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, by Bernard G. Richards**

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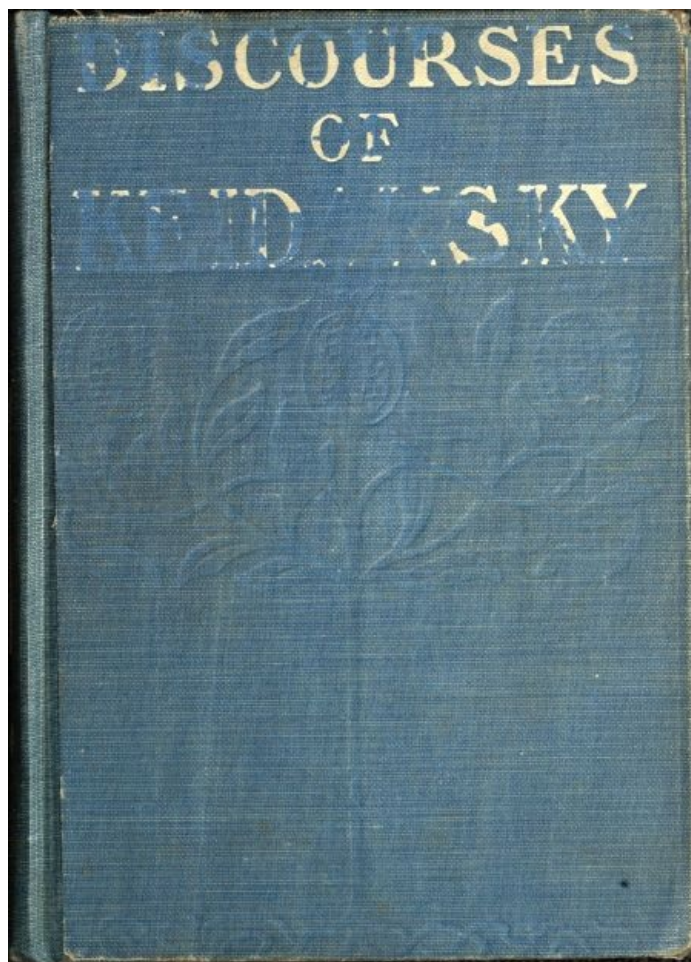
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***DISCOURSES OF KEIDANSKY***

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DISCOURSES OF  
**KEIDANSKY**  
*By Bernard G. Richards*

SCOTT-THAW CO.  
*542 Fifth Avenue*  
NEW YORK MCMIII

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**Note**

The majority of these papers have appeared in the Boston Evening Transcript, and thanks are extended to the editors not only for their permission to reprint the same, but also for the many kindnesses they have shown my friend Keidansky and myself.

All the papers have undergone many changes, and numerous corrections and additions have been made.

B. G. R.

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## Introductory

Heretical, iconoclastic, revolutionary; yet the flashing eye, the trembling hand, the stirring voice held us spellbound, removed all differences, and there were no longer any conservatives and extremists; only so many human beings led onward and upward by a string of irresistible words.

"Outrageous heresies," some said, yet those who paused to listen for a moment lingered longer, and as they hearkened to the harangues, marked the words and followed the flights of fancy, it came to them that these dreamers of dreams and builders of all sorts of social Utopias upon the vacant lots of the vague future; these ribald rebels holding forth over their glasses of steaming Russian tea in the cafés, or on the street corners under the floating red flag—that they were but a continuation of the prophets of old in Israel.

Those who paused to listen were loath to depart and some prayed for a perpetuation of the things that came out of a throbbing heart and soaring mind. Faint reflections here of the outpourings of a soul, but mayhap they will shed some little light upon the inner life of that strange cosmos called the Ghetto and point again to the Dream it has harbored and cherished through the harsh realities of the centuries.

"Why perpetuate these things," you wrote to me, "since that life is so fast slipping away from under my feet; practicability is urged on every hand, and to-morrow I may be led under the canopy, perhaps elected to the presidency of a congregation, given full charge of an orthodox paper, or put into a big store on East Broadway, and then, what I said would only stand out to taunt and menace me about the life that could not be. Besides, I may become so radical that I shall not want to say anything." Yes, we change, and the castles we build in the air become tenement houses, and we are either the tenants, or worse, the landlords; but "life has its own theories," and if the fine poetry of youth be reduced to plain prose in later years, and wisdom teach us to be stupid, why, we are still a pace ahead and those who will come after shall put their shoulders to the Dream and move it up at least one inch nearer to life. "And if the dreamer dies," as you said yourself, "will not the Dream live ever on?"

Surely! And let me send you the glad assurance that death will come sooner than the presidency of a synagogue.

You are safe, Keidansky; the orthodox will never forgive you.

We change, yet those who fail also come to their own, and even lost souls make great discoveries. Did you not say that "Life is the profoundest of all platitudes?"

B. G. R.

New York, March, 1903.

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## ***DISCOURSES OF KEIDANSKY***

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### **I**

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#### **Keidansky Decides to Leave the Social Problem Unsolved for the Present**

The lecture at the Revolutionary Club, Canal street, was over, the audience rose, one by one, and ere their departure, those who made it up, lingered on for awhile and stood in little groups of two, three and four, and earnestly discussed the things that had been, and particularly the things that might have been, said on the subject. The peroration was delivered with fervor and gusto by one of the "red ones" of the Ghetto. It was on "The Emancipation of Society from Government," a theme packed with meaning for those present, and as almost everybody was willing to be interviewed on his or her impressions, there was quite a little exchange of opinion afterwards. The speaker, besieged by a small circle of questioning dissenters and commentators, was holding an informal, compulsory reception. A few hard workers of the sweat-shops, who slumbered peacefully during the discourse, came up towards the platform to tell the speaker how well they liked it.

It was during this hobnob medley of varying voices that I introduced Keidansky to a lady, a friend of mine, who, having heard of the wicked things he says, and the queer things he does, desired very much to meet him.

As she greeted him the lady rather perfunctorily remarked:

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"And so you are a dreamer of the Ghetto?"

"No, Madam," Keidansky answered somewhat brusquely; "I am a sad reality."

"A sad reality? Why so?" Smilingly, pityingly, she queried.

"Oh, the reasons are not far to seek, not easy to find, and hard to relate," he said demurely. "Besides, why augment the soporific tendency? We have just listened to a lecture. The monstrous evil of government still exists. The tremendous task of its abolition is still before us."

"Yes, I know; but tell me, please."

"Well, then, if I must speak of myself—and I like nothing better—I will tell you." He cast down his eyes and spoke quickly, as quickly as he could think of the right words, which he was trying to find with evident effort. "A dreamer disillusioned, a great might-have-been become small, a would-be victor vanquished, a social reformer forced by society to reform, a herald of a new dawn lost in the night, a rebel rejected by the rabble, a savior of society without even the ghost of a chance to become a martyr, a visionary grown wise, an enthusiast at last awakened to things as they are, an idealist knocked out by cold, hard facts—don't you think it's a sad reality? I—we—wanted to do so many things and—"

"I wanted to change the world, and the world has changed me so that I am beyond recognition. That's a little and belittling way the world has with all who wish to save it. We—my comrades and I—wanted to transform this earth into a Heaven, and we came near going to—the other place. Pardon me, madam, but some of the fellows actually went there, one sent me his regards the other day. He is at court now, working for the king of the ward—assistant chief wire-puller, or something. Good salary; hardly any work to do. Better than Socialism, he says, under which system he would, at least, have to perform a few hours' work a day. But there was a time when he would walk six miles—he had to walk then—to hear a denunciation of the present political parties and the evil powers that be. Now he would talk six miles to win a single vote for them. The others who have gone have not fared so badly as he: they have not grown so wise, have remained poor, and, more or less—honest. But as to the things that might have been. There were great books to be written, which were abandoned because—oh, well, it is so much bother to deal with publishers. There was a powerful educational movement to be started in the Ghetto, which has also been relinquished for the manifold blessings of ignorance.

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"Why, I wanted to solve the social problem, and now I do not even see my way clear to do that. You see, we all came here with a smattering of Socialistic ideas and Utopian ideals. We brought them over from Russia—the land of the knave and the home of the slave—and we wanted to see them realized in this country, where the gigantic development of industry and the trusts were illustrating the beautiful possibilities of Socialism. That idea appealed to us Jews, at least, above all others. And we set ourselves with great zeal to the task of its promulgation. The common

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ownership of all the means of production and distribution of wealth, every member of society contributing to the work of the nation; those who do not work, neither shall they eat, etc.—we had everything down fine—too fine. If we were asked, who shall do the dirty work under Socialism, we answered, the bosses of the present political machines.

"And we demonstrated by all the proofs furnished us by our leaders—at the rate of ten cents a pamphlet—how the great change was inevitable from Marx's material conception of history and our own hysterical conception of materialism. The rich had not as yet consented to the equal distribution of all wealth; but the poor had; they were fast coming our way, and we were all getting ready for the great change. Oh, when a fellow gets the social revolution into his head he can see millions of proletarians marching to victory, and then the Coöperative Commonwealth looms up big before him in all its Bellamy glory. But after awhile, and a few gentle hints in the form of hard knocks—confound it—comes the calm, sober, second or second-hand thought. Socialism? What an arch bureaucracy, what a preposterous attempt to harness life with a monstrous system of rules, regulations and restrictions! What an endless chain of entangling laws, what an appalling monotony of order! The individual gagged, bound hand and foot by an overwhelming mess of statutes; not permitted to tell the truth unless it is officially recognized as truth by the State. Thousands of laws to be broken every day and as many heads to be mended. Heaven save us! you cry out, and you come to realize that it isn't because "a lot of contemptible capitalists have paid him for it"—as it has been alleged by some of us—that Herbert Spencer has declared Socialism to be the coming slavery. Perhaps Spencer wasn't wrong, after all; and the best solution of the social problem you had becomes a terrible problem, and you lay it on the table, or throw it into the waste-basket.

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"Then comes communism, as preached by my friend John Most and comrade Peter Kropotkin; individualist anarchism, as presented by Benjamin R. Tucker and others. Beautiful theories these are, enchanting studies; but, alas, only theories, so vague, so fantastic, so far off, so dimly distant, so elusive. And the problem is so stubbornly real, so disagreeably near, so puzzlingly capricious, and so spitefully independent of all solutions, that—oh, well—I haven't as yet solved the social problem, and I don't, as yet, know when I will; but perhaps the problem will stay long enough, until I get ready to do it."

The speaker looked touchingly perplexed as he continued: "I cannot find my way through these things, and don't know the way out. The problem is vexing and vast; the solutions various and voluminous. The solutions are in themselves highly problematic. Our doubts are endless, our ignorance is infinite. Finality is the most fatal folly. Nothing is certain but uncertainty; nothing is constant but change. Even the dream of transformation becomes transformed. Life has its own theories and is regardless of our patented plans. The logic of events makes our own systems illogical. The wind of Time blows out our little labelled lanterns. Time puts all our wisdom to shame. Life is so pitifully brief, and the problem that has troubled the ages cannot be solved in a day."

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"But what are you going to do about it?" I interrupted.

"Why, I have decided to leave the social problem unsolved for the present," he answered. "If I could spell English well I would write a book showing why I refuse to solve it for the present; but as it is, those who wish to know what I write will have to learn Yiddish. However, from what I know of the English language, I like it immensely. It is so rich, so big, has so many words; a splendid means for concealing one's thoughts. And the English and Americans, who master it, know it and appreciate the fact. But I see they are putting the lights out. We'll have to leave the hall now. Good-night, good-night. Pleased to have met you."

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## II

### He Defends the Holy Sabbath

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"We are so happy in this country that we must celebrate even when we don't want to," said a Hester street storekeeper, and then he quoted the words of the Psalms in the traditional monotone: "And they who led us captive requireth of us a song."

He stood on the sidewalk in front of his dreary and dilapidated grocery store. It was Sunday morning. The chosen people of old who have elected to come to the chosen country of to-day moved up and down in large numbers, almost crowding the street. They stood in little groups idly, and conversed loudly in a more or less Americanized Yiddish, often lapsing into a curious English of their own. Their dress and outward appearance denoted the degrees of their Americanization and prosperity. There were those who live in the Jewish street, or in the immediate vicinity, which is also within the Ghetto, and others who, after spending their first years here, have now travelled by the road of success to "nice, high-toned" districts, such as Allen street in the West End. On Sunday they all come down there, for then you can meet everybody, all the "Landsleute," you can hear all the news, and there was a time when Sunday was the liveliest day on the street. Thus these people walked up and down the thoroughfare, while some stood in small gatherings and talked. Women met, chatted for a few minutes, and then took half an hour in parting.

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All the stores were closed, all the places of business deserted, and it seemed strange and

incongruous to see all these people out on the street. It seemed as if the people were there for no purpose, as if they had nothing to do. One wondered, at first, if it were a holiday; but the absence of even a suggestion of the spirit of Sabbath soon made it clear that there was no religious meaning in this day, so far as the Hebrew people were concerned. Aside from that, the people would not be out so if it were a holiday. They would be at home, observing and celebrating the day. It appeared as if their idleness was forced upon them; they suggested gatherings of workers who are out on a strike, waiting for settlement. Upon investigation the stranger found that this was an enforced idleness, a compulsory holiday. The Christian Sabbath was forced by law upon the Jews, who had celebrated their Sabbath the day before, and they could not begin the week's work until their loving neighbors were through. And this, too, was the week before Passover, the busiest season in the Ghetto.

My friend, the storekeeper, stood upon the sidewalk in front of his emporium and continued his plaint, not without quaint gestures:

"They call this the freest country on earth, and yet here we have been compelled to close up our stores two days in the week for the whole winter. A number of us have already gone out of business, and the Uppermost only knows what will happen with the rest. We cannot make it pay in five days; rent is very high, profits are small, and around here times are always hard. The poor people who trade with us only know prosperity by sight or hearsay.

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"We have preserved our Sabbath through all the persecutions and sufferings which we have endured in the past centuries. Our Sabbath is as dear to us as life itself, and now it is endangered by the laws of this free land. We cannot afford to close our stores on both Saturday and Sunday. Sunday used to be one of the best days of the week for business. It is the first day of the week with us. It is the day after our Sabbath, when every household needs a new supply of food. It is also the day on which our people from the country, having a day off, come in to buy their goods—that is, they used to come in when we were permitted to keep our stores open on Sunday. Now all is changed, and the business is going down and down. We will not keep open on Saturday, and the police won't let us keep open on Sunday. It is outrageous, the way they treat us; it is scandalous, I say."

Keidansky, the radical of the Ghetto, is quite a unique, native character. He is the young man who once told me that he had more good ideas than were good for him, and I believe now that he was right. I met him one day in one of his resorts, a "kosher" lunch room of the Jewish district. I asked him for his opinion on the Sunday question, and he told me what follows—among other things—over a few glasses of Russian tea:—

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"So far as I'm personally concerned, one day is as good as another for a Sabbath, and we can't have too many of them. Any day on which we can rest and be at our best, is a holiday. I am too religious to be pious. I can sanctify as many days as I can celebrate. The new conception of 'kosher' is whatever is wholesome, digestible and tasteful. To be really happy is to be holy, and those who have lost this world will not be entrusted with another. I hate uniformity, and it's very tiresome to rest when everybody else rests; but since it would be most convenient to suspend business and activity when the majority of the people observe their Sabbath, since the Christians do not want to rest on the same day that the Lord rested, and decided to get ahead of God and repose on the first instead of the seventh day, why, let it be Sunday, then—as far as I am concerned. Convenience is the first step to happiness, and tolerance is the beginning of philosophy. There is nothing intrinsically sacred in any day; it is only an artificial measure of time, and time is only a blank space, absolutely worthless unless we write upon it with our deeds. All days are made holy or unholy by what we do in them. So, you see, so far as I am concerned, Saturday or Sunday, any day, will do. Personally I have never been compelled to close up my store. I have never been so unfortunate as to own a store. This, however, is only my point of view.

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"One of the most immoral things I know of is to force your own petty brand of morality upon the lives of others, and I can hardly conceive of anything more irreligious than forcing your particular religion upon others. To respect the religion of your neighbors is a deeply religious principle, and those who have no religion at all can almost make up for it by respecting the religion of others. Religious liberty is one of the most precious principles of our country, is it not? And here this fundamental principle is rankly violated by the law, or rather by what I think must be a silly misinterpretation of the law. There are thousands of Jews encumbered by and compelled to rest on, if not to observe, a Christian Sabbath. I do not like to believe with some of the Zionists that the seed of anti-Semitism has been sown in this country and that a good crop will soon be up to encourage the restoration of Israel to the Turk's Palestine. I am rather inclined to think that this idea is anti-Semitic. But certainly the stranger in this country would be extremely surprised at the way the Jews are treated here just now in regard to the observance of Sabbath. Who is to blame? The law or those who enforce it? Oh, the law. But perhaps our people now suffer the consequences of having been among the first to bring laws into the world. When people saw that the world was too good they began to make laws, and ever since they have kept up making and multiplying them faster than even the lawmakers can break them. Why, one can hardly walk two steps before he finds that he is breaking a useless law which it is very tempting to violate. I am not so radical as some of my friends. I do not believe that all the stupidity of the age has been incarnated into our laws. A great deal of it has been left in our customs, traditions and superstitions; but a law that interferes with religious liberty in a free country is bad enough.

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"I tell you it is just exasperating to walk through the Ghetto of a Sunday now and see all the places of business closed up and all the public resorts abandoned. The poor housewives of the



Ghetto whose cupboards are all empty and who need so many things on Saturday night, after their Sabbath, and have to wait until Monday—it is a great hardship for them. I tell you it's dead wrong to force this blue law upon the people. The Hebrew, to whom the traditional Sabbath is as dear as life, ought to receive due consideration, or rather the right to do as he pleases, in so far as he does not harm others. The law should have nothing to do with Sabbath, anyhow. People can never be made religious by law. If you are going to write about it, tell the whole story and show how ill-treated we are. Perhaps you can convert the Christians to the spirit of Christianity. Let the voice of the chosen people be heard!"

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### III

## Sometimes He is a Zionist

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Word flashed across the cables that Dr. Theodore Herzl and other leaders of the Zionist movement had held a favorable interview with the Sultan of Turkey, and the followers of the cause—the restoration of Palestine to the Jews—were all in a flutter of gladness. As it was interpreted by the faithful, the vague, meagre cablegram meant that the Sultan was willing, that he was hard up, and that the Holy Land was for sale. And who could doubt when this was announced by the New York Yiddish dailies, under four-column headlines? No one could doubt but the jester. He said that this only proved that the Yiddish papers also had big type in their composing rooms. He said that the truth about a certain movement could not be found in any party organ. In fact, if one wanted the absolute truth about anything he would advise him to go home and sleep it off.

But serious and sane folk will ask no jester for advice. The jester can only add to the sadness of the nations; but he cannot impair the faith of the believers. So the Zionists were rejoicing while their opponents were debating in the lighter vein, and laughing at the mistakes of the so-called new Moses and the errors of his followers.

The news had also reached Keidansky's circle, and the question was taken up again for consideration. They were all at Zarling's on Leverett street, where the "kosher" eatables are inviting, where tea is Russian, the newspapers Yiddish, and the attendant members of one industrious family, ranging from several bright pupils of the grammar school up. The poet, the young lawyer, the short-sighted medical student who has for many years been writing a scientific work, the Anarchist orator in embryo, the flower vendor and undiscovered inventor of an ingenious self-lighting lamp and a wonderful fuel-saving stove—they were all there, and, of course, Keidansky was with them. They all sat about a little round wooden table in a corner of the big dusky store, pouring out wisdom and drinking tea. The long row of "kosher" Vienna wurst hanging over Zarling's brass-railed counter were mocking and menacing the vegetarian of the group as he was munching a cheese sandwich.

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They were all heartily opposed to Zionism. Each one had the solution for the social problem, which would also settle the Jewish question, and Keidansky said that it was highly problematic whether there was such a thing as a Jewish problem. However, they all had plans for making this a better world, plans which the Jews were eminently fitted to help to carry out, and the benefits of which they would reap in the form of an ideal state of society, with universal brotherhood, and without racial hatred and anti-Semitism. They took Zionism severely, scathingly to task, and as there was no Zionist present it was an easy victory. The Jewish State was nipped in the bud, or rather abolished ere its establishment. The poet and the orator sailed heavily into the "dubious personality of Dr. Max Nordau," one of the leaders of the movement, and thus again avenged themselves on the man who, in his gentle booklet on "Degeneration," so wantonly threw so much mud on their revolutionary idols. Reference was made to the demolishing review of the Doctor's book by the only and original G. Bernard Shaw, and Whitman and Wagner and the others were saved.

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Keidansky listened silently to all that passed, looked into a book and sipped his tea. If the conversation was not good he could find something in his book, and if the book was not interesting he could at least enjoy his tea. So he once said when told that he was not attentive and not true to the spirit of "the order of midnight tea-drinkers."

Everybody had spoken, and I turned to Keidansky for a word. "Sometimes," he said, "I am Zionist, and all longings leave me and I yearn for naught but the realization of the old, long-cherished, holy dream that our people have carried along with them and fondly caressed through their cruel exiles of the ages—the restoration of our never-to-be-forgotten home, Palestine. The passion for the race returns, the old feeling of national pride and patriotism comes back and takes its old place, the consciousness of Israel awakens within me, and I am completely swayed by the mastering desire to see Judea 'emancipated, regenerated and redeemed.'

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"I feel again the unity I have forgotten. The old Messianic hope looms up big before me. The *Heimweh* of the long-lost wanderer, the grief-stricken, menaced nomad takes possession of me. I feel the terrible danger of dissolution: it is so bitter to stare destruction in the face, to contemplate annihilation of so long and so miraculous an existence. I feel that there is no place like his old home. The homeless Jew must return to Palestine. The big world is too small. It has no room for him. Good or bad, he is always offensive, and he is exalted only to be cast down into an

abyss of misery. Civilization is not even civil, and it has no hospitality for its earliest light-bearer. The world is a wretched ingrate. We have given everything, including the means of future salvation; we receive nothing but calumny, and are doomed to everlasting damnation. 'We have given you your religion,' we say to the Christians. 'That's nothing,' they answer; 'it has not affected us in the least.' And they prove it. They keep on baiting and persecuting and killing their neighbours, not as themselves. What must we do? Get back our old home, though we have to pay for it. There, at least, will we find 'a crust of bread and a corner to sleep in.'

"We must have a common cause, an object of unity, a centre of gravity, in order to survive as a people, and this is what we can have in the proposed Jewish State. [Pg 17]

"And what an inspiring picture it will be of Israel, bruised and bleeding from the travail of his long, futile travels, at last straightening up his back and returning home to rebuild his national life and his temple in Palestine. There he will create an ideal republic, fashioned after the teachings of the prophets and the lessons he has received from the teachers of the nations—a republic that will teach the world justice and righteousness. 'And from Zion shall issue the law, and the word of God shall go forth from Jerusalem,' and our poets to come shall sing new psalms to God on the banks of the Jordan, in the shades of Lebanon and in the beautiful gardens of Sharon and Carmel. I have never been there, and though I have gone through life without a geography, yet I seem to remember all these places. The grand, vigorous Hebrew language shall come to life again and we shall have a glorious literature of Israel's resurrection. Ah, how beautiful the vision that looms up as I contemplate these things! And then—"

Keidansky ceased speaking, paused, and asked for another glass of tea.

