not buy that house in the large city."

"Why should I not buy it?"

"I will tell you why. They have promised you, as wife, my first cousin. She is a good and intelligent girl. She has no education whatever, but she always wished to have it, and she was very glad when she was told that she would have an educated husband. You are going to marry her, and when you have married her, ask permission of the high officials to open in Szybow a school for the Jews, in which they will be made to study other things than the Bible and Talmud. I will help you to conduct such a school."

Leopold laughed, but Meir, all aglow with the joy of his idea, did not notice it. He leaned towards the young man and whispered:

"I will tell you, Leopold. There is great ignorance here in Szybow, and there are many poor people living in misery. But there are some people—all of them young—who regret that they do not know another world, and that they have not other knowledge. They wish to become familiar with it, but there

is no one to help them out of the darkness. And then the great Rabbi who lives here, Isaak Todros, is very severe, and he is dreaded by everyone; and the members of the kahal also oppress the poor people. You must come here and bring with you other educated people, and help us out of our misery and our ignorance."

All this was spoken enthusiastically, his head triumphally raised and his voice filled with warm prayer. But nothing could equal the astonishment, and in the meantime the irony, with which Leopold listened to him. As Meir finished he selected a match from a silver box, bending his head in order to hide the fact that he was laughing.

"Nu," said Meir, "what do you think of what I have said? Is it a good idea?"

Leopold lighted the match and answered:

"I am thinking that if I were to speak of your plans to my family or my comrades they would be much amused."

The light which shone in Meir's eyes was quenched at once.

"Why would they laugh?" he whispered.

At that moment Leopold lighted his cigarette and the fragrant smoke floated through the room to where the company were gathered around the yellow sofa. Raphael raised his head in astonishment and looked back at him. Saul also looked toward the window, and rising from the sofa he said politely but with determination:

"I beg your pardon, but I cannot permit anything in my house which is contrary to the holy law."

Having said this he sat down again looking at Leopold from beneath his bushy eyebrows. Leopold grew very red, threw the cigarette on the floor, and crushed it angrily with his foot.

"Such is your civility!" said he to Meir.

"And why do you smoke on the Sabbath?"

"Don't you smoke?" asked the guest satirically looking Meir in the face.

"No," answered Meir

"And you wish to lead human souls out of darkness! And you believe that it is a holy law not to smoke on the Sabbath!"

"No, I don't believe it," answered Meir, with as much determination as before.

"You wish to cause the people to rebel against the great Rabbi and the kahal, and you yourself give way before the enemy."

Meir's eyes shone again, but this time angrily.

"If it was a question of saving a human soul from obscurity, or a human body from ignorance, I would not give way, because such things are important; but when it is a question of denying myself a pleasure, I give way because it is a trifle. And although I do not believe that such a law is holy and comes from God, I know that the old people believe in it, and I think that it would be rude to contradict them in a trifle like this."

After this speech Leopold turned away from Meir and walked over to where Mera sat. For a while Meir followed him with a glance in which there was a mixture of disappointment and anger. Then he left the window and went out.

This sudden disappearance of the young man made a great impression on the women. The men hardly noticed it, for they thought it very natural and praiseworthy that the bridegroom, through modesty, avoided the fiancée chosen for him by the older people. But Pani Hannah and her sister became gloomy, and Mera whispered to her mother:

"Maman, let us go home!"

In the meantime Meir was on the way to the house of his friend Eliezer, but he only looked in at the window, and went further, for the cantor's room was empty; but he evidently knew where to find his comrades, and he went directly toward the meadow situated beyond the town. As a few weeks ago this meadow—a true oasis of quiet and freshness—was all bathed in the pink light of the sunset. It is true

that the grass was no longer so green, for it was a little burned by the beat of the summer sun, but the bushes were in full bloom, and the scent of the wild flowers filled the air.

Near the grove, under the thickly growing birches, sat a group of young people. Some of them spoke together in low tones, while others mechanically plucked the wild plants growing around them, and others still with their faces turned to the blue sky, in which floated golden clouds, hummed softly.

The pond, a short way off, was now surrounded with thick bunches of forget-me-nots and large flowers of the water-plants. On its bank was seated the motionless figure of a tall slender girl, and beside her, amid the bushes of sweet-briar, grazed the white goat, plucking the herbs and leaves.

Meir approached the group of young people who were evidently awaiting his arrival with some impatience for those who lay in the grass rose at once on seeing him and sat looking intently into his face. He did not greet his comrades and did not even look at them, but threw himself down upon the trunk of a birch tree which had been overthrown by a storm. He was sad, but perhaps even more angry. The young people were silent, and looked at him in surprise. Eliezer, who lay in the grass with his elbow resting against the trunk on which Meir sat, was the first to speak.

"Well, have you seen him?"

"Have you seen him?" several voices chimed in, "and is he highly educated and very wise?"

Meir raised his head and said emphatically:

"He is educated, but very stupid."

This exclamation caused great surprise among the young men. After quite a long silence, Aryel, the son of the magnificent Morejne Calman, said:

"How can it be that a man is educated, and at the same time stupid?"

"I don't know how it can be," answered Meir, his eyes dilating as though he saw before him a bottomless precipice.

Then a conversation started, made up of quick questions and answers:

"What did he tell you?"

"What was very stupid?"

"Why did not you ask him about wise things?"

"I did ask him, but he didn't even know what I meant."

"Did he not tell you what he thought of?"

"He told me he thought of how he could best buy a beautiful house which would bring him an income of two thousand roubles."

"He can think about the house, but about what else does he think?"

"He told me he did not think about anything else."

"And what is he accomplishing in the world?"

"He is in an office, where he copies some papers and when he returns home he smokes a cigarette and thinks about the house."

"And what does he think about Jews who have no education and live in misery?"

"He thinks they are stupid and dirty."

"And what did he say when you told him that we wished to free our souls from darkness, but could not."

"He told me that if he were to tell his family and comrades of it, they would laugh."

"Why should they laugh?"

Then there was a long silence, and finally someone said angrily:

"A bad man!"



After a while Meir's cousin, Haim—Abraham's son—said:

"Meir, that knowledge and education for which we wish so eagerly must be evil, if it makes people stupid and bad."

Another young man said:

"Meir, will you explain it to us?"

Meir looked sadly at his comrades, and dropping his face in both hands, he said:

"I don't know anything."

The answer came with stifled sobs. But at that moment the cantor raised his white band and pulled from his friend's sorrowful face the hands which covered it.

"Your hearts must not be sunk in sorrow," said Eliezer, "I will ask our master to answer that question for us."

He took from the ground a large book and with a smile on his lips he pointed out to his comrades the first leaf of it. On this leaf was printed the name of Moses Majmonides.

The young people drew near to him, and their faces wore an expression of solemn attention. The great Hebrew savant was about to speak to them through the mouth of their beloved cantor. He was an old master, forgotten by some, excommunicated by others, but dear and saintly to them. Since the spirit of that master in the form of several big volumes brought back by Eliezer on his return home from the outer world, had breathed upon their minds, they experienced the force of hitherto unknown streams of thought and rebellion—they were filled with sorrowful longings and desires. But they were grateful to him for this grief and longing, and rushed to him in all times of doubt. But alas! they could not find answers for all their questions—consolations for all their complaints! Centuries had vanished, the times had changed and there had passed through the world a long chain of geniuses bringing new truths. But of this they knew nothing, and when the large book was opened they prepared themselves with joy and solemnity to receive the breath of the old truths.

Eliezer did not begin at once to read. He turned the leaves, looking for a paragraph appropriate to the circumstances. In the meanwhile, the girl who had until now remained seated on the bank of the pond, rose from among the forget-me-nots and white briar and advanced slowly toward the group of young people. Even from afar her great eyes could be seen looking into Meir's face. The white goat followed her. Both disappeared in the grove and then Golda emerged and stood behind Meir. She came so quietly that no one noticed her. She threw her arms about the trunk of a birch tree and leaning her head against the softly swaying branch, she caressed the bent head of Meir with her looks. She seemed not to see the other people.

At that moment Eliezer exclaimed in his pure, crystalline voice:

"Israel, listen!"

With these words many psalms and sacred writings of the Hebrews commence. For the young people surrounding Meir this reading of the old master was a psalm of respect and deep spiritual prayer.

Eliezer began to read in a chanting voice:

"My disciples I You ask me what force attracts the celestial beings of the Heavens, which we call stars, and why some of them rise so high they are lost in mist, and others float more heavily toward the sky, and remain far behind their sisters?"

"I will disclose to you the mystery which you seek to solve."

"The force attracting the celestial bodies is the Perfection dwelling on the heights, and called God in the human tongue. The stars, seized with love and longing for this Perfection, rise continually in order to approach nearer and take something of wisdom and perfection from the Wise and Perfect."

"My disciples, from those celestial beings, which long for the Perfection, come all changes of the moon. They cause different forms and images. . . ."

Eliezer stopped reading, and raised his turquoise-like eyes from the book, and they shone with joy.

But the others thought a long while, trying to find an answer to their doubts in that passage of the master.

Meir answered thoughtfully:

"There are men who, like the celestial beings of which the sage talks, raise their souls toward the Perfection. They know that there is perfection, and they try to take from it Wisdom and Goodness for themselves. But there are also people who, like those stars which float more heavily upward, do not long for the perfection, and do not rise through such longing. Such people keep their souls very low. . . ."

Now they understood. Joy beamed from all faces. What a small crumb of knowledge it took to make joyful these poor, and at the same time rich, souls!

Meir seized the book from his friend's hands, and read from another leaf:

"The angels themselves are not all equal. They are classed one above the other, like the steps of a ladder, and the highest among them is the Spirit producing thought and knowledge. This Spirit animates Reason, and Hagada calls it Prince of the World—Sar-ha-Olam!"

"The highest angel is the Spirit producing thought and knowledge, and Hagada calls it the Prince of the world," repeated the choir of young voices.

Their doubts were scattered. Learning had reawakened respect in their minds, and longing in their hearts, and passed before them in the form of the Angel of Angels, flying over the world arrayed in princely purple, with a shining veil wrought by his thought. Reverie sat on their foreheads and in their eyes. The reverie of a quiet evening covered the meadow blooming around them. Before them purple clouds hung above the forest, hiding behind them the shield of the sun. Behind them the green grove, sunk in dusky shadows, was slumbering motionlessly.

Over the meadow and fields floated Eliezer's silvery voice:

"I saw the spirit of my people when I slumbered," Jehovah's pale cantor began to sing.

And it was not known whence came that song. Who composed it? No one could tell. One verse was given by Eliezer to his friend after a state of ecstatic unconsciousness which visited him often; the second was composed by Aryel, Calman's son, while playing on his violin in the grove. Some of them had their birth in Meir's breast, and others were whispered by the childish lips of Haim, Abraham's son. Thus are composed all folk songs. Their origin is in longing hearts, oppressed thoughts, and instinctive flights toward a better life. Thus was born in Szybow the song which the cantor now began:

"Once, while I slumbered, I fancied I saw My people's spirit before me; And I felt a strange spell stealing o'er me, As I gazed on the world in awe."

Here the other voices joined that of the cantor, and a powerful chorus resounded through the fields and meadow:

"Did he come toward me in royal array, In purple and gold like the dawn of day. Ah, no I on his brow there was no golden crown; His naked knees trembled, hi gray head bowed down."

Here the choir of singing voices was mingled with a whisper coming from the birch grove:

"Hush! Some people are listening!"

In fact, on the road passing through the grove, several human figures appeared in the distance. They were walking very slowly. But the singer heard neither Golda's warning nor the sound of the approaching steps. The second verse of the song resounded over the meadow:

"O, my people's spirit, say, where is thy throne? Are the roses of Zion all faded and gone? Are the cedars of Lebanon all broken down? O, my people's spirit, say, where is thy crown?"

The last line of the song was still vibrating when, from the road passing through the grove, three men entered the meadow. They were dressed in long, black holiday clothes, and were girded with red handkerchiefs, because it was not permitted to carry them on Sabbath, but being used to gird the clothes were considered as part of the attire, and thus it was not a sin to wear them in that way.

In the centre was the cantor's father, Jankiel Kamionker, and on either side were Abraham Ezofowich, Haim's father, and Morejne Calman, the father of Aryel. Notwithstanding the darkness, the fathers recognised their sons in the last rays of the daylight. The voices of the young men trembled, became quiet, and then were silent—only one voice sang further:

"Wilt thou never emerge from the darkness, despair? Will thy sweet songs of thanks ne'er resound in

the air?"

It was Meir's voice.

The dignified men, passing through the meadow, stopped and turned toward the group of young men, and at that moment the manly voice was joined by the pure, sonorous voice of Golda, who, seeing the angry faces of the men, began to sing with Meir as though she wished to join him in common courage, and perhaps in common peril.

And paying no attention to either his comrades' silence or the threatening figures standing in the meadow the joined voices sang:

"Let the wisdom of Heaven knock at thy door, And quiet the grief that has made thy heart sore; And bid the Angel of Knowledge come down, Restoring to thee thy lost glorious crown. We beseech thee to chase the dark shadows away, And the light of God's truth will turn night into day."

The song had only three verses, so with the last verse the two voices became silent. The dignitaries of the community turned toward the town, and talking loudly and angrily they went in the direction of the Ezofowich house.

Abraham, Saul's son, was quite different from his brother Raphael. Tall, dark-haired, and good-looking still, notwithstanding his more than fifty years, Raphael was dignified and careful, speaking very little. Abraham was small and bent. He was gray-headed, and had a passionate temper and sensitive disposition. He spoke very rapidly and with violent gestures. His eyes were very bright and generally looked gloomily on the ground.

Both brothers were learned, and for their learning the high title of 'Morejne' had been bestowed upon them by the community. But Raphael studied especially the Talmud, and was considered one of its best scholars. Abraham, however, preferred the study of the precipice-like mysteries of the Zohar. He was a close friend of the two high dignitaries of the kahal, Morejne Calman and pious Jankiel Kamionker. They transacted business together outside the town, and while in town they read sacred books together, and together they walked every Sabbath beyond the boundaries of the place, as far as an Israelite is permitted to go from his house. Therefore no one saw them go over two thousand steps, and only very seldom, when they were attracted by the shadow of the grove, they bent, and on the spot where their feet reached the two thousandth step they buried in the ground a crumb of bread. That spot then represented their house, and they were allowed to go two thousand steps further. Usually they were silent while walking, for they counted their steps, but the simple spiritually and bodily poor people, seeing them walking slowly and with thoughtful faces, admired the wisdom and orthodoxy of these scholarly and rich men. On seeing them they rose respectfully and stood until they passed, for it is written: "When you see a sage pass by, rise, and do not sit until he is out of your sight."

Moreover on their return they spoke, because it was not necessary to count their steps.

But the poor people had never seen the three dignified men walk as fast as that evening, when on the meadow they had heard the song of the young men. Even the magnificent Calman himself had not smiled as usual, and as for Jankiel Kamionker, his movements were so violent that his long black dress floated behind him like two black wings. Abraham Ezofowich had ungirded his handkerchief and carried it in his hand. Calman noticed this sign of senseless excitement and warned his friend that he was sinning. Abraham was dreadfully frightened, and in great haste he again girded his loins. When this happened they were already on the piazza of the Ezofowich house. Then the three men entered the room in which old Saul was sitting on the yellow sofa, reading in a large book by the light of two candles, which burned in two antique silver candlesticks.

Saul, seeing the entering guests was a little astonished, because it was already quite late and the time was not suitable for a visit. He greeted them, however, with a friendly nod, and pointed to the chairs standing near the sofa. The men did not sit in the places indicated to them, but stood opposite Saul. Although their faces were animated by anger, their mein was solemn. Evidently they had come to an understanding as to how the conversation was to be commenced, for Kamionker spoke first:

"Reb Saul," said he, "we come here to complain against your grandson Meir."

A painful shiver passed over Saul's face.

"What has he done?" he asked in a low voice.

Kamionker began to speak, at first solemnly, and then very violently:

"Your grandson Meir spoils our sons! He causes their souls to rebel against the Holy Law; he reads to them excommunicated books, and sings worldly songs on the Sabbath! Besides this he is bound by an impure friendship to the Karaimian girl, and we saw in the meadow our sons lying at his feet as though at the feet of their master, and over his head the Karaimian girl stood and sang abominable songs with him."

He stopped, out of breath from the angry speech, and Morejne Calman, looking at Saul with his honey like eyes, said slowly:

"My son Aryel was there, and I shall punish him for it."

Abraham, looking gloomily on the ground, then said:

"And my son, your grandson Haim, was also there, and I shall punish him for it."

Then all said:

"You must punish Meir!"

Saul bent his sorrowful face.

"Lord of the world," he whispered with trembling lips, "have I deserved that the light of my eyes should be changed into darkness?"

Then he raised his head and said with determination:

"I will punish him."

Abraham's eyes, fixed on his father's face, were shining.

"Father," said he, "you must think the most of that Karaimian girl. That unclean friendship between them is a great shame to our whole family. You know, father, our custom—no Israelite shall know another woman save the one his parents have destined for his wife."

It seemed that Saul's wrinkled forehead was covered with a pinkish flush.

"I will soon marry him," he answered.

Abraham continued:

"As long as he sees the Karaimian girl he will not care to marry."

"And what can I do to prevent him from seeing her?"

The three men looked at each other.

"Something must be done with her!" said one.

After a long while of deep thought, the two guests bowed to Saul and left the house. Abraham remained in the room.

"Father," said he, "how do you propose to punish him?"

"I will command him to sit for a whole day in the Bet-ha-Midrash and read the Talmud."

"It would not do any good," said Abraham, with an impatient gesture; "you had better order him to be flogged."

Saul remained bent over.

"I shall not do it," he answered. Then he added softly: "Michael's soul passed into the body of my father Hersh, and my father's soul is now dwelling in Meir's body."

"And how can you know this?" asked Abraham, evidently shocked by his father's words.

"Hersh's wife, the great-grandmother first recognised this soul, and then Rabbi Isaak recognised it."

Saul sighed deeply, and repeated:

"I will command him to sit in the Bet-ha-Midrash and read the Talmud. He shall neither eat nor sleep in my house for a whole week, and the Shamos (care-taker and messenger of the synagogue) shall announce his

shame and punishment through the town!"

## CHAPTER VIII

The Bet-ha-Midrash was a large, well-lighted building standing on the courtyard close to the synagogue. It served for various purposes: people congregated there for the less solemn prayers or lectures; the learned used it for their discussions upon knotty points of the Talmud, here also were kept the books of the different brotherhoods or societies, of which there are many in every Jewish community; and lastly, it served as a place of penance in exceptional cases, when any of the young men had transgressed the religious or moral laws. The punishment was not so much a physical discomfort as a moral one, and left an indelible stain upon the delinquent's character.

Opposite the Ha-Midrash rose a smaller but equally well-kept building. It was the Bet-ha-Kahol or Kahol room, where the functionaries of the town council and the elders held sittings. A little further was a more modest building, the Hek-Dosh or poor house, where all those who were unable to work and were hungry had the right to apply for food and shelter.

Opposite the house of prayer was the heder or school, where the learned and much-respected Reb Moshe ruled. The court with all its buildings, from the synagogue and hospital to the tiny dwelling of the Rabbi was like the capital of a small realm: everything was there which could promote the well-being of the public.

All these buildings had been raised at one time, to embody a great idea, either to serve God or mankind. In what manner these lofty ideas had been perverted and served other purposes than those first conceived is another thing altogether—for this we must go to history.

Eight days had elapsed since the memorable evening when the young men had conversed and sung together on the meadow. On the ninth day, after sunset, Meir left the Ha-Midrash and stood in its high portico.

Obedient to the order of the head of the family, he had spent the week in utter solitude, reading the Talmud which he knew so well already, and for which, in spite of all the doubts which troubled his mind, he never lost the reverence implanted into him from his childhood. The penance had not brought him any physical discomforts; his meals were carried to him from home, where the charitable women had tried to make them even more palatable than usual. Nevertheless, he was much changed. He looked paler, thinner, yet withal more manly. Neither in his expression nor bearing was there any trace of his former almost childish timidity. Perhaps his intelligence had rebelled against the injustice of the punishment; it may be the solitude and the study of the many volumes in the Ha-Midrash had called forth new ideas and confirmed him in the old ones. The nervous contraction of his brow and his feverish burning eyes betrayed hard mental work, all the harder because without help or guide. The penance inflicted upon him had missed its aim. Instead of quieting and soothing the restless spirit, it made him bolder and more rebellious.

When Meir descended the steps into the court another feeling took hold of him—that of shame. At the sight of several people crossing the courtyard he dropped his eyes and blushed. They were elders of the Kahol, who seeing Meir, pointed at him and laughed. One of them, Jankiel Kamionker, did not laugh, and seemingly had not noticed the young man. He was walking apart from his companions, and his face looked troubled and preoccupied. Instead of entering into the Kahol building with the other men, he almost stealthily approached the almshouse; he only passed it, but it was sufficient to exchange a few whispered words with a man whose shaggy hair and swollen face appeared at the open window. Meir knew the man, and silently wondered what business the rich and pious Jankiel could have with a thief and vagrant like the carrier Johel. But he did not think much about it, and directed his steps, not towards home, but to a small passage near the school, which would bring him out into the fields; he was longing for space and air. He stood still for a few minutes. An odd murmuring noise, rising and falling, mixed with an occasional wailing reached his ear; it was dominated by a thick, hoarse voice alternately reading, talking, and scolding.

A peculiar smile crossed Meir's face; it expressed anger and compassion. He was standing near the school where the melamed Reb Moshe infused knowledge into the juvenile minds. Something seemed to attract him there; he leaned his elbows on the window-sill and looked in.

It was a narrow, low and evil-smelling room. Between the blackened ceiling, the wall and the floor full of dirt and litter, which filled the air with a damp and heavy vapour, there seethed and rocked a compact, gray mass which produced the murmuring noise. By and by, as if out of a dense fog, childish faces seemed to detach themselves. The faces were various, some dark and coarse, as if swollen with

disease; others pale, delicate and finely cut. As various as the faces were their expressions; there were those who, with mouth wide open and idiotic eyes stared into vacancy; others twitched and fretted with ill concealed impatience but most of them, though suffering, looked patient and submissive. Their outward appearance showed an equal variety, from the decent coat of the rich man's child, in gentle graduations to the sleeveless jackets and tatters of the very poorest classes.

Some fifty children were crowded into that room which barely accommodated half that number. They sat almost one upon the other, on hard dirty benches, closely packed together. This was not the only school in Szybow but none of the others was so eagerly sought after by parents as the one conducted by Reb Moshe, known by his piety and cabalistic knowledge, the favourite of the Rabbi. It must not be thought that Reb Moshe initiated his scholars into the first steps of learning; this would have been sheer waste of his capabilities—which aimed at something higher.

The children he received were from ten to twelve years old, who had already been taught in other schools to read Hebrew and the Chumesh or Five Books of Moses, with all their explanations and commentaries; after that they came under the tuition of Reb Moshe and were introduced to the Talmud, with all its chapters, paragraphs, debatable points, and commentaries above commentaries.

All this would have been more than sufficient to enlarge or confuse the minds of those pale, miserable children; but Reb Moshe in his zeal did not content himself with exercising the memory of his scholars; he wanted also to develop their imagination, and sometimes treated them to extracts from the metaphysical Kabala. The reading or expounding of parts of those books was looked upon by him as a kind of rest or recreation, which sometimes it proved to be when the melamed was too deeply absorbed to watch his audience.

The melamed was thus occupied when Meir looked through the window. He was bending over a heavy book with an expression of ecstatic rapture, and rocking his body to and fro with the chair upon which he sat. The scholars with their books before them were also rocking themselves and repeating their lessons in a loud murmur, sometimes smiting the edge of the bench with their fists by way of emphasis, or burying their hands in their already tangled manes.

Suddenly the melamed left off rocking himself, took the heavy book in both hands and struck it with all his might on the table. It was the signal for silence. The scholars left off rocking and raised their eyes in sudden alarm, thinking the time had come to give out their lessons.

But the melamed was not thinking of the lessons; his spirit had been carried away into other spheres altogether, but he was still dimly conscious of his duties as a teacher, and wanted his scholars to share in his spiritual rapture. He raised his finger and began to read a paragraph from the Scheier Koma.

"The great prince of knowledge thus describes the greatness of Jehovah: The height of Jehovah is one hundred six and thirty times a thousand leagues. From the right band, of Jehovah to His left the distance is seventy-seven times ten thousand leagues. His skull is three times ten thousand leagues in length and breadth. The crown of His head is sixty times ten thousand leagues long. The soles of the feet of the King of Kings are thirty thousand leagues long. From the heel to the knee, nineteen times ten thousand leagues; from the knees to the hip, twelve times ten thousand and four leagues; from the loins to the neck, twenty-four times ten thousand leagues. Such is the greatness of the King of Kings, the Lord of the world."

After this last exclamation, Heb Moshe, his hands raised in the air, remained motionless. Motionless likewise were the children. All, without exception, the timid and the mischievous, the idiotic and the sensible ones, stared open-mouthed at the melamed. The description of Jehovah's greatness seemed to have paralysed their minds.

After a short pause the melamed woke up to the every-day business, and called out:

"Go on."

The children again resumed their murmur and rocking. It would have been impossible from their confused voices to get an inkling of what they were learning but Meir, who had passed through the same course and possessed an excellent memory, understood that they were at the eighth chapter of Berachot (about the blessing).

The children, with great efforts that brought the perspiration to their faces, read in a singing murmur:

"Mischna, 1. The disputed questions between the schools of Shamai and Hillel. The school of Shamai says: 'First, bless the day and then the wine.' The school of Hillel says: 'First bless the wine and then the day' (the Sabbath)."

"Mischna 2. The school of Shamai says: 'To wash the hands, then fill the cup.' Hillel says: 'Fill the cup, then wash the hands.'"

"Mischna 3. The school of Shamai says: 'After washing, put the napkin on the table.' The school of Hillel says: 'Put it on a cushion.'"

"Mischna 4. The school of Shamai says 'Sweep the room, then wash your hands.' The school of Hillel says: 'Wash your hands, then sweep the room.'"

A double knock with the heavy book upon the rickety table reduced the scholars to silence once more.

The melamed's round and gleaming eyes wandered around the room as if in search of a victim. He pointed to one of the hindmost benches, and called out:

"Lejbele!"

A pale and slender child rose at the summons and fixed a pair of large, frightened eyes upon the teacher.

"Come here."

There was a great rustle among the boys, for it was no easy matter to pass across that dense mass of children. Lejbele at last managed to squeeze himself through, and holding his book with both hands, stood within the small space between the teacher's table and the front bench. He did not look at the melamed, but kept his eyes fixed upon the book.

"Why do you look down like a brigand? Look at me!" and the melamed struck him under the chin.

The child looked at him, his eyes slowly filling with tears.

"Well! what does the school of Shamai say, and what the school of Hillel?" began the melamed.

There was a long silence. The children of the first bench nudged his elbow, and whispered:

"Speak out!"

"The school of Shamai," began Lejbele, in a trembling voice, says, "bless the wine. . . ."

"The day—the day, and then the wine," whispered a few compassionate voices from the first bench. But, at the same time, the melamed's hand came into contact with the ear of one of the offenders, and his yell reduced the others to silence.

Reb Moshe turned again to the child.

"Mischna the first. What says the school of Shamai?"

The answer came in a still more trembling, almost inaudible, voice:

"The school of Shamai says: 'Bless the wine'. The melamed's fist came down upon the young Talmudist's shoulder, out of whose hands the heavy book slipped and fell upon the floor.

"You bad, abominable boy," yelled the melamed, "you do not learn your lessons, and you throw your book upon the floor. Did you not read that the school of Shamai says, 'To bless first the day and then the wine?'"

Here a loud and sarcastic voice from the window called out;

"Reb Moshe, that poor child has never seen wine in his life, and suffers hunger and flogging every day; it is not easy for him to remember whether to bless first the day and then the wine."

But Reb Moshe did not hear that speech, because both his hands were busy belabouring the head and shoulders of his pupil, who, without crying out, tried to avoid the blows by ducking on the floor. Suddenly a pair of strong hands pushed the melamed aside, and he, losing his footing, fell down, carrying with him the rickety table.

"Reb Moshe!" called out the same sarcastic and angry voice.

"Is this not an Israelitish child that you wreak your spite upon it? Is it not a poor man's child and our brother?"