"And then?" I asked.

"Then," he continued, "the mood passes, the feeling alters, the picture that a fleeting fancy has thrown upon the canvas of my view, fades, a change comes over the spirit of my dream. I remember that I am no longer the pious little boy praying in the synagogue of Keidan, 'a year hence in Jerusalem.' The greater vision appears before me, the larger ideal comes back, and Keidansky is himself again. Sometimes I am a Zionist, but only sometimes. The rest of the time I am as strongly opposed to it as any of you, because with all my imputed universalism I have great hopes for my people, and because I have marked out a greater role for Israel to play in the history of the future than being a mere little bee building a little hive in a tiny obscure corner of the globe." [Pg 18]

Here the medical student protested that a man cannot be both for and against an idea at the same time, that those who are not with us are wrong and against us, and that Keidansky is a "long distance off"—for he said, "scientifically analyzed"—

"Scientifically analyzed, you are a bore," Keidansky broke forth infuriated, "and don't interrupt me when I am solving problems and making history. Be consistent, boys, and do not ask me to be so. Give me, at least, the right that you grant to a character in fiction, the right to be irrational, illogical, and, above all, superbly inconsistent. I am a character in life and nothing is so fictitious. At times, I want to be with all, feel with all, believe with all, see the beauties of all ideals, and also point out the great fact about them—that they are all fatal—and yet that to be without ideals is baneful and deadly. I cannot be partial, and that is why they expelled me from DeLeon's Socialist Labor party. Partiality is destructive to art, and I might have been an artist, if I had had the patience and self-abnegation and a lot of other requisites and things. [Pg 19]

"But to return to the larger vision, which eclipses the dreamlet of Zionism. The Jew must not be relegated to an obscure corner of the world, to a little platform whereupon he will recite a piece in an unknown tongue. I want a big stage for him—the world. I want a great play for him—all its multitudinous activities. For he is a wonderful actor. He has versatility, illusion, imagination and dramatic power. It is an inspiring part he plays in the world-drama. So let the play go on, and do not ask him to waste his energies and bargain with the Sultan for a bit of barren land that has been taken from him so long ago. He has a bigger task to perform, a larger mission to fulfil.

"He must live among the nations and help them in their upward struggle for a higher civilization and a nobler life. If there are evils to be abolished he will help abolish them, and if there are dire problems, why, he has brains, which he loans more often than money. And this is the spectacle that I gloat over and glory in seeing: Israel among the nations, the saviour and the outcast, the redeemer and the rejected, the revered teacher and truant student, the honoured guest and persecuted resident, helping nations to make their histories, here and there, writing great words in them, ministering to their arts and helping to humanize humanity. To be persecuted and oppressed by the nations is inconvenient and annoying, but to make music, paint pictures, write books, sing songs, mould statues for them—how superb! Ah, what a tragedy to be a Jew, and yet, how glorious! The nations need the Jew and he must not desert them in their hour of need, and if he is true to his best self and keeps on growing he will not die and vanish as a people. In any case 'tis nobler to die for a good cause than to live in impotence. So let the Jew remain, with whatever nation he abides, and as a good citizen help it grow great and good, and show that Ibsen was right when he called us the aristocracy of the race. Let not, I say to the Zionists, the Jew be like the little boy who runs away from school after he receives a thrashing and before he has taught his teacher a lesson. To sacrifice for Dr. Herzl's scheme our vast opportunities in the world, which owes us so much, and to which we are so indebted, would be selling our birthright for a mess of pottage. So let us remain. We can do so much in so many countries with the teachings and spirit of Judaism. We, too, are frail and have many faults, but we can improve where there's [Pg 20]



lots of room and plenty of opportunities.

"Life is a melodrama, and in the latter acts the long-lost brothers, Jew and Christian, who have for so long waged war against each other, will recognize, understand each another, and perhaps, things will end happily, after all.

"Meanwhile we will forgive France for the Dreyfus affair, because of her perfect prose and beautiful poetry. I will even forgive Captain Dreyfus for having been such a bore, if he will stop writing books. Let the Jews remain in Russia instead of going to Palestine, for think of the love of freedom that tyranny engenders! Think how good all our oppressions have been in that they made us love liberty and truth. Think what a chance to shed blood for freedom there will yet be in Russia. Our people should remain there. Things are changing. What a fine literature it is producing, and how noble Russia is—underground.

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"Away with your petty neutral little State, I say to the Zionist; the State to be bought on the instalment plan from the Sultan, to be built on the soil of superstition, where the Jews will go back to their traditional customs and fall asleep. The land is barren and sterile, and I do not believe in starvation, even on holy land. Even the orthodox must have a religion; but they will never acquire it in Palestine. They will cling to the old. They will not progress. The Bible—and I bow my head in reverence for that great work of fiction—will never be edited and revised as it ought to be, in Palestine. Judaism will not grow in Palestine. The Jews will cling to the letter, and the spirit of it will starve. God save the Jews from Palestine. Judaism there will not grow; it will stagnate and die. The Jews must live among the destroying forces of civilization. It is only when they outgrow their obnoxious superstitions and down-dragging traditions that they become great."

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The speaker waxed warm; his eyes flashed with enthusiasm, his voice grew loud.

"I want none of the Jewish State," he said. "The whole world is holy land. Wherever there are good, honest people is holy land, and from every corner of the earth shall issue the law, and the word of God shall go forth from every place, including my garret. Give us a big stage, give us the world, give us the universe, and let me watch it from its centre—my garret at 3 Birmingham Alley; let me watch the great and glorious play with Israel's heroic part in all the activities and growth and progress of the world, and I will 'thank whatever gods there be.' And this is my larger dream; a better, more humane world, created by the brotherhood of men, with Israel as peacemaker and fraternizer. Amen."

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## IV

### Art for Tolstoy's Sake

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It was at one of a series of lectures given under the auspices of the Social Science Circle during the winter season. The audience which assembled in the gloomy little hall on the third floor of an East Broadway building was rather small in size. In announcing the lecture no rewards had been offered to those who would come to listen to it, as often seemed necessary; the speaker of the evening was only a member of the club, who worked for his ideas, and not an eminent lecturer who lived on his reputation and whose name would "draw a crowd."

The majority of young men and women of the Ghetto would not think of wasting an evening on wisdom; they would commit no such folly, when they could have "such a lovely time" at the nearby dancing schools. Still, the few and the faithful were all present, and those who were thirsting for knowledge came to be saturated. Max Lubinsky was the speaker, and his theme, "Tolstoy's Theory of Art," was teeming with vital import.

Keidansky, as a member of the committee in charge of the literary work of the circle, acted as chairman of the meeting. In introducing the speaker he made a few remarks, somewhat as follows:

"Tolstoy has theories of art. Personally I am rather sorry for this, because if he did not have them he would be a greater artist. Even as theories of life often mar existence, so theories of art impair the artist. Admitting that art with a purpose can help the world, it is certain that art for its own sweet sake can create and re-create worlds. After he had contributed some of the greatest works of art to the literature of Russia, Tolstoy decided to find out just what art was. During his investigations, which lasted many years, he found that the art of the world was in great part lazy, unemployed, corrupt, suffering from ennui, and ministering to the debauched, poor rich people, whom the poor man ever envies; he decided that art should become useful and go to work, and he gave it an employment—the promulgation of his ideas of social regeneration.

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"Once, Tolstoy tells us, art was primitive and simple and pious, and it was good art and true; but during the Middle Ages, when the upper class and the nobility became sceptical and pessimistic, and could find no more consolation in religion, art became divorced from the church, because they took it up as an amusement and study. And ever since art got into such bad company—among people of culture and those who understand it, who cherished all its wonderful enfoldments and caressed all its capricious moods—ever since art got into such bad company, it became as beautiful as sin, and so complex, mystic and ambiguous that even the Russian *muzhik* or peasant cannot understand it. And so—as it seems to me—argues Tolstoy, the fact that the

*muzhik* cannot appreciate 'Tannhäuser' proves conclusively that Wagner never wrote any real music. Then, the dear old master delves deeply into all definitions, origins and explanations of art. He finds no designation, no description that satisfies him; they all hinge on and culminate in beauty—in the production and reproduction of beauty that is in life, in nature, in the worlds within us and without; and Tolstoy is rather shy at mere beauty, and thinks it a temptress, a siren and a song; besides, beauty, he says, changes and depends on taste, and taste varies, and as all these definitions are too far-fetched and vague, he finds one that is still more indefinite. Art is the communication of feeling, the expression of the religious consciousness. Of course it is that, but first and foremost it must have the sterling qualities of art in form and matter.

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"Tolstoy, however, would make this the chief basis and standard of art, for his would be an art that would detract men's minds from mere beauty, that would make them helplessly pious, that would unite mankind, make life as monotonous as possible, and convert humanity to Christian Anarchism.

"Every book, picture, statue and composition of music should be degradingly moral. And the question arises, what does he mean by religious consciousness? Walt Whitman expressed his religious consciousness in a manner that shocked the world, and it is not at all pleasing to Tolstoy, and yet Whitman was the most religious man that lived in centuries. The Abbé Prevost wrote "Manon Lescaut" to express his religious consciousness, and Robert Ingersoll delivered his lectures to do the same; to express their religious consciousness, great sculptors mould nude figures of women, out of worship of the divine beauty of the human form; and St. Francis of Assisi expresses the spiritual emotion in quite a different manner. But no, Tolstoy has a certain kind of religious consciousness in mind, and this should be expressed by all art and all artists in a uniform mode until we have gone back to primitive conditions.

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"I yield to no one in my admiration of the grand old man of Russia. He is one of the noblest souls that ever walked this earth, and as an artist, when he is at his best and does not preach, he is superb; there are few like him. But when he begins to philosophize and moralize, few can rise to the height of absurdity as quickly as he can. As it seems to me, Tolstoy's position is something like this:

"'Christianity is a colossal failure,' he says, 'so let us all become Christians. Our civilization is dreadfully slow in its advance; it has not as yet outgrown its barbaric primitiveness, so let us all go back to barbarism. All government is evil, so let us be governed solely by the teachings of a man who lived nearly two thousand years ago, a man who was pure and who made no study of the wicked conditions of our time. It is only thus that we can become free—by a circumlocutory process of self-abnegation, self-sacrifice and self-annihilation. Let us become slaves of the theory of minding our neighbors' business and we will be free. The power of will is the greatest thing in the world; he who follows his free will becomes a slave and is doomed to damnation. Let us be ourselves; let us stifle our feelings, become altruists and get away from ourselves. All government is tyranny; let us abolish all government, adopt a rigid, ancient, mystic morality, and let everyone become his own tyrant. Our morality is a failure; it has produced a false art; therefore we must have a true art which will promulgate our morality. Art that exists for mere beauty cannot be understood by the great masses, therefore let us have an art for the masses which will be beautiful. Our Christianity is a failure, therefore we must convert art to Christianity and send it forth as a missionary of the Gospels as I interpret them.' This, as I see it, is the queer position of Tolstoy, but his theories are exceedingly well-meant and highly interesting, and I am glad that we are to have a lecture this evening on Tolstoy's theories of art by one who is a thorough student of Tolstoy and to whom the master's teachings are near and dear.

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"I must not forget that I am not the speaker of the evening; I merely wanted to hint at the importance of the subject so that you may give it due attention, but I must not transgress upon the time of the lecturer, for the way of the transgressor, according to Tolstoy and others, is said to be hard. Besides, the chairman is not supposed to have any opinions; his duty is only to eulogize the speaker—in a merciless manner—and to introduce him with a few appropriate, well-chosen and ill-fated remarks. The chairman at best is only a relic of barbarism, and should be abolished."

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And Keidansky at last introduced the speaker, his friend, Max Lubinsky, who, after treating his audience to a bit of satire at the expense of "the eloquent and loquacious chairman," proceeded to give a simple, sympathetic and modest interpretation of Tolstoy's "What is Art?" illustrating his talk with copious reading from the book, and now and then referring to his written notes. It was a comprehensive review of Tolstoy's book he gave, and as to his own ideas on art he did not sufficiently differ from Tolstoy to have a formidable opinion on the matter, and he had too much reverence for the great Russian to voice it just then. The presiding officer did not close the meeting without again remarking that "art with a purpose is art with an impediment," and that "the only excuse of art is its uselessness." From what I overheard after the meeting I observed that there was a strong anti-Keidansky feeling in the gathering. He had evidently gone too far, had voiced his notions too freely, and had no right to take up so much time in speaking. Besides, most of those present were social reformers, tremendously in earnest, and they felt, more or less, that Tolstoy was right; that art was only great as an advocate.

As we were walking together, homeward bound, a little later, I said: "My dear fellow, you've got yourself into trouble. They are all up in arms against you and your awful heresies. You have almost delivered the lecture of the evening yourself, and the circle won't stand for it. Next thing you know you'll be court-martialed."

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"I almost expected that this would happen," said Keidansky, "but I had to say what I did. It was an imperative duty. I am only sorry that I forgot a few more things I had on my mind to say. Audiences confuse me and make me forget my best points. I suppose they will call a special meeting and pass resolutions to condemn me and my proceedings. But this will only prove the superiority of individuals over society. Before a society can pass resolutions, the individual acts. I suppose they'll say lots of things now. They will say I was trying to make epigrams. Epigrams are always hateful—to those who cannot make a point in a volume. They will say I was uttering platitudes. After you convince people that there are such things as platitudes in the world, they begin to find them in everything you say. I once had an uncle (he is still living, only he is very rich, and so I disowned him), and at one time I explained to him the theory of our moving along the lines of least resistance. A short while after that we had a very intimate interview and my uncle told me that I was a lazy, good-for-nothing visionary; that I did not want to do anything, and moved along the lines of least resistance.

"I had to say what I did because I did not want the people to go off with such crude and false conceptions of art. I knew that Lubinsky would not dare to differ from Tolstoy. He adores the old man. So do I, but I cannot afford to give up my mind to any one—not until I become a respectable member of the synagogue, and join a number of secret orders. Then it does not matter. The worst thing about a charming, noble personality is that our admiration for it gets the better of our reasoning power and we become ready to follow it in all its follies. This is the regrettable influence that Tolstoy has exerted upon Lubinsky. Thus our emancipators enslave us. 'Be yourself,' says Emerson, and you become an Emersonian.

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"But there is something else I wanted to say on this question of art. We Jews anticipated and lived in perfect accord with Tolstoy's theory of art—that art must be religious and must be burdened with a message, or a purpose—and the result is that we have no fine arts of our own, except poetry, which has more sighs and sobs and tears and piety than music and beauty. Of course, the reason for the absence of art among us is one of the commandments, which forbids the making of images, and oh, I cannot tell you how sorry I am that this commandment was ever observed. I do not object so much to the other nine commandments, but for this one I can never forgive my people. And here, by the way, is an example of what the religious consciousness can do for art.

"There is a religious consciousness which makes people unconscious of religion. 'The piety of art is the quest of the unattainable,' and the more freedom you give it from missions the greater the mission it will fulfil. One more answer to the theory of art for Tolstoy's sake: Here is a fable that occurred to me as I was listening to the lecture. I have no time to elaborate and polish it, but I give you the right to plagiarize it.

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"'You must pardon me,' said Art to Beauty, one day, 'if I do not pay so much attention to you as I used to, but this is a world of evils and problems, and I will have to leave you for awhile and go forth and help to make a better, juster system of society.' And Art went forth to fight the battle of the poor and the oppressed, and Beauty waited wistfully for its return, alone and deserted, withered and faded. After many years Beauty went in quest of her lost lover, Art, who had not returned, and she came upon a field of battle, and there, transformed into rebel warrior, was her lost lover, Art. And even as she gazed, a shot was fired from the enemy, and it pierced the heart of Art, and he lay prostrate and dead before her."

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## V

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### "Three Stages of the Game"

We had been speaking of "the only law that never changes"—the law of change: of the glorious ascent of the youthful nonconformist, and of the sad descent of the older and wiser compromiser—a theme, by the way, as old as age and yet as new as youth. We all had friends we once looked up to and now looked down upon, and we indulged in a few reminiscences. Every army had its deserters, every cause its traitors, and the crusaders who carried the red flag also changed their minds, lost heart and ran home.

"Oh, the flesh-pots of Egypt. Even the vegetarians cannot forget them," remarked my companion. "They who led the strikes among the sweat-shop workers in the course of time became heartless capitalist bosses; and there were Anarchists, who wanted to abolish all laws, who became lawyers and went into politics. One by one many of the promising young men of the Ghetto broke their promises and left the uplifting movements they brought into existence. Some died, some married for love of money, some took wives unto themselves, some became lawyers and doctors, some dentists, some wire-pullers, some went into politics, and some moved to Brooklyn. Compromise? They all hated that word and then—they compromised.

"Recently I have been thinking of three particular stages of the game—this grim and gruesome little game called life," said Keidansky. "The first is when we sternly demand the truth, the second when we ask for justice, and the third—when we beg for mercy—

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"There you are with your eternal questions. It was Zolotkoff who once called the Jew, bent and bowed by his sorrows and fearful of the future—it was he who called the Jew a living interrogation point. You just reminded me of the simile. But no; I cannot tell you at which of the three stages I have arrived. I am at all and at none. What I really want I never ask for, because I

hardly know what it is, and cannot formulate the demand. If I knew just what they were, perhaps I wouldn't want these things. Yet sometimes I think if I could play, if I could play the violin, I would express these starved longings and stifled yearnings. I could not only tell, but in the expression perhaps find what I want. In words I cannot do it; they are so formal, definite, rough. The other day my friend, the violinist, came and played for me. 'I'll tell you a story,' he said, and he took his violin and played—a beautiful, thrilling story. The Unknowable was revealed for a moment; and it occurred to me then that if I could play, I, too, might perform the miracle of expression, which proves the divinity of music. As it is, I cannot tell my desires; and yet I want but little here below and I don't want anything up above—"

"You don't mean to renounce your part of the world to come?" I asked.

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"I don't know that it is coming to me," said Keidansky. "Besides I am a little bit 'shy' on the world to come. I am afraid it is fashioned too much on the style of this one, and down here, you know, I am sometimes tired of everything. The entire panorama is so farcical, the whole game so monotonous, and our heroics are so ludicrous. The valetudinarians make me sick. I am weary of 'The Book of Jade,' and clever people are awful bores. Yes, I am somewhat afraid of the second story they call the other world, for it may really come, and history might repeat itself, even up there.

"The mortal fear of oblivion makes one crave for immortality; but, perhaps, one life is enough. No matter how sinful, or how saintly, a human being has been, one world is sufficient of a punishment. Virtue is its only reward; evil is its own punishment. The life beyond—is beyond. Let it stay there.

"Promises of Heaven and threats of the Midway do not move me so much now, for the chances are that they are one and the same thing, and this is the only place we are sure of and ought to make the most of. There is some good down here in spite of the reformers. The good is right beside the evil, and we can seldom tell the difference. The saint and the sinner often exchange pulpits and each proves the imperfection of the other. Paradise is right next door to Purgatory; in fact, you want to be careful when you are around that way lest you enter the place you weren't sent to. We ought to make the most of it, I say, and I know I am right, because I have been condemned by a number of orthodox rabbis."

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"You contradict yourself," I said.

"I do it to be consistent," said Keidansky.

"But I have digressed and transgressed, and all because of your useless question. As I was saying, when we are young, ignorant, innocent and inexperienced, we sternly demand the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We come to enlighten this dominion of darkness, to right a world gone wrong and to guide a poor and deluded mankind to the eternal verities. Iconoclasm becomes our creed, infidelity our religion. We are to repeal the world's laws, to shatter its idols, to demolish its traditions, and we at once reject its standards and ideals because they are not founded on truth.

"We question, investigate, analyze, and the imagination of youth works wonders. We are all gods in our dreams. The re-creation of the world is but an easy task. With all the modern improvements, it can be done in less than seven days, it seems. Glorious quest of truth and the golden goal, enchanting castles in the air, of which youth is the architect! Have you ever been young? I was born old, yet I know something about it. And for the rest, you know what happens. Most of the things in the world end sadly, because in the ending of a thing there is sadness. We find, at last, that what we wanted cannot be had for the asking; that we must pay for it with our lives; that the truth is—there is no truth—that as much of it as we find is often more than we want; that illusion is a necessary element in the composition of the world; that everything is relative and the quest of truth is a relative virtue. I hate the compromiser and deserter and I have nothing to say in their defence, but change is in the very nature of things, and sooner or later we must recognize that absolute truth does not exist, and we must accept the old foundation for building whatever we can in the world, and realize that perfection is a long and laborious process of becoming.

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"Later on we really see that all is for the best, that the pessimists are here as an object lesson, and we conclude that it is folly to be too wise. We cannot repeal the world's laws all at once, but we can break them gradually. There is much wisdom in folly and some truth in falsehood, too. The stupidity of the world is an absolute necessity: the world's work has to be done. So, at least, we decide, and we abandon the impossible quest after the absolute truth and become satisfied with justice, mere justice. We only ask for fair play. At this stage of the game we are already hardened and inured to things, and we manage to get along with justice, such as it is when we get it or buy it in court. At this time, if we are prosperous, we read and relish Omar Khayyam, the philosophy of whom is well expressed by the street urchin when he says, 'I don't give a hang.' And we also laugh at the poor fools who seek after the truth. Later on still, when we grow weary and weak and cannot have justice—are not crafty or strong enough—we come down a little lower and beg for mercy. Thus we reach the third stage of the game."

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The speaker paused for a moment, watching a little boy who was trying to float his little boat on the pond—for we were lucubrating in the Park, where we met by accident.

"That's all very well," I said, "but what have you to suggest?"

"Why, nothing that would make a sensation in a newspaper," he said, "but something that by chance or miracle may have some reason in it. It is this: Let the youth continue his noble, heroic, if melodramatic, quest of truth, that those who grow wiser and weaker may get justice. Let the young strive for the impossible and the possible will be attained, and those who ask for justice will really have it. Let them question and analyze and shatter idols and become bombastic and hysterical and build castles, and dream and disturb the order of the world—and let us admire their *heilige dumheit*—that some day those who have grown feeble may find at least fair play. The more the world will tolerate the extravagances of youth, the more it will benefit by its achievements. Let the wildest imaginations have free play and things will grow fairer and more fair. Let them dream. To be disillusioned is a trifle; but never to have dreamed is terrible. Finally, this earth will be turned into a heaven by all those who have failed to do it.

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"And those who have grown older and sadder and merely ask for justice, let them really demand it with all their might, and so shall their efforts not be in vain, and so shall those who beg for mercy receive it—or none beg for mercy. If those who ask for justice would only be just to those who are in the other stages of the game, and if those who beg for mercy would only be merciful! No matter at what stage, let all play fairly and honestly and be tolerant of others, and all things will tend towards ultimate decency. Again, were there more demanding truth, there would be fewer satisfied with mere justice, and none would beg for mercy. At any rate, more truth, more justice; more justice, more mercy, or no need of it at all. If only every one would want something, mean something, *do* something. Personally I cannot do very much, for you see I am somewhat of a preacher myself. Going on the 'elevated,' are you? Sorry for you. Good-bye."

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## VI

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### "The Badness of a Good Man"

I was looking for Keidansky, but he was nowhere to be found. He was not at home, and my visits to a few of his favorite resorts were also in vain. Then they told me over at Schur's bookshop on Canal street, that there was an entertainment being given by the Alliance on that evening, and Keidansky was to contribute an essay to the literary programme, a paper on "The Badness of a Good Man." "It serves them right," I said, and I forthwith betook myself to the dreary quarters of the Alliance, which formed the intellectual centre of our Ghetto. The exercises were already in progress. The hall was packed; hardly any standing-room left.