His face burning with indignation, he bent down, and raising the child in his arms, turned towards the door.

"Reb Moshe, you drive all intelligence out of the children's heads, kill all the feeling in their hearts; I heard them laughing when you beat Lejbele."

Saying this, he disappeared with the child in his arms.

Only then did Reb Moshe awaken from the stupefaction into which the sudden assault had plunged him, and disengaging his burly frame from under the table, he shouted:

"Assassin! murderer!" and turning towards his scholars, yelled: "Get hold of him! stone him!"

But he addressed empty benches; the books lay scattered about and the seats turned upside down. The scholars, seeing their master prostrate under the table, and one of their companions rescued by main force, had all rushed, partly from fright and partly from a wish for liberty, through the door and dispersed about the town like a flight of birds released from a cage.

The school was empty and the court deserted, except for a few grave looking men who stood in the portico of the Bet-ha-Kahol, and towards them rushed the frantic melamed, panting and tearing his hair. Meir in the meanwhile went swiftly on, with the child in his arms, whose tears fell thick and fast; but the eyes which looked through the tears at Meir were no longer the tears of an idiot.

"Morejne!" whispered Lejbele.

"Morejne!" he repeated, in a still lower voice, "how good you are!"

At the corner of the little street where the tailor lived, Meir put the child down.

"There," he said, pointing at Shmul's house, "go home now."

The child stiffened, put his hands into his sleeves, and remained motionless. Meir smiled and looked into his face:

"Are you afraid?"

"I am afraid," said the motionless boy.

Instead of returning as he had intended, the young man went towards Shmul's hut, followed at a distance by Lejbele. The day was almost over, and so was work in the little street. The pale and ragged inhabitants crowded before their thresholds.

Scarcely had Meir penetrated into the street, where he became aware of a great change in the attitude of the people towards him. Formerly, the grandson of Saul had been greeted effusively on all sides; they had come to him with their complaints, sometimes asked for advice; others had greeted him from their windows with loud voices.

Now scarcely anybody seemed to notice him. The men looked away; the women glanced at him with curiosity, whispered to each other, and pointed their fingers at him. One of the woodcutters with whom he had worked at his grandfather's looked at him sadly and withdrew into his hut. Meir shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"What is it all about?" he thought. "What wrong have I done to them?" Strange it seemed to him also that the tailor did not rush out to meet him with his usual effusive flatteries and complainings; nevertheless he entered the dwelling. Lejbele remained outside, crouching near the wall.

The young man had to bend his head in order to enter the low doorway leading into the dark entrance where two goats were dimly visible, thence to the room where the air, in spite of the open window, felt heavy and oppressive. A thin woman with a wrinkled face passed him on the threshold. It was Shmul's wife, who carried a piece of brown bread to the child outside, Lejbele's supper when he came home from school.

The whole family were eating a similar supper, with the exception of the elder and grown-up people, who seasoned their bread with pinches of chopped raw onion, of which a small quantity was lying on a battered plate. Besides Lejbele, there were two younger boys sitting on the floor, a two-year-old child crawled about on all fours, and a baby a few months old was suspended in a cradle near the ceiling, and rocked by one of the elder girls. Another girl was busy with the goats, and a third was feeding a blind old woman, Shmul's mother. She broke the bread in pieces, sprinkled onion upon it, and put it into the grandmother's hand, sometimes into her mouth. The blind mother was the only one in the family who possessed a bed; the others slept on the floor or upon the hard benches. She looked well cared for, the



crossover on her shoulders was clean and whole, and on her head she had a quilted cap of black satin, profusely trimmed.

The grand-daughter seemed quite absorbed in task of feeding the old woman. She patted wrinkled hand encouragingly when she perceived difficulty in masticating the hard food.

As in the prosperous household of Saul, so in the dirty hut of the tailor, Shmul, the mother occupied the first place, and was the object of general care and reverence. Such a thing as a son, be he rich or poor, neglecting those who gave him life, is never seen in Israel. "Like the branches of a tree, we all sprang from her," said the head of the house of Ezofowich.

The tailor, Shmul, could not express his feelings like Saul, but when his mother lost her sight, he tore his long, curly hair in despair, fasted with his whole family for three days, and with the money thus saved bought an old bedstead, which he put together with his own hands against the wall; and when Sarah Ezofowich, Ber's wife, gave him an order to sew a black satin dress for her, he cut a goodish piece from the material to make a quilted cap for his mother.

When Shmul saw Meir coming into the room, he jumped up, bending his flexible body in two; but he did not kiss his hand as usual, or call out joyfully:

"Ai! what a visitor, what a welcome visitor! Morejne!", he exclaimed, "I have heard of what you have done. The children from school came running past, and said you had knocked the melamed under the table and rescued my Lejbele from his powerful hands. You did it out of kindness, but it was a rash deed, Morejne, and a sinful one, and will bring me into great trouble. Reb Moshe will not take Lejbele back, nor receive any of my other boys, and they will remain stupid and ignorant. Ai! Ai! Morejne, you have brought trouble upon me and upon yourself with your kindly heart."

"Do not trouble about me, Shmul; never mind about what I have brought upon myself, but take pity upon your child, and at least do not whip him at home; he suffers enough at school."

"And what if he suffers?" exclaimed Shmul. "His fathers went to school, and I went there and suffered the same; it cannot be helped; it is necessary."

"And have you never thought, Shmul, that things might be different?" questioned Meir gently.

Shmul's eyes flashed.

"Morejne!" he exclaimed, "do not utter sinful words under my roof. My hut is a poor one, but, thanks to the Lord, we keep the law and obey the elders. The tailor Shmul is very poor, and by the work of his hands supports his wife, eight children, and his blind mother. But he is poor before the Lord, and before the people, because faithfully he keeps the covenant and the Sabbath, eats nothing that is unclean, says all his prayers, crying aloud before the Lord. He does not keep friendship with the Goims (aliens) as the Lord protects and loves only the Israelites, and they only possess a soul. Thus lives the tailor Shmul, even as his fathers lived before him."

When the flexible and fiery Shmul had finished, Meir asked very gently:

"And were your fathers happy? and you, Shmul, are you happy?"

This question brought before the tailor's eyes a vision of all his sufferings.

"Ai! Ai! Let not my worst enemy be as happy as I am. The skin sticks to my bones, and my heart is full of pain."

A deep sigh, from the corner of the room, seemed to re-echo the tailor's sorrowful outburst.

Meir turned round, and seeing a big shadowy figure in the corner, asked, "Who is that?"

Shmul nodded his head plaintively and waved his hands.

"It is the carrier, Johel, come to see me. We have known each other a long time."

At the same time a tall, heavy man came into the light, and approached the two. Johel was powerfully built, but he looked broken down and troubled. His jacket, without sleeves, was dirty and ragged, his bare feet cut and bruised, the fiery red hair matted, and the mouth swollen. There was something defiant in his looks, and yet he seemed as if he could not look anybody straight in the face. He went near the table to take a pinch of onion to season the bread he was holding in his hand.

"Meir," he said, "you are an old acquaintance. I drove your uncle Raphael when he went to fetch you, a poor little orphan, and I drove you and him to Szybow."

"I have seen you since," said Meir. "You were a decent carrier then, and had four horses."

The inmate of the poorhouse smiled.

"It is true," he said; "bad luck pursued me. I wanted to make a great *geschäft* (business), but it did not turn out as I thought it would, and then another misfortune befell me."

"The second misfortune, Johel, was a crime. Why did you take the horses out of the gentleman's stables?"

The questioned man laughed cynically.

"Why did I take them out? I wanted to sell them, and make a lot of money."

Shmul shook his head pityingly.

"Ah! ah!" he sighed. "Johel is a poor man—a very poor man. He has been in prison three years, and now cannot find work, but is obliged to seek shelter in the poorhouse."

Johel sighed deeply, but soon raised his head almost defiantly.

"That cannot be helped," he said. "Perhaps I shall soon see my way to make a big profit."

The words of the vagrant recalled to Meir's mind the short interview he had witnessed at the window of the poorhouse between Johel and Jankiel Kamionker. At the same time, he was struck by the expression of the tailor's face, which twitched all over as if under the influence of great excitement. His eyes sparkled and his hands trembled.

"Who knows," he exclaimed, "what may happen in the future? Those that are poor one day may become rich the next. Who knows? The poor tailor Shmul may yet build a house on the Market Square, and set up in business for himself."

Meir smiled sadly. The groundless hopes of these poor outcasts stirred his compassion. He looked absently around, and through the windows at the fields beyond.

"You, Shmul," he said, "will certainly not build big houses; nor you, Johel, make heavy profits. Is it to be thought of? You are too many, and there is not enough for you all. I sometimes think that if you left these narrow, dirty streets, and looked about in the world, you might find a better way of living; even if you worked like peasants on the soil your life would be easier."

He said this in an absent way, not so much addressing the two men before him as the noisy crowd without. But when Shmul heard these words, he twice jumped into the air, and twisted his cap upon his head.

"Morejne!" he cried out, "what ugly words come from your lips. Morejne, do you wish to turn Israel upside down?"

"Shmul," said Meir angrily, "it is true. When I look at your misery, and the misery of your families, I should like to turn things upside down."

"Ai! ai!" cried the impressible and lively Shmul, holding his head with both hands. "I would not believe what the people said of you, and called them liars; but now I see myself that you are a bad Israelite, and the covenant and customs of your forefathers are no longer dear to you."

Meir started, and drew himself up.

"Who dares to say that I am a bad Israelite?" he exclaimed.

Shmul's excited face took a quieter but more solemn expression, and he came close to Meir. Nobody would hear him, as the inmates of the room had gone into the street, and Johel retired into his corner to finish his meal. All the same, he spoke in an impressive whisper, as if about to disclose a terrible secret.

"Morejne, it is no use asking who said it. People whisper, like the leaves on a tree. Who is to say which special leaf has whispered, or which mouth? Everybody speaks ill of you. They say you break the Sabbath, read accursed books, sing abominable songs, and incite young men to rebellion, that you do not pay due respect to the learned and wealthy members of the community, and,"—here he seemed to hesitate, and added in a still lower voice—"and that you live in friendship with the Karaitish girl."

Meir listened like one turned to stone. He had grown very pale, and his eyes were flashing.

"Who dares to say that?" he repeated in a choking voice.

"Morejne!" replied Shmul, waving both hands, "you were sent for a week into the Bet-ha-Midrash to do penance. When the poor people in this street heard of it, there was a great commotion. Some wanted to go to your grandfather Saul and to the Rabbi to ask them not to put you to shame. The woodcutter Judel wanted to go, the carrier Baruch—well, the tailor Shmul, too. But soon afterwards people began to talk, and we heard why you had been punished; then we remained quiet, and said to each other: He is good and charitable, never proud with poor people, and has helped us often in our misery; but if he keeps not the covenant, his grandfather Saul is right to punish him."

He stopped at last, out of breath with his rapid speech, and Meir fixed his penetrating eyes upon him, and asked:

"Shmul, if the learned and wealthy people ordered me to be stoned, would you also think they were right?"

Shmul retreated a few steps in horror.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, "why should you think of such terrible things?" and then added, in a thoughtful voice: "Well, Morejne, if you do not keep the holy covenant—"

Meir interrupted, in a louder tone:

"And do you know yourself, Shmul, what is the covenant? How much of it is God's law, and how much people's invention?"

"Hush!" hissed Shmul, in a low voice. "People can hear, and I should not like anything unpleasant to happen to you under my roof."

Meir looked through the window, and saw several people sitting on the bench before Shmul's house. They did not seem to listen, but talked among themselves; at the last words of Meir and Shmul they had raised their heads and looked through the window with a half-astonished, half-indignant expression. Meir shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and without saying good-bye turned towards the door. He had almost crossed the threshold when Shmul rushed after him, stooped down, and kissed his hand.

"Morejne," he whispered, "I am sorry for you. Think better of it; reflect in time, and do not cause scandal in Israel. Your heart is made of gold, but your head is full of fire. Remember what you did to the melamed to-day! If you were not under such a terrible cloud, Morejne," he went on, raising a nervous twitching face up to Meir, "I should have opened my heart before you, for Shmul is in sore trouble to-day. I do not know what to do! He may remain poor all his life, or he may become rich; he may be happy or very wretched. A great fortune is coming to him, and he is afraid to take it because it looks like misfortune."

Meir looked in silent amazement at the poor man, who evidently was trying to convey some secret to him; but at the same time from beyond the blackened stove came Johel's deep voice:

"Shmul, will you be quiet! Come here, I want you!" The tailor, with his face troubled, rushed towards him, and Meir, deeply musing, went out into the street.

It was evident from the clouded mien of the men and their scanty greetings that he was not so welcome to them as he used to be. Nobody rose when he passed, or approached him with a friendly word. Only the child got up as he went by, pushed his hands into the sleeves of his garment, and followed him.

Walking one behind the other, they crossed a long, narrow street, and found themselves in the fields which divided Abel Karaim's hut from the town.

It was now almost dark, but no flickering light was to be seen in Abel's window. They were not asleep yet, as Meir could see the dark outline of Golda near the window.

They greeted each other with a silent motion of the head.

"Golda," said Meir, in a low and rapid voice, "have you met with any unpleasantness lately? Has anybody molested you?"

The girl pondered a little over his question. "Why do you ask me that, Meir?"

"I was afraid some injury might have been done to you. People have spread some foolish slander about us."

"I do not mind injury; I have grown up with it. Injury is my sister."

Meir still looked troubled. "Why have you no light burning?" he asked.

"I have nothing to spin, and zeide prays in darkness."

"And why have you nothing to spin?"

"I carried the yarn to Hannah Witebska and Sarah, Ber's wife, and they did not give me any more wool."

"They have not insulted you?" asked Meir angrily

Golda was again silent.

"People's eyes often say worse things than tongues," she replied at last quietly.

Evidently she did not want to complain, or it may be her mind was too full of other things to heed it much.

"Meir," she said, "you have been in great trouble yourself lately?"

Meir sat down upon the bench outside and leaned his head upon his hand with a weary sigh.

"The greatest trouble and grief fell upon me to-day when I found that the people had turned away from me. Their former friendship has changed into ill feeling, and those that confided in me suspect me now of evil."

Golda hung her head sadly, and Meir went on:

"I do not know myself what to do. If I follow the promptings of my heart, my people will hate and persecute me. If I act against my conscience I shall hate myself and never know peace and happiness. Whilst I was sitting in the Bet-ha-Midrash I had almost made up my mind to let things be, and to try and live in peace with everybody; but when I had left the Ha-Midrash my temper again got the better of me, and rescuing a poor child I offended the melamed, and through him the elders and the people. That is what I have done to-day. Arid when I come to think of it, it seems to me a rash, useless act, as it will not prevent the melamed from destroying the poor children's health and intelligence. What can I do? I am alone, young, without a wife and family, or any position in the world. They can do with me what they like, and I can do nothing. They will persecute my friends until they desert me; they have already begun to injure and insult you, because you gave me your heart and joined your voice with mine on the meadow. I shall only bring unhappiness to you; perhaps it would be better to shut my eyes and ears to everything, and live like other people."

His voice became lower and lower, and more difficult from the inward struggle with doubts and perplexities.

Both remained silent for a few minutes, when suddenly a strange noise, seemingly from the other side of the hill, reached their ears. First it sounded faint and distant, like the passing of many wheels upon a soft and sandy soil. It grew louder by degrees, till the grating of wheels and stamping of many human feet could be heard quite distinctly. All this amidst the dark silence of the night gave it a mysterious, almost unreal appearance.

Meir stood straight up and listened intently.

"What is that?" he asked.

"What can it be?" said Golda, in her quiet voice.

It seemed as if a great many carts were passing on the other side of the hill.

"I thought something rumbled and knocked inside the hill," said Golda.

Indeed, it sounded now like human steps inside the hill, and as if some heavy weights were being thrown down. There was fear in Meir's face. He looked intently at Golda.

"Shut the window, and bolt your door," he said quickly; "I will go and see what it is!"

It was evident that he feared only on her account. "Why should I fasten either window or door? A strong hand could easily wrench them open."

Meir went round the base of the hill, and soon found himself on the other side. What he saw there filled him with the greatest astonishment.

In a half-circle, upon the sandy furrows, stood a great many carts laden with casks of all sizes. Around the carts a great many people were moving—peasants and Jews. The peasants were busy unload-the carts and rolling the casks into a cavern, which either nature or human hands had shaped in the hill.

The Jews, who were flitting in and out among the carts and looking at the casks, or sounding them with their knuckles, finally crowded round a man who stood leaning his back against the side of the hill, and a low-voiced, but lively discussion followed. Among the Jews, Meir recognised several innkeepers of the neighbourhood, and in the man with whom they conversed, Jankiel Kamionker. The peasants whose task it was to unload the carts preserved a gloomy silence. A strong smell of alcohol permeated the air.

The astonishment of Meir did not last long. He began to see the meaning of the whole scene, and seemingly had made up his mind what to do, as he moved a few steps in Jankiel Kamionker's direction.

He had not gone far when a huge shadow detached itself from a projection of the hill and barred the way.

"Where are you going, Meir?" whispered the man.

"Why do you stop me from going, Johel?" replied Meir, as he tried to push him aside.

But Johel grasped him by the coat tails.

"Do you no longer care for you life?" he whispered. "I am sorry for you, because you are good and charitable; take warning and go at once."

"But I want to know what Reb Jankiel and his innkeepers are going to do with the casks," persisted Meir.

"It does not concern you," whispered Johel. "Let neither your eyes see nor your ears hear what Reb Jankiel is doing. He is engaged in a big business; you will only hinder him. Why should you stand in his way? What will you gain by it? Besides, what can you do against him?"

Meir remained silent, and turned in another direction.

"What can I do?" he whispered to himself; with quivering lips.

Passing near Abel Karaim's hut, he saw Golda still standing at the window. He nodded to her.

"Sleep in peace."

But she called out to him:

"Meir, here is a child sitting on the floor asleep."

He came nearer and saw, close to the bench where he had been sitting, the crouching figure of a child.

"Lejbele!" he said, wonderingly. He had not seen the lad, who had quietly followed him and sat down close to him.

"Lejbele!" repeated Meir, and he put his hand upon the child's head.

He opened a pair of half-unconscious eyes and smiled.

"Why did you come here?" asked Meir, kindly.

The child seemed to collect his thoughts, and then answered:

"I followed you."

"Father and mother will not know what has become of you."

"Father sleeps, and mother sleeps," began Lejbele, rocking his head; "and the goats are sleeping," he added after a while, and at the remembrance of those, his best friends, he laughed aloud.

But from Meir's lips the slight smile had vanished.

He sighed and said, as if to himself:

"How shall I act? What ought I to do?"

Golda, with her hands crossed above her head, looked thoughtfully up to the starry sky. After a while she whispered timidly:

"I will ask zeide; zeide is very learned; he knows the whole Bible by heart."

"Ask him," said Meir.

The girl turned her head towards the dark interior, and called out:

"Zeide! What does Jehovah command a man to do, from whom the people have turned away because he will not act against his conscience?"

Abel interrupted his prayers. He was accustomed to his grand-daughter's inquiries, and to answer them.

He seemed to ponder a few minutes, and then in his quavering but distinct voice, replied:

"Jehovah says: 'I made you a prophet, a guardian over Israel! Hear my words and repeat them to the people. If you do this, I shall call you a faithful servant; if you remain silent, on your head be the woes of Israel.'"

The old voice became silent, but Meir listened still, with glowing eyes. Then he pointed into the dark room and said:

"He has said the truth! Through his mouth has spoken the old covenant of Moses, the one true covenant."

Tears gleamed in Golda's eyes; but Meir saw them not, so deeply was he absorbed in thoughts which fired his whole being. He gently bent his head before the girl and went away.

She remained at the open window. Her bearing was quiet, but silent tears one after another rolled down her thin face.

"They beheaded the prophet Hosea, and drove the prophet Jeremiah out of Jerusalem," she whispered.

At a distance from the hut, Meir raised his face to heaven:

"Rabbi Akiba died in great tortures for his convictions," he murmured.

Golda's eyes followed him still though she could see him no longer; and folding her hands, she murmured:

"Like as Ruth said to Naomi, I wilt say to the light of my soul:  
'Whither thou goest I will go; where thou diest, I will die!'"

In this way these two children, thoroughly imbued with the old history and legends of Israel, which represented to them all earthly knowledge, drew from them comfort and courage.

## CHAPTER IX

The day had scarcely begun to dawn when, in Kamionker's house, everybody, with the exception of the little children, was awake and stirring. It was an important day for the landlord of the inn, as it was that of the principal fair, which brought crowds of people of all sorts to the town. Both Jankiel's daughters, two strong, plain, and slatternly girls, with the help of the boy Mendel, whose stupid, malicious face bore the traces of Reb Moshe's training, were busy preparing the two guest rooms for the arrival of distinguished customers. Next to the guest rooms was the large bar-room, where, during the fair, crowds of country people were wont to drink and to dance. The servant pretended to clean the benches around the wall, and made a scanty fire in the great black stove, as the morning was cool and the air damp and musty. In Jankiel's room, the first from the entrance, the window of which looked upon the still empty market-square, were two people, Jankiel and his wife Jenta, both at their morning prayers.

Jankiel, dressed his everyday gabardine with black kerchief twisted round his neck, rocked his body violently and prayed in a loud voice:

"Blessed be the Lord of the world that he hath not made me a heathen!  
Blessed be the Lord that he hath not made me a slave! Blessed be the  
Lord that he hath not made me a woman!"

At the same time Jenta, dressed in a blue sleeveless jacket and short skirt, bent her body in short, jerky motions, and in a voice much lower than her husband's, began:

"Blessed be the Lord of the world that he has made me according to his will!"

Rocking to and fro, she sighed heavily:

"Blessed be the Lord who gives strength to the tired and drives away from their eyes sleep and weariness!"

Then Jankiel took up the white tallith with the black border, and, wrapping himself in its soft folds, exclaimed:

"Blessed be the Lord who enlightened us with his law and bade us to cover ourselves with the tallith!"

He put the phylacteries, or holy scroll, upon his forehead and wrists, saying:

"I betroth myself for ever, betroth myself unto truth, unto the everlasting grace."

Both husband and wife were so absorbed in their prayers that they did not hear the quick step of a man.

Meir Ezofowich crossed the room where Jankiel and his wife were praying, and the next, which was full of beds and trunks, where the two smaller children were still asleep, and opened the door of his friend's room.

There was as yet only a dim light in the little apartment where Eliezer stood at the window and prayed. He recognised his friend's step, but did not interrupt his prayers, only raised his hands as if inviting him to join:

"O Lord of Hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?"

Meir stood a few steps apart and responded, as the people respond to the singer:

"Thou feedest them with the bread of stones, and givest them tears to drink in great measure."

"Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours, and our enemies laugh among themselves," intoned Eliezer.

In this way the two friends sang one of the most beautiful complaints that ever rose from earth to heaven. Every word is a tear, every word a melody expressing the tragic history of a great people.

There were as different expressions in the faces of the two young men as their characters were unlike each other. Eliezer's blue eyes were full of tears, his delicate features full of dreaminess and rapture; Meir stood erect, his burning eyes fixed on the sky, and his brow contracted as if in anger. They both prayed from the depths of their hearts until the end, and then their formally united souls parted. Eliezer intoned a prayer for the Wise Men of Israel:

"O Lord of heaven! guard and watch over the Wise Men of Israel, their wives, children and disciples, always and everywhere! Say unto me Amen!"

Meir did not say Amen. He was silent.

The singer seemed to wait for a response, when Meir, slightly raising his voice, said, with quivering lips:

"Guard, O Lord, and watch over our brethren in Israel that live in sin and darkness, always and everywhere; bring them from darkness into light, from bondage to freedom! Say unto me Amen!"

"Amen!" exclaimed Eliezer, turning towards his friend; and their hands met in a hearty grasp.

"Eliezer," said Meir, "you look changed since I saw you last."

"And you, Meir, look different."

Only a week had passed over their heads. Sometimes one week means as much as ten years.

"I have suffered much during the week," whispered the singer.

Meir did not complain.

"Eliezer," he said, "give me 'More Nebuchim.' I came to you so early to ask for that book. I want it

very much."

Eliezer stood with his head hanging down dejectedly.

"I no longer have the book," he said, in a low voice.

"Where is it?" asked Meir.

"The book which brought us light and comfort is no more. The fire has devoured it, and its ashes are scattered to the winds."

"Eliezer!" burst out Meir, "have you got frightened and burned it?"

"My hands could never have committed the deed; even had my mouth commanded it, they would not have obeyed. A week ago my father came to me in great fury and ordered me to give up the accursed book we had been reading on the meadow. He shouted at me, 'Have you that book?' I said, 'I have.' He then asked me, 'Where is it?' I remained silent. He looked as if he would have liked to beat me, but did not dare, on account of my position in the synagogue, and the love people bear me. He then ransacked the whole room, and at last found it under the pillow. He wanted to carry it to the Rabbi, but I knelt before him and begged him not to do so, as he would not allow me to sing any more, and would deprive me of people's love, and of my singing. Father seemed struck by my remark, for he is proud that a son of his, and one so young in years, holds such a position, and he thinks, also, that, when his son sings and prays before the Lord, the Lord will prosper him in his business, and forgive all his sins. So he did not take the book to the Rabbi, but thrust it into the fire, and, when it burned and crackled, he leaped and danced for joy."

"And you, Eliezer, you looked on and did nothing?"

"What could I do?" whispered the singer.

"I should have put the book on my breast, protected it with my arms, and said to my father, 'If you wish to burn it, burn me with it.'"

Meir said this with indignation, almost anger, against his friend.

Eliezer stood before him with downcast eyes, sad, and humbled.

"I could not," he whispered. "I was afraid they would deprive me of my office, and denounce me as an infidel. But look at me, Meir, and judge from it how I loved our Master; since he was taken away from me my face has shrunk, and my eyes are red with tears."

"Oh, tears! tears! tears!" exclaimed Meir, throwing himself upon a chair, and pressing his throbbing temples with both hands; "always those tears and tears!" he repeated, with a half-sarcastic, half-sorrowful voice. "You may weep for ever, and do no good either to yourself or to others. Eliezer! I love you even as a brother; but I do not like your tears, and do not care to look at your reddened eyes. Eliezer, do not show me tears again; show me eyes full of fire. The people love you, and would follow you like a child its mother."

Scolding and upbraiding his friend, Meir's eyes betrayed a moisture which, not wishing to betray, he buried his face in both hands.

"Oh, Eliezer, what have you done to give up that book? Where shall we go now for advice and comfort? Where shall we find another teacher? The flames have consumed the soul of our souls, and the ashes have been thrown to the winds. If the spirit of the Master sees it he will say, 'My people have cursed me again,'" and tears dropped through his fingers upon the rough deal table.

Suddenly he stopped his laments, and, changing his position, fell into a deep reverie.

Eliezer opened the window.

The sandy ground of the market-square seemed divided in long slanting paths of red and gold by the rays of the rising sun. Along one of these shining paths, towards Kamionker's house, came a powerful bare-footed man. His heavy step sounded near the window where the two young men were sitting. Meir raised his head; the man had already passed, but a short glimpse of the matted red hair and swollen face was enough for Meir to identify him as the carrier, Johel.

A few minutes later two men dressed in black passed near the window. One of them was tall, stately, and smiling; the other, slightly stooping, had iron-gray hair and a wrinkled brow. They were Morejeh Calman and Abraham Ezofowich. Evidently they had not crossed the square, but passed along the back streets almost stealthily, as if to avoid being seen. Both disappeared in the entrance of Kamionker's



house, where Johel had preceded them.

Eliezer looked up from the book which he had been reading.

"Meir," he said, "why do you look so stern? I have never seen you look so stern before."

Meir did not seem to have heard his friend's remark. His eyes were fixed upon the floor, and he murmured:

"My uncle Abraham! My uncle Abraham! Woe to our house. Shame to the house of Ezofowich!"

In the next room, divided from Eliezer's by a thin wall, loud voices and bustle were audible. Jankiel shouted at his wife to go away and take the children with her. Jenta's low shoes clattered upon the floor, and the suddenly-roused children began to squall. By degrees the noise sounded fainter and farther off. Then the floor resounded with the steps of men, chairs were drawn together, and a lively discussion in low but audible voices began.

Meir suddenly rose.

"Eliezer," he whispered, "let us go away."