The pictures of Karl Marx and Michael Bakounin—the respective fathers of Socialism and Anarchism—looked down upon a pious and picturesque congregation of people who swore by their names; the same studious, serious, troubled, yet occasionally smiling faces of young men and young women of the Jewish quarter—seekers after light among the people that walk in darkness. The hall was brightly illuminated. The people were in their best. It was Sunday evening. Even Keidansky had condescended, or compromised, and paid some attention to "external appearances," this time. He brushed his clothes "for the occasion," as he once remarked. At any rate, there was some change in his attire differing from his usual negligent appearance. This was an entertainment. There were several readings and they were all teeming with trouble, and propt with problems. The recitations, well given by several young women, were compositions like Hood's "Song of the Shirt," William Morris's Socialist chants; the songs of suffering and joyless toil, sung in Yiddish, were by Edelstatt, Rosenfeld and Goldstein. The people over here enjoy their sorrows, it seems.

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Keidansky was already on the platform when I came in; in fact, he was already reading his paper. His paper was a typical utterance of the iconoclast that he is, and craving the indulgence of the reader, I quote here as much of it as I copied then and there, ere we come to the conversation. I do not know what he said before I entered, but after that he hastily and nervously read somewhat as follows:

"He is a good man and a worthy, and a useful member of society. All his neighbors say so, and he stands well in the entire community. His friends are legion. He is always ready to do them a good turn, and they are in turn ever ready to reciprocate. He lives, acts, thinks and speaks like all other good men; and he is exceedingly popular and highly respected. He is tolerant. He agrees with everybody on almost every conceivable subject. He is a good man. This is a free country, and every man has a right to his honest opinion—provided he is not a crank, or eccentric, and does not make himself obnoxious by differing with everybody. In that case, of course, the man is beyond recovery; he is lost to all shame and to the good old political parties and principles.

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"He respects every honest opinion and sentiment, and when he does meet a man who differs from him, why, he gently and adroitly changes the subject and smiles irresistibly and talks pleasantly, anyway. Oh, well, we are bound to differ on some things—but what is the difference so long as we both vote the same ticket? Have a cigar? When the man does not vote the same ticket it is really too bad, you know; but there is still a smile and a pleasant word.

"His generous contributions to the charities of the city are well known. The newspapers frequently have paragraphs in praise of his philanthropic deeds. The press is one of our greatest institutions. It is the palladium of our liberties, and a great medium of advertising. There are always good words, cigars and drinks for the newspaper 'boys.' They are a lot of fine, clever,

noble fellows—according to the press, and he believes it. He is a good man.

"He travels through life in the good old-fashioned way. He is guided by the morality of our common ancestors, abides by their time-honored customs and reveres their sacred traditions. He thinks as his fathers thought, whose fathers thought as their fathers thought, and whose fathers—never thought anything. He is a good man, and he is agreeable. He once almost agreed with a Christian Scientist—he sold him a parcel of property. Christian Scientists have faith. It is good to do business with people who have faith. There is always much truth in what other people tell him, only we are bound to differ on some things, as he always says.

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"He is a patriot and his lungs are ever at the service of his country. It is my country, whatever it does or does not do. Let us give three cheers for the stars and stripes, and hang the social reformers. The people are always right and they know it. He believes in the people, and they have faith in him. They have already sent him to the Board of Aldermen, and there are many other places they may send him to. There is a Congress at Washington, and many good men are sent there. He is persistently honest. His honesty has been brought to the notice of many. 'Honesty is the best policy' is a line ever on his lips. His reputation for veracity is enviable. It pays to tell the truth, he says. He tells the truth as he sees it, and he sees it as everybody else does.

"He is the most active member of the largest congregation in his district, and is considered a strong pillar of the church—even of society at large. He gives aid and succour to the weak and the failures; but he is always on the side of the strong and the successful. It is the largest movement in his community, social, political, or religious, that receives his staunch support. And it so happens that he is ever in accord with the tendencies of the largest movement.

"He is a good man. He is eminently practical, and he harbors a horror for visionaries and their Utopias. He loathes agitators and rebels, disturbers of peace and order. Peace, order, accuracy, submission, obedience, duty—and uniformity is a good word, too. Children, you must always abide by the powers that be, and obey your parents; they know better what is best for you. They have buried many children. Gentlemen, respect the flag. This is a free country, and the Government can do as it pleases with the people.

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"Vague, unexpressed longings of a new time, hungry desires of the age, wistful heart-whispers for a freer, higher life, muffled music of far-off seas, stifled and half-drowned voices of the submerged Ego crying 'I'—these do not disturb his dreams. He has no dreams. Far be it from him to be touched by the shapeless, new-born aspirations which are suspended in the air waiting for some one to give them form. He is a man of facts, and lends no credence to far-away fictions. His health is so good that he is not easily affected by theories and books.

"He is consistent and hardly ever changes his mind; at least not more often than do those who draw up the platform of his political party. His intrepid loyalty to his party cannot be forgotten as long as he lives; he stands as solidly within its ranks as a mortared-in brick within a wall. When he says a thing it is said, and he keeps every promise he makes, good or bad. He prizes highly and is keenly jealous of his reputation, and believes in living up to it. He will not differ from you on matters of art or literature, because, well, because, as he says, he is not well up in these things, and besides, it is all a matter of taste, is it not? But he likes a good old-fashioned melodrama; don't you?

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"He is a good man. Fathers point him out to their sons as a paragon of virtue. He never swerves nor deviates from the path of duty and righteousness, as he sees it. He is indissolubly linked in the great chain of real, practical, daily events of the world, and he never chases any phantoms—not he. He never fights with fate. He takes things as they come, and many things come his way. Providence seems to be on his side. He never complains of the powers that be in heaven or on earth. God made the world, and no man can ever change it. All that is, is well for the industrious and the successful. There is always room on the top for those who can crawl up. He adapts himself to all circumstances, and profits by most of them. He moves along the lines of least resistance; is ever drifting into his proper niche. He will 'get there.' Where he cannot be aggressive, he is agreeable, and usually gains his end. He never falters, nor fails to fall in line with the rest. It is always safest to be on the safe side. He positively believes in the benefits that accrue to those who are negative.

"He possesses all the negative virtues of his honored ancestors, who now slumber beneath their eulogistically inscribed tombstones. He meekly follows their present example of abstaining from most of the vicious pleasures of life. He is a good and respectable man, and he never lets his desires run loose; they must abide by certain laws.

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"He is deeply interested in all matters concerning public improvements. Why? The motive of a man's interest in public affairs is often a private matter; but the impeccable reputation of a good man should be a sufficient shield against the scrutiny of the inquisitive. The inquisitive will never go to heaven, and they will 'get it' here on earth.

"He is modest. He frequently complains of the credit and the honors that are given him by the community—lest his hearers should not know that he bears the burden of demonstrative public admiration. He is profusely grateful for all he receives, which, he constantly protests, is so much more than he deserves. He only tries to do his duty in his humble way. He is effusively cordial and friendly. He has a pervasive, confidence-inspiring smile for all who pass him, known or unknown. He clasps your hand firmly and shakes it long. He is congenial even to the congealing.

"He is a self-made, self-advertised man. He has affluence; he has influence. His exemplary



character is worthy of emulation, as the newspaper and his political friends say; and his emoluments are not few nor far between. He is intensely, surprisingly religious. The creed of his fathers is good enough for him. He questions not, nor doubts—not he. A good, devoted churchman, he is a regular attendant; and he never sleeps nor slumbers, no matter how long and how old the sermon be. He is a brave man. The good souls of his district are most lavish in praise of his piety.

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"Alas, it is not possible to enumerate all his splendid deeds, his high-classed qualities and his standard virtues. But, then, that is hardly necessary. They speak for themselves, or for their owner. He is a good husband and father, and his word is law unto his wife and children. He is an excellent citizen, a loud-mouthed patriot. He is a good man. He is going to heaven. And, oh, I do wish he would go there soon!"

After I had listened to this scandalous screed and other sombre and shadowy things that were on the programme of the entertainment, I finally overtook the offender, and shook hands with Keidansky. "I've been looking for you," I explained, "and they told me you would be here, so I came, and caught you in the act."

"Glad you showed up," he said; "but I am rather afraid. Do be lenient. I cannot defend nor explain everything."

"Well," I began, leniently, "according to this harangue of yours, we would have to change our conception of goodness and morality, and—"

"No, we don't have to," he answered impatiently; "but we can't help it; it is always, always changing. The good man of one age is the dead man of another. Between vice and virtue there is often no more than a change of mind. Goodness is only a point of view, and morality ceases to be moral after awhile. What's a good thing to do to-day will, in all probability, be the best thing to avoid to-morrow. It's all a question of time; no standard stands forever. Why, the coat of tar and feathers is going out of fashion, and even in New England, it's no longer a crime to be happy. Morality is but an arbitrary agreement, subject to change. It is a catalogue of certain accepted virtues, which should be edited, revised, and reprinted, from time to time; for many of the articles in this booklet go out of fashion, and otherwise become stale, obsolete, and even obnoxious. At best, the goods are not what they are represented to be by the drummers, that is, the preachers, when it comes to their delivery—when it comes down or up to real life. What do you think of virtues that consist either of doing nothing, or of doing things for no other reason than that they have bored other people to death. The catalogue is full of them, and just now we have come to a time when our current conventional morality is a kind of mortality—dead and deadening. It holds us down to outworn, oppressive systems, customs, regulations, and the uniformity of things is stifling.

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"It prevents growth, it impedes progress. We cannot live as free, untrammelled individuals. We must be citizens, members of society; we must be what other people call respectable.

"Everybody owns everybody else. Everybody follows, no one leads his own life. No one has any initiative. Everybody examines your moral conduct, and dictates the term of your existence. How can one have a religion, if he must live up to the faith of everybody else? How can we live if we must follow the dull and noble examples of those who are dead and never knew any better? Everybody listens to what the people say, and no one hears his own voice. This is an age of machinery. There are no more individuals; there are automatic walking and working machines which have been wound up by public opinion to run so many hours according to a well-approved system of regulations. 'What's the use of common-sense?' says a character in one of Jacob Gordin's plays. 'What's the use of common-sense when we have a Constitution?' Thousands of fools are kneeling before the fetish of public opinion. 'What will the people say?' they all ask. Nothing, I say, nothing. The people never say anything. They only talk. Individuals say it all. Those who depend upon others, who see strength in union are weaklings. United we fall, divided we stand. Those who dare to tread in the path of freedom, who dare to do things and say things, who own their bodies and never raise any mortgages on their souls, who make their own morality—they are the people who advance the world's progress and help to civilize our civilization. They have nearly always been called bad by their contemptible contemporaries—yet they represented all the goodness worth having. God give us the men who have virtue enough to do as they please, and courage enough to shock their neighbors.

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"But it's all system and monotony and imitation with the majorities, and a lot of slavish, knavish, puny and pious little beings, afraid of their own voices and not daring to draw their breath any more often than their neighbors do, and with whom morality and sanity is a matter of majority rule—beings like these are called the good people.

"This idea must be reversed. We must come to realize the utter badness of the conventional, crawling, yours-truly-for-a-consideration, good people. Also we must come to realize the supreme goodness of so-called bad people—people who are too religious to go to church—to whom tyranny of any kind is the height of immorality, and slavery the depth of it. We must have more bad people to save this wicked world. And heaven save us from most of the good people of to-day.

"It is one of those 'dumb-driven cattle' that I tried to pay my respects to in my paper—one of those cattle that here in democratic America become leaders of men. They do not know that the progress of the world has been built upon discarded customs and broken laws—but let us go down the street. I must have a drink of something before I can solve the problem to your

## VII "The Goodness of a Bad Man"

Perhaps it was to the disgrace of the Alliance that Keidansky's disquisition, his merciless tirade against the good man, was received with some show of hand-clapping favor; and it may be to the credit of the membership that there were those in the audience who were surprised, shocked and startled, who dissented from and resented his utterances. At any rate, the dissenters and commentators stirred up a discussion, and for several days after that it was a topic of conversation and disagreement at the club, at the cafés and such places where our circles would congregate. Those who dissented and disagreed with the man who questioned the very bases of our morality said many, varying things and not all things were said in Keidansky's presence. And he? Sometimes he would say a word in explanation, or his defence, and for the rest he listened, looked wise, smiled and relished every attack made against him. His opponents finally agreed that his was a one-sided, partial view, and they told him that, after all, it was better to have a good man than a bad one.

"But it yet remains to be proved," he argued, "that the average good man is not a whole lot worse than the so-called bad man."

They all dared him to prove it, to present the other side of the case, the goodness of the bad man. "I don't care to prove anything," said Keidansky. "Even the truth can be proved," he quoted a favorite decadent; "but if you want me to, I'll try to show you the other side of the story, as it seems to me. I'll write it to-night or to-morrow, and read it to you all, say, on the evening of the day after to-morrow, at the Alliance." We all agreed to be there, and accordingly assembled at the appointed time, and waited until Keidansky appeared with a folded manuscript sticking out of his coat pocket. He was all out of breath. He had been walking very fast so as to get here "just in time to be late." He had just finished his composition. "My lamp went out last night," he explained, "and so I had to do it all this afternoon, and just got through." And so here is his paper as he read it to us on "The Goodness of a Bad Man."

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"He is a bad man, a worthless, useless member of society. Most of his neighbors say so, and he does not stand well in the community. His friends are few, with long distances between. He would not go far out of his way to do a fellow a good turn; does not believe in favours, he says, and nobody cares much for him. He lives, acts, thinks, speaks like a bad man, and to say nothing of popularity—very few of us have any—but who will have any respect for a man that scorns, jeers, sneers and pokes all manner of fun at respectability? Respectability, he says, is a mark of public formality behind which to hide private rascality, and the prettier the mask the more ugly the face.

"He disagrees with nearly everybody on almost every conceivable subject. No matter what other people think of his opinions, he actually believes them to be right. He is a bad man. He is not at all tolerant. When he disagrees with any one—and he does that most of the time—he bluntly and boldly tells him so up and down, and he is ever ready to state his reasons and argue the case. He will not conceal his convictions, even when he is your guest. Of course, this is a free country, and every man is entitled to his opinion—but one should have some tact, politeness, diplomacy, courtesy. If every one had these there would not be so much difference of opinion and discord in our land, and there would be more peace on earth. Polite people do not try to force their opinions upon others.

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"Polite people have no opinions that differ from those of others. I doubt whether it is polite to have any opinions at all. The aristocracy is setting a good example. It never thinks. Persons who think too much are ever behind the times. But even if one has a right to his opinion, he certainly has no right to be cranky, eccentric, and disturb the mental peace of the community with his queer, revolutionary notions. Stubborn, stiff-necked, hard-headed, determined, impulsive, he is ever present with that ubiquitous mind of his, ever ready to give everybody a piece of it. Considering the frequency with which he gives everybody a piece of his mind, I wonder that it is not all gone by this time.

"He is a bad man. He is aggressive and arrogant. His faith in himself is offensive, his self-reliance, self-satisfaction unbearable. He has too much respect for himself to follow the dictates of others. His life is a life, he says, and not an apology for living; he will have to pay for it with death and wants to make the most of the bargain—live fully and freely in his own way, however reprehensible. He does not want his neighbors to love and interfere with him—unless he cared for their affection. He says it would be a sin to love his neighbors if they did not deserve his love. The welfare of the community, I heard him say, depends upon the absolute freedom, the self-salvation of each individual. No one can ever do anything for another unless he has made the most of his own life—good or bad. Self-preservation in the end prompts us to do most for others. Selfishness is a pronounced form of sanity. Altruism has enslaved the world. Egoism will save it. And I could quote you such monstrous heresies as will make your hair stand on end. He is a bad man.

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"The world belongs to those who take things for granted. He will not take anything for granted

and that's why he has to take more hard knocks than anybody else. He impiously questions, doubts, examines, investigates everything on the face of the earth and—God save us—even the things that be in heaven. He is a living interrogation point, ever questioning the wisdom of this world and the promises of the one to come. Nothing is so sacred as to be above his scrutiny; he has little reverence for any of our glorious institutions. He says they are the handiwork of men and often as crude and as useless as men could make them. Whatever has been erected can be corrected, he says. He thinks lightly of our laws; thinks they are at best but a necessary evil and that in the course of human events it becomes necessary to abolish all evil.

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"He is a bad man. He does not even recognize the sacred authority of tradition, and has no decent regard for precedent. Precedent, he argues, only proves that some people lived before us and did things in a certain way. He does not even—well, think of a man who doubts the holy right of the majority! He does not believe that the majority is always right; in fact, he contends that it is always wrong. By the time the majority discovers a truth it becomes a falsehood, he avers. The majority only thinks it is always right. The majority is but another word for mediocrity. He does not heed what the people say. The monster called majority, in spite of his many heads, does very little thinking. What the people say seldom amounts to a meaning. Morality, he argues, is that which is conducive to one's happiness, without interfering with or injuring his fellow-men. To be moral is to live fully, freely, completely. Morality has nothing to do with the abnormal stifling, starving, thwarting of instincts and feelings.

"A truth, he told me, is a truth, and a principle is a principle, whether it is held by many or by one. Numbers no more make right than might does.

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"'The strongest man on earth,' he says, 'is he who stands alone,' and he always quotes a man named Ibsen. He is a bad case. 'Customs and conventionalities be hanged,' he says, 'I have my own life to live and mean to manage it in my own way. I have laws of my own and must obey them.' I heard him say it myself, and I wonder what he means by these things. There are always those who know better than you what is good for you, but you don't want to mind them, he told me. The most advisable thing in the world is never to take any advice. There may be those, he once remarked, who have lived longer than you have, but they have not lived your life.

"He has a mania for principles. I think that is a chronic disease with him. He imagines it is all one needs in life. There is not a material advantage in the world but he would forfeit it for a moral principle, as he calls it. 'Ideals are very well,' I once said, 'but one must live.' 'Not necessarily,' he answered. 'One must die, if one cannot live honestly.'

"Always he talks about the so-called social problem of the age. I do not know just what that is; but if there is such a thing as a social problem it is how to abolish social reformers. This man is a social reformer, and he has some scheme of his own how to reconstruct society on a basis of what he terms justice and truth. In the promulgation of this scheme of his he foolishly spends much of his spare time and not a little of his money—and Heaven knows he has not any too much. But he says he does it all for his pleasure; that it is out of sheer selfishness that he would uplift the fallen and elevate the lowly. He is a bad man. It is no disgrace to be poor, of course; but it is criminal of the poor not to know their place. I half told him so, but he answered in his usual contradictory way that the poor have no place at all.

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"He travels through life very much by his own crooked road, with his own conception of morality, justice and truth. Out of justice to the dead, he argues, we ought to abolish most of the institutions they have left behind. Otherwise they are being disgraced every day by the clumsy workings of the things they have established. If our honored ancestors desired to perpetuate their taboos, fetishes and inquisitions they had no business to die; they should have stayed here. By going to either of the places beyond they have forfeited their right to manage things here below. The dead should give the living absolute home rule.

"He is a bad man. He hardly ever gives any charity. He does not believe in charity; says it creates more misery than it relieves, and perpetuates poverty—the crime of mankind. Charity, he claims, curses both the giver and the receiver. It makes the former haughty and proud and the latter dependent and servile. What he wants is justice and the rights of all to earn the means of subsistence. And there is no use in quoting the Bible, when he talks of poverty. The Bible, he says, is a great book which could be immensely improved by a good editor with a long blue pencil. All the immoral problem-plays pale into pitiful insignificance beside some of the stories told in the Bible—and they are not anywhere half so well told. Did you ever hear such blasphemy? He is an infidel. He does not even believe the newspapers; has little faith in the great power of the press. Most of the newspapers, he told me, are published by the advertisers and edited by the readers. Journalists ever follow public opinion, and they are never sure of what they believe in because it is hard to find out what the people approve. Weather Bureau predictions are often Gospel truths beside editorial convictions. The best papers are yet to be printed. He has such rank disregard of the past and the present that he seems to think that all things really great are yet to come.

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"He puzzles and vexes me. I don't know just what he is in politics. I doubt whether he is either a Republican or a Democrat. I suspect he votes for the Anarchist party. What an absurdity! They will never elect a President, and this foolish man has not the ghost of a chance to get an office. He is not at all consistent. He changes his mind very often. No matter how zealous or ardent he is about his ideas he is ever ready to reject them to-morrow and accept other views. He does not believe in the newspapers, in things visible and present, yet he has the utmost faith in far-away fictions, intangible Utopias and the realization of iridescent dreams.

"I dare not repeat all his outrageous blasphemies, and I positively cannot mention his awful heresies as to his religion. He cannot accept the religion of his fathers because they were infidels; infidels who built little creeds out of fear, who were afraid of their shadows, who had monstrous, libellous conceptions of God. He says that he has too much faith to belong to any denomination. Religion is so large that no church can hold it. No one should meddle between man and his Maker. Christ, I have heard him say, may never forgive the Christians for what they have made out of him, for robbing him of his humanity. No church for him. He would rather worship beneath the arched dome of the starry skies and offer up a prayer to the God that dwells in every human heart and thinking brain. He is a bad man.

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"He is always on the ungrateful side of the few, the poor, the weak and the fallen; and he even sympathizes with beggars, criminals, fallen women and low persons; is not afraid to mingle with them. And what advantage can he ever derive out of that? Absent-minded, forgetful, engrossed in his queer ideas and impossible ideals, he gets lost in his theories and books, and loses life. He does not realize that millions have found this world as it is and millions more will leave it so. Poor man, he is a dreamer of dreams; and to see the invisible, to hear inaudible voices, is the most expensive thing in life. He sacrifices affluence, influence, power, political office, honor, *éclat*, applause, the respect of the community, the regard of his neighbors, the praise of the press, the advantages of politics and of the people's approval—sacrifices all these for his pitiful brain-begotten fancies. He is a dreamer of dreams. Yet he seems to like this journey along the lines of most resistance, says it is least resistance to him, and he tells me that he enjoys his poverty and all, immensely. He freely indulges in most of the vain and worldly pleasures of life as he sees them, regardless of all others, considers one day as holy as another and no day so mean as to wear a long and sanctimonious face on, and he says that the only thing which he prohibits is prohibition in any form. His wife does not fear him, does not have to obey him, does as she pleases, and his children are as free and wild as little savages. He is a bad man.

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"But what can be done? Ministers and other good men have repeatedly tried to save him, but he evades all their efforts, avoids all their sermons. He would save them the trouble of saving him, he says, because he thinks he can do it so much better himself. What can be done? All things are here to serve him, none to subserve him. He is a law unto himself, and has little or nothing to do with the Government, so he says. He is a bad man. He is not going to heaven—and yet, and yet—if there were more like him this world would be so different, and perhaps no one would ever want to go to heaven."

There was a pause and a silence at the close of the reading, but our essayist was soon spared "the agony of suspense," as he mockingly remarked. Then came comments of varied shades of opinion, approving and disapproving, constructive and destructive, too many to mention, and Keidansky enjoyed them all. At length I ventured to ask him what sort of administrator his friend, the bad man, would make if he was ever elected to office.

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"He would never run for office," said Keidansky, "and if he ran he would never be elected; and if he ever was elected he would certainly be a dire failure because he does not believe in managing other people's business. The best of men will not want to, cannot do it, and politics is no test. The man who goes in with or for the crowd ceases to be himself; and therefore we ought to invent our public officials and not make them out of men. However, don't press me, I am not at all sure about these things. I only know that the bad man is coming; that he is here; that he is a dire terror—and will save the world. What I gave you here is a mere suggestion, a hint of a possibility, a premonition. Every conception is spoiled by the description of it. He will come, and time will not tame him. He will come, and the divine institution of police-court morality is doomed. The virtues of the future will be useful. They will be conducive to growth—real happiness.

"But, as I say, I don't want to appear dogmatic; nor to be too sure of things. The most useful thing about our theories is that we know them to be useless. The best thing about our ideas is that the world has not accepted them yet. If the world had accepted them these ideas would probably now look like last winter's snow. Better to wait until it is ready for them—then they will not go to waste. Better a bad world than a good world come too early—before the people are ready for it. But what's the use! I've done it, my friends, and my apology for life is—that I never apologize. Come, it's getting close, up here. Come, let us forth into the darkness and pray for eternal night—for night hides all the ugly splendors of the world."

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## VIII

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### "The Feminine Traits of Men"

"You are as inquisitive as a man," said Keidansky.

"You mean—" I tried to correct him.

"I mean as inquisitive as a man," he repeated.

This was at a social gathering, a Purim festival given by the B'nai Zion Educational Society at Zion Hall. We sat in the little back room adjoining the main hall, which formed the library of the society. There was a good fire in the stove; we were just far enough away from the music and the dance to enjoy it, and also to relish our chat.

I suppose I had gone beyond the point of discretion in my quest of information; that I asked some questions of a rather personal nature which my friend thought best to leave unanswered, and hence the rebuke I received.

"Some one," said Keidansky, "ought to write an essay on 'The Feminine Traits of Men,' and point out in what a pronounced form men possess the traits, objectionable and acceptable, they constantly attribute to women. For centuries women have borne the blame and ridicule and criticism for qualities they either have in the mildest, most insignificant forms, or do not possess at all—when you compare them to men. And it's about time they should be vindicated, and the truth should make them free from this popular misconception. It seems to me that in a certain way men have actually monopolized most of the objectionable traits of women; and to have shifted all the blame on them for all these years was a crying shame—an outrageous wrong.

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"Yes, some one ought to write about it; some one who is young, handsome and gallant—so that he may receive the gratitude of the fair sex. For instance, woman is said to be inquisitive. But who, really, is so anxious to know, so peevish, petulant and prurient as man is? Who like him will go to so much trouble to find out the minutest detail about men, women and things that surround him? Who is so eager and diligent in his search of information, knowledge and light? Who like unto him—I mean, his majesty, man—takes such loving interest in his neighbors and pries so pitilessly into their private affairs? Who makes such an excellent reporter, detective, biographer? Who are the successful editors of our newspapers? Men, of course. They are the ones who constantly load you with questions, who are ever endeavoring to peer into your inmost self and who always want to know about your past, present, future, former and later incarnations. I am told, on good authority, that genealogy—which I understand to be the science of proving that your great-grandfather was somebody and that somebody was your great-grandmother—that this science has been nurtured and garnered and brought up to its present state of perfection, or imperfection, by men.

"It's appalling, this curiosity of man," he continued fervently. "He can go sixteen miles out of his way to pick up the smallest scrap of a fact, or fancy. He can collect endless stores of useless information. He fancies nothing so much as facts. His thirst for knowledge cannot be satiated even by flattery. Men not only make encyclopædias, but they actually use them. They not only build and endow libraries, but they actually utilize them—spoil their eyes over musty, misty, mazy volumes. And then, how anxious we all are to be posted on the most unimportant things concerning our friends and the people we meet and know; we are ever attempting to read their minds and their hearts, and if there are none, we put meanings into them. Have not the greatest novelists been men?"

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"Motke Chabad, the Jewish jester, once came to a strange town near his native city of Wilna, and as he entered the community a patriarchal old Israelite accosted him with the usual *Shalom aleichem. Ma simecho?* 'Peace be with thee, stranger. What is thy name?'

"'It's none of your business,' answered Motke.

"When asked why he thus rudely acted toward the old man, Motke Chabad explained that had he told the stranger his name the other would have asked where he came from, what his business was, how many children he had, if he was married, how old his father was, if he was still living, if he had any relatives in America, if he ever was blessed by the great rabbi of Wilna, etc., etc., and, said Chabad, 'to say nothing of my morning prayers, I had not as yet had my breakfast, when I met him.'

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"Chabad, you see, knew his brother, man. Men curious to know? Rose Dartle is nothing beside Andrew Lang, and he has this advantage over her—that he exists and can find things out. Another instance. You go into your store or factory in the morning. You have a slight toothache. You feel and look rather seedy, and the man who works next to you comes over and sympathetically asks you why it was that she rejected you, why the other fellow won her heart, by what magic charms your rival eclipsed you, etc., and he keeps on with his queries until you tell him—

"Go stand up on the first corner. Take off your hat and cry out: 'Gentlemen, this is a hat, this is a hat! Look into it!' And in a few seconds you will have a big throng of curious men standing about and staring at you. Women who will happen along will pass right on, but men will stand there and stare—like men.

"There was a time when certain things were considered beyond the scrutiny of curious men, when they were held too sacred for investigations and explanations, when the things that were not understood were deemed holy and when men stood in reverence before these things and bowed and took off their thinking caps. But now they want to know everything—even the things that are of prime importance. And there is no use in telling them that nothing really exists—not even the logic of Christian Scientists. They want to know. They must find the facts or make them. What's the use of living if one doesn't know just on what date King Pharaoh died? No news may be good news, but you can't run a newspaper on that principle now-a-days. Whether the things happen or not man wants to know the facts and the details of the cases. They must know. Knowledge is power. To know is to be able to boast of it. And men ever boast of what they know or think they know.

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"But why say more? The collected knowledge, the accumulated data and science of the world sufficiently prove the inquisitiveness of men. It is one faculty which works many ways, you know,

and these ways are shaped by circumstances and conditions. Now a man peeps through a keyhole to get some material for a bit of gossip, and then he looks up to the stars to make an astronomical observation. But the Darwins and the Newtons and the Herschels prove how curious to know men really are.

"And it is their extreme vanity, too, that makes men so presumptuous, ostentatious and obstreperous. They have so much faith in themselves that no self-respecting person can trust them. They are so confident in their right to know, so convinced of the value of their knowledge, so sure of the absolute necessity of their volubility. They are so unbearably overbearing, self-conscious and self-centred that they forget there are others besides them in this world. It is their vanity that makes men speak in volumes.

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"Then they say that women gossip, but you know that they are far outdone, almost totally eclipsed in this respect, too, by men. Men are the real, rapid-transit champion gossips and talkers of the world. It was a dark and dismal night, as the story goes, and we all sat around the fire and the captain said, 'Jack, tell us a story,' and Jack told a number of stories, and so did others, and we all told of divers devilish, wicked things our friends had done, and in our heart of hearts were awfully sorry we did not do these things ourselves, and we made mud-cakes out of good, well-preserved reputations. Oh, how well we can and how we do talk about our neighbors; but you know, people do like to talk about those whom they love. Marie Corelli recently said—now do not scowl because I quote Marie Corelli. She is a very good woman; only she could not resist the temptation to write a few novels, and they may not be so bad, only I could never get myself to read them because I heard that Queen Victoria liked them immensely. Hold on, though; I guess I did read one of these novels in a Yiddish translation; but that was because the translator did not say whose work it was. I think he thought it was original with himself. In fact, he passed it off as his own—which was a brave thing to do, though the book proved to be popular. But I lost my train of thought. Marie Corelli recently said that she never endured such a babel of gossiping tongues as she once heard when being entertained to luncheon at a men's club, and she added, 'nor have I known many more reputations picked to pieces than on that occasion.' But a recent writer told us what awful gossips all the historians have been, and they were all men. We were told that Herodotus, who is the father of history, was also one of the most inveterate of gossips. Saint Simon was considered essentially a gossip, and even therefore a wonderful historian of the time of Louis XV. Pepys, this writer told us, was the greatest gossip that ever lived, also the greatest historian of his time. Even Mommsen, we were told, shows some of the traits of a gossip in his monumental history of Rome. The same was said of Gibbon and many others. Gossip is not only the raw material of history, we were informed, but it is also the raw material of the realistic novel, and as I said before, the finest novels have been produced by the sons of Adam.

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"Women are also charged with being loquacious, but that is another trumped-up, false charge. You well know that the loquaciousness of men is prodigious, tremendous. Man is the most wonderful talking machine ever invented, and one of his favorite topics is the talkativeness of woman. Men talk you to mental derangement and death wherever you go. There is no escape. Nearly every man you meet is ready to tell you the sad story of his life—sad, because he is ready to tell it. Many of them write their autobiographies, and what with these and their sermons and orations, novels and essays, histories and philosophies—there will soon be no more room for libraries. And the worst thing about man's garrulity is that he taxes the intellect so heavily, that what he says is loaded with so much meaning. Anything a man says, you know, is in danger of becoming literature. It's appalling. He always makes you think, whereas what little a woman does say is so light and airy, breezy and restive. A woman, too, writes a book, occasionally, but she does not mean anything by it.

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"But men are so very bad in this respect, so terribly blatant. They never cease talking. When they don't talk they write, and the pen is worse than the sword. Why am I afraid to ask the man, who stands near me waiting for a car, what time it is? Because he might tell me of his grandfather's heroic exploits in the Civil War. To have gone to war was cruel; but to have left some one behind to boast of it was criminal. Why am I afraid to read the latest short story that I have written to my friend? Because he might show me a poem just done. And I nearly forgot to point out what a monumental proof of naïve garrulity the Talmud is. The Talmud, that strange conglomeration of law, love, legend, gossip, fable, and occasionally a bit of wisdom, which one can find if one searches diligently.

"They say also that women are capricious and changeful; but the progress of the world shows how easily men change their minds. Yes, someone ought to write an essay and point these things out, and vindicate a much-maligned sex. It's a good chance for a man for some interesting gossip on the subject."

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"I suppose, then, that you believe in woman's rights," I at length haphazardly interrupted.

"Yes," answered Keidansky, "I believe that women should have all their rights, and should not, as the French cynic would have it, be killed at forty. It's too late. I mean," he added quickly, "that it's too late to talk any more about it."



"What do I know? I don't know anything," said Keidansky, "and I don't care to."

"I thought you were always in quest of knowledge," I remarked.

"I am," he answered: "I am infatuated with the quest, I love it. It is so exhilarating, stirring, full of excitement and fraught with danger."

"Danger? Wherein is that?" I asked.

"The danger," he emphasized, "is in finding the knowledge I am in quest of; for once your search has been answered with success, and you have informed yourself with the facts of the case, the game is up and the fun is over, as the Americans say. The hallucination of the glorious quest is shattered, the suspense is spoiled, the ecstatic expectations are destroyed, and we become fit subjects for illustrations in the *Fliegende Blätter*. 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing' and a lot of it is fatal. Yes, knowledge is might, but illusion is omnipotence. So I like to seek information well enough, but I would rather not know."

I became interested, although scandalized, and my companion kept on musing aloud.

"Not to know is to hope, to fear, to be in delightful uncertainty, to dream fair dreams, to imagine the most impossible things, to wonder and marvel at all in childlike innocence, to build the most beautiful castles in the air, to give the imagination full swing, to conjure up the most fantastic mythological melodramas, to stand with deep awe and inspired reverence before all the mighty manifestations of nature, to form the finest idols, to build splendid religions, to have faith and to foster it, to see the invisible, to draw gorgeous rainbows of promise upon the horizon of life, in a word, not to know is to sustain perfect illusion, not to go behind the scenes, is to enjoy the entire performance.

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"On the other hand, my dear fellow, to know is to have your wings clipped, to see the distance between the earth and the skies and the difference between you and what you thought yourself to be, to feel your littleness and become dreadfully aware of the absurdity of it all, to have the imagination arrested for trespassing, to be rejected from the castles you built for non-payment of taxes, to be punished for the idleness of your idols, to see your little demigods crumble at the rate of sixteen a minute, to become aware of the futility of the whole business, the shortness of terms given you, the instability of your credit, to find that you are but a feather blown hither and thither by the whirlwind of the world, that your greatest plan may be demolished by a whim of fate, to learn that the stupid moon really does not look so pale because of your unrequited love, and that the great sun does not shine because you are going to a picnic, to discover that your credulity was the only miracle that ever happened, and that even gods suffer from dyspepsia, to lose faith, become sceptic, abandon religion, move out of the balmy fairyland of tradition and freeze in the realms of right reason. To know is to be deprived even of that little confidence in your power to alter the course of the universe; to recognize how inexorable, inscrutable, indifferent, the powers of life are, and what a common pedigree all things of beauty have; it is to have the dramatic effect of the play spoiled and to vote it all a farce and a failure.

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"We are all becoming so educated now-a-days that we no longer know the value of ignorance, and we have nearly forgotten things of goodness and of beauty that it has brought into the world. Ignorance is the mazy mist of morning in which so much is born; it is the mystic dimness wherein all things awe and enchant forever. Ignorance is the beginning of the world; knowledge is the end of it. In the unexplored vastnesses of ignorance the mind soars through all the heavens and works wonders; in the measured spheres of knowledge the mind travels carefully and creates little as far as mythology, theology, religion and poetry are concerned. Were it not for ignorance we would not have had all the wealth of legends and fables and fairy tales and sagas and *märchen*, strange, weird, wonderful, to intoxicate the imagination of the world and enable us to live for centuries in lands of magic and charm and dreamlike realities. And if you see some works of beauty and nobility in the world to delight you, it is because we have just come out of these lands, and we are imitating and re-creating what we saw there. There are some who still dwell in them, and they send us messages and often bless us with their visits.

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"Thank you for stopping me. I should not have liked to be run over before you had listened to the rest of my argument; besides, it makes a mess of one. This is a dangerous crossing—for a debate. But, to continue: Were it not for ignorance—had we known everything about God—Europe would not be dotted with all the beautiful cathedrals and the wonderful treasures of art that are an everlasting source of enchantment and inspiration. Were it not for the same reason we would not have such a beauty spot in Boston as Copley square, with its two imposing churches, Library and Museum of Art. And remembering that all objects to delight the eye, the ear and the mind began at the earliest shrines of worship, we can barely calculate how poor and meagre all our arts would have been were it not for this ignorance. What would poetry—in the largest sense—what would it be were it not for this ignorance concerning Providence? And poetry is the main motive, the quintessence of all the other arts. Religion is the great question mark of the world, and what you ask for religion I ask for ignorance. Whether the makers of the Bible wrote on space or not, no one can deny its high value as a work of poetry and fiction; and as much can be said for all the other sacred books of the great faiths.

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"The mood of ignorance is worth everything: it is wonder, amazement, naïveté, child-like innocence, fairy-like dreaminess.

"In ignorance we trust, trusting we serve, serving we achieve, achieving we glorify our names. Not to know is to long for, to expect everything—and work for it; while to know is to be sure of

this or that, and there is something significant in the coupling of the words, 'dead sure.' 'Tis good to have faith; what we believe in is or comes true. The illusion is the thing that makes the play. We are all chasing after phantoms, but the chase is a reality, and it's all in all. The less we know about the results—perhaps the more we do. And not knowing how incapable we are, some of us do remarkable things.

"A Jewish legend tells us that before the human soul is doomed to be born it knows everything, is informed of all knowledge—including, I presume, a knowledge of the Talmudic laws of marriage and divorce—but that at its birth an angel appears, gives the child a *schnel in noz*, or tap on the nose, which causes the infant to forget everything it knows so that it may be born absolutely ignorant. That is a good angel, I say, who performs a good office, and not like the rest of them, who, according to John Hay, are loafing around the throne. Here is a useful angel. For to give the child its ignorance is to confer a great boon; to make it capable of something in life. It is a valuable gift, though earthly creatures soon spoil the good work of the angel and stuff the child's head full of all sorts of useless knowledge. Soon the mind is clogged, the faculties for thinking, wondering, understanding are turned into a phonographic apparatus for remembering what should never have been learned, and the imagination is nipped in the bud, told to be correct and keep still. With all my inability to learn and disinclination to know, there are still a few things I have been trying to forget all my life, but I cannot do it. At the point of a cane my rabbi drove these things into my head. So if I ever impart any information to you, forgive me for I cannot forget. Here in America and in modernity, where superstition is such that people actually believe in the existence of facts, the schools and colleges form tremendous systems of stupefaction. Poor little heads of innocent children are packed, cramped and crowded with dates and names and all sorts of insignificant data. They teach them everything—except what interests them, and they are made to repeat and to remember all things dry and dull and dreary. 'Facts, facts, facts,' the teachers cry, not knowing that there are no facts in real life. Minds are measured, ideas must be of a certain size, you must think but one thought at a time and remember all things in history that never happened. Thus, fancy, whim, suggestion, imagination are sadly neglected, and the finest faculties are left behind. Everybody knows everything, but no one understands anything.

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"'Tis so with people generally—they are all clamoring for what they call facts, explaining things after fixed formulas, making the most astonishing, dead-sure statements; in short, spreading useful knowledge. They all have ideas and theories and philosophies after a fashion; they have sized this universe up, past, present and future, and they can explain everything except themselves. Everybody has found a few 'facts,' and after these fashioned a universal panacea, a little patented plan for solving the social problem. There are so many solutions that it is hard to find just what the problem is. Reform is so much in style that even a corn doctor proclaims himself a social saviour. The social reformers with their sure cures, positive facts and all-saving systems are the plague of the age. There is no escape from these things they call certain and positive and indisputable. Figures and statistics and so-called facts make up the sum of our life. Life is harnessed by systems and we are strangled by statistics. The subtle, the strange, the symbolic, the suggestive, the intuitive, the poetic and imaginative, the flash-lights that make you see eternity in a moment—these are overlooked and neglected. The things really true are forgotten. What is that Persian legend about the man who devoted his life to planting and rearing and raising the tree of knowledge in his garden, and afterwards, in his old age, was hanged thereon? What? There is no such Persian legend? Well, then, some Englishman ought to write it. At any rate this shows the value of knowledge. The fruit of the tree of knowledge is now sweet, now bitter—but mostly bitter. We analyze and examine so much these days that we find within ourselves and in our surroundings the symptoms of all diseases and all evil. To quote a quaint but true Zangwillism, 'Analysis is paralysis, introspection is vivisection, and culture drives us mad.' We measure things so closely and leave no room for the surprising, the spontaneous, the freely flowing, the lifelike. The age of reason has come and we are no longer wise. We have forgotten what we owe to ignorance. 'He knows everything,' said the doctor; 'there is no hope for him.'

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"In their ignorance of human nature and natural law idealists have dreamed and created the most unattainable Utopias, and their impossible visions shaped our destiny and made us great. The stirring speech that Lametkin delivered this evening is partly due to his ignorance of things and his blind faith in his panacea, but it enthused his audience immensely, and it will have a wonderful effect upon their lives. The other day I read some beautiful lines by Owen Meredith about the child who cries 'to clutch the star that shines in splendor over his little cot.' The matter-of-fact father says that it is folly, that it is millions of miles away, and that 'the star descends not to twinkle on the little one's bed.' But the mother tenderly tells the child to sleep and promises to pluck the star for it and by-and-by

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*'Lay it upon the pillow bright with dew,'*

and then the child sleeps and dreams of stars whose light

*'Beams in his own bright eyes when he awakes.'*

"Now in these lines one may find justification for all the idealizations of art, but they are also suggestive of the value of ignorance. So it is. We must learn to see the invisible. We must be oblivious to the obvious, to see anything. We ought not to try to clear up everything. If life were not a problem play it would not interest us so. Let the mystery remain. Intimations of immortality

are good enough; proofs would kill our longing for it. Whence? Whither? I rather hope these questions will never be answered. The halo, the maze, the mystery, the shadowy strangeness of it all makes it worth while and gives the fancy freedom to fly. Statistics sterilize the imagination and figures dry up our souls. Do you remember Whitman's 'When I Heard the Learned Astronomers?' The lecturer with his charts and diagrams soon made him unaccountably sick, till rising and gliding out of the lecture room he wandered off by himself 'in the mystical, moist night-air, and from time to time looked up in perfect silence at the stars,' and thus became himself again.

"Let others seek what they call facts: for me the lights and the shades, the dimness and the flash, the chiaroscuro of life. Let others pierce through phenomena and impregnate realities; my favorite amusement is to walk upon the clouds and play ball with the stars. I cannot grasp such details as the size of the earth, the distance between sun and moon. Logic? Lockjaw. Go study your astronomy and let me lie on my back in some verdant field and gaze upon the stars, and I shall be content. Let others study botany, give me but the fragrance of the blooms and flowers and let me gaze upon their gorgeous riots of color. For others the study of anatomy, for me the beauty of the human form to behold. Let others study ornithology, and let me listen to the thrilling music of the winged songsters. Take all the sciences that explain everything away, and give me the things beautiful to behold, sweet to hear and pleasing to touch. And before you run away let me also tell you that there is a mood of contemplation which, for comprehension, passeth all science and analysis.

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"But, after all," he added, as we were about to part, "I could only hint at these things, for it takes a very learned man to prove the value of ignorance."

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## X Days of Atonement

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All day the Ghetto was astir. There was a babel of excitement at the markets, an unusual rush and bustle on Allen street. The stores were well filled with bargaining, buying men and women, and the push-cart vendors were centres of attracted crowds. Everywhere housewives were busy washing, clearing, cleaning their homes. The spirit of awe, reverence, expectancy, was in the air. The great day of Rosh Hashona was approaching; New Year's day was drawing nigh.

We stood on the sidewalk in front of Berosowsky's book and periodical emporium, the strange place where you can procure anything from Bernard Feigenbaum's pamphlets against religion, to a pair of phylacteries, from Tolstoy's works in Yiddish to a holy scroll. We stood and gazed on the familiar yet fascinating scene. We had just left the store, wherein we glanced through the current newspapers and other publications. "It is so stupid to read. Let's go out and look at the people," Keidansky exclaimed abruptly as he threw down a eulogy of a Yiddish poet written by himself, in the paper of which he is now editor.

Not far off was heard the short, shrill sound of the ram's horn. It was the "bal tkio," the official synagogue trumpeter practising for the nearing ominous days. Hard by, a cantor and his choir of sweet voices were rehearsing the quaint hymns and prayers of the great fast, singing the strange, tearful, traditional melodies that have never been written, and yet have come down from generation to generation for hundreds of years; the weird musical wailings, the tunes of the cheerless chants, charged with the sighs, groans and laments of centuries of sufferings, flooded the noisy street, mingled with the harsh cries of the hucksters, and were lost in the general buzz and roar of the crowded district.

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"The days of awe and of atonement are upon us," said Keidansky, "and these evocative, awakening voices are drawing, drawing me back to the synagogue, back to the days of childhood, faith, hope, ignorance, innocence, peace, and plenty of sleep. A broken note of old music, then a flood of memories, a sway of feeling, and no matter what I have, or have not been, I am again as pious and penitent, and as passionately religious, as I was when a child in the most God-fearing Ghetto in the world.

"Did you say something about free thought, the higher criticism, universal religion, about the law of evolution applied to religion, about all creeds being equally true and equally false? Did you talk to me about these things?