"Why should we go away?" said the young man, raising his head from the book.

"Because the walls are thin," began Meir.

He did not finish, for from the other side of the wall came the violent exclamation from his uncle Abraham:

"I do not know anything about that; you did not tell me, Jankiel."

The mirthless, bilious cackle of Jankiel interrupted. "I know a thing or two," he exclaimed; "I knew that you, Abraham, would not easily agree to it. I shall manage that without your help."

"Hush!" hissed Calman. The voices dropped again to a whisper.

"Eliezer, go away!" insisted Meir.

The singer did not seem to understand. "Eliezer! do you want to honour your father, as it is commanded from Sinai?"

Kamionker's son sighed.

"I pray to Jehovah that I may honour him." Meir grasped him by the hand.

"Then go at once—go! if you stop here any longer you will never be able to honour your father again!" He spoke so impressively that Eliezer grew pale and began to tremble.

"How can I go now, if they are discussing secrets there?"

The voice of Jankiel became again distinctly audible:

"The tailor Shmul is desperately poor; the driver Johel is a thief. Both will be well paid."

"And the peasants who carted the spirit?" asked Abram.

Jankiel laughed.

"They are safe; their souls and bodies and everything that belongs to them is pledged to my innkeepers."

"Hush!" whispered again the phlegmatic, therefore cautious, Kalman.

Eliezer trembled more and more. A ray of light had pierced his dreamy brain.

"Meir! Meir!" he whispered, "how can I get away? I am afraid to cross the room; they might think I had overheard their secrets."

With one hand Meir pushed the table from the window, and with the other helped his friend to push through. In a second Eliezer had disappeared from the room. Meir drew himself up and murmured:

"I will show myself now, and let them know that somebody has overheard their conversation."

Then he opened the low door and entered into the next room. There, near the wall, on three chairs closely drawn together, sat three men. A small table stood between them. Kalman, in his satin garment, looked calm and self-possessed. Jankiel and Abraham rested their elbows on the table. The first was red with excitement and his eyes glittered with malicious, greedy light; the latter looked pale and troubled, and kept his eyes fixed on the floor; but nothing was capable of disturbing the smiling equanimity of Kalman. When Meir entered the room, he heard distinctly his uncle's words:

"And if the whole place burns down with the spirit vaults?"

"Ah! ah!" sneered Jankiel, "what does it matter? One more Edomite will become a beggar!"

Here the speaker stopped and began to quiver as if with rage or terror; he saw Meir coming into the room. His two companions also saw him. Kalman's mouth opened wide. Abraham looked threatening, but his eyes fell before the bold, yet sorrowful glance of his nephew, and his hands began to tremble.

Meir slowly crossed the room and entered into the next, where Johel stood near the stove staring absently at his bare toes.

Jankiel sent a malediction after the retreating figure; the two others were silent.

"Why did you bring us in such an unsafe place?" asked Kalman at last, in his even voice.

"Why did you not warn us that somebody might hear from the other side of the wall?" asked Abraham impetuously. Jankiel explained that it was his son's room, who did not know anything about business and never paid the slightest attention to what was going on around him.

"How should I know that cursed lad was there? He must have entered like a thief, through the window. Well!" he said, after a while, "what does it matter if he heard? He is an Israelite, one of us, and dare not betray his own people."

"He may dare," repeated Kalman; "but we will keep an eye on him, and if he as much as breathes a syllable of what he heard we will crush him."

Abraham rose.

"You may do what you like," he said impulsively. "I wash my hands of the whole business."

Jankiel eyed him with a malicious expression.

"Very well," he said, "in that case there will be all the more for us two. Those who risk will get the money."

Abraham sat down again. His nervous face betrayed the inward struggle. Jankiel, who had a piece of chalk in his hand, began writing on a black tablet:

"Eight thousand gallons of spirit at four roubles the gallon make thirty-two thousand roubles. These divided into three make ten thousand six hundred and sixty-six roubles sixty-six and one third kopecks. Six hundred roubles to each of the two, Johel and Shmul, and there remains for each of us ten thousand and sixty-six roubles, sixty-six and one third kopecks."

Abraham rose again. He did not speak, but twisted his handkerchief convulsively with both hands, Then he raised his eyes and asked:

"And when will it come off?"

"It will come off very soon," said Jankiel.

Abraham said nothing further, and without saying good-bye, swiftly left the room.

The large market-square showed signs of life. Long strings of carts and people began to arrive from all directions. Inside the houses and shops everybody was busy preparing for the day's business.

In Ezofowich's house the inmates had risen earlier than usual to-day. The part of the home occupied by Raphael and Ber with their families resounded with gay and lively conversation. Various objects of trade, with their corresponding money value, were mentioned. Sometimes the calculations were interrupted by remarks in feminine voices, which occasioned laughter or gay exclamations. Everything showed the peace and contentment of people who strove after the well-being of their families and lived in mutual confidence and harmony.

The large sitting-room smelt of pine branches, which were scattered upon the even more than usually

clean floor. On the old-fashioned, high-backed sofa, before a table spread with fine linen, sat old Saul and sipped his fragrant tea. The huge samovar had been taken down from the cupboard and gleamed with red coals and hissed and steamed in the next room, where a large kitchen fire illuminated the long table and white, scrubbed benches. The steaming of the samovar, the great kitchen fire and fresh curtains everywhere, together with the unusual stir of all the inmates, showed distinctly that many visitors were expected and preparations made accordingly.

But it was yet early in the day, and Saul sat alone, evidently relishing the atmosphere of well-being and orderliness and the sounds of the busy life filling the house from top to basement. It was one of those moments, not by any means rare in Saul's life, when he realised the many blessings which the Lord had bestowed upon his house with which to gladden his old age.

Suddenly the door opened and Meir entered. The happy expression vanished from Saul's wrinkled face. The sight of his grandson reminded him of the thorn which lurked amidst the flowers. The very look of the young man acted as a false or stormy discord in a gay and peaceful melody. Trouble was depicted on his pale face, and his eyes looked indignant and angry. He entered boldly and quickly, but meeting the eyes of his grandfather, he bent his head and his step became slower. Formerly he was wont to approach his father and benefactor with the confidence and tenderness of a favourite child. Now he felt that between him and the old man there arose a barrier, which became higher and stronger every day, and his heart yearned for the lost love and for a kind look from the old man, who now met his eyes with a stern and angry face. He approached him timidly, therefore, and said in a sad, entreating voice:

"Zeide! I should like to speak with you about important business."

The humble attitude of the once favourite child mollified the old man; he looked less stern, and said shortly but gently: "Speak out."

"Zeide, permit me to shut the door and windows so that nobody hears what I have to say."

"Shut them," replied Saul, and he waited with troubled face for the grandson to begin.

After closing the door and windows Meir came close to his grandfather and began:

"Zeide! I know that my words will bring you trouble and sorrow, but I have nobody to go to; you were to me father and mother, and when in trouble I come to you." His voice shook perceptibly.

The grandfather softened.

"Tell me everything. Though I have reason to be angry with you, because you are not what I should like to see you, I cannot forget that you are the son of my son who left me so early. If you have troubles I will take them from you; if anybody has wronged you I will stand up for you and punish him."

These words soothed and comforted the young man.

"Zeide!", he said, in a bolder tone, "thanks to you I have no troubles of my own, and nobody has wronged me; but I have come across a terrible secret, and do not know what to do with it, as I cannot keep it concealed. I thought I would tell you, so that you, Zeide, with the authority of your gray hair, might prevent a great crime and a great shame."

Saul looked at his grandson half-anxiously, half-curiously.

"It is better people should not know any secrets or trouble about any; but I know that if you do not speak to me, you will speak to someone else, and troubles might come from it. Say, then, what is this terrible secret?"

Meir answered

"This is the secret: Jankiel Kamionker, as you know, zeide, rents the distillery from the lord of Kamionka. He distilled during the season six thousand gallons of spirits, but did not sell any as prices were low. Now prices have risen and he wants to sell; but he does not want to pay the high government taxes."

"Speak lower," interrupted Saul, whose face betrayed great uneasiness.

Meir lowered his voice almost to a whisper.

"In order not to pay the taxes Kamionker last night carted away all the spirits to the Karaites' hill, where his innkeepers from all parts came to bargain for it and buy it up. But he thought what would become of him if the government officials came down to visit the vaults and did not find the spirits—he

would be held answerable and punished. Then he hired two people. Zeide! he tempted two miserable outcasts to—"

"Hush!" exclaimed Saul, in a low voice. "Be quiet; do not say a word more. I can guess the rest."

The old man's hands trembled, and his shaggy eyebrows bristled in a heavy frown.

Meir was silent, and looked with expectant eyes at his grandfather.

"Your mouth has spoken what is not true. It cannot be true."

"Zeide!" whispered Meir, "it is as true as the sun in heaven. Have you not heard, zeide, of the incidents that happened last year and last year but one? These incidents are getting more and more numerous, and every true Israelite deplores it and reddens with shame."

"How can you know all this? How can you understand these things? I do not believe you."

"How do I know and understand it? Zeide, I have been brought up in your house, where many people come to see you: Jews and Christians, merchants and lords, rich and poor. They talked with you and I listened. Why should I not understand?"

Saul was silent, and his troubled countenance betrayed many conflicting thoughts. A sudden anger toward the grandson stirred his blood.

"You understand too much. You are too inquisitive. Your spirit is full of restlessness, and you carry trouble with you wherever you go. I felt so happy to-day until my eye fell upon you, and black care entered with you into the room."

Meir hung his head.

"Zeide," he said sadly, "why do you reproach me? It is not about my own affairs I came to you."

"And what right have you to meddle with affairs that are not your own?" said Saul, with hesitation in his voice.

"They are our own, zeide. Kamionker is an Israelite, and as such ought not to cast a slur on our race; besides, they are our own, still more because your son, zeide, Abraham belongs to it."

Saul rose suddenly from the sofa and fell back again. Then he fixed his penetrating eyes upon Meir.

"Are you speaking the truth?" he asked sternly.

"I have seen and heard it all myself," whispered Meir.

Saul remained thinking a long time.

"Well," he said slowly, "you have the right to accuse your uncle. He is your father's brother, and from his deed shame and ignominy might come upon our house. The family of Ezofowich never did dishonourable things. I shall forbid Abraham to have anything to do with it."

"Zeide, tell also Kamionker and Kalman not to do it."

"You are foolish," said Saul. "Are Kamionker and Kalman my sons or my daughters' husbands? They would not listen to me."

"If they do not listen, zeide," exclaimed Meir "denounce them before the owner of Kamionka or before the law."

Saul looked at his grandson with flaming eyes.

"Your advice is that of a foolish boy. Would you have your old grandfather turn informer, and bring calamity upon his own brethren?"

He wanted to say something more, but the door opened to admit several visitors; they were Israelites from the country, respectable merchants or farmers from the neighbouring estates, arrived for the great fair. Saul half-rose to welcome his guests, who quickly stepping up to him, pressed his hand in hearty greeting, and explained that it was not so much business as the desire to see the wise and honoured Saul which had brought them to town. Saul answered with an equally polite speech, and asked them to be seated round the table, and without leaving his own seat on the sofa clapped his bony hands. At the signal a buxom servant girl came in with glasses of steaming tea, which filled the whole room with its subtle aroma. The guests thanked him smilingly, and then began a lively conversation

about familiar subjects.

Meir saw that he would have no further opportunity of seeing his grandfather alone, and quickly left the room and went into the kitchen. This also was full of visitors, but of a different class from those in the pitting-room. Upon the benches by the wall sat some fifteen men in old worn-out garments; and Sarah, Saul's daughter, and Raphael's wife, Saul's daughter-in-law, conversed with them and offered tea or mead and other refreshments.

The men responded gaily, if somewhat timidly, and accepted the refreshments with humble thanks. Most of them were inn-keepers, dairy farmers, or small tradesmen from the country. Their dark, lean faces and rough hands betrayed poverty and hard work. The smallest expense for food during their stay in town would have made a difference to them. They went, therefore, straight to Ezofowich's house, the doors of which were always hospitably open on such days, as had been the custom of the family for hundreds of years.

The two women in their silk gowns and bright caps flitted to and fro between the huge fireplace and the grateful guests. Outside the house there was another class of visitors. Those were the very poorest, who had not come to buy or to sell at the fair, but to obtain some wine and food out of the charity of their wealthier brethren. To these the servant carried bread and clotted milk and small copper coins. The murmur of their thanks and blessings penetrated to the kitchen, where the two busy women smiled yet more contentedly, and produced more small coins from their capacious pockets.

In another part of the roomy kitchen stood the children of the house, pleased with their pretty dresses and coral necklaces, eating sweets. The elder boys listened to the conversation of the men, and a few of the younger children played on the floor. Close to this group sat the great-grandmother, Freida. Days like this conveyed to her clouded memory pictures of the past, when she herself, a happy wife and mother, looked after the comforts of her numerous guests. Her great-granddaughter had roused her earlier than usual to-day, and dressed her in the costliest garments, and now, before she would be led into the sitting-room to her chair near the window, they were completing her toilette. The black-eyed Lija fastened the diamond star into her turban; her younger sister arranged the pendants; another put the costly pearls around her neck and twisted the golden chain cunningly among the soft folds of her white apron. Having done this they smiled and drew back a little to admire the effect of their handiwork, or peeped roguishly into the great-grandmother's eyes and kissed her on the forehead.

The men sitting round the wall nodded their heads sympathetically, looked reverentially at the old lady, and now and then exclamations of wonder and pleasure at seeing her surrounded by such tender care escaped from their lips.

The other part of the house, which had been so lively early in the morning, was now silent and deserted. Meir crossed the narrow passage that divided the house, and opened the door of his Uncle Raphael's room, meeting his friend and cousin Haim upon the threshold. The youthful, almost childish face, surrounded by golden hair, looked beaming and excited.

"Where is Uncle Raphael?" asked Meir.

"Where should he be? He is at the fair, together with Ber, buying bullocks."

"And you, Haim, where are you going?"

But the lad did not even hear the question. Trilling a gay song, he had rushed off where the stir and lively spectacle of the fair attracted him.

Meir went out into the porch and looked around. The fair had scarcely begun, but in the midst of some forty carts he saw Ber discussing the prices of the cattle with the peasants. A little further on he saw Raphael standing in the porch of a house, surrounded by merchants, evidently talking and arranging business, as all their fingers were in motion. To approach these two men, who, after his grandfather, had the greatest authority in the family, and engage them in private talk was impossible. Meir saw that, and did not even try.

The sight of the motley crowd, where everybody was engaged upon some business of his own, looked strange and unreal. His thoughts were so different from any of the thoughts that moved that bustling multitude.

"Why should it trouble me?" he murmured. "What can I do?" And yet it seemed to him impossible to wait in passive inactivity until a red glare in the sky should announce that the nefarious design had been accomplished.

"What wrong has the man ever done us?" he said to himself. He was thinking of the owner of

Kamionka.

His dull, listless eyes rested on the porch of Witebski's house, and he saw the merchant himself standing and leisurely smoking a cigar. He was looking at the lively scene with the eyes of a man who had nothing whatever to do with it. The fact is, he dealt in timber, which he bought in large quantities, from the estates; therefore the fair had no special attraction for him. Besides, he considered himself too refined and thought too highly of his own business to mix with a crowd occupied with selling and buying corn or cattle.

Meir descended the steps and went towards Witebski, who, seeing him, smiled and stretched out a friendly hand.

"A rare visitor! A rare visitor!" he exclaimed. "But I know you could not come sooner to see the parents of your betrothed. We have heard how your severe grandfather ordered you to sit in Bet-ha-Midrash to read the Talmud. Well, it does not matter much; does it? The zeide is a dear old man, and did not mean it unkindly, just as you did not mean to do any wrong. Young people will now and then kick over the traces. Come into the drawing-room; I will call my wife, and she will make you welcome as a dear son-in-law."

The worldly-wise merchant spoke smilingly, and holding Meir by the hand, led him into the drawing-room. There, before the green sofa, he stood still, and looked into Meir's face and said:

"It is very praiseworthy, Meir, that you are bashful and shy of your future wife. I was the same at your age, and all young men ought to feel like it; but my daughter has been brought up in the world, where customs are somewhat different. She is wondering that she does not even know the fiance who is to be her husband within a month. I will go and bring her here. Nobody need know you are together. I will shut the door and window, and you can have a quiet talk together and make each other's acquaintance."

He was moving towards the door, but Meir grasped him by the sleeve.

"Reb!" he said. "I am not thinking of betrothals or weddings; I came to you on a different errand altogether."

Witebski looked sharply at the grave and pale face of the young man, and his brow became slightly clouded.

"It is not about my own affairs I have come to you, Reb—"

The merchant quickly interrupted:

"If it be neither your affair nor mine, why enter it?"

"There are affairs," said the young man, "which belong to everybody, and it is everybody's business to think and speak about them."

He was thinking of public affairs, but though he did not express himself in these words, he felt all their importance.

"I have come across an awful secret to-day."

Witebski jumped up from the easy-chair where he was sitting.

"I do not want to hear about any awful secrets! Why should you come to me about it, when I am not curious to know anything?"

"I want you, Reb, to prevent a terrible deed."

"And why should I prevent anything; why do you come to me about it?"

"Because you are rich and respected, and know how to speak. You live in peace and friendship with everybody; even the great Rabbi smiles when he sees you. Your words could do much if you only would —"

"But I will not," interrupted Witebski in a determined voice and with clouded brow. "I am rich and live in peace with everybody;" and lowering his voice, he added: "If I began to peer into people's secrets and thwarted them, I should be neither rich nor live in peace with anybody, and things would, not go so well with me as they are going now."

"Reb!" said Meir, "I am glad that everything is prospering with you: but I should not care for

prosperity if it were the result of wrong-doing."

"Who speaks about wrong-doing?" said Eli, brightening up again. "I wrong no man. I deal honestly with everybody I do business with, and they are satisfied and feel friendly towards me. Thanks to the Lord, I can look everybody in the face, and upon the fortune I leave my children there are no human tears or human wrongs."

Meir bent his head respectfully.

"I know it, Reb. You are fair and honest, and carry on your business with the wise intelligence the Lord gave you, and bring honour upon Israel. But I think if a man be honest himself, he ought not to look indifferently upon other people's villainy; and if he do not prevent it when he can, it is as bad as if he had done it himself. I have heard that a great wrong is going to be done by an Israelite to an innocent man. I can do nothing to prevent it, and I am looking for somebody who might be able to save this innocent man from a great calamity."

Here a loud and jovial laugh quite unexpectedly interrupted Meir's speech, and Witebski patted him playfully on the shoulder.

"Well, well," he said, "I see what you are driving at. You are a hot-headed youth, and want to take some trouble out of your own head and put it into mine. Thank you for the gift, but I will have none of it. Let things be. Why should we spoil our lives when they can be made so pleasant? There, sit ye down, and I will go and bring your bride. You have never heard her play on the piano. Ah, but she can play well. It is not the Sabbath, and she will play and you can listen a little."

He said this in his most lively manner, and moved towards the door; but again Meir arrested his steps.

"Reb!" he said, "listen at least to what I have to say."

There was a gleam of impatience in Witebski's eyes. "Ah, Meir! what an obstinate fellow you are, wanting to force your elders to do or hear things they do not want to! Well, I forgive you, and now let me go and bring the young woman."

Meir barred the way

"Reb," he said, "I will not let you go before you have heard me. I have no one else to go to; everybody is occupied with business or visitors. You alone, Reb, have time."

He stopped, because the merchant laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder; he was no longer smiling, but looked grave and displeased.

"Listen, Meir," he said. "I will tell you one thing. You have taken a wrong turning altogether. People shake their heads and speak badly of you; but I am indulgent with you. I make allowance because you are young, and because I am not of the same way of thinking as the people here, and know that many things in Israel are not as they ought to be. I think it; but do not speak about it or show it. Why should I expose myself to their ill-feeling? What can I do? If it be the Lord who ordered it so, why should I offend Him and make Him turn against me? If it be people's doing, other people will come in time to set it right. My business is to look after my family and their well-being. I am not a judge or a Rabbi either; therefore I keep quiet, try to please God and the people, and be in nobody's way. These re my principles, and I wish they were yours also Meir. I should let you go your own way, and not give advice to you either; but since you are to be my son-in-law, I must keep my eye upon you."

"Rob!" interrupted Meir, whose eyelids quivered with suppressed irritation, "do not be angry with me or think me rude, but I cannot marry your daughter. I shall never be her husband."

Witebski turned rigid with amazement.

"Do we hear aright?" he said, after a while. "Did not your grandfather pledge you to her and send the betrothal gifts?"

"My grandfather agreed with you about it," said Meir, in a trembling voice; "but he did it against my wish."

"Well," said Witebski, with the greatest amazement, "and what have you to say against my daughter?"

"I have no feelings against her, Rob; but my heart is not drawn to her. She also does not care for me. The other day, when passing your house, I heard her crying and lamenting that they wanted her to marry a common, ignorant Jew. It may be I am a common, ignorant Jew, but her education likewise is

not to my taste. Why should you wish to bind us? We are not children, and know what our heart desires and what it does not desire."

Witebski still looked at the young man in utter bewilderment, and raising both hands to his head, exclaimed indignantly:

"Did my ears not deceive me? You do not want my daughter—my beautiful, educated Mera?"

A hot flush had mounted to his forehead. The gentle diplomatist and man of the world had disappeared, only the outraged father remained.

At the same time the door was violently thrown open, and upon the threshold, with a very red face and blazing eyes, stood Mistress Hannah.

Evidently she had been at her toilette, which was only partly completed. Instead of her silk gown she wore a short red petticoat and gray jacket. The front of her wig was carefully dressed, but a loose braid fastened by a string dangled gracefully at her back. She stood upon the threshold and gasped out:

"I have heard everything!"

She could not say any more from excitement. Her breast heaved and her face was fiery red. At last she rushed with waving arms at Meir, and shouted:

"What is that? You refuse my daughter! You, a common, stupid Jew from Szybow, do not wish to marry a beautiful, educated girl like my Mera! Fie upon you—an idiot, a profligate!"

Witebski tried in vain to mitigate the fury of his better half.

"Hush, Hannah, hush!" he said, holding her by the elbow.

But all the breeding and distinguished manners upon which Mistress Hannah prided herself had vanished. She shook her clenched fist close in Meir's face:

"You do not want Mera, my beautiful daughter! Ai! Ai! the great misfortune!" she sneered. "It will certainly kill us with grief. She will cry her eyes out after the ignorant Jew from Szybow! I shall take her to Wilno and marry her to a count, a general, or a prince. You think that because your grandfather is rich and you have money of your own you can do what you like. I will show your grandfather and all your family that I care for them as much as for an old slipper!"

Eli carefully closed the door and windows. Mistress Hannah rushed toward a chest of drawers, opened it and took out, one after the other, the velvet-lined boxes, and throwing them at Meir's feet, exclaimed:

"There, take your presents and carry them to the beggar girl you are consorting with; she will be just the wife for you."

"Hush!" hissed out the husband, almost despairingly, as he stooped down to pick up the boxes but Mistress Hannah tore them out of his hands.

"I will carry them myself to his grandfather, and break off the engagement."

"Hannah," persuaded the husband, "you will only make matters worse. I will take them myself and speak with Saul."

Hannah did not even hear what he said.

"For shame!" she cried out; "the madman, the profligate, to prefer the Karaites' girl to my daughter! Well, the Lord be thanked we have got rid of him. Now I shall take my daughter to Wilno and marry her to a great nobleman."

It was about noon when Meir left Witebski's house, pursued by the curses and scoldings of his mistress and the gentle remonstrances and conciliatory words of Eli. The fair was now in full swing. The large market square was full of vehicles of all kinds, animals and people, that it seemed as if nobody could pass or find room any longer. In one part of the square where the crowd was less dense, close by the wall of a large building, sat an old man surrounded by baskets of all shapes and sizes. It was Abel Karaim.

Though the day was warm and sunny, his head was covered with a fur cap, from under which streamed his white hair, and his beard spread like a fan over his breast. The sun fell upon the small and



thin face, scarcely visible from under his hair, and the fur which fell over the shaggy eyebrows gave but little protection to the dim eyes blinking in the sunlight.

Close to him, slim and erect, stood Golda, with her corals encircling the slender neck, setting off the clear olive of her complexion, and her heavy tresses falling down her back. A few steps in front of these two stood long rows of carts full of grain, wood, and various country produce; between the carts bullocks and cows lowed, calves bleated, horses neighed and stamped, small brokers and horse-dealers flitted to and fro bargaining with the peasants. In this hubbub of voices, in midst of bargaining and quarrels, mixed with the shrill voices of women and squalling children, sounded the quavering voice of old Abel unweariedly at his task of reciting. The surging elements around did not distract him; on the contrary, they seemed to stimulate him, as his voice sounded louder and more distinct.

"When Moses descended from Mount Sinai, a great light shone from his face, and the people fell down on their faces and called out as in one voice: Moses, repeat to us the words of the Eternal. And a great calm came upon the earth and the heavens. They grew silent, the lightning ceased, and the wind fell. And Moses called the seventy elders of Israel, and when they surrounded him, as the stars surround the moon, he repeated to them the words of the Eternal."

At this moment two grave men, poorly dressed, came from the crowd and passed close by him.

"He is reciting again," said one.

"He is always doing so," said the other.

They smiled, but did not go further. An old woman and some younger people joined them. The woman stood listening and asked:

"What is it he is telling?"

"The history and the covenant of the Israelites," replied Golda.

The young people opened their mouths, the woman drew nearer, the men smiled, but all stood still and listened.

"When the people heard the commandments of the Lord, they called out as in one voice: We will do all that the Lord commands. And Moses erected twelve stones against the Mountain of Sinai, and said unto the people: Keep therefore the words of this covenant; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel."

"Your little ones, your wives, and the stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water."

"He says beautiful things, and speaks well," said one.

"And the hewer of thy wood and the drawer of thy water," repeated the two poorly dressed men as they raised their shining eyes to heaven. The woman, who had listened attentively, drew from her shabby gown a dirty handkerchief, and undoing one of the knots, deposited a big copper coin on Abel's knees.

A few more had joined the little group which surrounded Abel, Jews, Christians, and young people. These few had torn themselves from the noisy, haggling crowd, and listened to other words than those of roubles and kopecks—the sounds of the far past. It seemed almost as if Abel felt the attention of the people, and as if all these eyes upon him warmed his heart and stirred his memory. His eyes shone brighter from under the half-closed eyelids; the fur cap pushed at the back of his head, and the long white hair falling upon breast and shoulder, gave him the air of a half-blind bard who, with national songs, rouses and gladdens the spirit of the people. In a louder and steadier voice he went on:

"When the Israelites crossed the Jordan, Joshua erected two great stones, and wrote upon them the ten commandments. One half of the people rested under Mount Gerisim, the other half under Mount Ebal, and the voice spoke unto all men: He breaks the covenant of the Lord who worships false gods, he who does not honour his father and mother. He breaks the covenant who covets his neighbour's property and leads astray the blind. He breaks it who wrongs the stranger, the orphan, and the widow; he who putteth a lie into his brother's ear, and sayeth of the innocent, Let him die. And when the people of Israel heard it they called out, as if in one voice: All that thou commandest, we will do."

"Amen," murmured around Abel the voices which a short time before had haggled desperately over their small bargains. A peasant woman pushed through the little group, picked up one of the baskets and asked the price. Golda told her, after which the woman began to bargain; but Golda did not answer again, not because she did not want to, as rather that she did not hear the shrill voice any longer. Her

eyes were fixed upon one point in the crowd, a hot blush suffused her features, and a half-childish, half-passionate smile played upon her lips. She saw Meir making his way through the crowd and coming near where she stood; but he did not see her. His face looked troubled and restless, and presently he disappeared within the precincts of the synagogue. This was almost as crowded as the market square, but not so noisy.

Meir went towards the dwelling of the Rabbi Todros; all the people were moving in the same direction. Close to the Rabbi's little hut the crowd was still denser; but there was no noise, no pushing, or eyes shining with the greediness of gain; a grave silence prevailed everywhere, interrupted only by timid whispers. Meir knew what brought the people here and where they came from. There were scarcely any inhabitants of Szybow amongst them, as these could always see the Rabbi and come to him for advice. They came mostly from the country around; some from far distant places. There was a slight sprinkling of merchants and well-to-do people, but the great bulk bore the stamp of poverty and hard work in their lean, patient faces, and upon their garments.