"Well, a scrap of Yom Kippur melody and the faith of my fathers is my faith. Our instincts destroy our philosophies. 'Our feelings and affections are wiser than we are!' The old is preserved for our self-preservation. The new is destructive, bewildering. The old is often worth deserting, yet it is bred in the bone; it is comforting and consoling and easy to live up to. The new is bewitching, but baneful; it breeds discontent, ennui, we can hardly ever live up to it. Blessed are those who live in the world they were born into. They are also damned, but that's not in their time.

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"Tradition," Keidansky continued musing aloud, "is far more beautiful than history, and even nature with all her charms has to be improved upon by art, by illusion. In the course of time science may build up some interesting superstitions, but meanwhile it is our poor debtor. It has filled the world with cold facts. It has emptied the heart of its fond fancies. And what do we really know, after all? The greatest philosopher of the age pauses and stands nonplussed before the

Unknowable. The densest ignoramus in the world knows it all; knows all about the worlds beneath and beyond—their climates, inhabitants, populations, moral status, tortures and pleasures. What do we know, anyway? Next to nothing, and we feel lonely and desolate and powerless after we have had everything explained to us. Orthodoxy, at least, gives us the consciousness of having some control in the universe; it gives us a sense of shelter and of safety. We know we have a kind of vote in the general management of things. We can accomplish something by our prayers, by fasting. And when the fearful days come, the days in which the destiny of every mortal for the coming year is determined on high, we ask for atonement, and fast and pour out our griefs in mournful prayers and burn candles for the dead. Our voices are heard on high, because we believe they are, and our names are entered in the Book of Life for another year. Do not smile now, nor look so wise. All that is, is well, and whatever we believe in is true. The greatest sacrifice we made to science was our ignorance.

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"But whether it is this or that, there is something rooted so firmly and so unfathomably deep within us that calls and pulls us back to all that we have deserted and tried to forget; and when these hallowed days come, we can no longer drown our feelings. No matter how far I went in my radical conceptions—and I often went far enough to be excommunicated by my worthy brethren—no matter how iconoclastic we became, how absorbed we were in our abstractions, and how fearlessly we theorized, the season of awe, beautiful, terrible awe, the judgment days drew near and hearts became heavy and the melody of the song of 'Kol Nidro' invaded our minds and shut out all the other music we ever heard in our lives. It is all a strain of music that, once heard, keeps singing in our memories forever—this faith of our fathers. Go where we will, do what we may, the beauties of the old religion are with us yet and we cannot, we cannot forget.

"Among the radicals of the New York Ghetto there is no more advanced nor brilliant man than is my friend Bahan. He has edited some of the best Jewish publications; he has written much of what was best in them, and he was always on the side of free-thought and new ideas. Like myself, he belonged to the circles that had reformed Judaism altogether. He had not entered a synagogue for purposes of prayer since he left Russia as a youth, and that was many years ago. He is now on one of the best New York papers, and when Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur arrive, he writes about these holidays so fervidly, feelingly, enthusiastically, with such tears in his eyes that one would think that these unsigned articles are the work of the most pious and orthodox Hebrew in New York. And, perhaps, they are too," Keidansky added, aside, "only if Bahan were accused of orthodoxy he would protest his innocence."

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"That was years ago," my friend continued after a pause. "I was young, seeking new worlds to conquer, and so I fell into bad company—among people who think. They are mostly free-thinkers and free-talkers, and in the course of time my religion dwindled and I became as erratic as any of them. The worst thing about one who begins to think is that he also begins to talk. I began to talk, to voice my doubts and heresies, and soon the world, or at least my relatives, were against me. I kept on saying the most unsayable things, and when New Year's came I refused to go to the synagogue, because I had discovered the existence of the Unknowable. We quarrelled, and things came to such a pass that I left my cousin's home, where I had been living, during the Days of Atonement. I knew what I knew and I was ready to make all sacrifices for the right of ranting and raving over the shameful superstitions in which humanity was steeped. The world was before me and so were all my troubles. But even when I refused to go to the synagogue, I was at heart of hearts exceedingly lonely without it, without the beautiful service of Rosh Hoshona. When the eve of Yom Kippur came I did not know what to do with myself. Our circle of friends was to meet at the home of one of its members and spend the evening gayly and happily, though it was the sad and solemn Fast of Atonement. I had promised to come, and so, when all the inhabitants of the Ghetto were wending their way to their respective houses of worship I started with a heavy heart to join my friends, glad that I had made the promise and sorry that I was keeping it. I arrived at my destination, a street in the West End Jewish quarter. When I neared the house I heard a loud, rather boisterous conversation going on. I rang the bell. Even as I did so I heard a number of shouts and loud peals of laughter. I did not wait for the door to open. I turned and walked away. I walked right on, not in the least knowing whither. Before I was barely aware of it, I was in Baldwin place, in front of the Beth Israel Synagogue. The cantor and his choir were just chanting the awe-inspiring, soul-stirring prayer of 'Kol Nidro,' that wonderful product of the Spanish inquisition, written by a Morano during the darkest days of Israel and freighted with the sighs and cries and moans of a suffering people. Those strains of music brought me to my own life again. I entered the synagogue. I had come into my own. I felt such peace and consolation as I had not known for ever so long.

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"Do not ask me to explain it, I cannot. If the incurability of religion could be explained it could also be cured. This is what happened, and this is what still happens to me from time to time. It may be strange, but mine is a government of, for, and by moods, and as they come and go I become everything that I have been and that I may be.

"I've been greatly moved by many preachers and teachers and I have followed some of the most advanced advocates of our time, the most universal universalists; but let me hear one of the beautiful old chants, such as 'Kol Nidro,' or 'Unsana Taukeff' and I become a most zealous orthodox. Did I ever tell you about it?

"'Unsana Taukeff' is the most important prayer on the two days of Rosh Hoshona and the Day of Atonement. It is known as the 'Song of a Martyr in Israel!' The story of the prayer is one of the prettiest in Jewish folk tales. It is the song of Rabbi Amnon, who was the rabbi of Metz, in the days of Bishop Ercembud (1011-1017). Rabbi Amnon was of an illustrious family, of great

personal merit, rich and respected by Jew and Gentile alike. The bishop frequently pressed him to abjure Judaism and embrace Christianity, but without avail. It happened, however, on a certain day, being more closely pressed than usual and somewhat anxious to be rid of the bishop's importunities, he said hastily: 'I will consider the matter and give thee an answer in three days.'

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"As soon as he had left the bishop's presence, however, his heart smote him and an uneasy conscience blamed him for having, even in the remotest manner, doubted his faith. He reached home overwhelmed with grief. Meat was set before him, but he refused to eat, and when his friends visited him he declined their proffered consolation, saying: 'I shall go down mourning to the grave.'

"On the third day, while he was still lamenting his rash concession, the bishop sent for him, but he failed to answer the call. Finally the bishop's messengers seized him and brought him before the prelate by force. 'Let me pronounce my own doom for this neglect,' answered Amnon. 'Let my tongue, which uttered these doubting words, be cut out. It was a lie I uttered, for I never intended to consider that proposition.'

"'Nay,' said the bishop, 'I will not cut out thy tongue, but thy feet, which refused to come to me, shall be cut off, and other parts of thine obstinate body shall also be tormented and punished.'

"Under the bishop's eyes the toes and thumbs of Rabbi Amnon were then cut off, and after having been severely tortured he was sent home in a carriage, his mangled members beside him. Rabbi Amnon bore all this with greatest resignation, firmly hoping and trusting that his earthly torment would plead his pardon with God. The days of awe came round while he was on his death bed, and he desired to be carried to the synagogue. He was conveyed to the house of God, and during the services he asked that he be permitted to utter a prayer. His words, which proved to be the last, given in English, are somewhat as follows:

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"I will declare the mighty holiness of this day, for it is awful and tremendous. Thy kingdom is exalted thereon; Thy throne is established in mercy, and upon it Thou dost rest in truth. Thou art the judge who chastiseth, and from Thee naught may be concealed. Thou bearest witness, writest, sealest, recordest and rememberest all things, aye those which we imagine buried in the past. The Book of Records Thou openest; the great sophor is sounded; even the angels are terrified and they cry aloud: "The day of judgment dawns upon us," for in judgment they, the angels, are not faultless.

"All who have entered the world pass before Thee. Even as the shepherd causes the flock he numbers to pass under his crook, so Thou, O Lord, causest every living soul to pass before Thee. Thou numberest, thou visitest, appointing the limitations of every creature according to Thy judgment and Thy sentence.

"On the New Year it is written, on the Day of Atonement it is sealed. Aye, all Thy decrees are recorded; who is to live and who is to die. The names of those who are to meet death by fire, by water, or by sword; through hunger, through thirst, and with the pestilence. All is recorded; those who are to have tranquillity; those who are to be disturbed; those who are to be troubled; those who are to be blessed with repose; those who are to be prosperous; those for whom affliction is in store; those who are to become rich, those who are to be poor; who exalted, who cast down. But penitence, prayer and charity, O Lord, may avert all evil decrees.'

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"When he had finished this declaration, Rabbi Amnon expired, dying in God's house, among the assembled sons of Israel.

"I can never forget these prayers, nor these days, go where I will, do what I may," Keidansky continued. "Did you say something about free thought, the higher criticism, universal religion, the law of evolution, the study of comparative religion, the absurdity of superstition? Come, let us go over to yonder house; the cantor and his choir are now singing 'Unsana Taukeff.'"

And I followed him.

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## XI

### Why the World Is Growing Better

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"The world is growing better than it ever was before," said Keidansky; "we no longer practise what we preach." And before I had time to recover from my surprise and utter any protest, he hastily continued in his exasperating manner: "We still believe in certain doctrines, hold certain theories, advocate certain ideas, preach certain gospels; but we feel different and act much better when it comes to real life. We are far wiser in adjusting our acts to our ends, or rather our deeds are more wisely adjusted to our aims than we know. We do not desecrate these principles we entertain by putting them into practice. We don't feel like doing so. We let the abstractions float above us as vapor in the air. We have human instincts, good motives, noble longings, and our conduct is fairly decent in spite of our conflicting codes.

"From a thousand pulpits we are told to do this, that, and the other; a thousand theories would divide our paths in life; a thousand methods of salvation are presented to us by the only and original authorized agents from on high; but our humanity makes us all akin, our instincts guide

us and our yearnings lure us all the same way to perdition and to happiness; and we follow after and pave the way for the ideal world. How widely, vastly different our religious and moral beliefs and our abstractions are. And yet, how nearly alike, how similarly we all act and perform our parts in the world's work. We still differ, dispute and debate over the future, the trend and ultimate aim of things; but we no longer allow these differences to prevent us from acting in unison and harmony in all things that are conducive to our better development and chief good. A dozen men cannot agree upon a Church, so they form another trust; and, aiding the industrial growth of the country, they work out their own salvation, and in the course of time endow colleges and build mansions and pay fabulous sums for great paintings, and even feed the beggars that live on theology. These men agree on one thing, and that is most important of all.

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"As I said, we still listen to and believe in many of the crude, incongruous and misty creeds that are preached to us, but we walk upon more solid ground when it comes to life, and all that we want to make of it—which is the most possible. We build wiser than we know, and we disobey the preachers because we can rise above them, do better, and put their advice to shame. Have we discarded the book? Well, we have followed life; and see, this world is quite inhabitable now. That we differ in theology, on legends, myths, is a trifle, but that we agree on the education of the young, hygiene, athletic exercise, morning walks, cold baths, pure diet, music, pictures: that we agree on the value of all these things makes the game worth the candle.

"For instance, we are perpetually urged to, and we half believe it best to, renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, forfeit all the joys of life, and join the Society for the Prevention of Anything; but in actuality, we are all strenuously engaged in capturing the world, in gratifying the flesh and in getting as much devil into us as is possible in the pitifully brief span of this short life. This is absolutely necessary. The more devil within us the better. A man with no devil in him will not go to heaven, or any other pleasurable resort. By doing and daring and deviling we become strong, and if the world is better to-day than it ever was before, which it certainly is, it is because we no longer practise what we preach—have nearly always practised better. If man did not do things, and do them so much better, sermons would never become obsolete; but as it is, loads of them have to be dumped in some swamp every little while.

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"We have also been advised as to the beautiful virtues of humility, meekness, timidity, obedience, submission, self-effacement, self-suppression, wiping yourself off the face of the earth with benzine and a rag, and we have believed in the advice, but fortunately only believed; for a voice from within prompted us to feel and be different and do more wisely. So we cultivated haughtiness, pride, aggressiveness, have given free play to our physical and spiritual forces, have become conscious of our powers, and more powerful still, and the phantom of freedom is becoming a fact and the world is growing fair. We walk with our heads erect nowadays, no matter what conception we have in our minds. We have become so arrogant that we even question the divine right of bishops and policemen. We take off our hats for nothing, known or unknown. No matter what we believe, we feel that obsequiousness is the most disgraceful word in the dictionary. Then we are becoming so self-appreciative and selfish that we refuse to let others save us. The salvation of a soul is a rather delicate matter, and it cannot be done at short order while you wait, by all those whose advertisements we have read. It is not quite so easy a matter as it is to find a watchmaker to put your timepiece into good repair. In fact, we are growing so egoistic that we want to do it ourselves. We no longer want any mark-down bargains, such as salvation for a prayer, a fish dinner or ninety-eight cents in charity. We feel the fraud of bribing our way into heaven. Those are cheated most who get their things cheaply. It is the height of impudence and imbecility to think that putting on a long face, or some other act of piety or penance, will change your destiny, and incidentally, the course of the universe. At least, we feel that these things are wrong, no matter what we think. Life or death or immortality, a man must pay his rent. Everything has its price. What you get for nothing is worth the same. The theological bargains will not wear well at all. You must pay honestly and fairly for everything you receive, and for all you become. What we procure for nothing is not worth while. We are only cheating ourselves miserably when we attempt to get what is best through bribes and pass through the gates on false pretences. Whatever we have been told, we feel that we cannot follow the newspaper advertisements in these things and buy redemption at closing-out bargain sales. No one can grow for another, no one can acquire, no one can become for another, no one can be saved by proxy or buy salvation. Each must work and suffer and struggle his way up.

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"I see that you are a little incredulous about these things," he said, after a short silence. "Do you find it hard to follow me? I know exactly what I mean, only the difficulty lies in making you see it as I do. No; don't be in haste. Let's walk a little more. I am afraid your education is being sadly neglected; I haven't talked at you for some time. No; I never hasten. Whenever I am in a great hurry to get to a place of the most urgent necessity I walk into a second-hand book store, like those on Fourth avenue, and look at the titles and read the prefaces of old and odd volumes. Never mind the swarming, surging, scurrying crowds. They are attending to the world's business, and make it possible for me to be idle and look on.

"But what I was driving at is this: That there is one life and many theories of it, that most of these theories are a disgrace even to Sunday schools, that it's all hitting the nail on the finger. While these theories would have us go by various little walks and byways and lanes and alleys, life prompts us to take to the open road that leads to strength and happiness. While these theories would have us thwart and stifle and starve our desires, life forces us to give them full play in spite of all conventions and creeds, and the result is civilization and all its blessings. Way down into the recesses of our souls we are so deeply religious that we all do better than we believe.

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"Take three children of different birth; send them to three different schools, instruct them in three different religions, and then, will they not, when they grow up, work and aim and struggle and trade and worry and aspire and get dyspepsia—in short, live and die in very much the same way, and more or less fairly and squarely? Inasmuch as their morals will be useful, will they not be of the same brand? Will they not do better than they respectively believe? There are other illustrations. The leading orthodox rabbi of this city naturally believes in the restoration of Palestine, the regeneration of Judaism, the resurrection of the Hebrew language, and the resuscitation of many things long dead and passed away. In his speeches he is a most ardent advocate of the revival of Hebrew lore, the essence of all wisdom according to him, and the greatest of all tongues, the Hebrew language, which revival, he avers, is the most radiant promise of Zionism. The neglect of the ancient lore in this country is his most woful regret. But his own son he sends to Harvard for a modern education, and the son will become a man of the world and a useful, valuable member of society because his father did better than he believed.

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"A year hence in Jerusalem,' cries the pious Hebrew at the close of his holiday prayer, and then, as soon as the festival is over he buys himself a little house, pays \$800 down, raises two mortgages and, trusting in God, he hopes to pay up the entire sum in about ten years, and he and his family are happier and this country is richer and better for their being here. 'A year hence in Jerusalem,' and here we are doing what we can for our own good and for the good of whatever country we abide in, and all of us are well because we act better than we preach and believe. Most of us believed in the colonization of Palestine when we were way back in Russia, yet we came over here feeling that this is the new promised land. Palestine may be a good place for the old to die in, if the superstition is true that the worms will not touch your corpse there, but I don't think it is a promising country for the young to live in. The land that was once flowing with milk and honey now lacks water. No, I don't know in what part of New York they make the Passover wine that they bring from Palestine.

"I am somewhat of a Zionist myself, as you know, but as soon as I can afford it, as soon as my Yiddish play is produced and the New York critics condemn it to a financial success, I will send for my little brother to come from Russia to this country, and as there is no genius in our family, I am sure he will do very well here. Yet I believe in the restoration of Palestine, and so long as the Zionists permit me to live in this country I am willing to support their movement.

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"And, let's see, there 's something else. I want to fix you up so that you will never again come to me with that hackneyed plaint that the world is going to the dogs because we do not practise what we preach. We have laws and we all preach against intermarriage, do we not? We all condemn the intermarriage of Jew and Christian, of Protestant and Catholic, of chorus girl and rich college student, of an actress and a minister; we prohibit these things and perhaps rightly, and yet—"

"And yet?" I asked anxiously.

"Do not be alarmed," he answered quickly; "I am not going to advocate intermarriage or assimilation. By this time you will, perhaps, have gathered from what I said that I do not much believe in measures that have to be advocated; rather do I favor the things that heart and soul prompt us to do, whatever our beliefs and theories and in spite of them. The advocacy of a thing, or the supposed necessity of advocating a certain measure, proves the uselessness, untimeliness and futility of it. It is hardly wise to advocate anything. Things must be brought about by conditions to be of vital import. Least of all should any one ever advocate intermarriage, and yet, and yet—do you remember these lines?

*"Two shall be born the whole wide world apart,  
And speak in different tongues and have no thought  
Each of the other's being, and no heed.  
And these over unknown seas to unknown lands  
Shall cross, escaping wreck, defying death,  
And all unconsciously shape every act  
And bend each wandering step to this one end,  
That one day, out of darkness they shall meet  
And read life's meaning in each other's eyes."*

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"Yes," he concluded, as we were about to part, "the world is growing better than it ever was before—and it isn't because we have a more efficient police force either."

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## XII

### Home, the Last Resort

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"There is no place like home," said Keidansky, "and there's nothing like running away from it."

"What is the matter with the home?" I asked.

"Nothing," he answered, "except that very often everything is. You are surprised?" he continued. "That's promising. Somehow when I see you shocked it makes me feel as if I am saying

something, and I am encouraged to go on. What do I mean? Just this:

"There is no place that is so small, petty and narrow as the home is; there is no place so close, cramped and crowded; so limited, restricted and tape-measured. There's no place where there is such agreement, unity and uniformity; where there is so much subordination, subjection and coöppression—if you will pardon the coining of a word—as in the home; no place where there is such conformity of opinion, speech and action; where there is so much dependence, interdependence and inter-domination; where so much good advice is given you, so many high examples set up and so many paragons of perfection presented to you; no place where there's so much upholding of old standards and so little scope for building new ones; where respectability is regarded with such reverence and the neighbors' say held so sacred; no place so lacking initiative, so barren of originality, so devoid of daring—no place where you are so tenderly cared for, so kindly comforted, so closely watched, and so grossly misunderstood as the home. It is the most dangerous place in the world.

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"No, do not interrupt me—I know just what you are going to say. Let me state it for you—while I am at it. What I said is blasphemy, of course, and what you want to say is that the home is the garden where all our virtues flower and bloom; that it is the foundation of our morals, the birthplace of our highest ideals, the great character-builder, the school of patriotism, the source of true religion, the protector of our national life, the benign soul-uplifter, the place where goodness and purity flourish, and the place where the best principles are manufactured. I know just what you are going to say because I, too, have heard some sermons and have read some after-dinner speeches in my life. And I do not say that these utterances are altogether misleading. There is some good, I doubt not, in a sermon and some shadow of truth even in an after-dinner speech. But because the home has ever been the subject of indiscriminate encomiums and puffy panegyrics, no one has ever dared to say anything against it. It has not been treated as a human institution, and so many crimes have been committed in its good name. It is because these beautiful things about it are, or are supposed to be, that so many of us have been sentenced to stay home without a proper trial.

"Granting even that the halo is not hollow and that home is the ideal place it is pictured to be, the admission is perhaps the strongest argument against it and for running away from it; for, in that case, the home is almost too good a place to stay in, too tame and agreeable, a nest of the neutral, a triumph of the negative, maybe, and hardly a place where you can grow, learn, enlarge and expand distinctly and in your own way. I fear me that in any case home is about the last resort where one can express his individuality and become fully equipped to grapple with the world and those who own it. Do not misunderstand me. No one intends to wage wanton war against that which is held in reverence.

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"The radical is only ahead of time because all the others are behind it. No one wishes to abolish merely for the sake of abolition. There is no satisfaction in mere annihilation. No one wishes it. Wisdom and folly have the same intention. To say that the most destructive radical and the most orthodox conservative are in perfect agreement as far as their aim is concerned will be dangerously near uttering a commonplace. Both seek well-being and happiness. There was a time when there was a little difference between the two; when one of the two parties wanted to postpone that welfare unto another life; but now, in this hasty age, both demand all that it is possible to procure here and now. There may be difference of opinion, but there is no difference of intention. The object of all is to preserve the virility of our being, the veracity of soul, the strength to do and to be. There may be a question as to my being a conservative, but there is no doubt that I am a conservator. I would conserve everything that is conducive to growth and happiness. What I believe, what I say, has this object in view. And having this in view, I realize that in the course of human events it ever and anon becomes necessary to demolish the divinities that be.

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"If I seem to attack this sacred institution it is because it has a very seamy, sore and searing side to it. In the first place there are usually parents at home. What a pity that parents and children cannot be of the same age; that there cannot be some understanding between them. What a sorrow that those who brought us into the world should have no sympathy with us—that those whom we love most should understand us least; that there should be such conflicting contrasts in feeling, in thought, in temperaments and tendencies. But regrets do not alter circumstances. They exist and they are obdurate. The old look backward: the young look forward. The old have become hardened, inured to things and indifferent: to the young this is the greatest danger. The old are relics of the past; the young are the hopeful heirs of the future. To the former life is a lost game, to the latter it is a beautiful dream. The old stand with their backs to the rising sun, with their faces towards their graves; they belong to a dying world and—the pity of it!—they would shape the destinies of those who belong to the glorious future; they would make the children prematurely wise and deprive them of most of the fun in life and all the benefits that come from folly, error and indiscretion. Age would convince youth that life is real and earnest and a practical business—which is not true in the case of youth—and should not be. There is constant disagreement, or agreement—which is often worse, for it implies submission of the weaker party. The freedom of the young is ever curtailed. The home is often their prison. Youth and age is a bad match, and that's the disadvantage of home. See this moonlight: it is beautiful, is it not? But a flower must have sunshine in which to bloom. All respect for age: but youth must have freedom.

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"I hope this is not true of many phases of life; but I am thinking now of a condition in the Ghetto that creates appalling misery, a condition that makes the home a most desirable place—to run away from. Between the Jewish children, who have acquired their uplifting education here in

American schools and their parents, who have brought their ignorance and fanaticism over from Russia—where the despotism of the throne and the tyranny of the Torah have united in making the densest, darkest Ghettos—between these children and parents there is a difference in time and progress of several hundred years. I would like to pause here and tell you about the Jewish religion—how it has enlightened the world and darkened the life of the Jews, victims of fatal fanaticism; how the world has accepted the spirit of Judaism in various forms and to its benefit, and the Jews have remained bound by a thousand rigid rituals, iron precepts, meaningless stuff about 'pots and pans,' to their awful detriment—how they persecuted themselves when they could get no Christian nation to do it for them—but there's no time to talk about these things now; besides, I want to get back to the home. So many things occur to me and I do not know what to say first. Write about it? Perhaps, some day. It may be that I, too, have been cursed to live by the sweat of my pen, but oh—I hate to write. Besides, what's the use? It is too late to convert my people to Judaism, now.

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"But what I mentioned before shows a pronounced phase of misunderstanding, estrangement and division between children and parents, also a good illustration of the bad, narrow, uncongenial home.

"Under any circumstances the old and the young are out of joint; but here the clashing of interests is so accentuated that the condition is heart-tearing. There are parents, crude, careless, callous, often essentially material, mercenary, miserly, whose only mental occupation is their blind, outlived fatalistic faith; they are Russian products, and they cannot follow, cannot comprehend their Americanized, intelligent, idealistic and aspiring boys and girls; they follow them, but blindly, praise or blame indiscriminately; they cannot appreciate the many and noble longings of these youths. No sympathy and the home stiflingly small. Yes, they love each other, if there can be any love without respect and understanding. These bright boys and girls that you meet in the Ghetto, and who do so much towards the education of slum students and settlement workers—they are what they are, not because, but rather in spite of, their parents. They struggle and strive upward alone and unaided, and also act as missionaries of civilization in their homes. They beautify their little rooms with pictures and books and trifles of art, and they play sweet music—but what is the use, I ask you, of a thought, a work of art, a poem, a piece of music, if you cannot share it with those who are near and, somehow, are dear to you. What is the use of these things if you cannot share them with some one? And what is to be done when there is no response at home? These children are so lonely in their sorrows and in their joys, and the home is so compressed, so 'kleinlich,' so 'eng' (only these German words can give my meaning). How terrible to see the grandeur of the universe and have no one to tell it to! How awful this yawning gulf in the Ghetto! If I say harsh and bitter things it is because I have looked into it and seen an appalling spectacle of crushed hearts, broken spirits, blighted hopes, ruined lives, thwarted beings and stifled souls. I have looked into the gulf, and this is why I want to jest about the holiest things in the world.

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"But speaking generally, home is a dangerous place, and he was a wise sea captain who bribed his son—clandestinely gave him \$50—to run away from home. While away the youth will come in contact with realities, learn what the world is, what it demands, and finally become big enough to build his own home. Or, he will come back to be, at last, understood and respected. But let him go forth. He will find everywhere pie that will give him dyspepsia as badly as that which mother used to make.

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"As it is, the home covers a multitude of sins. It is very faulty, and, above all, it lacks perspective. The persons within it are not seen in the proper light. They are either underestimated or overjudged. Home is either a mutual admiration, or a mutual mutilation, society. Close as the home is there is ever plenty of room for prejudice and illusion. The lights in which things are seen are artificial—and so are the subjects. If the child is a mediocrity, has graduated at the head of his class and is a veritable phonograph for remembering facts, he is at once regarded as a genius and not a little time and effort is wasted on him, and he is sent forth to bore and prey upon an innocent world; but if he have real talent and show it before any one has had time to decide that he has it, his wings are clipped immediately and he is forthwith cast down and discouraged. But there is always enough appreciation of talent to discover a mediocrity. Home is the nest of nefarious nepotism, and between that and disparaging prejudice, countless youths go to the devil. The home judgments as to capacities, aptitudes and abilities are tremendous. If a boy is color-blind, he is born to be a painter; if he has no sense of proportion, why architecture is his sphere; if he stammers, he is placed upon a chair, made to recite pieces, and hailed as the coming orator; if he is a little bit hard of hearing, they dedicate his life to music; if he has absolutely no imagination, they say history is his field; they try to make a lawyer of him when he has a wonderful proclivity for telling the truth, a merchant when he has a fine sense of honesty—and, by heaven, they want to make a minister of a fellow who has a sense of humor! One must leave home to find what he can do; and then do it; and then come back and do what one can for the education and welfare of his parents. Leave your home that you may suffer hardships and learn, and then come back to cheer the old folks up. Forgive them for what they have done to you with their sincerity and devotion—and build your own home. But run away for awhile if you would grow. It is too narrow and the atmosphere is not healthy. There is ever disparagement, disagreement and fatal favoritism. No son ever walked in the ways of his father; no father ever wanted him to do otherwise. There is always someone at home who knows what is best for you, only you don't want to mind. But, oh, the tyranny of tears, the despotism of tender words, and the fearful sincerity of the intentions to do you good! All inquisitors have been sincere. There is no need of arguing that there is something radically wrong with the average home. Conditions prove

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it. We are, most of us, running away from home to get acquainted with things as they are—running away to the tune of 'Home, Sweet Home.' Even as we hum the sweet melody, we go forth into life to get some education, make our fortunes, and build our own homes. Do you remember 'Die Heimath,' and how Magda is tortured by home and loving parents? It's the same argument that Sudermann presented in this play, and again, in 'Die Ehre,' he showed us phases of the home."

There was silence for a space, and then Keidansky continued: "Homes of a thousand tender memories clustering from the cradle up through all the paths of life; homes of kind deeds and unforgotten words; homes wherein love and freedom are wedded, wherein the most beautiful dreams are born; homes wherein folks look into each other's eyes and understand, wherein there are no clouds of suspicion and misunderstanding, and each one is taken at his worth; homes unblighted by cold wisdom, wherein the old are young and the young are old—I have heard—I have read—of such homes."

The pale moonlight streamed into the open window of the attic. The disorderly piles of books, heaps of old papers and magazines, the queer little pictures about the walls, the small table with a confusion of all things mentionable upon it—all these presented a strange picture in this dimness. Keidansky sat on his bed, his head leaning against the inclined ceiling.

It was this sense of home and comfort that prompted his remarks on the subject. In the dusk the faces in the little pictures seemed to listen attentively and change expression as he talked so fervidly. I sat in the only chair in the room—thinking, wondering. I felt pensive.

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"An extreme view, eh?" my friend asked after awhile, and he answered: "Perhaps it is.

"And that reminds me," he added, "that you once said that my apparent mission in life is to throw stones. Well, granting that it is, who shall say that my task is not as important as any?"

And I, drowsily, absently, also asked, "Who shall say?"

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### XIII

#### A Jewish Jester

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They were telling stories of Motke Chabad, the jester, who many years ago lived, moved and had his joke on everybody in the city of Wilna, where he was well known (but not so well liked) as the troublesome town clown. After nearly everybody in one group at Zarling's had contributed a Chabad yarn to the general entertainment, the question arose as to whether there ever really existed such a personage as the redoubtable Motke. He had said and done so many impossible things that it became a matter of wonder whether he had said and done them at all. So daring were his utterances, so strange his adventures, his queer pranks so preposterous, that he was considered by some to be an imaginary character. He possessed those vices of individuality which art raises to the dignity of virtues. He had become a tradition, and so a matter of doubt and speculation. This last was clear at our discussion. The poet suggested that, whether Motke ever existed or not, he was certainly a great humorist. But even this did not satisfy us. We were bent upon investigation. The medical student made a motion that we ask Zarling, who is a native of Wilna and at least has known some one who knew Chabad; but here Keidansky protested. "Do not ask any one," he said, "who has known, or known of, him closely; his description would be too familiar, intimate, personal, and it would mar and discolor the halo that tradition had cast about him. No, do not ask the Czar, for he knows too much about him and those who were near our hero never understood his significance. You must have perspective to see the picturesque, even as you must be a poet to see that which does not exist. It is only for the blind that an eye-witness can write history. Artistically speaking, the closer you get to life the less you know about it. Realism fails because it takes the existence of reality for granted. Because it becomes systematic and too sure of its subject. Those who have known, those who have touched elbows with Chabad or his brother's grandchildren, will be accurate, but not truthful. To describe a person truly, one must include all its infinite possibilities of failure or success—what he might have been, what he longed to be, what he could not be with his given conditions, what he was not, what he was believed to be, etc., and he who has decided all about the exact measure of a person cannot fathom his possibilities. We are all so sure of the conditions of contemporary life that it will take a succeeding generation to know all about it.

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"And I am not trying to hinder the work of this investigation, because it may prove the non-existence of Chabad. That would not matter in the least, for the anecdotes and tales that are being circulated in his name, and his storied misadventures and gloried misdeeds create him in fancy and he exists in imagination—which is all that is necessary for one desiring to point out the benign and malignant work of the scoffer. But he did exist, so we are told by those who have known some one who knew him intimately. He did exist, because, while we have superfluous virtues to attribute to all sorts of saints who did live, we have not a superfluity of humor to ascribe to one who has never been. Some one must have given birth to these things which we can all admire but could not create. Some one must have been witty enough to think these things, and reckless enough to say them. We all have the convictions, but he had the courage, and that was long ago.

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"He did exist, this beggar, braggart, buffoon, town-gossip, dealer in wind and old clothes, match-maker, man of all occupations and no means of existence, practical joker and general jester of the Ghetto of Wilna; for such he was and as such he did his good work. He was an outcast, and as such he ministered to the sanity of society that hath cast him out, and kept it from going to the extremes of stupidity. For so it is; the outcast reduces respectability to the ridiculous; the criminal points to the futility of the law; the rascal shows the relativity of right; the infidel reforms and enlarges our religion; the enemy of order advances our progress; the earthly materialist proves the baselessness of all our idealisms; the ascetic demonstrates the stupidity of excess; the prohibitionist drives us to drink; the strongest accusation convicts the accuser; the

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plaint of the pessimist makes life interesting; the tyrant gives the greatest lesson in freedom; men write books to prove what fools they are, and the jester suggests what a tragic farce it all is. So many efforts in life, life itself defeats its own purpose. It is the undesired that happens. Help comes not from heaven because we expect it from that source. They who break laws to suit their own convenience make larger laws for the welfare of society. I told you before that the outcasts of society are often its saviors.

"Now be in order, gentlemen. I have the floor this time. This is my chance to get killed. Not to the point? But there are many points to this, and if I have deviated from one I was only getting so much nearer the other. I was trying to show what good this scoffer and sycophant has done, and to point out the value of the jest. God created the world and he saw what he was 'up against,' so he smiled, and thus humor was born. After awhile the divine flashlights from on high began to play hide-and-seek in the unlit chambers of the human brain; men became possessed of the sense of humor, and this was the awakening and dawn of civilization. The lightnings of the mind which suddenly reveal the multitudinous contradictions of life, the mental illuminations which cause the immediate recognition of the incongruous, the flash which makes you see all in a moment, the wide view which makes the universe as small as the lantern in your hand, the whimsicality of thought forever creating unsuspected analogies and unexpected comparisons, the sense of proportion which reduces all things to what they are, or should be, truth seen through the falsehoods, the sureties discovered through the absurdities, the exactness of things measured through their exaggerations, miracles of instantaneous reasoning and feats of ingenious deductions, the intellectual rapid transit between the sublime and the ridiculous, which keeps you from going to either extreme, the magic charm which keeps you above the abysses of the stupid, small and great, the bright footlights to the tragedy of life—such, in brief, is humor. And what else is there that is so powerful to prevent extravagances, to check excesses, to arrest all sorts of frenzies, to curtail abnormal credulity, to sober all kinds of intoxications? In the Ghetto, as everywhere else, humor is the saving presence; it makes existence tolerable, and preserves the sanity of the little journey to the grave. It was dark and dismal and dreary and dingy in the Russian Ghettos, and life had the color of last year's snow, and it all seemed like a funeral procession in a sultry, rainy weather; from without we were harassed by our enemies; from within we were harried by our friends, our guardians of sacred law and traditional superstition; it was sad and sorrowful, and so we jested. God sent us some sunshine in the form of such scoffers and outcasts as Motke Chabad, and we laughed. We laughed and forgot to weep. Humor is essentially pathetic, but the absence of it is tragic. Did we not laugh a little we could not have lived. Humor, my friends, is the redeeming grace. If you have ever been very serious in life, why, you can laugh it down. What shall we do to be saved? Cultivate a sense of humor.

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"How could we have lived it through without a Chabad? With a smug, smooth, sullen, soulless respectability that moves along the lines of least daring and most obedience, that cannot do any good because it must fulfil the *Taryag Mitzves*—the 313 precepts—that commit all sorts of prescribed follies on earth to be admitted into heaven, that divides its time between praying in the synagogue three times a day and preying upon its less fortunate neighbors the rest of the time, with a mob of skull-capped numskulls that did not think because its mind was made up—has been made up for it centuries ago—a crowd that would not move an inch because, as is insisted, 'the hell that was good enough for our fathers, is good enough for us'—with a class of good people like that, how should we have fared if we had not had a Motke to chastise it with his jests and jeers and sneers and arrows of scorn? He laughed with the lowly and for them; he was on the side of reason as against precept; he stood for natural needs as against supernatural suppositions; he was one of the under-dogs, but he barked loudly for their cause, and his service shall not be forgotten as long as we have a sense of humour left—as long as we are human! Crude were his jests, and clownish most of his jokes; did he have the talent of a Heine or Bürne, he could not be what they were without their possibilities; he was a rough-hewn, Ghetto-enclosed child of darkness, but he did his work in his own way, and the work told the story.

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"God has spoiled his chosen people by choosing them. Many of them are stiff-necked, stubborn, reactionary; and they do countless things in the name that would not countenance it. As often as not the powers that be in Jewish communities are haughty, proud, unjustly aggressive, and they prey upon and oppress the humbler children of Israel. It is well that there should ever be some one constantly to criticise, castigate, scold, and Carlyle these powers that be and guard and interpret the law. So, in a sense, every good Jew should be an anti-Semite. He should beware of the abuses of organized bureaucracy by leaders of the community. He should be opposed to the inimical doings of the united many. United action is seldom good action. The individual should look out for the crowd. In organization, every one gives up part of his soul, and so even organized religions are soulless. So let the good Jew keep an eye on what the leaders in Judaism are doing, and to make sure that he is right, let him put his ear to the ground and listen to the voice of the rejected prophet and blasphemous jester.

"Many stories of Chabad have been told, but a few things may be mentioned to help me out of my poor plight, to illustrate my meaning. Thus, once upon a stormy day, when the rain and thunder and lightning became fearful and awesome, Motke was seen running through a street of Wilna, at his greatest possible speed, frantically waving his hands. A few Jews witnessing this, and overtaking him, stopped him, demanding what the trouble was. 'Such terrible thunder and lightning,' said he, all out of breath; 'I fear me that the Almighty is about to give us a new Law!' Here is a blessed bit of blasphemy which strikingly voices the protest of a law-entangled, ritual-ridden, tradition-tied people against the grinding yoke of the Torah. There is a story by another Ghetto jester, driving at the same evil. There came a time once—so the story runs—when the children of Israel became weary of this heavy yoke, when they could no longer live up to the laws forced upon them amid the dramatic effects of Sinai, when they could no longer bear all the sufferings and persecutions that living up to these laws entailed, and they prayed to God that they might be delivered from the Law, that they might be permitted to return to him the Tables of Stone; and the Uppermost consented to take it all back; and so, upon a day, the Jews from all corners of the earth started on a journey toward Mount Sinai, with heavy-laden trains and ships and caravans of scrolls and Biblical Commentaries. They came from all parts of the world—from East and West, North and South, from the Occident and the Orient; there were all manner of Jews, and they came by all means of transportation, but they all labored painfully under their tremendous loads, which they brought to be returned. At Sinai, they were to give up their burdens. Arrived there, they piled up their great packs of 'precept upon precept' around the holy elevation, until their luggage formed a mountain larger than Sinai. When the Uppermost appeared in his invisible, yet blinding glory, he asked for the meaning of this huge mountain of books, and the Jews, with their faces to the ground, cried, 'It is the Law. Take it, O Lord.' The Lord—so runs the story—was astonished at this, and he told the chosen people that only ten simple rules of living had been given to them at Sinai. He knew nothing of all these volumes. These multitudes of laws and endless commentaries were of men's making, not of his giving. They were empty vaporings of idle brains. He refused to take the Law back in its present form. So the Jews journeyed to their respective homes in all parts of the world, wiser, if not relieved of their burdens. I was irresistibly reminded of this story, and could not help telling it. It is the product of a far more subtle brain than Chabad's was. I do not remember the name of the author now, but he and Chabad unwittingly worked for the same cause."

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A boisterous group of "dancing-school fellows," as "the intellectuals" called them, entered the place, demanding, at the point of their pay, something to eat. Keidansky's audience became restless. But he persistently kept on, despite all kinds of interruptions.

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"Religion, as you all know, is the absence of the sense of humor," he said. "It goes to all sorts of absurd extremes. Its tower commands but one view of life, and that view is marred by emotion. When faith is not blind, it is, at least, short-sighted. The loyal member of the sect is not a seer. Enthusiasts are painfully one-sided. They see, or rather they feel, but one side. All their glances are on one thing. So we need the man with humor, who can see all things in one glance. The jester is the wide-eyed, all-observing fellow. He is the many-sided, much-seeing man. The sense of humor is the true sense of proportion, and it has been rightly urged that only the humorists have perceived and painted life as it is. Only they have presented life in all its largeness. Of course, the humorists, who merely chose to jest and not write great tragedies, did not do such things, but they were ever great reformers. The man who laughs can be deeply religious without being a pietist: he can be deeply religious, yet behave decently; his existence is a sure cure for hysteria. He infuses a little reason into things which prevents the sublime from becoming ridiculous.

"A maggid, or preacher, once announced that he had written a new commentary upon the 'Hagadah.' 'What!' everybody asked, 'are there not enough commentaries already in existence?' 'Yes,' said Chabad, 'but he cannot make a living out of those.' At a wedding of the Jewish aristocracy of Wilna, where wealth was flaunted pompously, Motke was asked to say something funny. 'All the rich men of Wilna ought to be hanged,' he said. The wealthy guests were scandalized. 'Wherein is the joke?' they asked. 'It is no joke,' said Motke.

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"In the synagogue students of the Talmud were disputing a point concerning the use or rejection of an egg 'with a blood-drop' in it—a point to which so many pages of the holy books are devoted. 'Why don't you throw the rotten egg out?' said Motke, who stood near. 'What's the use of wasting so much time?'

"Once, it is told, when all his resources were at an end, Chabad went to the burial committee of the town, told the members that his wife had died and asked for the means of performing the last rites and ceremonies. He accordingly secured a few roubles, and when the committee-men and their officials came to take charge of the body, they found Motke, his wife and children, at their table enjoying a bountiful feast of roasted goose and things.

"Gentlemen,' exclaimed the master of the household, 'you will have her; I swear to you, you will have her. She is yours; it is only a question of time.'

"Fare thee well,' said Motke one day to a rich merchant. 'I am going away, and all I want of you is a few roubles for expenses.' His request was refused. 'Then I am not going,' he announced, 'and you need not fare well.' Chabad was also a match-maker, and his humor made him the best caricature of the institution. Thus once he came to a young man to speak of a match with a certain young woman. 'Oh, but she is lame,' protested the young man. 'Yes,' Chabad admitted, 'but that will keep her home, and prevent her from going out too much.' 'But she is blind,' the

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young man argued. 'So much the better,' said the *shadchen*; 'she will not see you flirting with other women.' 'She is also deaf,' insisted the youth. 'That is certainly fortunate,' was the reply; 'you will be able to say what you please in the house.' 'But she is also dumb,' pleaded the victim. 'Still better,' Motke assured him. 'There will always be quiet and peace in your home.' 'But she is also humpbacked!' the young man cried out in anger. 'Well, well,' said Chabad, 'do you expect her to be without a single fault?' Now I am almost ready for the maledictions," said Keidansky, as he was nearing the close of his argument, but I was suddenly called away.

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## XIV

### What Constitutes the Jew?

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One day when I made a perilous ascent to Keidansky's garret, barely escaping harm through boxes and barrels and darkness and things in the way, I found him hard at work on an article—this time in the English language—on "What Constitutes the Jew?" A kind and interested editor to whom I had the honor of introducing him, asked my discovery to write on the subject, and pleased with the suggestion he took it up. He motioned to an up-turned coal scuttle for a seat as I entered, and bade me take a Jewish paper and be quiet. While I waited he finished his essay. "I haven't any time to talk to you," he said, looking disconsolate and running his long fingers through his curly black hair: "I want to read you this thing I've just scribbled. There he goes again—" he broke off in despair, as the old man in the next attic began to chant the Psalms. "But I shall read louder than he does," said Keidansky, "I pay rent here—sometimes—and King David, the fruit vendor, in there, sha'n't put me down." I listened, and he read as follows:

"And after we have read about him in the comic weeklies, have seen him delineated in popular works of fiction, have observed him caricatured in various publications, have beheld him portrayed on the vaudeville stage and have heard from the slum student of the Ghetto; after we have visited a few money lenders—on important business—have heard our minister talk patronizingly of him, telling pityingly of how he hath a great past and possessed more than a few commendable qualities, and of how he was, alas! doomed to damnation because he would not accept the religion that he hath given to the world; after we have bought clothing in one of his stores, taken a personal peep at the Ghetto, met a reformed rabbi, conversed with a distant descendant of his people, read the polite charges of his friend, the anti-Semite, and gone down and made beautiful speeches before him prior to the election; I say even after we have done these things, or some of these things have happened to us, we must still ask the question: What constitutes the Jew?"

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"For, of a verity, he is so complex in his character, so heterogeneous in his general composition, so diverse in his activities, so many sided in his worldly and heavenly pursuits, so widely varying in his appearance, so wonderfully ubiquitous, and withal such a living contradiction, that even after we have made the above painful efforts to understand him, we are still at a loss to know—what we know about him.

"He represents one of the ancient races and yet is as up to date as any; he reaches deepest into the past and looks furthest into the future; he is the narrowest conservative and the most advanced radical; in religion he is the most dogmatic, sectarian, stationary, orthodox, and also the most liberal and universal reformer; he is a member of the feeblest and strongest people on earth; he has no land of his own and he owns many lands; his wealth is the talk and the envy of the world, and none is so poor as he; his riches have ever been magnified and exaggerated, his dire poverty ever overlooked. 'As poor as a Jew' would be a truer simile than the one now in use. He is the infamous Shylock, the money-lender, yet he borrows as much and more money than he lends to others, only he pays his debts and so there is no talk about it; Christians and others who borrow from him go to court, denounce him, call him Shylock, and give him several pounds of 'tongue,' though he asks not for flesh, because it is not 'kosher,' and because whatever he is he is never cruel. Come to think of it, what a fine thing the Shylock story has ever been for those who did not want to pay their debts!"