"Why should I go there?" said Meir to himself; "he will not listen to me now; but where else can I go?" he added after a while, and he again mixed with the crowd, which bore him onwards until he found himself before the wide-open door of the Rabbi's dwelling.

Beyond the door, in the entrance hall, people stood closely pressed together like a living and breathing wall; no other sound than their long-drawn breaths were audible. Meir tried to push his way through, which did not present much difficulty, for many of the poor people had been humble guests at Ezofowich's, and recognised Saul's grandson and made way for him. They did this in a quick, absent-minded way, their eyes being riveted on the room beyond; they stood on tip-toe, and whenever they caught a broken sentence, their faces glowed with happiness as if the honoured sage's words were balm for all the sorrows of their lives.

The interior of the room, which Meir beheld from the open door, presented a singular appearance. In the depth of it, between the wall and a table, sat Rabbi Todros in his usual worn-out garments with his cap pushed to the back of his head. The upper part of his body bent forward; he sat perfectly motionless except for his eyes, which roamed along the people, who looked at him humbly and beseechingly. There was a small space between the sage and those who stood before him, which none dared to cross without his permission. The whole scene was lighted up by the rays of the sun streaming in through the window, on one side; on the other by the lurid and fitful flames in the fire-place. Near the latter crouched the melamed, feeding the fire with fresh fuel and putting various herbs into steaming vessels.

Besides the function of apothecary he had also the office of crier. He called out the names of the people who, according to his opinion, were entitled to appear before the master.

He now raised his thick forefinger towards the entrance, and called out:

"Shimshel, the innkeeper."

The summoned man whose name, Samson, time and custom had transformed into Shimshel, did not in the least resemble his namesake, the Samson of history. He was slender and red-haired, and bent almost to the ground before the Rabbi.

"Who greets the Wise Man bows before the greatness of the Creator," he said in a timid, shaking voice. It was not only his voice which trembled, but all his limbs, and his blue eyes roamed wildly about the room.

Isaak Todros sat like a statue. His eyes looked piercingly at the little red-haired man before him, who, in his terror, had lost his tongue altogether.

"Well?" said the sage, after a lengthy pause.

Shimshel raised his shoulders almost to his ears and began:

"Nassi! let a ray of your wisdom enlighten my darkness. I have committed a great sin, and my soul trembles while I am confessing it before you. Nassi! I am a most unfortunate man; my wife Ryfka has lost my soul for ever, unless you, oh Rabbi, tell me how to make it clean again."

Here the poor penitent choked again, but gathering courage, proceeded:

"Nassi! I and my wife Ryfka and the children sat down, last Friday, to the Sabbath feast. On one table there was a dish of meat, on the other a bowl of milk which my wife had boiled for the younger children. My wife ladled out the milk for the children, when her hand shook and a drop of milk fell upon

the meat."

"Ai! Ai! stupid woman, what had she done! She had made the meat unclean."

"Well, and what did you do with the meat?" The questioned man's head sank upon his breast, and he stammered:

"Rabbi, I ate from it, and so did my wife and children."

The Rabbi's eyes flashed with anger.

"Why did you not throw the unclean food on the refuse heap? Why did you make your mouth and the mouths of your family unclean?" shouted the Rabbi.

Shimshel choked again, and stopped. The sage, still motionless, asked:

"Nassi! I am very poor, and keep a small inn that brings but little profit. I have six children, an old father who lives with me, and two orphaned grandchildren, whose parents died. Rabbi it is difficult to find food for so many mouths, and we have meat only once a week. Kosher meat is very dear, so I buy three pounds every week, and eleven people have to keep up their strength, on it. Rabbi! I knew we should have nothing during the week, except bread and onions and cucumber. I was loth to throw that meat away and so ate from it, and allowed my family to eat from it."

Thus complained and confessed the poor Samson, and the master listened with clouded brows.

Then he spoke, transfixing the sinner with angry eyes. He explained in a long and learned speech the origin of the law of clean and unclean food. How great and wise men had written many commentaries about it, and how great the sin of a man was who dared to eat a piece of meat upon which a drop of milk had fallen.

"Your sin is abominable in the sight of the Lord," he thundered at the humble penitent. "For the sake of greediness you have broken the covenant which Jehovah made with his people, and transgressed one of the six hundred and thirteen commandments which every true Israelite is bound to keep. You deserve to be cursed even as Elisha cursed the mocking children, and Joshua the town of Jerico. But since it was only your body which sinned, whilst the spirit remained faithful, and you came to me and humbled and confessed yourself, I will forgive you, under the condition that you and your family abstain from meat and milk during four weeks, and the money saved thereby be distributed among the poor. And after four weeks, when your souls will be clean again from the abomination, you may dwell in peace and piety among your brethren Israelites."

"Say everybody Amen."

"Amen," called the people within the room and without, and those who pressed their eager faces against the window.

The little red-haired Samson, relieved of the burden that had oppressed his conscience, though otherwise burdened with a four-weeks' fast, murmured his thanks and retreated towards the entrance.

Reb Moshe again raised his finger and called out:

"Reb Gerson, melamed."

At his summons a round-backed, middle-sized man, with shaggy hair and clouded mien, appeared. He was a colleague of Reb Moshe, a teacher from a small town, where he enlightened the Israelitish youths. He stood in the middle of the room, holding a heavy book with both hands, After greeting the master, he began in these words:

"Rabbi! my soul has been in trouble, Two days ago my children read that evening prayers ought to be said until the end of the first watch. The children asked me: 'What is the first watch?' I remained mute, for I did not know how to answer, and I come to you, Rabbi, for a ray of wisdom to enlighten my mind. Tell me, oh Rabbi, what are the watches according to which every Israelite has to regulate his prayers. Where are they, so that I may give an answer to the children?"

The round-backed man stopped, and all eyes rested with excited curiosity upon the sage, who, without changing his position, answered:

"What should it be but the angels' watch? And where do they watch? They watch before the throne of the Eternal, when the day declines and night approaches. The angels are divided into three choirs. The first choir stands before the throne and keeps watch till midnight. Then is the time to say evening prayers. The second comes at midnight and keeps watch until dawn; when you see the sky turn rosy-

red and pale-blue, the third choir arrives, and then it is time to say morning prayers."

The master stopped, and a low murmur of admiration and rapture was heard among the crowd. But the melamed did not retire yet; his eyes fixed upon his book he began anew:

"Rabbi, give me another ray of wisdom to carry back to my scholars. Near our little town lies the estate of a great lord. Sometimes the children go there and hear all sorts of things. Once, coming thence, they told in town that the origin of thunder had been explained to them. They were told that thunder comes from heaven when two clouds meet and give out a force they called electricity. I never heard of it before: is it true that such a force exists and that it originates thunder?"

During Reb Gerson's speech the Rabbi's face twitched with suppressed impatience, and he smiled scornfully.

"It is not true!" he exclaimed. "There is no such force, and not from there comes thunder. When the Roman emperor destroyed the Temple, and dispersed the people of Israel, there was thunder. Where did it come from? It came from Jehovah's breast, who wept aloud over the destruction of his people. And now the Lord weeps over his people, and his moans are heard upon earth as thunder; his tears fall into the seas and make them heave and rise, and shake the earth to its foundations, and send forth fire and smoke. I have told you now whence come thunder and earthquakes. Go in peace and repeat to your children what I have told you."

With a humble bow and thanks the melamed retired into the crowd. At the same time from beyond the door the loud wail of a child became audible.

Reb Moshe called out:

"Haim, dairy farmer from Kamionka, and his wife Malka."

From the crowd came a man and a woman. Both looked pale and troubled. The woman carried a sick child in her arms. They knelt before him, and holding up to him the child, wasted with disease, asked for his help and advice. Todros bent tenderly over the fragile little body and looked long and attentively at it. Reb Moshe, squatting on the floor, looked at the master for orders, mixing and stirring the decoctions. In this way, one by one, came the people to their teacher, sage, physician, prophet almost, plied him with questions and asked for advice. A troubled husband brought his comely, buxom wife, and asked for judgment by help of a certain water, called the water of jealousy. If the wife be guilty of infidelity, the efficacy of the water is believed to cause death; if innocent, it will enhance her beauty and give her health. Another man asked what he was to do if the time for prayers came during a journey and he could not turn his face to the east, because the storm and dust would blind his eyes. A great many came crying and bewailing their miserable lives, and asked the sage to look into the future and tell them how long it would be till the Messiah arrived. The greater part of the people did not want anything, asked neither questions nor came for advice; they simply wanted to see the revered master, breathe the same air with him, and fill their souls with the words that dropped from his lips, and see the light of his countenance.

It was evident that Isaak Todros felt and appreciated his high position. He attended to all their wants with the greatest gravity, zeal, and patience. He explained, and put the people right in points of law, inflicted penances upon sinners, gave physic to the sick, advice to the ignorant—without changing his position—only fixing his either stern or thoughtful eyes upon those who came to him. Several times when the people wailed and complained, entreating him to foretell the coming of the Messiah, his dark eyes grew misty. He loved those who came to him with their troubles and felt for them. Big beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead, and his breath came hard and fast; still he went on with his ministrations, in the deep conviction that he was doing his duty, with a fervent faith and belief in all that he was achieving and teaching, and the disinterestedness of a man who wants nothing for himself, except the little black hut, a scanty meal, and the tattered garments he had worn for many years.

In the meanwhile a man passed rapidly through the court of the synagogue, looking around him as if in search of something or somebody. It was Ber, Saul's son-in-law. He looked at the people crowding round the Rabbi's dwelling; at last his eyes lighted on Meir, and he grasped him by the sleeve of his coat.

The young man awoke, as from a trance, and looked round absently at his uncle.

"Come with me," whispered Ber.

"I cannot go away," said Meir, in an equally low voice. "I have important business with the Rabbi, and shall wait till all the people have left so that I may speak with him."

"Come away," repeated Ber, and he took the youth by the shoulder.

Meir shook him off impatiently, but Ber repeated:

"Come with me now; you can return later when the people have gone—that is, if you wish it, but I do not think you will."

Both left the crowded hut. Ber walked swiftly and silently, leading his companion to a quiet part of the precincts where, under the shadow of the walls of Bet-ha-Midrash, nobody could overhear, their conversation.

Meir leaned against the wall. Ber stood silently before him, looking intently at his young kinsman.

Ber's outward appearance did not present any striking features; many would pass him without taking particular notice, yet the student of human nature would find in him a character worth knowing. He was forty years old, always carefully dressed, yet according to old customs. His delicately moulded features and blue eyes had a dreamy and apathetic expression, which only lighted up under the excitement of business speculations. A deep yearning after something, and carefully suppressed dreams and stifled aspirations gave to his mouth an expression of calm resignation. Sometimes, when the ghost of the past appeared before him, two deep furrows appeared across his forehead. It was evident that some fierce conflicts had raged under that quiet exterior, and left wounds and scars which now and then would remind him painfully of the past.

He now stood opposite the young man whom he had dragged away from the crowd almost by force.

"Meir," he said at last, "an hour ago your grandfather had a long talk with his son, Abraham. He left his visitors on purpose to speak with him, and bade me to be present at their conversation. Rest in peace, Meir; your uncle will have no hand in the vile deed which will be perpetrated."

"Will be perpetrated?" interrupted Meir passionately. "Not if I can prevent it."

Ber smiled bitterly

"How can you prevent it? I guessed you wanted to speak about it to the Rabbi, and I went after you to warn you and save you from the consequences of such a step. You thought that if you put the case before him, he would rise in anger and forbid any one to do such an infamous deed. If he did that they would obey him; but he will not."

"Why should he not?" exclaimed Meir.

"Because he does not understand anything about it. If you questioned him about clean or unclean food, whether it was allowed to snuff a candle on the Sabbath, or gird the loins with pocket-handkerchiefs, he would answer readily enough. He would tell you whether to bless first the wine or first the bread, or how the spirits transmigrate from one body to another, how many Sefirot emanate from Jehovah and how to transpose the sacred letters in order to discover fresh mysteries, or about the arrival of the Messiah. But if you began to speak to him about distilleries, taxes, estates, and things in connection with them, he would open his eyes widely and would listen to you like a man struck with deafness, because these things are to him like a sealed letter. For him, beyond his sacred books, the world is like a great wilderness."

Meir bent his head.

"I feel the truth of what you say; yet if I asked him whether it be right for the sake of gain to wrong an innocent man?"

Ber answered:

"He would ask you whether the innocent man were an Edomite or an Israelite."

Meir looked intently at the sky, thinking deeply, and evidently puzzled.

"Ber," he said at last, "do you hate the Edomites?"

The questioned man shook his head.

"Hatred is like poison to the human mind. Once, when I was young, I even thought of going to them and entreating them to help us. I am glad now that I did not do it and remained with my own people, but I have no ill-feeling towards them."

"And I have none," said Meir. "Do you think Kamionker hates them?"

"No," said her decidedly. "He makes use of them. They are his milch cows. He may despise them, because they do not look after their business but allow themselves to be cheated."

"And Todros; does he hate them?" questioned Meir.

"Yes," said Ber, very emphatically; "Todros hates them. And why does he hate them? Because he does not live in the Present; he still lives in the Past, when the Roman emperor besieged Jerusalem and drove the Israelites out of Palestine. He breathes, thinks, and feels as if he were living two thousand years ago. He does not know that from the time of his ancestor, Halevi Todros, other wise people have lived, and that times are changed, and that those who hated and persecuted us once have since then stretched out their hands in peace and goodwill. How can he know anything? He never left Szybow since he was born; never read anything but the books left by his forefathers; has never seen or spoken to any one out of Israel."

Meir listened, and nodded his head in sign that he agreed with his companion.

"I see that it is of no use at all going to him," he said, thoughtfully.

"It is not," said Ber; "therefore I came in search of you. He will not prevent Kamionker from wronging the lord of Kamionka, who represents to him the people of Ai, with whom Joshua went to war, or the Roman nation who destroyed the Temple, or the Spaniards who, five hundred years ago, burned and despoiled the Jews. He would not even listen to you, and would denounce you as an infidel. If he has not brought his hand down upon you, it is owing to the love and respect the people bear towards your grandfather, Saul. If you accused Kamionker before him, Kamionker would set him, against you, as already does Reb Moshe. Meir! be careful! there are rocks ahead. Save yourself before it is too late."

Meir did not reply to the warning.

"Ber," he said, "I am sure that man, blind and revengeful as he is, possesses a great soul. Look how patiently he sits night and day over his books, how full of pity and compassion are his eyes when he listens to the poor people and comforts them, and does not want anything for himself. Ber! his faith is so sincere!"

Ber smiled at his words, and turned his dreamy eyes to heaven.

"You speak thus about the Rabbi, Meir; what do you say about the people who, in the midst of misery, hunger, and humiliation still thirst for wisdom and knowledge. Never mind whether it is the true wisdom or true knowledge, but look how they raise themselves above their narrow lives by their faith and reverence for their Wise Men. Do you think that this narrow, bigoted, greedy people have a great soul?"

"Israel has a great soul, and I love it more than my life, my happiness, and my peace." He stopped for a minute, then grasped Ber by the shoulder. "I know what is wanting in Todros to make him a great man, and what is wanting in the Israelitish people to show their greatness to the world. They ought to come out of the Past, in which they persist to dwell, into the Present. They want Sar-Ha-Olam, the angel of knowledge, to touch them with his wings."

Whilst the young man spoke thus, his face glowing with excitement, Ber looked at him thoughtfully.

"When I look at you, Meir, and listen to you, I see myself as I was at your age. I felt the same anger, the same grief, and I wanted—"

He stopped, and passed his hand over his brow, marked with two deep lines, and his eyes looked far away as if into the future.

Anybody seeing their animated faces and lively gesticulation as they stood near the wall of the Bet-ha-Midrash, would have concluded that they were discussing bargains. What else did people like them live or care for? Yet they think and suffer, but nobody guesses it or wishes to penetrate the mystery of their thoughts. It is like the depth of an unfathomable sea—its depths unknown even to those who are perishing in it.

"Come home with me," said Ber. "Your grandfather will soon be sitting down to dinner with his guests and be displeased at not seeing you at table. There is already a storm brewing for you, because Mistress Hannah has returned the betrothal gifts, broken off the engagement, and given Saul a piece of her mind in presence of all the visitors."

Meir carelessly waved his hands.

"I wished for it," he said. "I shall ask my grandfather's pardon. I can only think about one thing now: where to go next."

Ber looked wonderingly at the speaker. "How obstinate you are," he remarked. They were near the entrance gate when Ber suddenly stopped.

"Meir, whatever you do, don't go to the government authorities."

Meir passed his hand over his forehead.

"I thought of that," he said, "but I am afraid. If I reveal the whole truth, they will not only punish Kamionker, but also those poor wretches he tempted with his money. Poor people, ignorant people, I am sorry for them—"

He suddenly paused, and looked fixedly in one direction. An elegant carriage, drawn by four horses, crossed the market-square. Meir pointed at the carriage, which stopped before Jankiel Kamionker's inn, and his eyes opened wider, for a sudden idea took hold of his mind.

"Ber!" he exclaimed, "do you see him? That is the lord of Kamionka."

The sun was declining towards the west when, in the porch of Saul's house, stood a group of men gaily conversing among themselves. They were Saul's visitors who, after having feasted at his hospitable board, were now saying good-bye, and pressing the old man's hand, thanking him for his kind reception; then, by twos and threes, they mounted the waiting carts, their faces still turned towards their venerable host, who stood in the porch.

In the sitting-room the women, with the help of the servants, were busy clearing the table, and putting away the dinner service.

The fair was also drawing to an end; the carts grew fewer by degrees, so did the people upon the square. All the noise and liveliness concentrated itself now in the several inns where the people were drinking and dancing. Jankiel Kamionker's inn was by far the most frequented and noisiest, No wonder.

The crafty dealer rented several distilleries and some seventy inns about the country, and ruled over a small army of subtenants and inn-keepers, of the Samson kind, who bought meat once a week, and starved on other days. They depended entirely on Kamionker, who, if he did not treat them generously they, on their side, were not generous towards the peasants, whom they plied with drink. Through his subordinates, Kamionker held thousands of peasants' families under his thumb. Therefore they all came to his inn. He did not himself look after his humble customers, but left them to his wife and his two strong and ugly daughters, who carried bottles and glasses round the tables, together with salted herrings, and different kinds of bread. Nobody could have guessed, seeing the faded woman, shabbily dressed, moving in that stifling atmosphere of alcohol and human breath, that she was the wife of one of the wealthiest men in the country.

Neither did the man in his musty garments who stood humbly at the door of the guest's room, look like a great capitalist and financier.

He stood near the threshold, and his guest, the lord of Kamionka, reclined in an easy-chair smoking a cigar. The young gentleman was tall and handsome; his dark hair fell upon a white forehead, though the other part of his face was slightly browned by the sun. He had a good-natured and thoughtful face.

The gay playfulness with which his eyes twinkled was evidently caused by the sight of the nimble Jew, whose body seemed to be made of india rubber, and the two corkscrew curls behind his ears of a fiery red, seemed to dance to and fro with his every motion.

Then he became thoughtful again, because the red-haired Jew spoke about important business. The young nobleman did not know anything about the man himself with whom he dealt.

He was to him a Jew, and the tenant of his distillery. Thus he might be also a prominent member of a powerfully organised body, a greatly respected and pious person, a mystic deeply versed in sacred knowledge, and finally a man who, in those dirty, freckled hands, held the entangled threads of many Jewish and Christian families; of all this the lord of Kamionka knew nothing. Therefore it never occurred to him to invite the Jew to draw nearer or sit down. Reb Jankiel likewise did not think of such a thing. He had been accustomed to stand humbly, as his fathers had done before him; nevertheless, his pale blue eyes were full of malice whenever the young gentleman turned his look elsewhere and could not see him. It may be Reb Jankiel did not realise his own feelings, yet he could not help seeing the contrast between his present humble attitude and the proud position he occupied in his own

community. Such feelings, though ill-defined, if united to a bad heart, could produce no other results than hatred and even crime.

"You bore me, Jankiel, with your everlasting bargains and agreements," said the nobleman carelessly, twisting his cigar between his fingers. "I stopped at your inn for a few minutes to rest my horses, and you get me into business discussions at once."

Reb Jankiel bowed nimbly.

"I beg the gracious lord's pardon," he said smilingly, "but the distillery will be starting work next month, and I should like to renew the agreement."

"Of course you will be my tenant, as you have been these last three years; but there is plenty of time."

"It is better to arrange everything beforehand. I shall have to buy a hundred head of cattle for fattening purposes, and I cannot afford the outlay unless I am sure of the tenancy. If the gracious lord permits, I shall come to-morrow to write the agreement."

The young nobleman rose.

"Very well, come to-morrow, but not in the morning, as I shall not be at home."

"The gracious lord thinks of spending the night in the neighbourhood?" asked Jankiel, his face twitching nervously.

"Yes, in the near neighbourhood," answered the nobleman, and was going to say something more when the door behind Jankiel's back opened gently, and a young Jew, with a pale face and burning eyes, entered boldly.

At the sight of the newcomer Jankiel drew back instinctively, and an expression of terror came into his face.

"What do you want here?" he asked in a choking voice.

The nobleman glanced carelessly at the young Jew.

"Do you want to speak to me, my friend?" he asked.

"Yes, with the gracious lord," said the newcomer, and he advanced a few steps nearer. But Jankiel barred him the way.

"Do not permit him to come nearer, gracious lord, and do not speak with him. He is a bad man, and interferes with everybody."

The lord of Kamionka waved the frantic Jankiel aside.

"Let him speak if he has any business with me. Why should I not speak with him?"

Saying this, he looked with evident curiosity at the youthful face of the intruder.

"The gracious lord does not know me," began the young man.

"And why should the gracious lord know such a good-for-nothing fellow?" interrupted Jankiel. But the lord of Kamionka bade him be silent.

"I have seen you, gracious lord, at my grandfather's, Saul, whose son, Raphael, buys your corn."

"So you are Saul's grandson?"

"Yes, gracious lord, I am his grandson."

"And the son of Raphael Ezofowich?"

"No; I am the son of Benjamin, the youngest of Saul's sons, who died long ago."

Meir did not speak Polish very fluently, yet he made himself understood. He had heard it spoken by those who came to deal with members of his family, and had learned it of the Edomite, who had also taught him to read and write.

"Did Raphael send you to me?"

"No; I came on my own account."



He seemed to collect his thoughts, then boldly raised his head.

"I came to warn you, gracious lord. Bad people are preparing a great misfortune for you—"

Jankiel rushed forward, and, with outstretched arms, placed himself between the two.

"Will you hold your tongue," he shouted. "Why do you come here to disturb the gracious lord with your foolish talk?" and, turning towards the nobleman, he said:

"He is a madman and a villain."

It was not the lord now who waved Jankiel but Meir himself. With heightened colour, breathing quickly, he pushed him away, said:

"He will not allow me to speak, but I will say quickly what I have to say. Do not trust him, gracious lord; he is a bad man, and your enemy. He wants to do you a grievous harm—guard yourself and guard your house like the apple of your eye. I am not an informer; therefore I came to say it in his presence, and warn the gracious lord. He will revenge himself upon me, but that does not matter. I am doing my duty, as every true Israelite ought to do, for it is written: 'The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you,' and it is further said: 'If thou remainest silent, upon thy head be the woes of Israel.'"

The young nobleman looked at the speaker with some interest, but his eyes twinkled. The quotation from Scripture, beautiful in itself, but easily marred by faulty pronunciation, appeared more ridiculous than interesting.

"I perceive that old Saul has a grandson who is well grounded in the Scriptures, and has a prophetic gift; but tell me clearly, and distinctly, my young prophet, what misfortune is threatening me, and why this honest Jankiel, who has been dealing with me for years, has suddenly become my enemy?"

Jankiel stood close to the easy-chair, and, bending closer to the lord, whispered smilingly:

"He is mad. He always foretells all sorts of terrible things, and he hates me because I laugh at him."

"Oh! then I shall not laugh at him and make him hate me," said the nobleman gaily; and turning towards Meir, he asked: "Tell me what is the misfortune that threatens me. If you tell me the truth, you will be doing a good deed, and I shall be grateful for it."

"You ask me a difficult thing, gracious lord; I thought you would understand from a few words. It is hard for me to speak more clearly," and he passed his hand over his brow which was wet with perspiration. "Promise me, gracious lord, that if I speak out, my words will fall like a stone into water. Promise me to make use of my information, but not to go to law."

The nobleman looked amused, yet curious.

"I give you my word of honour that your secret will be safe with me."

Meir's burning eyes turned towards Jankiel, his whole frame shook, he opened his mouth—but the words refused to come. Jankiel, seeing his emotion which momentarily deprived him of his tongue, suddenly grasped him by the waist and dragging him towards the door, shouted:

"Why do you enter my house and disturb my honoured guest by your foolish talk? The gracious lord is my guest, has known me for years; there! off with you at once."

Meir tried to get out of Jankiel's hands, and though he was the taller and stronger, Jankiel was nimbler, and despair redoubled his energy. Struggling and panting, both rolled towards the door, and the young gentleman looked at the struggle with an amused expression. Meir's pale face towering above Jankiel's red head suddenly flushed.

"Do you laugh at me, gracious lord?" he said brokenly.

"You do not know how difficult it is for me to speak, but guard your house from fire!"

At these last words he disappeared through the door, which the panting Jankiel slammed after him.

The lord of Kamionka still smiled. The struggle between the nimble, red-haired Jankiel and the tall young Jew looked very funny. During the battle the long coat tails had flapped about like wings, and Jankiel, in his desperate efforts to get rid of the intruder, had performed the most extraordinary acrobatic feats. It was a ridiculous scene altogether—the more ridiculous as the combatants belonged to a race at which it was an old, time-honoured custom to laugh. How could the young nobleman

understand the deeper meaning of the play enacted before him? He saw before him a young Jew who spoke in broken Polish, the grandson of a merchant, and who would be, in his turn, a merchant. That he was a noble spirit in rebellion against everything mean and dishonest, a despairing spirit longing for freedom and wider knowledge, that coming to him as he did he had done an heroic action that would destroy his whole future—of all this the nobleman had not the slightest suspicion.

After a short pause he looked at Jankiel, and asked:

"Explain to me now; what did it all mean? What kind of a man is he really?"

"What kind of man?" said Jankiel, who seemingly had regained his composure. "It was a stupid affair, and I beg the gracious lord's pardon that it should have happened to him under my roof. He is a madman and very spiteful. He went mad from mere spitefulness."

"Hm!" said the young gentleman. "He did not look like a madman. He has a handsome face and an intelligent one."

"He is not altogether mad—" began Jankiel, but the lord interrupted him.

"He is the grandson of Saul Ezofowich?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"He is Saul's grandson; but his grandfather does not like him."

"Whether he likes him or not, I could scarcely ask his grandfather about him."

"On the contrary, ask him, gracious lord, what he thinks of his grandson," exclaimed Jankiel triumphantly. "Ask his uncles; I will go and bring his uncle Abraham."

"No need," said the nobleman shortly.

He rose, and looked thoughtful, then fixed his eyes upon Jankiel's face.

Jankiel boldly met his searching glance. "Listen, Jankiel," said the lord of Kamionka, "you are a man of years, a respectable merchant, and father of a large family. I ought to trust you more than a young man whom I have seen to-day for the first time, and who may be wrong in the head for anything I know; but there must be something at the bottom of what he tells me. I must get some information about him."

"The gracious lord can get that information very easily," said Jankiel, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously.

The owner of Kamionka thought a little, and then asked:

"Is that celebrated Rabbi of yours in town?"

"Where should he be?" said Jankiel. "He has never been out of the town during his life."

"A steady man, your Rabbi," said the nobleman, reaching for his hat. "Now, Jankiel, show me the way, and, if I do not hear anything new, I shall at least have seen and spoken with that celebrated man."

Jankiel opened the door for his distinguished guest, and followed him into the square, which was now almost deserted. Half-way across they met Eli Witebski, whom the lord of Kamionka greeted affably. By his manner and appearance the wealthy merchant came a little nearer to the civilised sphere in which the landowner moved himself.

"Has the gracious lord come to town on business?" asked Eli.

"No; I am only passing."

"And where might the gracious lord be going now?"

"To see your Rabbi, Witebski."

Witebski looked astonished.

"To see the Rabbi! And what business can the noble lord have with the Rabbi?"