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"He loans money to kings, and the kings oppress the Jews; he is the great concentrator of wealth, and he is the Socialist and Anarchist working ardently for the abolition of the private ownership of wealth; he is eminently practical, and is ever among the world-forgetting dreamers, 'the great host of impracticables'; he has no fine arts of his own, and he carries off the highest prizes for his glorious contribution to the arts of the nations. Now he is exclusively confined to his own Hebrew, religious lore, believing that beyond it there are no heights to scale, no depths to fathom, and then he becomes a Georg Brandes, a great interpreter of the literatures of the world; his own literature is so Puritanical, so religious and chaste that there is hardly a single love song to be found therein, and then comes a Heinrich Heine. He is the slave of traditions and the first to break them; persecute him and he will die for the religion of his fathers; give him freedom and he will pity them for their crude conceptions and applaud Ingersoll; he is intensely religious and the rankest infidel; he condemns the theatre as being immoral, and he is the first to hail Ibsen and applaud him, even on the Yiddish stage; there is no one so clannish and so cosmopolitan as he is, and these contrasts can be multiplied to the abuse of time and space.

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"If, then, he is everything and to be found anywhere, to be seen in all sorts of circumstances, in all walks of life and walking in so many diverse ways, making his way in such strongly contrasting

conditions, how shall we know him? How shall we know what constitutes the Jew? He does not always abide in the Ghetto, and, things are coming to such a pass, that he rarely has the old Ghetto appearance. I suppose if our dear Mr. Zangwill had his own way he would fill the world with Ghettos. He could use them in his business. But perhaps the time is drawing nigh when we must have the books of Mr. Zangwill and other works of such excellence to preserve the most picturesque life of a unique people and save it from oblivion. The Ghetto walls are falling, falling.

"Old-fashioned folk, like other things, go out of fashion. The old-style long garb, the 'capota,' will take itself away after the toga, and such is the awful power of civilization that even the time-honored skull-caps of the men and the wigs of the women are vanishing before it. Time, with its scythe, cuts down even the curling sidelocks and the long beards dear to tradition. Up-to-date fashion is a democratic tyrant, an expansionist invading and permeating all places and peoples. So we cannot count on these externals. Physiognomy is another thing by which to be misguided. Other outer details may help us as much as medicine can help the dead—or the living, for that matter. Then there are names. What's in a name? An opportunity for misunderstanding. One cannot even know himself by his name. All these artificial designations do not designate.

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"What, then, are the telling traits, the conspicuous characteristics by which the typical, representative Jew may be known? Now I am blissfully ignorant of anthropology, and could not analyze scientifically, even at the risk of being destroyed critically. But through a certain accident—an accident of birth—I may be enabled to make a few suggestions, which I will offer with all due and undue apologies, of course.

"First and foremost I should mention his wonderful versatility; he is the most versatile actor in this play called life. He has acquired this versatility throughout his wanderings, sufferings, trials and tribulations, and, together with his prodigious adaptability, it constitutes the secret of his survival. Originally a being of the highest talent with the radiant glow of the Orient upon his brow, he had walked through the histories of many nations, and being persecuted by all peoples who recognized his talent, he received a most liberal education in the school of sorrow. Thus his abilities were cultivated and he learned to adapt himself easily to all circumstances and to create his own little world wherever he pitched his tent.

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"Mentally alert, keen of comprehension, quick to grasp any situation, almost too shrewd to be wise, practical to the detriment of his high ideals, calm, careful, cautious, calculating, hopeful in the face of despair, optimistic to a discouraging degree, often too regular and respectable to become great; intensely individualistic, proud of his past, anxious about the future, ever devoted to his cause, self-appreciatory, at times too sure of his capabilities, confident in the ultimate decency of things, deeply in love with life—these are among the qualities that may be attributed to the Jew.

"His isolated, peculiar and purely religious life, 'the spiritual Palestine' which he has carried along with him in his wanderings through the darkness and cold of the Ghettos, has under all circumstances and in all hazards preserved those fine domestic and social qualities for which he is noted. What can now be said about his domesticity, his love of home and care of family; his sobriety, thrift, peacefulness and good deportment, the readiness with which he cares for his poor, his public spirit in the interests of his community—wherever that may be—his unequalled kindness; what can now be said about these things would be mere repetition; but these are nevertheless some of the undisputed qualities which constitute the Jew. Believing himself chosen of God, he has strong faith in the part he plays, the work he does, and the mission he is to perform with his being. And like others who have much faith in themselves, he has abundance of conceit. But let us not call it that. 'Sublime egotism' sounds so much better, and besides, the line of demarcation between the two is so fine that it does not exist. The Jew is strongly individualistic in his social tendencies, and for that reason often so progressive. He dares to deviate from the trodden path. He is not always in harmony with the rest of his community in which there is from time to time much discord—discord that sometimes amounts to war. Thus the persecution of the Jews often begins at home. His receptive mental attitude often brings him into the ranks of the most radical, despite his traditions, which would hold him back.

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"He has talent to waste, and much of it is really wasted because he lacks opportunity for cultivation and frequently has not the required concentration and application. Perhaps it is better so; for if all Jewish talent was brought out in the various forms of greatness, what would—what would the anti-Semites not say? They would say that the Jews have stolen their talents. For anti-Semitism is the cry of despair of defeated mediocrity, or it is the plaint of the blinded Christian maddened by jealousy because he has been beaten by the wandering Jew in his own game of trade, commerce, politics, or art. But the Jew is kind, his kindness is unsurpassed, and the Hebrew line in which his people are called 'merciful sons of the merciful' is literally true. He pities the anti-Semite as he pities all who suffer and who are in want of the good things and the good qualities of life.

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"The Jew is a great possibility. Sensitive of and susceptible to all things, to the very color of the atmosphere around him, with a soul sharpened by sorrow and a mind of keenest understanding, he can become anything and everything, assimilate himself with any and all conditions, and illustrate life with a new meaning or adorn it with a worthy work. He is like unto an Æolian harp on which various breezes play various tunes.

"His beautiful, consecrated, peaceful, religious, home life, the life wherein the home is a synagogue and the synagogue is a home, this on the one hand and the strange world with its hard

realities, with its stumbling-blocks and stunning blockheads, on the other, have created in the Jew a striking two-sidedness, a kind of duality and, if I may so call it, a sort of conciliation between the ideal and the real. This forms another trait by which you may tell him. Thus he is very practical, and still dreams, hopes for the restoration of Palestine, and loves his home and his country wherever he abides. He is an ardent Zionist and a good citizen at the same time.

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"Murder, or any other kind of talent, will out. Say rather that talent will out even if it must come in the shape of murder, so to speak. People capable of the highest good and noblest greatness are often cast down into the abyss of degradation by their loving neighbors, or other circumstances. People must live, you know, and therefore they often live a living death. Not permitted to live rightly and happily, they still must live somehow. The instinct of self-preservation preserves much evil, but life is life. Those who have talent and are not permitted to use it for the good of all, use it for their own temporal good, regardless of the consequences. The thought that I wish to leave here as we part with the Jew is: That they who walk in darkness find the ways that are dark. Over-praise is damning, and I want to be careful. The Jew has on the whole been far, far better than he has been permitted to be—and this, too, is one of the charges against him. He is a graduate of the school of sorrow, with the highest honors.

"What is that story about the man who in his long quest after the ideal, at last found her in the woman who has suffered?

"Well, here is the Jew, a being who has suffered."

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## XV The Tragedy of Humor

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"Sometimes," said Keidansky, "it is grossly immoral to live up to your highest principle." And in reply to my half-uttered protest, he quickly continued: "No, no; I am not jesting. It's a sad business, this jesting about the human tragedy. For what is it but mocking each other's wounds, laughing at one another's infirmities in this great lazaretto, where we are all pitiful patients? What is it but scoffing at our sores, grinning at our gashes, deriding our diseases, laughing at our own weaknesses? No, I am not jesting," and the speaker eyed me strangely as he looked up from his manuscript on the little table in Machtell's café.

"Beneath the levity is lead," he said slowly. "Behind all the fun is crushing failure. Behind all the satire is sorrowful shortcoming. Behind the smile is a searing smart. Grief lurks in the grin. Through all the drollery despair peers forth, and there is nothing more lugubrious than laughter. Comedy is made up of error, failure, confusion, misunderstanding, misfortune, misdirected efforts and wasted energy. Whenever error ends fatally it is called tragic, but that is not the worst. The real tragedy is not the play that ends with the death of the leading characters, but the one in which they are condemned to struggle and live on and laugh and be laughed at. Each one of us is his own caricature. There is so little to do, yet we all overdo it. We all reduce our lives to absurdities. Our efforts exaggerate their importance and betray our barbarities.

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"We overdraw our characters and all our lifetime suffer in our own estimation. The more serious we are the more extravagant is the farce. As we creep along the roads, the shadows we cast mock and menace us.

"We are poor debtors, all. With infinite intentions in a world of infinitesimal possibilities, our efforts constantly caricature and cartoon our aims. All our works are filled with comic illustrations galore. We make them ourselves, and they overshadow our works. Did you ever see any one fall on the street and a lot of lookers-on laugh? Well, that is in a measure the history and interpretation of humor.

"We seek and do not find; we fight and do not conquer; we play and do not win; we attempt, but do not achieve; we aspire and do not attain; we desire and are not gratified; we long for light yet grope on in darkness; we struggle and are defeated; we strive for salvation and discover it to be a mere sham; our labor is lost, our love is not returned, our devotion is not understood, our wings are broken at the point of flying, all our yearnings are in vain; and then, the newspaper humorist writes half a column of pointed jottings out of these things; or else the literary comedian will prepare a series of funny papers. Do you understand now what an appalling, grim and gruesome spectacle there is behind all these little jests? And how tragic it is for the humorist who sees it all? They say that a Scotchman laughs on the third day after he hears a joke. It does not take so long to find that there is nothing to laugh at. It is all so sad. Think what a tremendous tragedy the funny paragrapher sums up in a few lines and sells to 'Puck' for \$2.98. Come, take up a column of comicalities in any publication and see what is at the bottom of every jest. What is it about? Is it about a man and a woman linked together by law, with a Chinese wall of misunderstanding between them, 'so strangely unlike and so strongly attached to each other' that it is hell for both of them? Or, is it about a woman who wears her life away in the farce of 'Vanitas Vanitatum'? Is it about the greedy mercenary who loses his soul to gain the world? Or is it about one who gives up the world to gain nothing?

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"Is it about an enthusiastic youth who, to escape the materialism of his surroundings, jumps from the frying-pan into Bohemia; or is it about a philosopher who, gazing at the stars, falls into a mud

puddle? Is it about the poet starving in a garret, or is it about the artist lost in the quest of the unattainable? Is it about the moral principle trampled under foot because of the material advantage, or is it about the low life of him who longs for the highest? What is it about? Is it about a man who bleeds and a woman who laughs, or is it about beings who sell themselves for life with promises to love, honor, cherish and protect? Is it about some one groping in darkness, grappling with the impossible, or is it about a great republic gone mad over the visit of an effete representative of monarchy? Perhaps it is about a bright American girl in quest of a titled idiot, or else about a being so degraded that he is in mortal fear of work and has a horror for soap! It may be about mediocrity dreaming of talent, of failures chasing the phantoms of success, of fading beauty, waning love, of the stumbling of the blind, or of any and all the confusions of error and the thousands of misunderstandings of the home and of people who are near and fail to be dear to each other. The list is too long. It can never be exhausted. But at the bottom of any one of the jests, old or new, you will find an excruciating little tragedy. It is all so sad, sorrowful and depressing. The humor of the situation? Say rather the tragedy of the case.

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"And to look behind, to peer through the panorama, to see all this, to have a sense of humor and to have it bad, is not such a cheerful thing as it is thought to be, for it is also a sense of our hopelessness. It is a sad business, this jesting about the human tragedy—or the human farce. In other words, it is to see the futility of all our efforts, the failure of all our fighting, the uselessness of our aspirations, the emptiness of our aims, the vanity of our strivings, the nothingness of it all. Life, with all its faults and foibles and failures, with all its incongruities, irreconcilables, clashes and unfitnesses, stretches out before you as just so much material for sardonic satire. Scrambling, squabbling, scurrying, seething, squally squads and crowds of humanity, how gruesomely grotesque it all is and how ludicrous! With all its heroics, brave deeds and still greater bravadoes, with all its gloried wonders and wonderful achievements, with all its glorious boasts, lofty hopes and superb masteries, with all our arts and philosophies, humanity and the whole world seems to me like a swarming mole-hill, and at times moves me to nothing but to laughter. It is so ridiculous, all the mimicry of the whole microcosm. Tell me, have you ever been seized by a sense of the utter absurdity of it all, so that you laughed and laughed until there were tears of blood, almost, in your eyes?

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"I wonder if you know what it is to have a mocking demon within you to laugh and leer at everything you do, at every step you take, at your best deeds, finest words, greatest strides, noblest endeavors. Imagine a voice that at every turn of the road—especially when you act your grandest, talk your loudest, achieve your highest—that at every turn of the road exclaims: 'How absurd, how silly of you!' Imagine a state of mind when all is farce around you and your own caricature is your constant companion. Such things happen to some people, and to them everything is so unreal, so absurd, so stupid; the greatest events, the sublimest utterances, are ever so laughable. The more seriously the people play their parts the more ridiculous the performance seems. The greater the tragedy the more laughter. What is so funny as Hamlet's soliloquy? What are so laughable as the ravings of Job? And so it sometimes feels with the other sublimely sad things that have been written. The moving finger writes, and the mocking voice within laughs—laughs at everything and you can take nothing seriously. You take up the best, the most pathetic things you have written yourself, and even these make you smile. Such things have been said before and they were absurd and out of place—in the first place. Whatever you do you hear the mocking voice from within say: 'Silly creature, those things have been done before, and they have only led fools to their dusty death.' You whisper the sweetest things, prompted by love to your lady fair, and the voice from within: 'Silly fool, these things have been said before and the course of true love never did run long.' You have a feeling that it is all histrionic, all acting, all farce, and that we are all overdoing our parts tremendously. Strutting, swaggering, blustering, bombastic swashbucklers all. It is not life. It is an historical novel. It will sink into nothingness. '*O, Thor, du Thor, du prahlander Thor!*' Do you remember Bret Harte's parody on Hugo's '*Les Misérables*'? So easily is the sublime tipped over and made ridiculous. 'Tis but a slight step from pathos to bathos. But wait until I address this letter to the New York '*Abend Blatt*.' Abe Cahan came over here and spoke for the Socialists this afternoon, so I wrote the thing up. He is in the other room with that blatant crowd of Jewish actors. They are taking him to task for one of his reviews in the '*Arbeiter Zeitung*' of a recent performance of theirs. They never know exactly what a critic means except when he does not criticise. They are to give here Gordin's '*Jewish King Lear*' to-morrow night. You don't know Cahan? He is one of the brightest, biggest men in our movement. I come in here," Keidansky explained, "because these actors are so ignorant of the conventions, simple and natural, and I like them for it.

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"There is a story by J. L. Peretz," Keidansky continued, after he had folded up and addressed his communication, "that I want to tell you apropos of what I have been saying. Peretz is one of the literary masters of to-day, but he writes in Yiddish, so the world misses his greatness. The story is about a reformer, a revolutionary, an idealist. He addresses a meeting in behalf of his cause, speaks fervently, passionately, 'spits fire,' waves a sharp sword at his audience and makes a ringing appeal for the truth. In the room where he speaks there is a mirror. Accidentally he looks into it. He sees himself. His enthusiasm leaves him at once, his fervor vanishes, he loses his power of speech, becomes calm, indifferent, and finishes his oration in disgust. He no longer feels the saint and hero he felt. While speaking so excitedly he looked like a murderer in the mirror. After this he has an unearthly dream about the part of hell that is allotted to reformers. When he wakes up he receives a postal card asking him to come to another meeting of the revolutionists. He immediately burns the card. This is giving but the faintest outlines of the story, but you see Peretz, like Heine, also has the sense of humor developed to a tragic extent—to the extent of seeing the absurdity, futility and irony of it all—even our grandest efforts.

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"Yes, so it seems to some eyes, and so it is at least to those who see it so. After all, what is it? A cry and a struggle and a sigh, a flash of light and a streak of dawn and darkness, and then we stand by the grave and weep for the dead that the living may see our tears. Ah, the helplessness and hopelessness of it all; the desolation and despondency, the thoughts that paralyze the mind and stifle the soul; all things out of joint, out of proportion, and Fate cries out to you in the slang phrase 'you don't fit!' Ah, the humor of the entire procession and the deep tragic background behind it. Seek and you will find, and when you find you shall not want it. Wealth makes us weary of it. Fame brings her wreath and finds her poet dead. Faith consoles, but we have the consciousness all along that we are sick and are taking medicine. 'Love grows hate for love's sake and life takes death for guide.' Love? Have ever two souls come near each other? Those whom we love most understand us least. Happiness? The art of finding happiness is one of the lost arts. No one is ever consciously happy. Knowledge is almost positive proof that we cannot know. With it we are more puzzled than we were without it. The last word of science is 'wait.' What do we know? Moses went up to heaven, but God refused to be interviewed. The people, like the modern editor, insisted upon a story and so we have the Bible. But science and the higher criticism has interrupted our reading and spoiled the pleasure of it. What do we know? Even Professor Daniel De Leon does not know everything. Man asks questions, investigates, '*und ein Narr wartet auf Antwort.*' Life contains more emptiness than anything else. Life is a long wait for that which does not come. Is life worth living? 'Tis not worthwhile asking the question."

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"If that is so, or seems so," I hazarded the question, "then why be here?"

"Why, to see it all, to enjoy the tragedy," Keidansky answered with swift enthusiasm. "I would not advise my best friend to commit suicide. Such an exciting farce. What would life be, what would art be without the tragic elements in it? It's great! But I began to tell you why it is sometimes grossly immoral to live up to your highest principles, when my train of thought was wrecked. Some other time. Come, let's go into the other room and I'll introduce you to the players and to Comrade Cahan—if he is still alive."

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## XVI

### The Immorality of Principles

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"Yes, I have promised to tell you why it is sometimes grossly immoral to live up to your highest principles. It was a rash promise, yet I shall try to make it good. And though it was several weeks ago, I am more than ever inclined to think the same way."

Thus spake Keidansky when I reproachfully reminded him of a former utterance.

"There are the missionaries," he said, "who go forth among peaceful, law-avoiding savages to force upon them a religion that has outlived its usefulness, a religion that has not prevented them from doing such an immoral, impolite thing. They go forth to promulgate the truth of which they are not sure. They invidiously invade the premises of goodly primitive people, and ruthlessly trample upon their traditions, beliefs, superstitions and feelings. We shut people out of our country, and we send missionaries to offer them free admission or standing-room in our heaven. Heedless that their bodies are starving, we come and ask to let us save their souls. We forget that they have a right to their religion, to their way of non-thinking, to take the medicine they like; that their method of salvation is best for them,

'That human hopes and human creeds  
Have their roots in human needs.'

We forget that they have just as much a right to wear their mental corsets as we have to wear ours, or, if you wish, that their beliefs are as true to them as ours are to us. We forget that they speak to God in their own language. We go forth among them and mock at all that is holy and dear to their hearts.

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"Of course, missionaries, like all agitators, are devoted people, living up to their very highest principles, and we all mean well; but this sort of business, this invasion and utter disregard for others, is to me grossly immoral. And to court and minister to the needs of cannibals and brigands is too much altruism on our part, and that excessive phase of it is wicked and hurtful."

"But," I protested, "is not the legitimate advocacy of ideas justifiable?"

"Yes," said Keidansky, "the legitimate advocacy of ideas. There are those who on one day of the week would turn our cities into cemeteries, who would stifle our spirits and starve our souls, who on that day deny us music and mirth and song—think it a sin to smile, wicked to be happy, and a crime to make merry. If they could reach the sun, they would stop it from working overtime and shining on the Lord's day; yet if the sun should ever reach them, their piety would not cast such a pall over the community. Yes, I know; but listen. Have patience. Patience is a Christian virtue, which Christians have forced upon Jewish money-lenders. I know that there are many people today who have quite a high opinion of the Almighty, believing that He loves light and sunshine, laughter and joy, and glories in the happiness of every living thing, down to the humblest worm. But I am speaking of the others—those who deny the pleasure of everything except self-denial;

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for whom the only laws of life are the blue laws.

"Just now our city is being held up by the police, and at the point of a club told to be good and pious and religious. We are told not to breathe, or sigh, or sneeze, or smile, or show any signs of life on Sunday. Orders to stop the circulation of our blood on that day have not yet been issued, but everything comes to those who wait—every evil comes to those who have over-zealous pietists among them. To heaven, or be damned. It is a case of your adherence, or your life. You must be killed, or cured. Now in this disregard of disbelievers, the narrowness of vision and hurtful overzeal, I discern something immoral.

"Yet it is a matter of principle to spread whatever gospel one has been captured by. Personally, I have never been so tortured by any as by those people who wished to save me, and out of justice to them, I must say that they tortured me according to their highest principles. It must be admitted that there is an amount of good and pleasure for the agitator, involved in agitation, yet his work cannot, generally, be called moral on the ground that it conduces to happiness, because he is only one, and those whom he is molesting to save are many.

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"And so many of those who sacrifice and abnegate and deny themselves, who neglect nature, ignore the laws of their being, emaciate their bodies and starve their souls, is it not immoral of them to weaken their constitutions, minds and spirits, and diminish their power for positive good in the world? In the end, are not many of them miserably misled by their highest principles?

"If he loseth the world, what shall it profit a man that he gaineth his soul? Of what earthly use is a soul, without a wicked world to use it in? To what good is a soul without all the opportunities of losing it?

"Alone in the mountains, far from the madding crowd, it is easy to be sane and soulful and saintly; but to me, every effort to separate the soul from the world is immoral, though it is in accord with some lofty principles. The soul outside of the world is a tramp who shirks work. To remain in the world, to do, to work, to wage war against weakness, to live strongly and have no fear—that is the soul doing its duty, and sowing happiness for all.

"And speaking of happiness for others, in the first place, it is not right to force it upon others against their consent, and in the second place, it is wrong to do it at the expense of your own welfare. Do all that you can for yourself first, or you are not justified in trying to manage other lives on a better basis. I believe in perfection, but I believe that as much of it as is possible should begin with the perfectionists. I believe that nothing is worth doing, unless there is a sound reason for it. I believe in egoism. Altruism may have done much good, but I pity the Altruists, who have enervated, weakened and impoverished themselves by their mostly futile attempts to help others.

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"Largely, altruism is an attempt to do for others what you cannot do for yourself.

"There are principles which have led people to lose all that was good in them. The roads to unattainable ideals and impossible perfections are strewn with countless corpses of lost victims. People lose their health, peace, welfare and all, trying to do for others what, in so many cases, cannot be done at all. All this is wrong. It is wrong to add to the store of the world's misery, though you are attempting to alleviate it. No, no one should work for philanthropy unless he gets a good salary for it. As to asceticism, it has never been a profitable business. Contrary to other religions, Judaism rather stood for the joy of life than the arrest of it.

"I have seen much of the problem of immoral principles among our radicals of the Ghetto, many of whom have ruined and wrecked their lives because of the ideas they advocated. If the dream of social justice would be realized to-morrow, many of them would not have the strength to enjoy it. Others are so weak that they would not be able to stand the shock. There were those who had others dependent upon them, and who neglected everything and everybody, particularly themselves, for the sake of 'the cause,' and who finally became utterly useless. They added to the poverty of the East Side in their efforts to abolish it, while if they had taken good care of themselves they would, in the long run, have done vastly more for their ideals. Among my plots for stories that I have never written, is the case of a man who became a tramp, because he was too anxious to abolish the system that produces tramps. One of the finest poets of the East Side is now a mental and physical wreck, because he lived up to his highest principles—and neglected himself.