"It is a ridiculous story, Witebski. There, tell me, do you know Saul Ezofowich's grandson?"

"Which of them?" asked Eli. "Saul has many grandsons."

"What is his name?" asked the nobleman, half-turning his head toward Jankiel.

"Meir, Meir, that worthless fellow!"

Witebski nodded his head as a sign that he understood.

"Well," he said, with an indulgent smile, "I would not quite call him a worthless fellow. He is young, and will mend; he is hot-headed though."

"What! a little wrong here?" laughed the gentleman, pointing to his forehead.

"Well," said Eli, "he is not mad, but rash and impulsive, and just now had done a very foolish thing, and put me into a most awkward position. Ai! Ai! what trouble and vexation I had through him, and shall have still—"

"Oh, that's it!" said the lord. "He is a kind, of half-witted mischief-maker, who does not know what he wants, and gets in everybody's way?"

"The noble lord has guessed it," said Eli, but he added at once. "He is very young, and will yet be a decent man."

"Which means that he is not a decent man at present? I see."

"This way, please," said Jankiel, showing the gates of the synagogue court.

"And where does your Rabbi live?"

Kamionker pointed to the little black hut close to the synagogue.

"What, in that little cottage?"

And he went towards it with Jankiel alone, as Witebski, guessing that some unpleasant business had brought them hither, directly took his leave, and, bowing politely, left them.

The door of the hut was already closed, but a little group of worshippers still lingered at the open window. It was very silent within; but the Rabbi did not rest, he never rested, as the few hours spent in broken sleep could scarcely be called by that name. He was bending over his books, which he knew by heart, but still pondered over, and of which he strove with his whole mind and soul to penetrate the mystery.

Reb Moshe rested, but not altogether. He sat in the corner of the fireplace, his knees drawn up to his chin, and his hands buried in his beard. He looked fixedly at the Master, not unlike a fanatic savage worshipping his fetish, or as a scientist watches the universe. The eyes of Reb Moshe expressed deep veneration, wonder, and utter devotion.

Suddenly the door opened, and upon the threshold stood the lord of Kamionka who, turning to Jankiel, said:

"Remain outside; I will speak alone with the Rabbi."

Saying this, he stooped in order to enter the low doorway, and then looked around.

Opposite him, near the wall, sat a man with a mass of coal-black hair, slightly tinged with gray, about him a worn-out garment, and with a yellow, wrinkled face, who, looked at the intruder with amazed and piercing eyes. In a far corner squatted another man, only dimly visible; upon him the young gentleman bestowed only a passing glance. It did not even enter his mind that the man in the tattered clothes and with the piercing eyes could be the celebrated Rabbi, whose fame, spreading over the Jewish communities, had sent a faint echo into the Christian world.

He approached the man very politely. "Could I see the Rabbi of Szybow for a few minutes?"

There was no answer.

The man sitting near the wall craned his long yellow neck, and opened his eyes and mouth wider.

The sudden amazement, or perhaps other feelings, gave him the appearance of stupidity, almost idiotism.

No wonder that Isaak Todros looked like one turned to stone at the sight of the nobleman standing before him. He was the first Edomite who had ever crossed his threshold—the first he had ever seen

closely, and the first time he had heard the sonorous language, which sounded strange and unintelligible to his ears. If the angel Matatron, the heavenly patron and defender of Israel, or even the foremost of the evil spirits had stood before him, he would have been less appalled: with supernatural beings he was in constant though not direct communication. He studied them—their nature and their functions. But this tall, stately man, in his abominable garment which reached barely to his knees, with the white, effeminate forehead and unintelligible language, who was he? Was he a Philistine? a cruel Roman, or perhaps a Spaniard—one of those that murdered the famous Abrabanel family, and drove his ancestor Todros out of Spain?

The lord waited a few minutes, and not getting an answer, repeated the question:

"Could I speak with the Rabbi of Szybow?"

At the sound of the somewhat raised voice the squatting figure in the corner moved and rose slowly. Reb Moshe, with open mouth and stupid, glaring eyes, came into the light, and in his hoarse voice uttered the monosyllable "Hah!"

At the sight of the man dressed in such primitive and now-a-days unseen simplicity, the lord's face twitched all over with suppressed merriment.

"My good sir," he said, turning to the melamed, "is that man deaf and dumb? I asked him twice whether I could see the Rabbi of Szybow, and got no answer."

Saying this, he pointed at Todros, who, craning his neck in the melamed's direction, asked:

"Was sagd er? Was will er?" (What does he say? What does he want?)

Reb Moshe, instead of answering, opened his mouth still wider. At the same time murmurs and whispers became audible from the open window, and the young gentleman, looking in that direction, saw a cluster of faces peeping into the room: the faces looked inquisitive, and a little frightened. He turned towards them and asked:

"Does the Rabbi of Szybow live here?"

"He does," said some voices.

"Where is he, then?"

A great many fingers pointed at the bench near the wall.

"What! That man is your wise and celebrated Rabbi?"

The faces framed in the open window radiated with a peculiar blissfulness, and nodded.

The young man made an heroic effort to control his risible muscles, and with twinkling eyes he pointed at the melamed.

"And who is this?"

"He is the melamed," said several voices; "a very wise and pious man."

The nobleman turned again to Todros.

"Reverend sir," he said, "could I speak alone with you for a few minutes?"

Todros remained silent as the grave, but his breath went faster and his eyes grew fiercer.

"Mr. Melamed," said the nobleman to the barefooted man in the long coarse shirt, "perhaps this is a day when your Rabbi is not allowed to speak?"

"Hah?" asked Reb Moshe drawlingly. The nobleman, half-amused, half-angry, turned towards the people.

"Why do they not answer?"

There was a momentary silence. The faces looked perplexedly at each other. One of them at last said:

"They only understand the Jewish language." The owner of Kamionka looked at them in open-eyed amazement; he could scarcely believe that he heard aright.

"What! You don't mean to say they do not understand the language of the country they live in?"

"Well, they do not understand it."

There was some undefined resentment in the voice that said that.

At this moment Isaak Todros drew himself up, and raising both arms above his head, began to speak quickly:

"And a day will arrive when the Messiah, who sleeps in Paradise, will wake up and descend to the earth. Then a great war will spread over the world. Israel will stand up against Edom and Ishmael, until Edom and Ishmael will fall at his feet like shattered cedars."

His gestures were at once solemn and threatening, his eyes blazing, and catching his breath, he repeated again:

"Edom and Ishmael will lie at the feet of Israel like broken cedars, and the thunderbolt of the Lord will fall upon them and crush them to powder."

It was now the Edomite's turn to look astonished, for he did not understand a word. He looked not unlike a tall, stately cedar as he stood there, but not like one that could be easily crushed to powder. His face was rippling over with laughter, which he carefully tried to suppress.

"What does he say?" he asked the people at the window.

There was no answer. All eyes were riveted upon the sage, and on the melamed's face there was an expression of ecstatic rapture.

"My good people, tell me what he said," repeated the nobleman.

A deep voice, as if in sarcastic retribution, answered with another question.

"Did the gracious lord not understand?"

This ingenuous question put an end to the young man's self-control, and he burst out into a peal of laughter and turned towards the door.

"Savages!" he murmured to himself, and he still laughed as he crossed the precincts, and the people who crowded round the Rabbi's window looked after him with astonished and deeply-offended eyes. The young man laughed, tickled by the ludicrous aspect of the whole scene; yet under his apparent merriment there was an under-current of resentment and anger, that the Wise Men of Israel should have shown themselves to him like savages, who did not even speak the language of the country whose air they breathed, and that had nourished them for many centuries. The people around the Rabbi's hut followed him with looks of displeasure almost amounting to hatred, because he had blasphemed what they loved and revered beyond anything. Poor sages of Israel with their worshippers! Poor Edomite laughing at the sage and his worshippers! But poorest of all, the country, the sons of which after journeying together for so many centuries do not understand each other's heart and language.

At the gate of the precincts Jankiel Kamionker met the young nobleman.

"Well, Jankiel," he said, "you have indeed a wise and learned Rabbi."

Jankiel did not reply to this, but began at once to speak about the agreement and the Kamionka distillery. He spoke glibly and easily, and did not appear to remember what had occurred or refer to it. Neither did the lord of Kamionka, upon whom the whole scene had left an impression of astonishment and amusement. The young prophet, and Jankiel with his red curls trying to evict him; the Rabbi, who only spoke the Jewish language, and his companion in the wonderful costume: it was as good as a play. How his friends would enjoy his description; how the good-natured Sir Andrew would laugh, and his daughter, the beautiful Hedwiga, of whom he thought night and day as the believer in his paradise, would smile!

Thinking of her he jumped into the carriage, and looking at the west, he exclaimed:

"How long you have kept me!"

He nodded to Jankiel and called to the coachman:

"Drive on."

The four grays and the light carriage carried him swiftly through the town till he disappeared in a cloud of golden dust. In the western sky the red clouds died gradually away, and the transparent dusk of an August evening enveloped the town and darkened the sitting-room in the Ezofowich house. Loud

and angry cries had reverberated in that usually peaceful household. The shrillest and angriest among them was that of Reb Jankiel, who abused all the members of the family one after the other, who answered either angrily or quietly according to their different characters. After that, the accusing and threatening man, shaking with fury, or perhaps terror, had rushed out of the house towards the Rabbi's dwelling; and those who remained behind sat silent and motionless, as if riveted to their chairs by their angry and perplexed feelings.

Saul sat on the sofa with his head sunk upon his breast, his hands lying motionless upon his knees, and sighed loudly and heavily. Around him sat on chairs Raphael, Abraham, and Ber. The wives of Raphael and Ber, the much-respected and beloved women, entered quietly and sat down behind their husbands. In a corner of the room, not noticed by any one, sat young Haim, Abraham's son and Meir's devoted friend.

It was Saul who interrupted the silence.

"Where is he gone to?"—meaning Jankiel.

"He is gone to denounce him before the Rabbi," said Abraham.

"He will bring Meir before the ecclesiastical tribunal," said Raphael.

Saul rocked himself and moaned aloud:

"Ai! ai! my poor head! Did I live to see a grandson of mine brought up to judgement like a thief or robber?"

"It is as informer he will appear before the judges," said Abraham swiftly and passionately.

"Something must be done with Meir, father."

"Think of it and tell us what to do with him. Things cannot remain as they are. He will ruin us and our sons and bring shame upon the whole family. Father! people used to say that it was always an Ezofowich who tried to undermine the faith of Israel: that the house of Todros and the house of Ezofowich are like two rivers than run in opposite directions, but meet now and then, and struggle to see which is the stronger, and to push the other underground. This talk had subsided, people began to forget, till Meir stirred it up again. Something must be done. Think of it, father, and we will do as you command us."

Two red spots appeared on Saul's face.

"What is to be done with him?" he asked in a voice that sounded like a smothered sob.

Raphael said:

"He must be married as quickly as possible."

Ber, who had until now remained silent, observed:

"Why not send him into the world?"

Saul thought a long time, and then replied:

"Your advice is not good. I cannot punish him severely. What would my father Hersh say to it, in whose footsteps he wishes to go, and whom I am not at liberty to judge. I cannot marry him quickly, because the child is not like other children—he is proud and sensitive, and does not brook any fetters. Besides, he is so disgraced and openly rebuked already that no wealthy or respectable Israelite will give him his daughter in marriage."

Again Saul's voice shook. He had lived to see his grandson, the most beloved of all his children, come down so low that no respectable family would receive him as son-in-law.

"I cannot send him away either," he continued, "because I am afraid that in the world he will lose all that is left of his father's faith. I am in the position of the great and wise Rabbi of whom it is written that he had a reckless son who ate pork in secret. People advised him to send his son out into the world and expose him to misery and a wandering life. But he replied: 'Let my son remain at home. The sight of his father's troubled and sorrowful face may soften his heart and lead him to a better life; stern misery would change it into hard stone.'"

Saul became silent—all around were silent; nothing was heard but now and then a sigh from the

women.

The room became darker and darker.

After a while, in a subdued, almost timid, voice, Ber began:

"Allow me to open my heart before you to-day. I speak but seldom, because as often as I want to speak the remembrance of my younger years seems to rise before me and smother my voice; therefore it is the voice least heard of all the voices in the family. I left off speaking or advising, and looked only after my business and my family. But I must speak now. Why trouble so much about Meir? Give him his liberty; let him go into the world, and do not punish him either by your anger or by dooming him to poverty. What wrong has he done? He keeps all the commandments faithfully; has studied the holy books; all the members of our family, and even the poor, ignorant people love him like their own soul. What do you want from him? What has he done? Why should you punish him?"

Ber's speech, delivered in a lazy, half-timid voice, made a deep impression on all those present. His wife Sarah, evidently frightened, pulled him by the sleeve and whispered:

"Hush, Ber! hush! they will be angry with you for your rash words."

Saul raised his head several times and bent it down again. One might have said that gratitude for Ber's defence of his grandson struggled with his rising anger.

"Ber, your own sins have spoken through your mouth. You stand up for Meir because you were once what he is now," said the passionate Abraham.

Raphael, with his usual gravity, said:

"You say, Ber, that he has not sinned against the ten commandments. That is true; but you forget that the covenant does not stand alone upon the ten commandments which Moses brought from Sinai, but also upon the six hundred and thirteen which the great Tanaites, Amoraites and Gaons, with other Wise Men, have put down in the Talmud. We not only owe obedience to them, but also to the six hundred and thirteen of the Talmud; and Meir has transgressed many of them."

"He has sinned greatly," called out Abraham, "but the greatest and blackest sin be committed to-day, when he denounced a brother Israelite before the stranger, and thus broke the solidarity and faith of his people. What will become of us if we accuse each other before the stranger? Whom shall we love and shield if not our brethren, who are bones of our bones and our blood. He felt more sorry for a stranger than for a brother Israelite, and for that he ought to—"

The violent and impulsive man broke off his sentence in the middle and remained open-mouthed, like one turned to stone.

He sat opposite the window, at which he stared fixedly with stupefied eyes.

"What is that?" he called out in a trembling voice:

"What is that?" said everybody; and all except Saul rose from their seats.

The room, which had been quite dark, became suddenly lighted up, as if by the reflection of thousands of torches from without; not only the house of Ezofowich, but the whole sky above was illuminated by a red glare.

The men and women stood spell-bound in the middle of the room, and looked silently at the fiery volumes, which rose higher and higher into the heavens above.

"How quickly he has done the deed!" said Abraham.

Nobody answered.

The little town, so quiet a moment before, became suddenly very noisy and tumultuous. No nation in the world is so easily carried away by sensations of any kind. This time the sensation was a powerful one. It was aroused by the mighty element which carries destruction upon earth and lifts its blood-red banner up to the skies, The noise of thousands of running feet re-echoed in the streets like the rushing of many waters. The square was black with a dense crowd, which swiftly and noisily moved in one direction. Above the din of all the voices single words were heard now and then more distinctly.

"Kamionka! It is the Kamionka estate!" exclaimed those that knew the country.

"Hear! hear! it is Kamionka!" took up a chorus of voices.

"Ai! Ai! such a fine place! such a magnificent place!"

Those were the last words that reached the inmates of Ezofowich's house. The crowd streamed on, and the voices sounded faint and far off.

Then Saul rose from the sofa, and, his face turned towards the window, he stood silent and motionless.

Then he raised his trembling hands and said, in a faltering voice:

"In my father Hersh's time and in my own, such things did not happen, and sins like this were not in Israel. Our hands used to spread gold and silver over the land, but not fire and tears."

He paused a few moments, gazing thoughtfully at the window.

"My father Hersh and his grandfather lived in friendship; they often conversed together about important affairs, and the lord of Kamionka—he wore then a gold brocaded sash and a sword at his side—said to my father Hersh: 'Ezofowich, you are a large-hearted and a far-seeing man; if our side win we will make a nobleman of you at the Diet.' His son was not quite like his father, but he always spoke courteously to me, and I bought his corn for thirty years. Whenever he wanted money I was always ready, because his estate brought much gain to me. The lady of Kamionka—she is still living—liked my mother Frieda very much; she used to say: 'Mistress Frieda has a great many diamonds and I have only one.' She called her son, who was as the apple of her eye, her diamond—the same son whose house is now in flames," and he pointed at the fiery columns with a silent gesture of grief and horror.

Then Raphael spoke.

"When I was last time at Kamionka, the old lady was sitting with her son upon the balcony, and when I began to speak about business, she said to him: 'Remember, Sigismond, never sell your corn to anybody but to an Ezofowich; they are amongst the Jews the most honest and friendly towards us.' And after that she began to ask whether old Frieda was still alive, and her son Saul, and if he had many grandchildren. Then she looked at her son and said to me: 'Raphael, I have no grandson!' And I bowed politely and said: 'May the gracious lady live a hundred years and see a great many grandsons of her own!' I did not put a lie into her ear; I sincerely wished her well. Why should I not wish her well?"

Raphael left off speaking, and Saul, turning towards him, asked:

"Raphael, has he ever wronged you?"

Raphael thought a little and then replied:

"No. He has never done me the slightest wrong. He is a little proud, it is true, and does not look sharp after his business; he is fond of amusements, and when an Israelite bows to him he gives a careless nod and does not try to make a friend of him . . . but his heart is good, and his word is his bond, and in business he is more likely to wrong himself than anybody else."

Sarah, who stood near her husband, wrung her hands, and rocking her body gently, sighed mournfully:

"Ai! all such a handsome gentleman to have such a misfortune happen to him."

"Such a fine young man, and he was going to marry such a beautiful young lady," said the wife of Raphael.

"And how will he be able to marry now, when he is ruined?" said Saul, and he added in a lower voice:

"A great sin has been committed in Israel!"

"A great shame has fallen to-day on Israel's head," said Raphael.

From a corner of the room where the glare penetrated least, came or rather crept forth Abraham. Bent almost in two, and trembling in every limb, he kissed his father's hand.

"Father," he said, "I thank you that you saved me from it."

Saul raised his head. The colour came back to his face, and energy gleamed in his eyes.

"Abraham," he said, in a commanding tone, "have your horses ready at once, and drive as quickly as you can to the estate where the young lord is staying. He cannot see the conflagration from there; drive



quickly and tell him to come and save his property and his mother."

"You, Raphael, go at once to the Jankiel's and Leisor's inns where the peasants are drinking. Tell them to drive home quickly to save their lord's property."

Obedient as two children, Saul's two sons left the room at once and the women went into the porch. Then Ber came close to Saul.

"Father! what do you think now of Meir? Was he not right to warn the lord of Kamionka?"

Saul bent his head, but did not answer.

"Father," said her, "save Meir! Go to the Rabbi, and to the judges, and elders; ask them not to bring him before their tribunal."

For a long while Saul did not answer.

"It is very difficult for me to go," he said at last. "The hardest task to humble my gray head before Todros," but he added after a pause, "I will go tomorrow—we must stand up for the child—though he be rash and does not pay due reverence to the faith and customs of his father."

While the foregoing took place in the house of Ezofowich, the little meadow close to the town was covered with a waving, murmuring and compact mass of people. From this spot, the terrible conflagration could be seen most distinctly; therefore the whole population, eager and greedy for sensation, congregated there.

The reflected light of the fire rose above the pine forest, which was enveloped in a ray light and so transparent that every branch and stem could be seen distinctly. The wide half-circle of the glare, dark red below, grew paler and paler above, till the golden yellow light lost itself in the pale blue sky. The stars twinkled with a feeble, uncertain light, and on the opposite side, beyond the birch wood, rose the red ball of the moon.

Among the population, sentences and words, quick and sharp, whizzed about like pistol shots. Somebody was telling that when Jankiel Kamionker heard about the fire, he had gone off to the estate tearing his hair like a madman, wailing and lamenting over the loss of the spirits which he had there in such quantities. Hearing this, many people smiled knowingly; others shook their heads compassionately at the supposed heavy losses of Jankiel; but the greater part of the people remained silent. They guessed the truth; here and there somebody knew about it; but nobody dared to meddle in a business so full of danger, even with an unwary word.

A full hour after the first gleam of the fire had been noticed a light carriage and four gray horses were seen in full gallop across the streets in the direction of the meadow.

It was not the regular road to Kamionka, in fact, there was no road at all; but by driving across the meadow, the young owner shortened his way considerably. He did not sit in the carriage, but stood straight up, holding on by the box, seat, and kept his eyes fixed upon the red glare of the flames, where his mother was, which was consuming the house of his fathers.

When the horses came to the meadow and he saw the crowd, he shouted to the coachman:

"Be careful; do not hurt the people."

"A good man," said one in the crowd; "at such a moment he still thinks of other people."

Some groaned aloud.

A few heads clustered together, whispering. The name of Jankiel was whispered low—very low.

But there was a spot, not on the meadow, but in the little street close by, where people talked aloud. Near Shmul's hut, upon the bench before the window, stood Meir. Thence he looked at the meadow, black with people, and at the red glare of the fire; around him in the street stood a dozen or more young men, his friends. Their faces looked excited and indignant.

Haim, the son of Abraham, who an hour before had been an unseen witness to Saul's conversation with his sons, told his friends about it. Carried away by his indignation, he repeated in a loud voice every word that had passed and his friends re-echoed them. The young and usually timid spirits grew bolder under the pressure of shame and exasperation. Only one voice was missing among the chorus of voices—the most prominent of all, because he was the leading spirit of the young people. Eliezer was not among those who crowded round Meir; he sat apart, leaning against the black wall of the hut, His elbows rested on his knees and his face was buried in his hands. He looked like one petrified in this

position; full of grief and shame. From time to time he rocked his body slightly. The dreamy, timid man was overwhelmed with bitter and desperate thoughts.

Presently, from beyond the corner of the street, a black thin shadow glided swiftly along the walls; and close by the group of young men, the heavy panting, almost moaning, of an exhausted human being became audible.

"Shmul!" said the young men.

"Hush!" said Meir, in a low voice, jumping down from the bench. "Let nobody utter the name of the miserable man, so as not to bring him into danger. I have been standing here to watch for his return. Go away from here, and remember that your eyes have not seen Shmul coming from that direction, not seen—"

"You are right," whispered Aryel; "he is our poor brother,"

"Poor brother, poor, poor!" they repeated all round.

They dispersed at once. Near the hut remained only Meir and Eliezer, whom nothing could rouse from his stupor.

Shmul ran into the hut, now deserted by every one except the blind mother and the smallest children.

There he threw himself at full length upon the floor and beat his forehead in the dust; sobbing and moaning, he uttered in broken sentences:

"I am not guilty, not guilty, not guilty. I did not fire it. I did not hold the vessel full of oil. He, Johel, did it all; I stood on watch in the fields—when I saw the fire—Ai! ai! I understood what I had been doing—"

"Hush!" said a low, sorrowful voice close to the despairing, almost senseless, man. "Hold your tongue, Shmul, till I shut the door and window."

Shmul raised his face, but again dropped it on the dusty floor.

"Morejne," he moaned, "morejne, my daughters were growing up; it was necessary to marry them; I had no money to pay the taxes with for the whole year!"

"Get up and calm yourself," said Meir.

Shmul did not listen. With his lips sweeping the dusty boards, he kept on moaning.

"Morejne! save me. I am lost, body and soul."

"You have not lost your soul, Shmul. The Eternal will weigh your poverty against your sin; that is if you do not take the money with which bad people tempted you."

This time Shmul lifted his face from the floor. The lean and ashy-pale face, covered with dust and twitching with nervous terror, presented a picture of the deepest human misery.

He looked at Meir with despairing eyes, and pointing at the miserable room, he groaned:

"Morejne! how shall we be able to live without that money?"

Fully half-an-hour passed before Meir left the cottage, where the outcast Shmul accused himself, wailed and moaned in a voice that gradually became lower till it almost sank to a whisper. The ruddy glow from the street fell upon one corner of the dark entrance. There, coiled up between the goats, his head resting upon a projecting board, with the red light of the fire upon his face, slept Lejbele. Neither noise nor the glare of the fire, not even the lamentations of his unhappy father, had disturbed his innocent sleep among his friends, the goats.

Next morning an unusual stir prevailed amongst the inhabitants of the town. The common topic of all their conversation was the conflagration at the Kamionka estate. The whole house was reduced to ashes; nearly all the outbuildings had been burned down; the barns and ricks with all the year's harvest had been devoured by the flames.

The old lady, the mother of the lord of Kamionka, was very ill, and had been carried into a neighbour's house.

To discuss these and other items of news, people stood in groups about the streets or before their houses; all the ordinary business of their every-day life seemed suspended for the time being.

Now and then among the groups a single question was heard repeatedly:

"What will become of him?"

The question had nothing whatever to do with the ruined young nobleman, but referred to Jankiel.

Some pitied the former sincerely, as also some blamed the latter; but the landowner was to them a perfect stranger, known to most of them only by sight. Jankiel Kamionker was connected with them by a thousand threads of common interest and friendship; besides that, he was surrounded by the halo of wealth and the reputation of ardent piety. No wonder that even those who blamed him trembled for his safety.

"Will they suspect him?" asked somebody here and there.

"Nobody would dream of suspecting him, but for Meir Ezofowich putting bad thoughts into their heads," was said here and there.

"He has broken the solidarity and the covenant of Israel."

"What else could you expect? He is a kofrim, a heretic!"

"He dared to raise his hand against Reb Moshe!"

"He lives in friendship with the Karaite's girl!"

Those who spoke cast ominous, threatening glances in the direction of Ezofowich's dwelling.

The house was unusually quiet and lifeless. The windows looked upon the square, which, as a rule, were open in summer-time so that anybody could see the daily life of people who had nothing to conceal, were shut to-day. No one had remembered to open them, or to straighten the sitting-room—as a rule kept in such perfect order. The women wandered aimlessly from one place to another; their caps were crushed and in disorder from their frequently putting their hands upon their heads; they stood before the kitchen fire and sighed distractedly. Sarah's eyes were red; her husband, Ber, had two deep wrinkles on his forehead, a sure sign to her that he suffered grievously. He did not open his lips to her, but sat with his head resting upon his hand, looking vacantly at his brothers-in-law. Raphael had his account books before him, but his thoughts were elsewhere as he raised his head frequently and looked at his brothers. Old Saul sat on the sofa reading the sacred books; but, judging by his countenance, derived but little comfort from them.

Near the window in her deep easy-chair sat the great-grandmother, dozing. Hers was the only face that did not show any change, or lose any of its usual serenity. She opened her eyes now and then, then dozed off again. Soon after twelve o'clock the women busied themselves with arranging the table for dinner.

The door opened softly. Meir entered the room, and standing close to the wall, his eyes looked around at all faces. It was a troubled look, almost timid and very sorrowful. Those present raised their eyes at him for a second only; but in that short instant a heavy load of mute reproaches fell upon the young man. It was the reproach of people used to a quiet, peaceful life, for past troubles and troubles still to come; there was some pity in it for the offender, and also a threat of casting him off.

Only the great-grandmother opened her eyes when she saw him, and with a smile, murmured:

"Kleineskind!"

Meir's eyes rested tenderly and thoughtfully upon her face. At this moment there came a sudden dash and a heavy thump. From among the groups that looked angrily at Ezofowich's house, somebody had thrown a heavy stone, which, breaking the window, flew close over Freida's head and fell into the middle of the room.

Saul's face became of a dull red; the women arranging the table screamed in terror; Raphael, Abraham, and Ber jumped up suddenly. All stared at the broken window, but presently their attention became concentrated upon their great-grandmother Freida, who stood straight up and looked attentively at the stone in the middle of the room, and then called out in her loud, tuneless whisper:

"It is the same stone! They threw it through the window the same when Reb Nohim quarrelled with Hersh because he wanted to live in friendship with the strangers. It is the same stone—at whom did they throw it now?" All the wrinkles in her face quivered, and her eyes for the first time wide open, travelled about the room.

"At whom did they throw it?" she repeated.

"At me, dear bobbe," replied, from the opposite wall, a voice full of unspoken grief.

"Meir!" exclaimed the great-grandmother—not in her usual whisper, but in a loud, almost piercing voice.

Meir crossed the room, stood before her and took the little wrinkled hand caressingly in his own. He looked at her eyes full of tenderness, and as if in mute entreaty. She seemed to feel his look, for her eyelids flickered tremulously and restlessly. Saul rose from the sofa.

"Raphael," he said. "Give me my cloak and hat."

"Where are you going, father?" asked both sons simultaneously.

"I am going to humble my head before the Rabbi; to ask him to delay his judgment on my headstrong child until the anger in the hearts of the people has subsided."

Presently the gray-headed patriarch of the greatest family in the town, dressed in his long cloak and tall shiny hat, was seen slowly and gravely crossing the market-place. The groups standing about made way for him, bowing respectfully.

Somebody said loudly

"Poor Reb Saul, to have such a grandson!" The old man did not reply, but pressed his lips closer together.

More than an hour had elapsed ere Saul returned from his errand. He found all the elder members of the family in the same position as he had left them. Meir sat close to the easy-chair of the great-grandmother, who tightly clutched him by the coat sleeve.

Sarah met her father and relieved him of his hat and cloak.

"What news do you bring, father?" asked Raphael.

Saul breathed heavily, and looked gloomily on the floor.

"What could I bring from there," he said after a momentary silence, "but shame and humiliation? The hearts of Todros rejoice over the misfortune of the house of Ezofowich. Smiles, like reptiles, are writhing and crawling over his yellow face."

"And what did he say?" asked several voices. "He said he had been far too forbearing towards my godless, insolent grandson—that Reb Moshe, Kamionker, and all the people were urging him to sit in judgment upon Meir; at my intercession he would put off the trial until to-morrow after sunset, and said if Meir humbled himself and asked his and his people's pardon, the sentence would be less severe."

All eyes turned towards Meir.

"What do you say to it?" asked a chorus of voices.

Meir looked thoughtfully down.

"Give me time—till to-morrow," he pleaded. "I may perhaps find a way out of it."

"How can you find a way?" they exclaimed. "Allow me not to answer you till to-morrow," repeated Meir.

They nodded and became silent. It was mute consent.

In all their hearts fear and anger were struggling with family pride. They felt angry with Meir, yet trembled for his fate, and the very thought that a member of their family should humble himself publicly before the Rabbi and the people seemed unbearable.

"Who knows," whispered Raphael, "he may find a way to avoid it?"

"Perhaps his mother will appear to him in his sleep and tell him what to do," sighed Sarah.

The belated dinner, passed off in gloomy silence, interrupted only by the sighs of women and a smothered sob from the children, who had been forbidden to laugh and chatter.

The grieved and mournful faces looked now and then at Freida, who showed an unusual restlessness.

She did not speak, neither did she doze during the meal; but moved uneasily in her chair, looked at Meir, then at the shattered window, and in the middle of the room on the spot where the stone had fallen.

"What ails her?" asked the members of the family of each other, in a perturbed voice.

"She is recalling something to her mind," others replied. "She is afraid of something. She wants to speak, but cannot find words."

When the dinner was over, two great-granddaughters wanted to help Freida into the next room and lay her down to rest as usual, but she planted her feet firmly on the floor and pointed to the easy-chair by the window. Presently the inmates of the room began gradually to disperse.

Raphael and Ber went driving away to a neighbouring estate, where they had some important business to transact. Abraham shut himself up in his room to look after his accounts, or perhaps to read. Saul gave orders to his daughter to keep the house quiet, and sighing wearily, lay down upon his bed. The women, after raking out the fire in the kitchen, shut the door of the sitting-room and betook themselves with their needlework to the courtyard, where they watched the children at play, and conversed together in a low voice. The great-grandmother remained alone in the sitting-room.

Strange to say, though perfect silence reigned in the house, she did not fall asleep or even doze for a moment.

She sat in the easy-chair with her eyes wide open, and looking at the broken window, her lips kept moving continually as if she were speaking to herself. Sometimes she rocked her head, heavy, with the voluminous turban, and the diamonds flashed out and glittered in the sudden motion, and the pendants jingled against the links of the golden chain. Her lips moved incessantly. Presently her hands also moved quickly. It seemed as if she spoke with somebody; with the spirits of the Past, who came forth from her clouded memory. Suddenly she rocked her head, and said aloud:

"It was the same way when my Hersh found the writing of the Senior—bad people threw stones at him."

She stopped; great tears gathered in her eyes and ran down her withered cheeks.

Meir rose from the bench where he had been sitting, crossed the room quickly, sat down on the low stool where the old woman rested her foot, and putting his folded hands upon her knee asked:

"Bobe! where is the writing of the Senior?"

At the sound of the voice which, as well as the face, reminded her of the man she had loved so well, and the days of her youth and happiness, she smiled. Her eyes full of tears did not look at her great-grandson, but somewhere far beyond, and she began to whisper:

"The day he quarrelled with Reb Nohim and angered the people, he came home and sat down sorrowful upon the bench and called his wife, Freida. Freida was then young and beautiful; she wore a white turban and stood before the kitchen fire, looking after the servants; but when she heard her husband's voice, she went at once and stood before him, waiting for his words. 'Freida!' he said, 'where the writing of the Senior?'"

Then suddenly the whisper ceased. The young man sitting at her feet pressed his hands convulsively together and asked again:

"Bobe! where is the writing of the Senior?"

The old woman gently swayed her head, and her lips moved.

"He asked: 'Where is the writing of the Senior? Did the Senior bury it in the ground? No! he could not have buried it, as dampness and worms would have destroyed it. Did he hide it in the walls? No! he knew that fire might destroy the walls. Where did he hide it?' Thus asked Hersh, and his wife Freida pondered over his words and then pointed at the bookcase where the Senior's old books were preserved, and said: 'Hersh my Hersh! the writing is there.' When Freida said that, Hersh rejoiced and said: 'You, Freida, have a wise head, and your soul is as beautiful as your eyes.'"

And smiling at the dim pictures of her youthful days, she whispered:

"Then he said: 'A virtuous woman is far above rubies and her husband doth trust her!'"

The young man looked at her with entreating eyes, and again asked:

"Bobe! what did Hersh do with the writing?"

The old woman did not answer at once, but her lips moved silently as if she spoke with an invisible being, and then took up the thread of her tale again:

"Hersh came back from a long journey, deeply grieved, and said to Freida: 'Everything is lost. We must bide the Senior's writing again; it is no use now.' Freida asked: 'Hersh! where will you hide the writing?' Hersh replied: 'I will hide it where it was before, and you alone, Freida, will know the secret.'"

Meir's eyes sparkled with sudden joy.

"Bobe! is the writing there?" And he pointed at the old bookcase.

Freida gave no answer, but continued in a whisper:

"He said: 'You alone will know the secret. And when the time is drawing near and your soul is about to leave your body, tell it to the son or grandson who resembles most your husband'—'and which of my sons or grandsons is most like my husband Hersh?' 'It is Meir, the son of Benjamin, who is like him as two grains of sand are like each other. He is my child, the dearest of all. Freida will tell him the secret.'"

Meir took both the hands of his great-grandmother in his own, and covered them with kisses.

"Bobe," he whispered, "Is the writing there?" pointing at the bookcase. But the old woman still followed the thread of her musings.

"Hersh said to Freida: 'If the elders of the family raise their hands against him and the people throw stones at him, you, Freida, tell him the secret. Let him take the writing of the Senior to his heart, and leave everything, his house and wealth and family, and go forth into the world; for that writing is more precious than gold and pearls. It is the covenant of Israel with the Present, which flows like a great river over their heads and with the nations which tower around him like great mountains.'"

"Bobe! the elders of the family have risen up against me; the people have thrown stones at me—I am that dearest grandson of whom your husband Hersh spoke—tell me, is the writing among those old volumes?"

A broad, almost triumphant, smile lit up the wrinkled face. She shook her head with a feeling of secret joy, and whispered:

"Freida has watched over her husband's treasure and guarded it like her own soul. When she became a widow, Reb Nohim Todros came to her house and wanted to have the bookcase and the volumes put into the fire; then Reb Baruch Todros came and wanted to burn the books; but whenever they came, Freida screened the bookcase with her own body, and said: 'This is my house, and everything in it is my own.' And when Freida stood before the bookcase, Freida's sons and grandsons stood before her and said: 'It is our mother; we will not let her be harmed.'"

"Reb Nohim was very angry and went away—Reb Isaak did not come, because he knew from his fathers that as long as Freida lives nobody touched the old bookcase—Freida has watched over her husband's treasure; it remains there and sleeps in peace."

With these last words the old woman pointed her thin hand at the bookcase, which stood not far from her, and a quiet laugh, a laugh of joy and almost childish triumph, shook her aged breast.

With one bound Meir reached the bookcase, and with a powerful hand shook the old, rusty lock. The door flew open and a cloud of dust burst forth which covered Meir's head as it had once—long ago—covered Hersh's golden hair and Freida's white turban. He did not heed it, but plunged his hand amongst the books from which his ancestors, had drawn their wisdom and where that lay hidden which was to direct him on his way.

At the sight of the open bookcase and the clouds of dust Freida stretched forth both arms and called out:

"Hersh! Hersh! my own Hersh!"

It was not the usual tuneless whisper, but a loud cry wrung from the heart, full of the joys and griefs of the past. She had forgotten the great-grandson, and thought the tall, golden-haired youth, covered with dust, was her husband come back to her from unknown worlds.

Meir turned his excited face and burning eyes to her.

"Bobe!" he said breathlessly, "where is it? On the top? Below? In this book—that—or that?"

"In that," said the woman, pointing at the book upon which Meir's hand rested.

Presently a roll of yellow papers rustled under the parchment cover of the volume. Holding them in both hands, Meir fell down before his great-grandmother and kissed her hands and feet.

Freida smiled, and touched his head gently; but by and by her eyelids drooped, and her whole face took the expression of sweet dreaminess again. Tired with the strain upon her clouded memory, looking still into the bright dreamland of the past, the centenarian had fallen asleep—touched, as it were, by a gentle wave of the eternal sleep.

The passionate outpouring of thanks did not rouse her again. Meir hid the precious papers in his breast and went swiftly upstairs towards the top of the house, where his young cousins dwelt.

During the whole of the evening, and the greater part of the night, the large window near the pointed roof flickered with an uncertain light, and people were seen moving about constantly. At early dawn, some people came out of the house by a side door and went in different directions.

Soon afterwards strange news began to circulate about the town. The news was undefined, vague, told and explained in different ways; but, such as it was, it excited the greatest curiosity among the people. The everyday work seemed to go on as usual, but in the midst of the dashing and rattling of implements of handiwork a continual hum of conversation was going on. Nobody could point out the source from which sprung all the rumours which filled the public mind; they seemed to be floating in the air, and pervading all the streets and alleys.

"To-day, after sunset the elders of the Kahol and the judges, with Rabbi Isaak at their head, will sit in judgment upon Meir Ezofowich."

"How will they judge him? What will they do to him?"

"No; there will be no judgment. The bold grandson of Reb Saul will come to the Bet-ha-Midrash and confess his sins before the Rabbi and the people, and ask forgiveness!"

"No, he will not humble himself or ask forgiveness."

"Why should he not?"

"Ah, ah, it is a great secret, but everybody knows about it, and everybody's eyes burn with curiosity. Young Meir has found a treasure!"

"What treasure?"

"A treasure that has been buried for five hundred years—a thousand years—ever since the Jews came into this country, in the house of Ezofowich. The treasure is the writing of one of their ancestors, left as a legacy to his descendants."

"What does the writing say?"

"No one knows for certain."

All the inhabitants of the poorer streets had heard something about it from their fathers and grandfathers; but everybody had heard it different. Some said it was the writing of a wise and saintly Israelite, who lived long ago, and who wanted to make his nation powerful and wise. Others maintained that this same ancestor of Ezofowich was an unbeliever, bribed by the stranger to destroy the name of Israel and the holy covenant from the face of the earth.

"The writing was to teach people how to make gold out of sand, and it tells poor people how to get rich."

"No! it teaches how to drive away the evil spirits, so that they cannot touch you, and how to transpose the letters of God's names into a word with which you can work miracles."

"The writing teaches how to make friends out of your enemies, and to enter into a covenant of peace with all nations. Somebody heard that it showed the way how to bring Moses back to life again, and call on him to bring his people out of bondage into the land that flows with gold and wisdom."

"Why did they not search for the treasure sooner?"

"They were afraid. It is said that whoever touches that writing will be scorched with fire and burned

into powder. Serpents will twist themselves around his heart! His forehead will become as black as soot! Happiness and peace will go from him for ever! Stones will fall upon him like hail! His forehead will be branded with a red mark! Long, long ago, there still lived people who remembered it, the great merchant, Hersh Ezofowich, Saul's father, had touched that writing."

"And what became of him?"

"The old people said that when he touched the papers serpents coiled round his heart and bit him, so that he died young."

"And now young Meir has found that writing?"

"Yes, he has found it, and is going to read it before the people in Bet-ha-Midrash after sunset."

Going to and fro amongst the people who exchanged the above opinions, was Reb Moshe, the melamed. He appeared first in one street, then in another; was seen in one court, and near another's window; always listening intently; he smiled now and then and his eyes gleamed, but he said nothing. When directly appealed to by people, and urged to give an opinion, he shook his head gloomily and muttered unintelligible sentences. He could not say anything, as he had not spoken to the master yet, to whom, out of fanatical faith and mystic personal attachment he had given himself up body and soul. Without definite orders from the revered sage he dared not give an opinion or settle things even in his own mind. He might unwittingly act against his master's wish, or transgress any of the thousands of precepts; though he knew them all by heart, yet he might fail to catch their deeper meaning without the guiding spirit. The melamed was fully conscious of his own wisdom, yet what did it mean in comparison with the Rabbi's, whose mind pierced the very heavens? Jehovah looked upon him with pleased eyes, and wondered how he could have created such a perfect being as Rabbi Isaak Todros.

About noon, when his mind and ears were full of what he had heard, he glided silently into the Rabbi's hut. He could not get the Rabbi's ear at once, because he was conversing with an old man, whose dusty, travel-stained garments showed that he had come a great distance; he now stood leaning on his stick before the Rabbi, looking at him with humble, and at the same time radiant, eyes.

"I dearly wished," he said, in a voice trembling with age and emotion, "to go to Jerusalem to die in the land of our fathers; but I am poor and have no money for the journey. Give me, O Rabbi, a handful of the sand which they bring to you every year from there, so that my grandchildren may scatter it upon my breast when the soul is about to leave my body. With that handful of soil, I shall lie easier in my grave."

The Rabbi took some white sand out of a carefully, wrapped-up bag and gave it to the old man.

The man's whole face lighted up with joy; he carefully secured the precious relic under his ragged garments, and then kissed the Rabbi's hand with fervent gratitude.

"Rabbi," he said, "I have nothing to pay you with."

Todros craned his yellow neck towards him:

"You have come from a far country, indeed, if you do not know that Isaak Todros does not take payment. If I do good to my brethren, I ask only for one reward: that the Almighty may increase by one drop the wisdom I possess already, but of which I can never have enough."

The old man looked with admiring eyes at the sage, who, so full of wisdom, yet wished for more.

"Rabbi," he sighed, "allow me to kiss your benevolent hand."

"Kiss it," said the master gently, and when the old man bent his head covered with white hair, the Rabbi put his arm round him and kissed him on the forehead.

"Rabbi!" exclaimed the old man, with a burst of happiness in his voice, "you are good—you are our father—our master and brother."

"Blessing upon you," replied Todros, "for having preserved your faith until your old age, and the love for our fatherland which makes you prize a handful of its soil more than gold and silver."

Both their eyes were full of tears. It was the first time they had ever met, and yet their hearts were full of brotherly love and mutual sympathy.

Reb Moshe, who sat in his usual corner waiting for the end of the interview, also had tears in his eyes. When Isaak Todros was alone he still waited a little, and then said in a low voice:



"Nassi!"

"Hah?" asked the sage, who was already buried in mystic speculation.

"There is great news about the town."

"What news?"

"Meir Ezofowich has found the writing of his ancestor, the Senior, and is going to read it to-day before the assembled people."

The Rabbi was now fully awake, and craning his neck towards the melamed, exclaimed:

"How did you come to hear of it?"

"Ah! the whole town is full of it. Meir's friends since early morning have been among the people spreading the news."

Todros did not say a word; but his eyes had a keen, almost savage expression.

"Nassi! will you allow him to do this?"

Todros was silent. At last he said in a determined voice:

"I will."

Reb Moshe gave a convulsive start.

"Rabbi!" he exclaimed, "you are the wisest man that ever was, or will be on this earth; but has your wisdom considered all the consequences, and that this writing may detach the people from you and the covenant?"

Todros looked at him sternly:

"You do not know the spirit of the people if you can speak and think like that. Have not I and my fathers before me tried to mould and educate the people and make them faithful to their religion? Let him read the papers—let the abomination come forth from its hiding-place, where it has lain till now; it will be easier to fight against it and crush it down, once and for ever. Let him read it: the measure of his transgressions will then be full, and my avenging hand will come down upon him!"

A long silence followed upon these words. The master was absorbed in thought, and the humble follower looked at him in silent adoration.

"Moshe!"

"What is your will, Nassi?"

"That writing must be taken from him and delivered into my hands."

"Nassi! how is it to be taken from him?"

"That writing must be taken and delivered into my hands!" repeated the Rabbi decisively.

"Nassi! who is to take it from him?" Todros fixed his glaring eyes upon his follower. "That writing must be taken from him and delivered into my hands," he repeated for the third time.

Moshe bent his head.

"Rabbi!" he whispered, "I understand. Rest in peace. When he reads the abomination before the people such a storm will break over his head that it will lay him in the dust."

Again there was silence. The Rabbi interrupted it:

"Moshe!"

"Yes, Nassi!"

"When is he going to read that blasphemous writing?"

"He is going to read it in the Bet-ha-Midrash after sunset."

"Moshe! go at once to the shamos (messenger) and tell him to convoke the elders and the judges in

the Bet-ha-Kahol for a solemn judgment."

Moshe rose obediently, and went towards the door. The Rabbi, raising both arms, exclaimed "Woe to the headstrong and disobedient! Woe to him who touches the leper and spreads contagion!"

Saying this, his whole face became suffused with a wave of dark, relentless hatred. And yet, a quarter of an hour ago the same face was full of brotherly love; the same mouth spoke gentle and comforting words, and the eyes were full of tears.

Thus gentleness and wrath, love and relentless hatred dwelt side by side in the same heart; virtues and dark crimes flow from the same source. Charity goes hand in hand with persecution and neighbour often stands for enemy. Man, who tended to human suffering and healed the sick, with the same hand lit the stakes and prepared the instruments of torture.

What mysterious influences rule such dual lives?—asks the perplexed student of human nature.

But for these mysterious undercurrents which lead human brains and hearts into awful error, Rabbi Isaak might have been a great man.

Let us be just. He would have been a great man but for those that raised the weapons of fire and sword, and the still more deadly weapons of scorn and contempt, against his brethren, and thus confined them in the narrow, dark,—a spiritual and moral Ghetto!

The sun had set, and the earth was wrapped in the dim light of a summer evening. The large court of the synagogue swarmed with a crowd. The interior of Bet-ha-Midrash was already full of people. There could be seen heads of old men and fair locks of children, long beards, black like crow's wings and blonde like hemp. They all moved and swayed, necks were craned, beards raised, and eyes glowed in anticipation of some new sensation. Everything appeared in shadow. The large room was lighted by a small lamp, suspended at the entrance door, and a single tallow candle in a brass candlestick, which stood on a white table; this, with a solitary chair close to the high and bare wall, constituted the platform from which the speaker was wont to address the people. In Israel, everybody, young or old, and of whatever social position, had the right to speak in public, according to the democratic principles prevailing in the ancient law. Every Israelite had the right to enter this building, whether for the purposes of praying, reading, or teaching.

The people who crowded outside the building looked often in at the windows of the room where the elders and judges held their conferences. In the entrance hall the lamp was being lit, and burning candles were placed upon the long table. Presently people well-known to the inhabitants ascended, the steps of the portico. Singly or in twos arrived the judges of the community—all of them men well on in years, fathers of large families, wealthy merchants, or house owners. There ought to have been twelve in number, but the bystanders counted only up to eleven. The twelfth judge was Raphael Ezofowich. People whispered to each other that the uncle of the accused could not sit in judgment against him; others said that he would not. After the judges arrived, the elders, amongst whom was Morejne Calman, with his hands in his pockets and the stereotyped, honeyed smile on his lips, and Jankiel Kamionker, whose face looked very yellow, and whose eyes had the hunted look of a criminal. The last, but not least of them, was Isaak Todros, who glided in so swiftly and silently that scarcely anybody in the crowd noticed him.

At the same time, from the depth of Bet-ha-Midrash, a clear, resonant voice reached the ears of the surging crowd without:

"In the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hear, O Israel!"

The murmur of the crowd within and without increased, and almost rose to a tumult. For a few moments the voice of the speaker was drowned in the general hubbub, and his few sentences sounded indistinct and broken.

Suddenly somebody from the crowd shouted:

"Silence and listen, for it is said: 'You shall listen to whosoever speaketh in the name of Jehovah!'"

"That is true," murmured voices. "He began in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Then everything became quiet, except for the rustle of those near the door, who tried to get a better view of the speaker. They did not see anything unusual. Behind the white table, pale and grave, stood Meir Ezofowich. He was much paler than usual, and his eyes burned feverishly. His emotion was not

the outcome of fear or doubt, but of a powerful conviction and radiant hope. In his hands he held a few sheets of old yellow paper, which he raised now and then, to show whence he took his words.

"O Israel!" he read out, in a clear and thrilling voice, "you are a great people! You were the first among nations who recognised one God in heaven, and heard on earth, amid the roar of thunder and flashes of lightning, those ten great commandments, which, like ten rocks, helped you and other nations to climb towards the sun of perfection. Israel! blind from his birth, or blinded by malice, must be the man who fails to recognise the greatness of your mission. Dry from its birth, or dried by the searching breath that comes from the nether world, must be the eye that does not shed a tear at the sight of your sufferings. Ill-fated he who, looking at you, calls you contemptible. May the Lord pity him and forgive him, as he possesses not the balance in which are weighed a nation's virtues and crimes, possesses not the wisdom which shows how pain and degradation produce sin. Israel! of you were born Moses, whose love was like the flaming bush, David with the golden harp, the beautiful Esther, weeping over the misery of her people. The Maccabees with their mighty swords came from among you, and the prophets who died for their faith. Whilst living happily in the land of your fathers, you loathed to bind a brother into slavery; upon your fields you left the tenth sheaf to the poor and needy, and gave a hearing to anybody who spoke to the people. Humbling yourself only before Jehovah, you said: 'We are all alike in the eyes of our Father.' And when, in after years, ill-fated, vanquished, covered with the blood of your sons who defended the land of their fathers, you stood an outcast amongst nations, and suffered from contempt and persecution, you yet remained faithful unto your God and the memory of your fathers, and taught other nations who suffered like you how to defend themselves without weapons. The Lord hath made you intelligent, pure, and charitable, O my people; but it is nigh two thousand years since you possessed the one necessary thing on earth—a fatherland."

Here the voice of the speaker gave way, and he paused for a minute. The crowd had caught his emotion, and a low tremor seemed to pass through the people. A few subdued voices murmured:

"Let us listen! Let us listen! It is the writing of a true Israelite who tells of the glory of his people."

They listened in silence, and Meir went on:

"Woe to the people who have no fatherland! The soul of the people clings to the soil as a child clings to its mother's breast which gives it nourishment, health, and relief from sickness. The Lord ordained it thus; but the people acted against His will and tore your soul, O Israel, from the soil to which it was attached. As an outcast you went and knocked for charity at the very doors of those that had despoiled you; your head bent down under laws from which your mind recoiled; your tongue tried to imitate their speech, and the roof of your mouth dried up in exceeding bitterness; your face darkened from wrath and humiliation, and you lived in fear lest your faith and the name of Israel should be obliterated from the face of the earth. Then under torments and awful sorrows your greatness fell from you; your sins and transgressions began to grow and multiply, and Jehovah your Lord, looking down upon you said: 'Is this my chosen people with whom I made the covenant of Truth and Grace? Can he not keep it except with the words of his mouth, which do not agree with the deeds of his hands? Does he see the covenant only in his offerings; songs, prayers, and incense, and forget the high ladder I showed my servant Jacob in his dream to teach the people in all times how to reach me, who is Perfection and Understanding.'"

Here the voice of the reader became drowned again in a low, ever-increasing murmur.

"What is it he is reading?" they asked each other. "It is the writing of a bad Israelite who throws ugly words at his people."

"Which are those sins that have been multiplying amongst us? And how are we to praise the Lord if our songs and, prayers have no value in His eyes?"

Meir grew pale when he found his voice powerless against the increasing tumult. But he would not stop now, and went on reading. By and by curiosity prevailed over discontent and they became silent once more.

They listened to the tale of Michael Senior's life; how, by order of the king, and out of love for his people, he had stood at the head of their affairs, and wanted to lead them into new ways, at the end of which he saw the dawning of a happy future; how he had been thwarted in all his undertakings, and the heart of the people turned away from him.

"Great thoughts crowded into my brain which I could not utter, because my old friends and my pupils abandoned me! In my breast there was fire, at which they would not warm themselves, but said it had been kindled by evil spirits. Then my body wasted away, the light of my eyes became dim, and the sleep of death drew near. I cried out in anguish: 'Lord of the world! do not forsake thy messenger! Give him a voice powerful enough to reach the ears of those that are not born, since those that live will listen no

longer.' And I opened the Holy Book and read:"

"'Though he be dead, he yet speaketh.' Son of my sons, you who have found this writing, read it to the people to let them know what I desired from them. The first thing I asked from them was; Forgetfulness. Did I want them to forget their Lord Jehovah, or the name of Israel which produced the greatest men of the past? No, I could not ask them to forget it because the remembrance is dear to me and rejoices my heart."

"I asked my people to forget the wrongs and sorrows of the past. Do not remember injuries! Do not say an eye for an eye! Mar Zutra every day, before he lay down to rest, said, 'I forgive all those that have saddened me.' Mar Zutra was a great man."

"When you begin to forget Israel, you will approach the flame which you speak of as alien, and which belongs to all nations. The alien flame, from which you fly in your blind hatred, has been kindled by Sar-ha-Olam, the angel of knowledge, who is the Angel of Angels and the prince of the world. The knowledge of religion is sacred, but other knowledge has equally been created by him who dwells in perfect wisdom. Good is the apple of paradise, but are we therefore to refuse other products of the earth? A time will come when the world will be full of knowledge, as the sea is full of water."

"Thus spoke and wrote the sage whom your teachers hold accursed. His name was Moses Majmonides, a true prophet, who did not look into the past but into the future, for he knew that a time would come when all those who did not gather around the flame of wisdom would fall into the dust, and their name become a by-word of contempt and derision. He was the second Moses; he was my teacher from whom came all my joy and all my sorrow."

Here the reader dropped the hands that held the papers, and an expression of rapture shone in his face.

"He was my teacher from whom came all my joy and all my sorrow." Strange coincidence! Both he and his ancestor who had died three hundred years ago had listened to the same teacher. In the hearts of both he had kindled the heroic, self-sacrificing love, the greatest upon earth—the love of the ideal. But the descendant who read these words which one by one dispersed all his doubts, felt no sorrow; nothing but a great joy and hope.

A hoarse and thick voice shouted from the crowd:

"Hear! hear! he praises alien flames! He calls the accursed heretic a second Moses!"

All heads turned towards the door to see who had spoken. It was Reb Moshe, who had climbed upon the bench near the door and was thus raised above the crowd; he shook his head, laughed derisively, and fixed his malignant eyes upon Meir. But the people's curiosity was not yet satisfied; under their ragged garments many hearts were beating with a new, and by themselves undefined sensation.

"He speaks to us through the mouth of his descendant. Listen to him whose soul dwells already amongst the Sefirot."

An old man with stooping back, who leaned upon his stick, raised his white head and said to Meir, plaintively:

"How could Israel warm himself at the sun of knowledge when he was driven away from it by his enemies? And we once had, Reb, famous physicians and wise men who were ministers at the courts of kings; but when they thrust us from the portals of knowledge we went forth and said: Henceforth Israel will hold aloof from the stranger, like an elder brother whom the younger brethren have offended."

Meir looked at the old man with a gentle, half-triumphant smile.

"Reb!" he replied, "the voice of my ancestor will give an answer to your question:"

"A time will come when wrong and injustice will disappear from the earth. The gates of knowledge will be thrown open wide before you. Enter quickly with a joyful heart, because understanding is the greatest weapon given by the Lord who rules the world by the eternal laws of wisdom."

"They do not wish to behold the works of the Creator; of such it is said: 'A fool hath no delight in understanding.'"

"The second thing I asked from my people is: Remembrance. Rava asked Raba, the son of Moro, the origin of the proverb! 'Do not throw mud into the fountain from which thou drinkest.' Raba answered with the words of the Scriptures: 'Thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian, because thou wast a stranger in his land.' Eliezer the son of Azalrya, said: 'The Egyptians did not invite the Israelites into their country

from self-interest, therefore the Lord rewarded them.' Since the country whose bread you eat did not treat you as cattle to plough his field, but as a tired brother to rest on his bosom, how have you rewarded it, O Israel?"

"It is not said, Thou shalt despoil the stranger, but 'One Law shall be for him that is home-born and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.'"

"When I was holding the office bestowed upon me by the king, two base Israelites were found who had gone to the enemy's camp and betrayed the king's secrets and brought calamity and trouble upon the king's troops. What did I do with these base subjects? I ordered it to be published by the sound of trumpets, all over the country, that these two, traitors to their God and their country, were for ever expelled from the bosom of Israel. I did this because when contemplating their deed my heart boiled over with wrath. I saw, as if in a dream, the second Moses, who said: 'Thrust them out of Israel, for they have betrayed those that received them as guests into their land.'"

"Not only for the good of your souls did I ask you for remembrance and gratitude, but also for your earthly welfare. When I sat in the great Synod assembled at the wish of the king and nobles, in the rich town of Lublin, I advised and urged the wise and honest men to send out a proclamation that would shake the hearts and brains of the people, even as the gardener shakes the trees to make the ripe fruit fall."

"In this proclamation we said: 'Be useful to the country wherein you live and the inhabitants will respect you. This is the first step towards happiness, because contempt is bitter and respect sweet to the human heart.'"

"But there are still other things which I have in my mind: He who is the servant of the soil, hath bread in abundance. How is the soil to nourish you if you treat it, not as a faithful servant, but as a stranger who only cares for the present day?"

"Rabbi Papa said: 'Do not engage in trade, but cultivate the soil, though both are good things; but the first is blessed by men.' If you come into the land, plant all kinds of trees that produce fruit."

"There will come a time when wrong-doing will disappear from the earth, and the nations will call out to the sons of Israel: 'Take the plough into your hands and cultivate the land, that you and your sons may eat your bread in peace.' But false prophets will raise their voice and tell you not to till the soil in the land of bondage."

"Oh, my descendant who reads this, tell the people to beware of false prophets! Call out to them in a loud voice: The false prophets have brought you low, O Israel!"

It was evident that the descendant fulfilled the command of his ancestor with conviction and unspeakable joy. Had he not himself felt the deep hatred towards the false sages? Why he considered them as such, he could not have told. His tongue was tied by want of knowledge, and his spirit, longing for light, had beaten against the walls of darkness in the midst of which he was imprisoned. Now he knew and understood; therefore from the depth of his heart he called out:

"Do not believe, O Israel, in your false sages."

The crowd grew noisy.

"Of whom does he speak?"

"Who are the false sages and prophets in Israel?"

"He speaks of our rabbis and learned men; abominable blasphemy comes out of his mouth."

"He throws only blame upon the children of Israel!"

"He bids us plough the soil in the land of bondage."

"Rabbi Nohim, the grandfather of Rabbi Isaak, said to our fathers: 'You shall not till the soil with your own hands in the land of bondage.'"

"Rabbi Nohim was the wisest of wise men; his wisdom lighted up the whole earth."

"Hersh Ezofowich quarrelled fiercely with Reb Nohim."

"Hersh Ezofowich was a great sinner!"

"Why, does he not tell us how to make poor people rich?"

"He said we ought to become servants of the soil on which we live. When the Messiah comes and takes us to the promised land, we shall leave this one. Why should we become its servants?"

"It was said the writing would teach us how to change sand into gold!"

"And how to drive out evil spirits."

"How to bring Moses to life again."

"They have told us lies; there is nothing wise or pleasing to the Lord in the writing."

Questions and mutterings followed rapidly one upon the other, accompanied by the scornful laughter of those that had been balked in their hopes and expectations. The melamed, towering above the crowd, threw out insulting remarks, or burst into harsh laughter full of venomous malice. Under the second wall opposite the melamed stood Ber on a bench. These two men, standing opposite each other, presented a striking contrast. The melamed shook his head and waved his arms, wildly shouting and laughing; Ber stood silent and motionless, his head thrown back, resting against the wall, and from his blue eyes that looked into the far, far distance, tears fell in thick drops. Close to Meir in a compact body stood a dozen or more of young men, who looked with rapt attention at the reader. They breathed quickly, smiled now and then, and raised their arms and sighed. They seemed not to see or hear the crowd; their spirits, longing for truth and blindly searching for it, had fastened upon the new thoughts. A thin, quavering voice was heard from the crowd: "They talked much about that, long, long ago; when I was young." A deep sigh accompanied the young man's words. Perhaps he was one of Hersh's friends. Young boys who pushed their heads between the people laughed and shouted, then disappeared again.

The old yellow papers began to tremble in Meir's hands; upon his pale face appeared two red burning spots. He looked half angrily, half entreatingly at the public.

"Be quiet!" he called out. "Let me read the words of the great man to you to the end. He has chosen me as his messenger, and I must obey his commands."

His voice was loud and authoritative; his whole frame seemed to expand under the influence of a new power.

"Be quiet," shouted the melamed. "Let him read the abomination which hitherto has lain in hiding. Let it come forth that we may stamp it out all the easier."

"O Israel!" began the youthful voice once more. "O Israel, the third thing I ask from you is Discernment."

"In ages past, the learned men among us were called Baale Tressim or armour-bearers. What was their armour? Their armour was the understanding of the covenant. Why were they armed? To protect Israel from annihilation. They said: Israel shall not disappear from the surface of the earth, for we will give him a strong hold from the covenant of 'Moses. Thus said the Tanaim. And the Sanhedrin where they sat, and the schools in which they taught became as the arsenal where they ground and prepared their weapons. Gamaliel, Eliezer, Joshua, Akiba, and Jehuda were amongst them like suns among the stars. Others followed in their footsteps, and through five hundred years they compiled, explained and wrote the great book which they' named the Talmud, and which through centuries was a bulwark to the Israelites, shielding them from the devouring elements From its pages the sons of Israel drew wisdom and comfort, and during the great dispersion they were never divided, because their thoughts and sighs went towards it and gathered round it, like children round their mother."

"But is everything which is good in itself equally perfect?"

"This book, which during five hundred years was written and composed by wise and loving men, cannot be a foolish or a bad book. He who speaks thus of it, tell him to clean his heart from evil, and then open it and read."

"There are clouds in the sky, and in the purest heart the Lord discerns a flaw. Did Jehovah himself write the books of Our Law? Did the angels write them? No; people wrote them. Has there ever been a man during all the ages who did not know what it meant to go astray? Is there any human work which is adequate or all times and all ages?"

"The throne of the Pharaohs has been shattered; Nineveh fell into ruins; Rome which ruled over half the world broke asunder; and Greek wisdom has made way for other wisdom. The desert spreads now where once were rich and powerful cities; and cities are rising where formerly was desert. Thus human works, the greatest of them, pass away and others take their place."

"Israel! the nourishment which sustained your soul through many generations contains grain, but also chaff. In your treasure hoards there are diamonds and worthless sand."

"The books of your Law are as the pomegranate which the foolish man ate with the rind, which left a bitter taste in his mouth. When Rabbi Meir saw him doing this, he plucked fruit from the tree, threw away the bitter rind and ate the luscious fruit. I wished to teach you as Rabbi Meir taught the man who ate the pomegranate. I wished for you the gift of discernment, for the books of your faith. Wished that you might use your intelligence as a sieve in order to separate the grain from the chaff, the diamonds from the sand; so that you may keep the pure grain and the diamonds."

"You have thrust me off for this my request; your hearts became hardened against me because of the fear and hatred towards things new. And yet it is written: 'Do not look at the vessel, but look at its contents.' There are new pitchers full of old wine, and old ones that are empty."

"Meir," whispered Ber, "look at the people!" and then he added in a still lower voice: "Depart from this place as quickly as you can."

Meir looked around at the seething, muttering crowd; a smile half-angry, half-sad came on his lips.

"I did not expect this; I expected something quite different," he said in a low voice, and he bent his head; but he raised it again almost instantly and called out:

"I am the messenger of my ancestor. He has chosen me to read his thoughts to you. I must obey him."

He drew a deep breath, then added in a still louder voice:

"He penetrated the doubts which were to arise in those who were not born, and gave an answer to them. He penetrated into the inner life of the human soul, which thirsts after truth and knowledge, and offers you freedom and happiness through my mouth. I love him as if he had given me life. I bow down before the greatness of the man who has worked out his own immortality and dwells now in Jehovah's glory. I think as he thought; I wish for you as he wished. I am like him; I am the child of his spirit." His clear voice shook with emotion, and smiles and unshed tears were together on his mobile features.

"My ancestor says to you that all nations are moving on towards knowledge and happiness; but our heads are so full of little things that there is not room for great thoughts; that the study they call Kabala, and which you consider, is a cursed science, for it kills the Israelite's intellect and leads him away from true science."

His voice became drowned in the general uproar, laughter and groaning, so that only broken sentences reached the small, inattentive audience. Yet he did not cease speaking, but went on quicker and quicker, with heaving breast. It almost seemed as if recognising the futility of his efforts, he tried to stand at his post as messenger of the dead as long as he could. Perhaps he had not lost hope altogether.

"Woe I woe!" called out voices in the crowd. "Heresy and sin have entered the house of Israel! Out of the mouths of children comes blasphemy against holy things."

"Listen, listen!" cried Meir. "It is still far to the end of my ancestor's writing."

"Let us stop his mouth and drive him from the spot where only true Israelites should speak."

"Listen, it is written here that Israel should leave off expecting a Messiah in the flesh."

"Woe! woe! he will take from the heart of this only hope and comfort."

"Because he will not come upon earth in the shape of man, but in the shape of Time, bringing to all people knowledge, happiness and peace."

"Meir, Meir, what are you doing? You will be lost! Look at the people! Go away while there is time," whispered those around him.

Ber stood at his side. Eliezer, Aryel, Haim, and a few others surrounded him; but he neither saw nor heeded anything. Large beads of perspiration stood on the proudly-raised brow, and his eyes looked despairingly and angrily at the tumultuous crowd.

Suddenly a dull thump was heard near the entrance door. The melamed had jumped down from the bench, and, with his naked feet, stamped several times upon the floor. Then, in a few bounds, he cleared the crowd, which made way for him, and with a violent jerk of his arm threw down the brass

candlestick with the yellow candle. At the same time someone climbed on the bench and blew out the lamp near the door. Except for the pale streaks of moonlight, which came through the windows, the whole room was plunged into darkness, and amidst that darkness seethed and boiled the raging element—an exasperated populace.

Nobody could have singled out any individual expression. Words, curses, groans, came down like hailstones, and mixed together in a chaos indescribable. At last, from the wide open door of the Bet-ha-Midrash poured the dark stream of people which, outside in the court, was met by another of those who had not found room within, and were less noisy, though equally excited. A large wave of moonlight lit up the open space and the Bet-ha-Kahol with its closed door and shuttered windows. On the portico steps, motionless and silent, his elbows resting on his knees, sat the shamos (messenger) awaiting orders from the interior of the building which, in the midst of the uproarious mob stood dark and mute like the grave.

The crowd broke up into many groups. One of these, the largest, crossed the gates of the precincts; shouting and struggling, it poured into the moonlit square, where it looked like a monster bird flapping its huge wings. It was mostly composed of poorly-dressed men with long beards and maliciously gleaming eyes. Children of different ages fluttered to and fro among them, picking up stones and mud. They all thronged towards one point; a single man surrounded by a bodyguard of friends. Pushed and knocked about, they resisted with their arms and shoulders until, yielding to the pressures they finally gave way, and were swallowed up by the crowd. Then a shower of stones fell upon the back of the man whom, until now, they had screened; dozens of hands grasped his garments and tore them into strips; upon his bare head fell mud and handfuls of gravel picked out of the gutter. In his ears thundered the yells and groans of the infuriated mob; before his face flashed the clenched fists and inflamed faces of his assailants, and beyond, as if veiled in a blood-red mist, silent and closely shuttered, appeared the house of his fathers.

Towards that house, as if to a haven of salvation, he directed his steps as quick as the grasping hands and the children crowding round his feet would let him. From his compressed lips came no sound either of complaint or entreaty; he did not seem to feel the hands that smote him or the stones, which pelted his body, and which might maim or kill him at any moment. With breast and shoulders he tried desperately to push aside the mob. It was not himself he defended, but the treasure he carried; now and then he touched his breast to make sure it was still there. Suddenly a burly figure, dressed in a coarse shirt, and with a thick stick in his hands, barred his way, and shouted:

"Fools, what are you doing? Why do you not take the loathsome writing from him? The Rabbi Isaak has ordered it to be torn from him; he has bidden it in his breast!"

In an instant the young man, who had been assailed from the back and sides only, found himself attacked in front also. Rough and dark hands reached at his breast; his convulsively clenched arms were wrenched asunder, and they began to tear his garments. Then he raised his pale face towards the moonlit sky with a despairing cry:

"Jehovah!"

He felt a lithe and supple body creep up from under his feet, and a pair of hot lips were pressed to the hand which hung down powerless. A wonderful contrast this single kiss of love in the midst of all that hatred and fury. With a last, almost superhuman effort, he pushed off his assailants, stooped down, and, before anybody had time to rush at him again, lifted a child up in his arms. It threw its arms around his neck, and looked with streaming eyes dilated with terror at the people.

"It is my child! it is my Lejbele! do not hurt him!" called the frightened voice of the tailor Shmul from the crowd.

"Reb!" called out several voices to the melamed, "he is shielding himself behind the child—the child loves him!"

"Take away the child and tear from him the writing!" yelled the melamed.

But nobody obeyed him. They still pulled at his clothes at his sides and behind, a few stones whizzed over his head; but he saw a clear space in front of him, and, with a few bounds, he reached the porch, which an invisible hand opened quickly, and as quickly bolted after he had entered.

Meir put the child down in the dark passage, and he himself entered the sitting-room, where, by the light of the lamp, he saw the whole family assembled. Panting and breathless, he leaned against the wall, and his dull eyes looked slowly round the room. All were silent. Never since the house of Ezofowich had existed in the world had a member of that family looked like the pale, panting youth whose head was covered with dust and mud, and whose garments hung in tatters around him. The



forehead, moist with the dew of mortal anguish, was marked across with a red scar, caused by a rough stone, or perhaps some blunt instrument in the darkness of the Bet-ha-Midrash.

But for the expression of pride and undaunted courage in his face, he might have been taken for a begging outcast or a hunted criminal.

Saul covered his face with both hands. Some of the women sobbed aloud. Raphael, Abraham, and other grave members of the family rose from their seats, stern and angry, and called out in one voice:

"Ill-fated lad!" They were about to surround him, and to speak to him, when suddenly the shutters flew open with a crash, the windows shattered into bits, and heavy stones thundered against the furniture from beyond the broken windows, yells and shouts arose, over which dominated the hoarse voice of the melamed. They called for Meir to give up the writing, heaped abuse and insults on the family, and threatened them with heaven's and the people's wrath.

The members of the family stood motionless, as if turned to stone with terror and shame.

Saul took his hands from his face, drew himself up proudly, and went quickly towards the door.

"Father, where are you going?" cried the men and women in terror.

He pointed his shaking hand at the window, and said:

"I will stand in the porch of my house, and tell the foolish rabble to be quiet, and take itself off."

They barred his way. The women clung around his shoulders and knees.

"They will kill you, father!" they moaned.

Suddenly the raging tumult ceased. Instead yells, a low murmur passed from mouth to mouth.

"The shamos! the shamos! the shamos!" It was indeed the same man who, silent and motionless, had sat on the steps of the Be-ha-Kahol waiting for orders, and who now approached the house of Ezofowich to proclaim the sentence of the tribunal before the family of the accused. The crowd, stirred by ardent curiosity to hear the sentence, pressed close to the windows, in which not a single pane of glass remained. Others, scattered over the square and in the neighbouring streets, drew nearer, and surrounded the house like a dark, living wall. The door of the house was opened and shut again, and the shamos entered the sitting-room.

He looked anxiously, almost suspiciously around, and bowed very low before Saul.

"Peace be with you," he said in a low voice, as if he himself felt the bitter irony of the greeting.

"Reb Saul," he began, in a somewhat more assured voice, "do not be angry with your servant if he brings shame and misfortune into your house. I obey the commands of the Rabbi, the elders, and the judges who sat in judgment upon your grandson Meir, and whose sentence I am ordered to read out to him and you all."

A deep silence followed upon his words. At last Saul, who stood leaning upon the shoulder of his son Raphael said in a low voice:

"Read."

The messenger unrolled the paper he was holding in his hand, and read:

"Isaak Todros, the son of Baruch, Rabbi of Szybow, together with the judges and elders of the Kahal, who constitute the tribunal of the community of Szybow, heard the following accusations, confirmed by many witnesses, against Meir Ezofowich, son of Benjamin:"

"Meir Ezofowich, son of Benjamin, is accused, and found guilty, of the crime of breaking the Sabbath. Instead of giving himself up to the study of holy books, he watched and defended the dwelling of the heretic Abel Karaim, and raised his hand in anger against Israelitish children."

(2.) "That Meir Ezofowich was seen reading the accursed book, 'More Nebuchim,' by Moses Majmonides, the false sage, excommunicated by many saintly rabbis and learned men; read this same book aloud to his companions, thus teaching them heresy and other abominations."

(3.) "That Meir Ezofowich held rebellious speeches against the covenant and the wise men of Israel, perverting thus their youthful minds."

(4.) "That under pretext of charity and pity for the poor of the town, he gave them criminal and

foolish advice, saying, they ought to see what the elders did with the money they received from them; and further, they should distinguish in the covenant between God's work and people's invention; finally, told them to work in the fields like peasants."

(5.) "That having hair growing on his face, he refused to get married, and broke his engagement with the Israelitish girl Mera, daughter of Eli, and showed thereby his resolution to avoid the married state."

(6.) "That he lived in impure friendship with Golda, the granddaughter of a heretic, who, not belonging to the faithful, had been allowed to live in his place through the great charity of the Rabbi and the elders. Meir, the son of Benjamin, has been seen in their dwelling, and meeting the girl Golda in lonely places, taking flowers from her, and joining his voice with hers in worldly songs on a Sabbath."

(7.) "That he has not paid due respect to the learned men, and has raised a sacrilegious hand against the melamed Moshe, whom he knocked down, throwing the table upon him, causing, thereby, bodily harm to the melamed and great scandal to the community."

(8.) "That in his great, unheard-of malice, he denounced a brother Israelite, Reb Jankiel Kamionker, before an alien, thereby breaking the solidarity of his people, and bringing Reb Jankiel into trouble and perhaps danger."

(9.) "That in his boundless audacity he extracted the writing of his ancestor, Michael Senior, from its hiding-place, where it should have rotted away, and with criminal insolence read it to a large crowd of people, thereby endangering the old law and customs of the Israelites; and as the writing, we have been told, contains blasphemous and pernicious doctrines we consider the reading of the said document as the greatest of his crimes. Therefore, according to the power given us by our law over the sons of Israel, we decree:"

"That to-morrow after sunset, a great and terrible curse will be pronounced against the audacious and disobedient Meir Ezofowich, son of Benjamin, through the mouth of Rabbi Isaak, son of Baruch, for the hearing of which all the Israelites of Szybow and the environs will be summoned by the messenger; and Meir Ezofowich will be thrust out and ignominiously expelled from the bosom of Israel. All of you who remain faithful unto the Lord and the covenant live in peace and happiness with all your brethren in Israel."

The shamos had finished; and putting the paper under his coat, bowed low, and swiftly left the room.

For several minutes a deadly silence prevailed within and without.

Suddenly Meir, who had stood like one entranced, threw his arms wildly above his head and uttered a heart-broken cry:

"Expelled from Israel! cursed and expelled by my own people!" His voice died away in a loud sob. With his head pressed against the wall he sobbed in great anguish. It was enough to hear one of these sobs, which shook his whole frame, to guess that he had been wounded in the most vital part of his soul.

Then approached his uncles, their wives and daughters, with voices of entreaty, anger, threats, and prayers, beseeching him to give up the writing of the Senior, to let it be burned publicly, and perhaps the decree of the elders would be mitigated. The men crowded round him; the women kissed him.

Still shaken by sobs, and his face closely pressed to the wall, deaf to all the voices of entreaty and anger, his only answer was a motion with his head and the short monosyllable:

"No! No! No!"

This single word, thrown out amidst his sobs, was more eloquent than the longest speech: it expressed such deep suffering, love, and undaunted courage.

"Father," exclaimed Raphael, turning towards Saul, who sat alone and motionless, "Father! why do you not command him to humble himself? Bring him to reason; tell him to give up the writing to us, and we will carry it to the Rabbi and ask him to relent!"

When Raphael said this, Meir uncovered his face and turned it towards his grandfather.

Saul raised his head, stretched out his hands as if blindly groping for support, and then rose. The previously dull eyes became all at once singularly restless, till they met with the fixed look of his grandson. He opened his mouth, but no words came.

"Speak, father! command him!" urged several voices.

The old man seemed to totter on his feet. A cruel struggle was taking place within him. Several times he tried to speak, but could not. At last in a heavy whisper, he said:

"He is not cursed yet—I am still allowed:"

"In the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob I bless you, son of my son!"

And trembling in every limb, his eyes full of tears, he sank back in his chair.

Those present exchanged glances of amazement and reverence. Meir bounded forward and threw himself at the feet of the old man. In a low, feverish voice he spoke of the love he bore him—about the Senior's legacy to his descendants, and that he would go into the world and come back sometime. Then he rose from his knees and quickly left the room.

At this moment there was nobody near the windows of the house. The great crowd of people had retreated towards the middle of the square, and there they stood almost motionless, quietly whispering with each other. A singular thing happened. Scarcely had the messenger finished reading the sentence when the storm of wrath and anger suddenly subsided. What had happened to them? Their emotional nature which, like a stringed instrument, answered to the slightest touch, quivered under a new feeling. It was respect and sympathy for the misfortune of an ancient and charitable family. The crowd, which such a short time before had yelled and cursed and was ready to tear everything to pieces, became suddenly quiet and subdued, and began to disperse peacefully. Here and there still sounded malicious laughter or insulting epithets, but more voices were heard in gentle pity.

"Yet he was good and charitable!"

"He never was proud!"

"He fed my foolish child and kissed it!"

"He saved my old father when the cart had fallen upon him!"

"He worked with us like a common man, and sawed wood!"

"His face shone with beauty and intelligence!"

"All eyes rejoiced looking at his young age!"

"Herem!! Herem! Herem!" (Excommunicated) repeated many.

Then they shook their heads in wonder, faces paled with horror, and breasts heaved with sighs.

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Three shadows glided swiftly over the moonlit deserted fields which separated the town from the Karaite's Hill. The first belonged to a tall, slender man; the second to a child who clung to the sleeve of his garment; these two shadows were so close together that often they formed but one; the third shadow showed the outline of a burly figure, which kept carefully in the distance, now and then stood still or doubled up, at times disappearing altogether behind palings, shrubs, or trees. It was evident the shadow wanted to hide itself, and was looking for something, listening and watching for something or somebody.

At the open window of Abel's cottage a low voice called out:

"Golda! Golda!"

From the window bent a face, whitened in the moonlight, and surrounded by waves of black hair. A low passionate whisper sounded in the still evening air:

"Meir! Meir! I heard a terrible noise and awful voices! My heart trembled in fear; but it is nothing now you are here."

Two arms were stretched forth towards the approaching young man. The corals on her neck quivered under the throbbing emotion where sobs mingled with laughter.

Suddenly she uttered a piercing cry.

Meir stood before her, and she saw his torn garments and the red scar on his forehead.

She moaned, and put her hand gently on his brow, and caressingly touched the dusty hair and ragged clothes with the almost motherly feeling that longs to comfort and soothe. Meir sat on the bench in the posture of a man deadly tired. He leaned his head against the window-frame, and seemed to draw in the mild evening breeze. The moon reflected herself in the mournful eyes that were raised in question towards the silvery clouds. After a while he straightened himself and said quickly, in a low voice:

"Golda, people may search for me; if they find me they will take my treasure. I will give it to you to hide it, and then I will go into the fields and woods to cry out unto Jehovah for mercy."

The girl, too, stood straight and grave. "Give it to me," she said quietly. The leaves of the paper rustled in Meir's hands, and, giving them to the girl, he said:

"Hide it in your breast, and guard my treasure as the apple of your eye. It contains the precious words of my ancestor, which have removed all blindness from my eyes. They will be my passport which will open to me the doors and hearts of wise men. It is quiet here, and safe—nobody sees or suspects. When I am ready I shall come and ask you for it."

Golda took the paper.

"Rest tranquil about your treasure," she said. "I would rather lay down my life than give it up to anyone but you. It is safe here, it is quiet, nobody will suspect."

Meir rose from the bench.

"Sleep in peace," he said. "I must go; my soul is full of cries; I must walk, walk. I shall go and throw myself down among the trees, and send my prayers up to Jehovah with the evening breeze. I must unburden my mind of the heavy load."

He was going away, but Golda held him by the sleeve.

"Meir," she whispered, "tell me what has happened. Why did the people beat and hurt you? Why must you go out into the world?"

"People have beaten and stoned me," replied Meir gloomily, "because I would not go against the truth, and would not agree to what the people agree. I must go, because to-morrow a terrible curse will be pronounced against me, and I shall be excommunicated and expelled from Israel."

"Herem!" (the curse) shrieked the girl, and she threw her folded hands in horror above her head. She stood thus for a moment; then a gentle, thoughtful smile came on her face.

"Meir!" she whispered, "zeide is cursed and I am cursed; but the mercy of the Lord is greater than the greatest terror and His justice vaster than the vastest sea. When zeide reads this, he leaves off grieving and says: 'The cursed ones are happier than those that curse . . . because a time will come when the justice of the Lord will enter into the human heart, and then they will bless the names of those that have been cursed.'"

Meir looked at the girl, whose deep-set eyes glowed with inspiration.

"Golda!" he said softly, "you are the second half of my soul. Come with me into the world as my wife; holding each other's hands, we will bear the curse together and live so that people shall bless our names."

A great wave of fire passed over Golda's face and left it radiant with ineffable joy.

"Oh, Meir!" she exclaimed. She wanted to say something more, but could not. She bent her lithe figure very low and hung upon his arm.

He put his arm around her neck and pressed his lips to the wavy black hair. It was only for a moment. The girl straightened herself, and with the hot blush still dying her face, she said softly:

"And zeide?"

Meir looked at her like a man suddenly aroused from sleep. She went on in the same low voice:

"His feet are so weak that he could not go with us, and besides he would never leave the graves of his fathers. How can I leave him? How could he live without me, whom he brought up with his hands, taught to spin, to read the Bible, and told all his beautiful stories? Who would feed him if I went away? Who during the cold winter nights would lie at his feet and warm his cold limbs? And when the soul is

about to part from his body, who will rock the old head to its eternal sleep? Meir! Meir! you have a grandfather whose hair is white as snow, and who will rend his garments when you are gone. But your zeide has many sons, daughters, and grandchildren; he is rich and respected by everybody. My zeide has only this poor hut, his old Bible and granddaughter Golda."

Meir sighed.

"You are right, Golda; but what will become of you when your grandfather dies, and you remain alone in the world, exposed to poverty and human scorn?"

Golda sat down because her limbs trembled. She passed both her hands over her hot face, and with upraised eyes replied:

"I shall sit before the door of this hut, spin my wool and tend my goats, looking along the road whence you will come back!"

It was an adaptation from the story of Akiba.

Meir asked dreamily:

"And what will you do if people come and laugh at you and say: 'Akiba is drinking at the spring of wisdom whilst your body is consumed with misery and your eyes are dull from weeping?'"

A voice stifled with emotion replied to him:

"I shall answer this: 'Let misery consume my body, and my eyes run over with tears; yet truly will I guard my husband's faith.' And if he stood before me and said: 'I have come back because I did not wish you to weep any longer,' I should say to him: 'Go and drink more.'"

Meir rose. There was no despair on his face now, but hope and courage depicted in his whole bearing.

"I will come back, Rachel," he exclaimed. "Jehovah will give me strength, and good people will help me if I show them my hard yearning after knowledge and the writing of the Senior, which is the covenant of peace between Israel and the nations. I shall drink long and eagerly at the spring of wisdom; then come back and teach my people, and for all the misery and contempt which you suffer, I shall put a golden crown upon your head."

Golda shook her head. The expression in her face showed she had been carried away by a wonderful dream. She dreamt she was Rachel, greeting her husband Akiba. With passionate eyes and a far-away smile, she whispered:

"And I shall embrace your knees, and with eyes that have regained their former beauty I shall look at all your glory and say: 'Lord and Master! your glory be my crown.'"

They looked long at each other, and through their tearful eyes there shone a love as deep and earnest as their hearts were pure and heroic.

A low, childish laughter reached their ears. They looked astonished in the direction whence it came. Upon the threshold of the hut sat Lejbele, holding in his arms a snow-white kid. The kid had been purchased at the fair with the money Golda had taken for the baskets. The child had seen it in the entrance, brought it out on the threshold, and nestled his face to the soft white hair and laughed aloud.

"The child always follows you," said Golda. "He kissed me to-day, when everybody beat and stoned me; with him I shielded my treasure against their strong hands," replied Meir. Golda disappeared from the window and stood upon the threshold. She bent over the child, her flowing hair covered his head and shoulders, and she kissed him on the forehead. Lejbele was not frightened; he seemed to feel safe here. He had seen the girl before, whose luminous eyes looked at him with an expression of great sweetness. He raised his grateful, now almost intelligent, eyes to her, and whispered:

"Let me play with this little goat?"

"Will you have some milk?" said Golda.

"Yes," he said; "please give me some."

She brought a bowl full of milk and fed the child; then asked:

"Why do you leave your father and mother, and follow Meir?"

The child rocked his head and replied:

"He is better than daddy, and better than mammy. He fed me and patted my head, and saved me from Reb Moshe."

"Whose little boy are you?" asked Golda. Lejbele remained silent and kept on rocking his head. He evidently tried to collect his confused thoughts. Suddenly he raised his finger and pointed after the retreating figure of Meir, and said aloud:

"I am his."

And he laughed: but it was no longer the laugh of an idiot, only the expression of joy that he had found the way to clothe in words the thoughts of his loving little heart.

Golda looked in the direction where Meir had disappeared, and sighed heavily. Presently she rose, wrapped herself in a gray shawl, went half-way up the hill, and sat down under a dwarfed pine-tree. Perhaps she wanted to look down and watch his return from the woods. Her elbows resting on her knees—her face buried in her hands, she sat motionless, like a statue of sorrow; the black hair which covered her like a mantle, glittered and shone in the bright moonlight.

At the same time the low door of the Rabbi's hut was softly opened and Reb Moshe crept in, looking worn, ashamed and troubled. He squatted down near the fireplace and looked anxiously at Isaak Todros who sat in the open window, his eyes fixed on the sky.

"Rabbi!" he whispered timidly.

"Rabbi!" he said a little louder, "your servant will look guilty in your eyes—he has not brought the abominable writing. The storm was fearful, but his friends defended him; he resisted himself, and then a little child shielded him. The foolish people tore his clothes, beat, abused and stoned him; but did not take the writing from him."

"Nassi! your servant is ashamed and troubled; have mercy upon him, and do not punish him with the lightning of your eyes."

Todros, without taking his eyes from off the sky, said:

"The writing must be taken from him and delivered into my hands."

"Nassi! the writing is no longer in his hands."

"And where is it?" said the Rabbi, in a louder voice, without turning round.

"Rabbi! I should not have dared to appear before you, had I not known what became of it. I followed him—my whole soul entered into my eyes and ears. I saw how he gave the writing to the Karaitish girl to hide it; I heard how he called it his treasure, and his passport to go into the world with, and which would open for him the hearts of the people."

Todros shuddered convulsively.

"It is true," he whispered angrily. "That writing will be to him a shield and weapon, on which our sharpest arrows will have no effect. Moshe!" he said, in a more determined voice, "the writing must be taken from the Karaitish girl."

The melamed crawled to his master's knees, and raising his face to him said, in a low voice:

"Rabbi! the girl said she would sooner lay down her life than part with the writing."

Todros was silent for a moment, and then repeated:

"The writing must be taken from her."

The melamed remained, silent and thoughtful for a long time.

"Rabbi!" he said in a very low whisper, "and if anything happens to the girl?"

Todros did, not answer at once. At last he said:

"Blessed is the hand that removes garbage from the house of Israel!"

The melamed seemed to drink in the words eagerly and ponder over their meaning. Then he smiled.

"Rabbi!" he said, "I have understood your wish—depend upon your servant; he will find men whose hands are strong and whose hearts are steel. Rabbi!" he added, entreatingly, "let a gentle ray from your eyes fall upon your servant; let him see your wrath is softened towards him. My soul without your love and favour is like a well without water or a dark prison where no love enters."

Todros replied:

"No gentle ray will come from my eye, nor will my wrath be softened till the writing has been torn out of the accursed hands."

Moshe groaned:

"Rabbi, the writing shall be in your hands tomorrow."

The moon fell bright upon the faces of both men, of whom one looked at the heavens, the other into his master's face. The master searched the heavens for the silvery streaks which are the ways the angels travel from star to star through eternity; the pupil looked into the master's eyes for the reflection of the supernatural light.

In both their minds the name of the angel of death whom they had called up was present—yet both their hearts were full of love and boundless admiration.

## CHAPTER X

A great and unusual emotion prevailed among the population of the little town. From all parts they thronged towards the large brown house of prayer, where, under the three-storied roof covered with moss, the row of high and narrow windows blazed with light. The sky was covered with stars twinkling feebly and paling before the full moon.

The interior of the temple, large and roomy, would easily hold several thousand people. The high and smooth walls, forming a perfect square, were cut across by a long, heavy gallery, divided into niches, not unlike private boxes, and surrounded by a high, open-work grating. Wooden benches, standing closely together, filled the body of the synagogue from the entrance door up to the raised platform, which was surrounded by a highly ornamental grating. There was a table on the platform, used for unfolding the leaves of the Tora on days when extracts from it were read to the people. It served also as a pulpit when, on solemn days, speeches or religious discourses were delivered. Here also stood the choir of young men or grown-up children, who united their voices or answered to the intoning singer.

The platform was about a dozen feet from the principal part of the building, which looked very impressive in its dignity and blaze of colour. It was the altar, or the place where the holy of holies was preserved. The top of the altar reached to the ceiling, and consisted of two great tables incrusting with lapis-lazuli and covered with white letters, like strings of arabesques, in a rich and fantastic design, in which the initiated eye could read the Ten Commandments. The tables of lapis-lazuli were supported by two gilt-bronze lions of huge size, resting on two heavy columns of the intensest blue, surrounded with white garlands of vine-leaves and grapes. All this rose from a heavy stone foundation, the large surface of which, from top to bottom was covered with inscriptions from the Bible. The two columns stood like guards on either side of a deep recess, veiled entirely with a red silk curtain richly embroidered with gold. Behind this curtain, only raised at certain times, lay the holy of holies, the Tora, a great roll of parchment covered with costly silk and tied with ribbons embroidered in gold and silver.

Seven chandeliers of a hundred lights each, illuminated the gallery above, showing behind the transparent grating innumerable female figures in bright coloured dresses; below were the benches, where the men were sitting on their soft white talliths. Around the necks of the more prominent members gleamed large silver bands worked in delicate bas-relief. The costliest and largest of the seven chandeliers hung suspended by heavy silver cords before the red silk curtain and reflected in the heavy gold embroidery, and showed the delicate design of the vine leaves twining round the columns. Here stood Eliezer, the singer who intoned the old psalms, the limitless melodies of which resound with all the voices of human joy, suffering, and entreaty. Never had the beautiful voice produced richer or mellower tones; never had it vibrated with such deep emotion. It almost seemed as if that evening a superhuman power had taken possession of him. Now and then his voice died away in a low wail; then it rose again with such voluminous power of entreaty as if it carried him on its wings before the throne of Jehovah—to plead for something or somebody.

The whole building was filled with the sound, in which the choir of young voices joined from time to time. There was a deep silence among the congregation. Here and there some one whispered:

"It is like the angel Sandalphon, who offers to Jehovah the garlands made from human prayers."

Others shook their heads sadly. "He is pleading for his friend, who is to be excommunicated to-night."

Suddenly the singer's voice was interrupted by a heavy thump, repeated several times. It ceased, as if the golden string had been torn asunder by a brutal hand. The choir disappeared from the platform, and in their place stood one man, whose dark, piercing eyes looked more baneful than ever. In his hands he held a heavy book, with which he struck the table as a sign for silence. Throughout the building everything was quiet, except in the portico, where some twenty people surrounded a young man who, with a deathly pale face and compressed lips, stood leaning against the wall.

Whisperers crowded around him.

"It is still time. Have mercy upon yourself and your family! Run quick, quick, throw yourself at the feet of the Rabbi! Oh, Herem! Herem! Herem!"

He did not seem to listen. His arms were crossed over his breast. The contracted forehead, marked with the red scar, gave him the expression of inward pain, but also of inflexible courage.

"In the name of the God of our fathers," sounded the loud voice of Isaak Todros.

A long sigh like a tremor seemed to shake the whole congregation, and then everything was silent.

Isaak Todros spoke slowly and impressively:

"By the force and power of the world, in the name of the holy covenant and the six hundred and thirteen commandments contained in the covenant; with the malediction of Joshua against the town of Jericho; with the malediction of Elisha against the children who mocked him; with the shamanta used by the great Sanhedrims and Synods; with all the herems and curses used from the time of Moses to this day; in the name of the God eternal; in the name of Matatron, the guardian of Israel; in the name of the angel Sandalphon, who from human prayers wreathes garlands for the throne of Jehovah; in the name of the archangel Michael, the powerful leader of the heavenly army; in the name of the angels of fire, wind, and lightning; in the name of all the angels conducting the stars on their courses, and all the archangels who are spreading their wings above the throne of the Eternal; in the name of Him who appeared in the burning bush, and by the power of which Moses divided the waters; in the name of the hand who wrote the tables of the holy law, we expel, disgrace, and curse the strong, disobedient, and blasphemous Meir Ezofowich, son of Benjamin."

He paused a little, then, with a vehement motion, raised both his arms above his head, and, amidst the deepest silence, he went on faster and louder:

"Be he accursed by heaven and earth; by the angels Matatron, Sandalphon, and Michael; by all the angels, archangels, and heavenly orbs. Be he accursed by all pure and holy spirits which serve the Lord; accursed by every power in heaven and upon earth. Let all creation become his enemy, that the whirlwind crush him and the sword smite him. Let his ways be dangerous and covered with darkness, and let the greatest despair be his only companion thereon. Let sorrow and unhappiness waste his body; let his eyes look upon the heavy blows falling upon him. Let the Lord never forgive him; nay, let the wrath and vengeance of the Lord eat deep into his marrow. Let him be wrapped up in the curse as in a garment; let his death be sudden, and drive him into utter darkness."

Here Todros paused again to draw breath into his exhausted lungs. His voice had become every minute more laboured, and his sentences more broken. His face was burning, and his arms waved wildly over his head.

"From this moment," he shouted again, "from this moment the curse has fallen upon him; let him not dare to approach the house of prayer nearer than four yards. Under the threat of excommunication, let no Israelite approach nearer to him than four yards distance, nor open to him his house, nor give him bread, water, or fire, though he see him dying with thirst, hunger, and disease; nay, let everybody spit upon him, and throw stones under his feet, that he may stumble and fall. Let him not have any fortune, either what he has earned himself or what comes from his parents; let it be given up to the elders of the Kahal, to be used for the poor and needy."

"This curse which has fallen upon him, let it be made public all over Israel wherever you go, and we will send the tidings of it to all our brethren to the farthest confines of the world."

"This is our decree, and you all who remain faithful unto the Lord and his covenant, live in peace."

He had finished; and, at the same time, by some prearranged contrivance, all the lights in the seven



chandeliers grew dim, and in the four corners of the edifice trumpets began to sound in a low, mournful wail, in which joined a chorus of sobs and loud moans. A heart-rending cry came from the portico, which was all the more terrible as, it came from the breast of a young and powerful man. There was the noise of many feet, and the sound of somebody driven out. Meir disappeared from the house of prayer. Among the benches near the altar came the sound of rent garments, and grave men fell on their faces.

"In the dust lies the mighty house of Ezofowich," said several voices, pointing at them.

From the gallery came the loud sobs and wailing, of women, and in the background of the edifice people without silver ribbons round their talliths wrung their hard, work-stained hands.

Todros wiped the perspiration from his brow with his ragged sleeve, and, leaning upon the balustrade with heaving breast and twitching lips, looked at the singer. He did not leave the platform, for, according to the prescribed rules, a blessing for all the people ought to follow the curse. It was the singer's duty to intonate it. Todros waited for it. Why did the singer delay so long? Why did he not take up his last words, "Live in peace," and intonate the blessing? Eliezer stood with his face turned to the altar. Whilst the Rabbi pronounced the curse his whole frame had shook under the folds of the tallith. By and by he grew quieter, stood motionless, and his eyes seemed to look far, far in the distance. At last he raised his arms. It was the sign for silence and prayer. The trumpets, which had kept on the low, mournful wailing, grew silent, the human sobs and cries ceased. The dim light blazed up again, and amidst the deepest silence, interrupted by some stifled sobs, rose the pure and silvery voice of Eliezer:

"O Lord, who blessed our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, the prophets of Israel, and all righteous people, pour down thy blessing upon the man who this day has been injured by an unjust curse."

"God in thy mercy shield and guard him from all unhappiness, prolong the years of his life, and bless all his undertakings. Release him from distress, and darkness, and fetters, together with all his brethren in Israel."

"Do this, O Lord. Say all unto me, Amen." He stopped, and there was a short silence of stupefaction, and then out of several hundred throats came the cry, "Amen!" "Amen!" called out the members of the Ezofowich family who rose from the floor, shaking the dust from their rent garments. "Amen!" called out the group of poor people who had wrung their black, work-stained hands.

"Amen!" came from the voices of the weeping women in the gallery. "Amen!" repeated at last a chorus of young voices.

The Rabbi took his hands off the balustrade, and looked around the congregation with amazed eyes.

"What is that? What does this mean?"

Then Eliezer turned his face to him and the people. The hood of his tallith had slipped from his head on to his shoulders. His face, usually white, was flushed, and his blue eyes glowed with anger and courage. He raised his hand, and said, in a loud voice:

"Rabbi, it means that our ears and our hearts will not listen to any such curses any more!"

These words were like the signal for battle. Scarcely had he finished speaking when some fifty young men ranged themselves on either side of him. Some were the excommunicated man's personal friends; others had only seen him from a distance; among them were even those who had blamed him and condemned his rashness.

"Rabbi!" they called out, "we will hear such curses no more!"

"Rabbi! your curse has made us love the accursed!"

"Rabbi! with that herem you have laid a burden upon a man who was pleasant in the sight of God and man!"

With a mighty effort Todros seemed to rouse himself from the numbness into which the unexpected rebellion had plunged him.

"What is it you want?" he shouted. "What are you speaking of? Has the evil spirit bewitched you? Do you not know that our Law commands us to curse those who rebel against the holy covenant?"

Not from among the young men, but from the benches where the elders were sitting, came a grave voice:

"Rabbi! do you not know that when the old Sanhedrim were in fierce debate whether to adhere to the

teaching of Hillel or Shamaï, a mysterious voice, 'Bat Kohl,' taken for the voice of God himself, was heard, 'Listen to the Law of Hillel, for it is full of charity and gentleness.'

All heads were craned in the direction whence the speech had come. It was from Raphael, the uncle of the excommunicated.

At this moment Ber made his way through the crowd and stood at the side of the young men.

"Rabbi!" he exclaimed, "have you ever counted the intellects you and your forefathers crushed with your despotism; all the souls eager for knowledge that you thrust into darkness and suffering?"

"Rabbi!" said a youthful almost childish voice, "will you and those that stand by you always keep from us all knowledge after which our minds are yearning?"

"Why do you not, Rabbi, teach the people to use their intelligence as a sieve, to divide the grain from the chaff, and the pearls from the sand? Rabbi! you have made us to eat the pomegranate with the bitter rind; we begin to feel the acrid taste of it and it causes pain."

"Unhappy, misguided youths! Reprobates!" shouted Todros passionately. "Did you not see with your own eyes that the people hated him, stoned him, and marked his forehead with a red scar?"

Proud and scornful laughter answered his speech. "Do not agree with everything the people say," and one voice continued: "The curse you pronounced against him has softened many hearts and opened many eyes."

"Malicious promptings stirred up hatred against him; but to-day all hearts are full of compassion, because with your curse you have killed his youth."

"It is worse than death, Rabbi; for amongst the living he will be like one dead."

"And is it not written in the statutes of the great Sanhedrim: 'The tribunal which once in seventy years pronounces a sentence of death will be called the tribunal of murderers?'"

"In the Sanhedrim, did not childless and stony-hearted men sit?"

"Who soweth wrath, reapeth sorrow!"

Such and similar were the sentences which fell like hail around the Rabbi, accompanied by threatening looks and indignant gestures.

Todros answered no more. He remained quite motionless and, with his mouth open and eyebrows raised, presented the picture of a man who does not understand what is going on around him. Suddenly, the melamed rushed from the crowd, jumped over the balustrade, and spreading out his arms as if to shield the beloved master, confronted the people and shouted in angry tones:

"Woe! woe! to the insolent who does not reverence those who serve them before the Lord!"

Eliezer replied:

"No wall is to be raised between the Lord and his people. We appointed men from amongst us to study the Law in order to teach it to the ignorant. But we did not, tell them: 'We deliver our souls unto you in bondage'; because every Israelite is free to search for the Lord in his own heart and to explain His words according to his intelligence."

Others exclaimed:

"In Israel there are no higher or lower grades. We are all brethren in the eyes of the Creator; no one has the right to fetter our will and intellect."

"The false prophets have lost us, because they separated us from other nations, that we are even as prisoners in the dark, left in loneliness."

"But a time will come when Israel will shake off his fetters, and the blind and proud spirits shall fall down from their heights and the imprisoned souls will regain their liberty."

Isaak Todros raised his hands slowly to his head, as a man who tries to rouse himself from sleep; then he leaned again on the balustrade, raised his eyes, and sighed deeply:

"En-Sof!" he said in a dreamy whisper.

It was the kabalistic name of God which whirled across his despairing mind. But as if in protest

against the doctrines which had encumbered the pure Mosaic faith, a chorus of voices answered:

"Jehovah!"

The melamed's body shook as in a fit of ague. With violent speech and gesture he called upon the people to stand up for their beloved sage, and punish the audacious rebels. But the more he spoke, the more amazed he grew. Nobody moved. The rich and prominent of the community sat silent, their foreheads supported on their hands, their eyes riveted to the floor. They were in deep meditation. The bulk of the people remained motionless and mute.

The melamed understood at last that all efforts to rouse them were useless. He became silent, but his eyes opened wider in great wonder; he could not understand why they did not listen.

But through the misty brain of Isaak Todros passed a ray of light, and he got a glimpse of the terrible truth. Something whispered to him that in the young breasts all the dormant desires and aspirations of which the excommunicated man had been the interpreter, had stirred into life. The young man was, then, not the only one; but he was bolder, more enterprising and proud. He heard another whisper. The young heads whose fearless attitude had made him powerless to-day, had been touched by the wings of the angel of Time, which, as he perceived in a dull, indistinct way, was full of rebellion and upheaving and would break down the barriers he had raised between them and the highest truth. And he heard again why the people had not stood up for him, because the angel of Time, who carries with him rebellion, and battle, also brings charity and forgiveness, and sweeps away curses and hatred with his powerful, yet soft, wings.

All this Todros heard in a dim and vague way; but it was enough, to benumb his heart, full of petrified faith and pride.

"Bat Kohl," he whispered.

The voice of his own conscience he took for the mysterious voice said to be heard in great crises by the lawgivers and priests of Israel.

"Bat Kohl," he repeated with trembling lips, and turned his gaze around the building.

The interior of the synagogue was half-empty. The people dispersed slowly and silently, as if they were seized by a great sorrow and doubt. The poor and rich, until now great admirers of the Rabbi. There was the rustle of the belated women in the gallery, and then everything was quiet and deserted.

As in times of yore, Joseph Akiba was coming back in the moonlit night, to his shepherd's hut, so Meir pale and trembling approached the house of his fathers.

He went there, but without the intention of entering it again. He knew that he would have to go away, to pursue in loneliness and misery the great aim he saw in the far, far distance, and which was so difficult to reach. He wanted to see the house once more, but did not intend to cross its threshold. Among the many darkened windows, he saw one where a light glimmered. He stood still and looked at it. Through the window he saw the motionless figure of his great-grandmother in her easy chair. A wave of moonlight made the diamonds sparkle.

Meir slowly ascended the steps of the porch and touched the door latch. It yielded to the pressure; contrary to the usual custom the door was unlocked. He entered the narrow passage and stood at the door of the sitting-room, which was wide open. The whole house was wrapped in darkness and silence.

Was everybody asleep? Not likely; but not the slightest noise was to disturb the last farewell between the great-grandmother and her great-grandson and drive him from her knees. It was the last time he rested under the roof of his fathers.

"Bobe," he said softly, "Elte Bobe!"

Freida slept peacefully as a child: the rays of the moonlight played on the wrinkled face like childish dreams.

"I shall never see you again, never any more."

He pressed his lips to the dear old hand that had given him the treasure which was his salvation and ruin, life and death.

Freida's head moved gently.

"Kleineskind!" she whispered, without opening her eyes.

Meir lost himself in thought. His forehead resting on his great-grandmother's knees, he said farewell to everything and everybody around.

At last he rose and slowly left the room.

In the dark passage he suddenly felt two strong arms closing around him, and a heavy object was put in his pocket.

"It is I, Ber. Your grandfather looked around the family for a courageous man who would give you a handful of money on the way; and found me. Everybody in the house mourns for you; the women have taken to their beds, crying; your uncles are angry with the Rabbi and the elders; the grandfather is almost beside himself with grief—but nobody will see you any more. It is thus with us; reason drags one way; the old faith the other. They are afraid. But Meir, do not grieve! You are happy. I envy you! You have not been afraid to do what I did not dare to do, and you will win. To-day your friends stood up for you, and the people were silent and did not defend the Rabbi. It is the beginning; but the end is still far off. If you showed yourself to-morrow before the people, their wrath would flare up again. Go! go into the world. You have youth on your side and courage; life is before you."

"Sometime you will come back and put an end to our sins and darkness. We have many diamonds, but they want sifting. Go forth now, to conquer. Be like Baale Tressim, armour-clad like our ancestors; and my blessing and the blessings of those who, like me, wished, but could not—longed, but did not obtain what they longed for—be with you."

They exchanged farewells, and Ber disappeared as silently as he had come. The deep silence of the whole house seemed to bid the excommunicated youth to go hence.

When he left the house it had begun to dawn. The market square and the adjacent streets were asleep. The whole town was wrapped in the gray mist of an almost autumnal morning.

He swiftly crossed the mist-covered fields to get away, and say farewell to her who had promised to be a faithful Rachel to him, and to claim from her his treasure.

The door and window of the little hut stood wide open.

"Golda!" he called softly, "Golda!"

There was no answer.

He repeated his call, but the silence remained unbroken. He drew nearer, and looked at the spot where old Abel was wont to sit. It was empty.

A strange, undefined dread took hold of him.

He looked around, up the hills and along the fields, and called in a loud voice:

"Golda!"

There was a slight rustle not far off. It came from a wild rosebush, from among the branches of which rose the sleepy figure of little Lejbele.

Meir went quickly up to him. The child disengaged himself from the branches, and put his hand under his coat.

"Where is Golda?" asked Meir.

Lejbele did not answer, but handed him the roll of papers.

Meir bent towards the child.

"Who gave you that?"

"She," answered Lejbele, pointing to the hut.

"When did she give it to you?"

The child answered:

"When the people were coming she rushed out of the hut, woke me, and put the roll under my coat, and said, 'Give it to Meir when he comes.'"

Meir began to tremble.

"And afterwards?" he asked, "afterwards?"

"Afterwards, Morejne, she hid me in the bush, and went back to the hut."

"How many people were there?"

"Two, Morejne, three—ten—I don't know."

"And what did they do? What did the people do?"

"The people came, Morejne, and shouted and screamed at her to give up the writing; and she screamed that she would not, and the goat in the entrance ran about and bleated."

Meir trembled in all his limbs.

"And then what happened?"

"Morejne, she took the spindle into her hands and stood before her zeide. I saw it from the bush. She was so white, and the spindle was white, and the people were black, and the goat kept on running amongst them and bleating."

"And then—and then?"

"Then, Morejne, I did not look any longer, but cowered down in fear, because there was such a noise in the hut—such moans. Then the people went away, and carried her, and carried her grandfather, and the goat ran up the hill bleating, and I do not know where it has gone."

Meir straightened himself, and looked up to the sky with stony eyes. He knew everything now.

"Where did they carry them?" he asked in a dull whisper.

"There."

The outstretched arm of the child pointed in the direction where, in the gray mist, the meadow was dimly visible—and the pond. Beyond the pond were marshes and bogs, where two lifeless bodies would easily sink. There, beyond the meadows, where in spring she had gathered yellow lilies among the rushes, and unconsciously betrayed her fresh and innocent love—there, hidden from all human eyes, she was lying at the feet of her grandfather, wrapped in the wealth of her black hair.

A threefold cry of Jehovah rang out in the still morning air, and only Lejbele remained before the door, holding in his raised hand the scroll of paper.

Meir had gone into the hut.

What a terrible story was revealed to him! The straw lying about Abel's couch, and amongst it, like drops of blood, Golda's red corals. The broken spindle and the old Bible torn in shreds told their tale. It was a long and cruel tale to which the young man listened, his head pressed against the wall—a tale so long that hours passed over his head, and he still listened with beating heart and trembling limbs.

When he stood again on the threshold, the sun was shining brightly. How terribly changed he looked. The forehead, marked with a red scar, was seamed and corrugated as if long years of suffering had ploughed the once smooth surface. The half-shut eyes had a dull despairing lustre, and his arms hung down limp and powerless. He stood thus a few minutes, as if listening intently for the sound of the voice he should never hear more, when a weak hand tugged at his clothes, and a small voice said:

"Morejne."

Lejbele stood before him, his mournful eyes raised to his, and stretched out a roll of paper. It seemed as if the sight of the papers reminded Meir of something, roused him from sleep, and told him to do something that was sacred and important. He passed both hands over his forehead, and then took the Senior's legacy from the child's hands, and at the touch of it he raised his head, and his eyes seemed to regain their old power and courage. He looked at the town waking up from sleep, and murmured something in a low voice—something about Israel, its greatness in the past, and its great sins, and that he would never desert it, and not give back curses for curses; that he would carry the covenant of peace to other nations, drink at the source of wisdom, and come back sometime-sometime, he repeated, thinking of the far future; and with a last look embracing the poor little hut, as if in farewell to his short and pure dream of love, he slowly ascended the hill.

The child, standing motionless near the door, looked after the retreating figure of the young man. His

wide open eyes became suffused with tears. When Meir was about half-way up the hill, one convulsive sob burst from the child, and he began to run. At first he moved very fast, but finding they were about a dozen steps apart, he slackened his speed, and tucking his hands under his sleeves, walked slowly and gravely after him.

Thus walking, one after the other, the excommunicated youth and the child of the poor man, they disappeared beyond the hill, where they beheld a broad, sandy road leading into the wide, unknown world.

Has the humiliated, excommunicated, and despised youth reached the aim after which he strove so ardently? Has he found in the world people ready to open their hearts and doors, and help him on the road to learning?

Has he, or will he come back, and bring with him forgiveness, and that light, by the power of which the soil on which now grows nought but thorns—will it produce cedars of Lebanon? I do not know.

The story is too recent to have its end yet—for stories like this have no end. But as it is similar to many of the same kind of stories, reader! of whatever race, or country, or religion, if you meet this obscure apostle on your way, give him cordially and quickly your brotherly hand in friendship and help.

**THE END.**

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN OBSCURE APOSTLE: A DRAMATIC STORY \*\*\*

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