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"Enthusiasts very often lose the sense of justice, become oblivious to everything—except the invisible. I know too well the nobility of the motives; I know that there are more of them on the East Side than any other place in America; I know, also, that a cause requires such sacrifices, yet, what are the results? Very often, failure. It has been observed that a man, who in the midst of a savage or barbarous community, in defiance of current social or religious customs, should attempt to live the ideal life of a perfect civilization, would doubtless be quickly eliminated from such a society by violent and tragical means, and thus effectively be stopped from influencing those around him to better ways of living. A great deal of our enforced civilization of savage races has been fatal in its effects upon the health and happiness of the vast majority, while it has failed to elevate the average morals of the survivors. Authorities say that this is likely to be the result, whenever conventional education is forced upon a people in advance of their functional development. The Hawaiian Islanders are pointed out as an impressive example, and the missionaries, as well as the radicals of the Ghetto, trying to convert their orthodox brethren, ought to remember these things.

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"The way out of it? Some one says: 'That course of conduct must be adopted which will promote

the greatest possible development of life-giving energies, both in the individuals immediately affected, and in society at large, including the life of posterity.' That's science, if I have the quotation right. Principles should be founded on fact, and be conducive to the largest happiness, including even the happiness of the one who holds the principles. In size, they should be more than 8 by 12 inches. They should be a yard wide—wide enough and true enough for all. Yet they should be such principles as to allow others to hold other principles. The right principles, in accord with the best laws of life, and not theology, will come up to all requirements, and they will be moral.

"Yes, individualism by all means," he added; "be yourself, but don't be a savage."

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## XVII

### The Exile of the Earnest

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I met Keidansky at the performance of a Yiddish play, and our talk turned to matters dramatic.

"I notice by the papers," I remarked, "that Sarah Bernhardt has just produced a play written for her by F. Marion Crawford, the American novelist. So we are going to supply the theatres of other countries with plays. Are you interested?"

"Very much," said Keidansky; "this is not the only case of an American writing for the foreign stage, and it suggests to me a fine possibility. About Crawford I know but little; but he is one of our popular men. He has, according to his own confession, written to please; he has never offended any living beings by putting them into his works; he has never attempted to picture life, uninteresting as it is, and he is, on the whole, not one of those that we should want to send away to write plays for the people of other lands. And I am rather glad his 'Francesca da Rimini' has failed in London.

"But if there are any among us who are terribly in earnest, with tremendous intentions to elevate the stage, to write plays that will instruct, stimulate, uplift, to take all the struggles of humanity and put them into dramas—why let them learn some one of the foreign languages and go abroad and write plays for the serious people of Europe. Yes, if they persist in these things, and want to make us think, and all that sort of thing, which is short of pleasure, if they cannot amuse us with something funny or entertain us with something nice and romantic, why let them go abroad. It's the only way we can get rid of them, and we shall not mourn the loss of those who would have us do nothing else but mourn.

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"We Americans do not want any plays that require intellect, for we need all that we have in our business enterprises; we do not want to think in the theatre, because it takes all our thoughts to advertise and sell our goods, nor do we want our emotions stirred, for that is a nervous strain, clouds the mind, and makes people unfit for speculation, scheming or anything on the next day. Then, these plays that arrest the brain and touch our very soul, they make us sentimental, soft-hearted, kind-natured, and draw us out on long conversations with our wives, children and friends. Meanwhile the wheels of trade are turning, and in the race for success we are left behind.

"We are a healthy people, and we don't want any morbid, lurid, ghastly productions over here, and in a large sense all very serious works are morbid, lugubrious and gloomy. At bottom of them there is always a problem, an evil, a crying wrong, a morbid state of something. A happy home is not dramatic; people at peace with themselves and the world are not good subjects for tragedy. According to the conception of these earnest writers there is no plot for a play without a peck of trouble. We don't want any such dramatic dishes served. We don't want people to play upon our feelings, and yet pay them for it. Occasionally, we are willing to have something a little bit sad, but we want it to end happily. But the earnest ones tell us that in real life few sad stories end happily, that their pictures are true to life. Hang it, we ourselves know they are true to life. There's plenty of trouble at home,—that's why we go to the theatre—to forget it. Gorky pictures a man—fat and forty, successful and comfortable as a government official—a man, who after reading 'a book of one of these modern much-praised writers,' comes to the conclusion that he is 'an insignificant nonentity, a superfluous being, of no use to any one.'

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"This is just what one of the modern plays does for you. See, it seems to say, see, you crown of creation, what a crawling creature you are. Your past is what it ought not to have been. Your present is what it ought not to be. 'The future is but the past again, entered through another gate.' Yesterday you were a fool—to-morrow you will be a still greater one. Your best resolutions shall become bitter regrets. You are weak, and you make laws and build governments and create creeds, and they make you weaker yet. All the adornments of your civilization are relics of barbarism. Evolution is too slow for anything, and you cannot get ahead of yourself. You have talked all your life and not uttered an original thought. There have been a few original beings, but most of you are poor imitations—you must follow others. You must have a master, either in heaven, or on earth; you are a slave of society. You strike for freedom and anti-conventionality only when it becomes a fad. You don't understand. Your children cannot teach you anything. You are too old to learn. When you were young you had only your parents to instruct you. Your home rests upon false assumptions. It is a field of battle—or there are no strong individuals in it and all is peace. The theory of heredity is not true—your children are stupid; your wife is a doll, which

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you have chosen for her pretty cheeks, and, though she is fading, claims the rights of a free-born human being, and does not understand—but what's the use? Of what earthly good can such plays be? Why should we in this free, independent and prosperous country listen to such things? Besides, family quarrels, filial relations, disagreements between relatives are not fit materials for the dramatist. It is none of his business to meddle in such private matters. If there is trouble in the home, if a man and a woman find that one and one is two, if the interests of certain persons, or classes, are against those of others, if people find their religion too small for them and their laws not big enough, why there are courts that they can go to, and legislatures and clergymen and lawyers and Christian Scientists and so many other sources of help and salvation. For a writer it is extremely bad taste to deal with such matters. His mission is to amuse us, and he has no right to abdicate the sovereignty of his exalted office.

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"At least that is what we Americans—the majority of our people—think, and if there are writers among us so abnormally serious as to see things otherwise, there is but one thing to do with them—we should send them away to other countries where people like that kind of dreary drama.

"Let them, like Marion Crawford, write for the French stage. The French are not even shocked when they see a real resemblance between life and the drama. In fact they put everything into their plays, all their faults, and I wonder how they can look at these plays. So many things happen in France, and it is all in their books and plays, besides a lot of things that never happen. You cannot in their country escape life and all its troubles by going to the theatre or reading one of their novels. All life's tribulations, turmoil and travail are in them. Not that the people are over-earnest, but that they like something strong, love to be stirred and moved, and are recklessly unafraid of the vertigoes of thought. They have great artists and wonderfully fine writers, but their dramatic works are terribly upsetting. A good performance of 'Camille' breaks a person up for several days. They are a dangerous lot, all the French writers.

"No, we over here do not want such productions. There are plenty of pretty incidents and fables out of our romantic history that we can use on our stage.

Every veteran of our wars tells enough of his own heroic deeds to make a dozen of plays. Then there are so many historical novels, guaranteed to have nothing to do with life, that have not as yet been dramatized. Such plays would help us to understand our grand history.

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"But there is lots of room in Europe for our would-be realists, and our government would do well by making an appropriation for their instruction in foreign languages and their deportation to the lands of burdensome intentions, revolutionary movements and problem plays. This would mean peace in our own country.

"There are the Germans, who love Schopenhauer and beer and usually drink the two together. They feel intensely, revel in realism and have the keenest enjoyment of tragedy. Nothing is too sad, sombre, or too stirring for their stage. All the unanswered questions that have vainly troubled the ages are raised in their dramatic and literary works. What an uncomfortable prospect that is! They always have men who writes plays that will never die. They have no shame, these Germans. They feel strongly and openly show it. Altogether they have a passion for the thoughtful, and give the modern playwright with tendencies a splendid opportunity. But what is to be said of a country that can produce such play as Hauptmann's 'Die Weber'—a country that can send fifty Socialist members to the Reichstag? Yes, we can safely send them to Germany, or else to Russia. It would be hard for an American to learn that language, but Russia is the land where they say the most daring, the boldest things in the most candid manner, or without any manner at all. I don't know why it is unless it is because free speech is forbidden in that country. There the play, or the novel, palpitates with life and vibrates with heart-throbs. All the evil and oppression and ruin of the country cries out through its literature and drama, and the people worship such art. Life itself is seen on the Russian stage. This is where we should send our earnest writers. True, there is a censorship in Russia, but the radical utterances of an American author will easily pass the Russian censor.

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"There is Norway, where a man like Ibsen, who has made that country the scene of action of all the tragedies of the world, is allowed at large after an exile of many years. Ibsen has held up the Land of the Midnight Sun as a dominion of darkness, yet they like him and are also proud of him in his country. Belgium is another good market for the serious and revolutionary drama. In Spain, Echegaray is doing nearly what Ibsen is doing in Norway, and he has a number of literary companions with similar sombre intentions. Even in England they are beginning to write such plays, and an American can easily learn the English language. It's a good thing that Henry James prefers to live in England, only we ought to put a tariff on his psychological stories. We need not fear. Any and all these countries will serve us as places of exile for our earnest authors.

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"But hold on, I've nearly forgotten. Perhaps the expenses of sending these people to Europe can be saved. Let them learn to write in Yiddish, for in the Jewish theatres of the New York Ghetto all sorts of serious, sombre, life-like, problematic and powerful plays are produced."

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## XVIII

### Why Social Reformers Should Be Abolished

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"It's quite a problem," said Keidansky, suddenly, after a pensive pause, as he watched the glimmering lights of the Cambridge bridge across the gloomy Charles.

"What is?" I asked.

"How to abolish the social reformers," he answered in a tone of determination.

It was nearly two o'clock in the morning when we left the little café where we spent part of the evening, and he said it was too early to go home, which in any case was the last resort. It was so roasting hot up in his attic, that no matter what time he climbed up there, he would be "well done" by the time he rose in the morning. But the place he told me of had this advantage: it was delightfully cool in the winter. Keidansky was physically exhausted and mentally lazy, and would say but little at first. He had spent the day in preparing an article for one of the Jewish papers, and during the evening gave two lessons in English, visiting his pupils at their homes; for it was thus, he once informed me, that he learned what English he knew—by teaching it to others. Incidentally these lessons he gave and his journalistic efforts helped to pay for the necessities of life, such as rent, laundry, lunches, symphony concerts ("on the rush"), admissions to picture exhibitions, books, gallery tickets to the best plays that came to town, etc. He had worked very hard that day, he said, which was a direct violation of his principle. He did what he could to keep his ideas out of his article, and he hoped it would be published. He felt tired, did not want to go home, and proposed that we walk over to the Charlesbank Park where, on a night like this, we could at least in imagination conjure up a breeze.

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"Your whim is law," I said, and we set off for the park. I had been speaking of a Yiddish melodrama which had been produced in Boston a few days before. Keidansky had not seen the play, but he intended to write a review of it for one of the New York papers. He knew all about it and the species to which it belonged. When capital punishment was abolished, sitting through one of these plays would be an all-sufficient penalty for murder, he said. Then this subject gave out and there was a pause, after which Keidansky made the startling remark concerning social reformers.

"Abolish them? Do you really mean it?" I asked.

"Yes, though I do say it," he replied.

"What for?" I, being puzzled, queried again, and he answered:

"For the welfare of society, and perhaps also the sure approach of the millennium." He continued: "The social reformers, as a rule, are a most unsocial job lot of people. As I have known them, their business has been to frighten, to scowl, to scare, and to make a mountain of evil out of a mole-hill that did not exist. They are often the most blinded zealots, the narrowest-minded, one-sided partisans, with tremendous, almost Dante-like propensities to conjure up hair-raising horrors, but with the genius and the poetry of a Dante left out. Their method is to cut life up piecemeal, pepper it good and heavy, and send you to bed with a few bitter morsels. After a night of the most excruciating nightmares, you wake up with a nauseous taste in your mouth, and a pronounced case of reformania. It is not so much what they say, as how they emphasize it; the very dictionary groans beneath the weight of their abuse of adjectives, and after a time they convince you that you don't know your own address, that you have not, as you imagined, been living on the planet earth, but in the most devilish, hellish purgatory.

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"In order to convert this earth into a heaven, they must needs make it appear to be the blackest hell. In order to abolish evil, they must prove that nothing else exists. To convince you of the infinite possibilities in the development of men, they must prove to you that they have ever been divided between parasitic capitalists and starving slaves. Evolution, as they concoct it for you, has been a process of going from bad to worse, from a mild form of slavery to a more abject one.

"You see, they are in for effect, and with the aid of the most bombastic language and turgid phraseology they are bound to make it, no matter how many people they dishearten, discourage and dismay. To damn humanity, they think, is but a trifle when their supreme end is to save the world. Hope is not in heaven, earth sees no gentler star; earth is hell and hell bows down before the social reformer. The reformer that I mean is a man ever wandering about with a pail of black paint in one hand, a brush in the other, and with an expression of heartrending sorrow in his face because he cannot find a ladder high enough to enable him to put a few coats of his paint on the skies. The world must be saved at any cost, say these reformers, and if the world is the cost, why it is dead cheap at that, when they can become saviors of society and possibly sainted martyrs. And so they proceed to exaggerate the evils that exist in the most brazen-faced manner and to magnify the evils they imagine to the utmost extent. They generously enlarge every iniquity that is and fully describe those that have never been; they complicate every simple problem in order to puzzle mankind and to be misunderstood and to appear great. The world has become so civilized, the reformers reason, or rather think, that it is hard to find its monstrous wrongs and social reform are being forgotten, and so out with our telescopes, magnifying glasses and alarm clocks. The capitalists must be dethroned, the down-trodden wage-slave must be enthroned, and then our saviors riot and revel in their never-ending disquisitions. Yes, when there are many reformers in the world, the world is in sore need of reform.

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"These people are pitifully short-sighted and can barely see one side of life at a time; they dissect life and remove it from reality. Their solutions are so fine that they have nothing to do with the real problems. They detach humanity from the world. They abolish the concrete (for convenience) and get lost in their abstractions like the detective who disguised himself so much that he could

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not discover his own identity. They conceive more evil than exists because they rarely know the difference between right and wrong. They are visionaries without breadth of visions; theorists, not knowing the uselessness of all theories; people who would save the world because they do not know it; builders without a foundation; saviors without the saving graces of truth and beauty. They embitter humanity, they darken the world, painting it blacker than it ever was in the barbaric past and—they make me weary, the more so because they constantly remind me how foolish I once was myself.

"I tell you, the world is better to-day than it ever was before, and it would become still better if we could abolish these disparaging, discouraging, slanderous social reformers. The true reformers are those who make us see how good and great the old world is. As you said the other day, the greatest explorers were those who discovered heaven on earth. And after we have abolished the reformers we could gradually also abolish the other evils which afflict our civilization and mar existence. They would no longer impede our progress and we could little by little wipe out the wrongs that oppress us and institute more just conditions for all members of society. These things could be done gradually, reasonably, with good cheer, and with the best results. For another trouble with the vaudeville social reformers that I did not mention is their overweening, overwhelming conceit, which makes them so ludicrously unreasonable and prevents them from seeing that the world is just a trifle bigger than one of their numbers."

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It was nearing dawn, and I asked him how he was going to do away with the reformers.

"Well, there's the rub," he said. "I do not know exactly, but I've been thinking that perhaps the only and best way of abolishing the social reformers would be by finding the true solution of the social problem and abolishing all the wrongs and iniquities of our civilization. Let us destroy, annihilate the evils of unjust laws, governments and monopolies, and institute a just system of society and the social reformers will disappear.

"Let us have a society wherein all will share equally in all the joys and sorrows of life, wherein none shall be starved and none shall be pampered to death, wherein none shall have too much of the goods of the world and all shall have enough, wherein no hungry babes will wallow in the gutters to become candidates for the prisons and insane asylums, and no children shall be ruined by riches; a world wherein there will be no temperance movements to drive men to drink, no trust to destroy men's souls, and no churches to harbor infidels; a world without the constant clouds of harrowing, sad thoughts, without the rains of tears, and with more and more of sunshine. Let us do that and we will abolish the obnoxious reformers. Let us abolish the monstrous crime of poverty, which has not the shadow of a reason for existence in a world that is overwhelmed with wealth, and the occupation of the reformers will be gone, and they will vanish. Really, we ought to be willing and ready to do anything for their abolition."

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## XIX

### Buying a Book in Salem Street

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"I am going to buy a book on Salem street," said my friend, when we suddenly encountered on Tremont Row. "Do you wish to come along?"

I was bent on any adventure, and so we started for the quarter, down through Hanover street. It was but a short distance, and before we had done much chatting in the way of exchanging ideas, we were at the head of the street, facing the pawnshop of No. 1, with the welcome legend of "Money to Loan."

We passed safely the bedecked and bedraggled second-hand clothing stores, though the pullers-in were out in full force. As my companion explained, it is only the seeming strangers who are approached and asked to buy, or sell, but familiar figures and persons in their company are never molested. One of these attendants, a dark, sad-eyed, kind-faced young man, was leaning against the door-post of a store and intently reading a Jewish magazine. We were across the street and we stopped to look. This fellow, who was engaged in the most sordid business, was reading the "Zukunft," the magazine of dreams, ideals and Utopias, published by the New York radicals. An elderly, bearded and stout man came down the street. Without looking up from his booklet the youth mechanically asked: "Any clothing to-day?"

"No," the man shouted, "no clothing to-day, and you'll never sell anything if this is the way you'll attend to your business." It was the proprietor of the store. For a moment the puller-in seemed dazed. Then he shoved his "Zukunft" into his coat pocket. He began to cast his eyes about for customers. He looked a model of sorrow. I was told that it was his idealism, his striving for the impossible, beautiful, that reduced him to the ugly position he was in. We moved on. There were other men reading, if only in snatches, but they apparently owned their stores and had their assistants. One of the pullers pointed out to me is one of the most enthusiastic Zionists in this city. Children were playing on sidewalks and doorsteps, sedately but happily. A school-teacher from one of the neighboring institutions passed through the street. Several little girls recognized and flocked about her. One took the teacher's umbrella, the other asked for the privilege of carrying the young lady's Boston bag. They took hold of her arms and went along dancing and smiling as she talked to them. Above the rumbling of wagons were heard the pleasing notes of a piano and the singing of a sweet-voiced daughter of the tenements.

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Farther up the street was more crowded. It was Thursday afternoon. The stores were all activity and bustle, and the pedlers with their wagons and pushcarts were crying their foods and wares for "the Holy Sabbath" in quaint and singing Yiddish phrases. I was reminded by my friend that Abraham Goldfoden, the father of the Jewish stage, in one of his operettas uses a swarming, eve-of-Sabbath market-scene like this very effectively, and makes his hucksters sing beautifully of the things they have to sell. Said my guide: "Of course, in the operetta of 'The Witch' the pedlers are not so ragged and besmeared, and you cannot hear the smell of the meat and the fish, but neither can you buy and eat these things. After all, if art is beautiful, real life is quite useful.

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"To our people," said Keidansky, casting his eyes about, "everything here is a matter of course, and there is nothing unusual about it all. The strangest things are the strangers, who come to stare, study and wonder. In fact, the self-concentration of the Jew, probably the secret of his survival, makes this the only place in the world, the temporary Palestine, the centre of the universe. There are other places in this city, but they are only the outskirts, the suburbs of the Ghetto. There are other peoples and religions, but we are the people and ours is the faith. The flattery that children receive from their parents afterwards helps them to bear the brunt of the battle. The consciousness of his being chosen helped Israel to find his way through the dark labyrinth of the centuries. Everything here is as it should be, only a little more on the exclusive and pious European plan. This is more of the old fashioned view, but it is still extant, inasmuch as the Ghetto remains."

Now we were near Bersowsky's book-store which was on the other side of the street and we stopped, facing it. A street-organ was playing in front of the strange emporium and a band of children were dancing gayly to its music. We could see the books and periodicals, phylacteries and newspapers, holy fringe-garments and sheets of Jewish music in the windows from the other side of the street. And as we came nearer we could see the very aged woman, bewigged and kerchiefed, wan, wrinkled and wry—the most familiar figure in the Ghetto—we could see her sitting on her high stool, drinking a glass of tea and selling newspapers. There were several simple prints and chromos in the window, reproductions from pictures of Jewish life. Parents blessing their children on the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Passover, high priests lighting the candles in the temple—these were their subjects. In the windows were also brass candlesticks, such as are being lighted and blessed on the eve of each Sabbath. We stood outside and mused.

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"This," Keidansky explained, "is the leading Jewish book-store in Boston, and it is in a sense also the spiritual centre of this Ghetto. If any one were to ask me what is to-day the moral condition of the Jews, their spiritual state, what are their intellectual status and religious aspirations, if any one should ask me—I would take them into this store and let them see what it contains. Religion, history, literature—it is all in here—at least in all its physical manifestations. Pentateuchs, Bibles, prayer-books, all books of religious instruction, books of piety and penance, volumes of the Talmud and of Mishna, phylacteries and holy scrolls, covers for the scrolls and curtains for the Holy Ark, ram's horns to sound on New Year's, knives wherewith to kill cattle according to a merciful ritual, candle-sticks and show-threads which the Jews were commanded to wear at the bottom of their garments (and some of them now wear under their garments)—in a word, all that stands to preserve the old faith is here. All the symbolism of our old faith is here incarnated. And yet side by side with these are the things which tend towards the transformation or dissolution of the ancient religion—the publications of the radicals, the destroying utterances of the revolutionists. Here come the orthodox for prayer-books and the anti-religious for free-thought pamphlets. Here you find the organs of the patriots and Zionists, who wish to preserve and regenerate the Jewish people, and also the organs of the Socialists and Anarchists who are fighting against all national ideas and for an assimilated humanity. Come in and I'll show you. There is the 'Zukunft' (Future), the best literary and scientific monthly we ever had, which is published by the Socialists. It was formerly edited by Abe Cahan, now Dr. Caspe has charge of it. And look! 'Die Freie Arbeiter Stimme,' the Anarchist weekly, ably edited by S. Yanofsky, one of the cleverest Yiddish writers.

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"And," my friend whispered, "this old lady, who stands for all that is pious and ancient, handing out the 'Freie Arbeiter Stimme' and the Socialist 'Vorwärts,' is to me as strongly dramatic and as profoundly symbolic a picture as any thing in life and literature. Mr. Bersowsky, who started this store, now sells books, it is hoped, in a better world. Look at this young old woman—his widow—and see if hearts ever break around here. The aged lady is his mother, and she would not be in any other place in the world, except where her husband, and afterwards her son spent their last days. So she stays here all the time the store is open, and sells papers and books in spite of protests.

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"The Jew is so practical that he always looks ahead; he is chronically optimistic, and his imagination creates everything that the world denies him. Dreamer he has been ever since the prophets, and even before their time. It must have been superb idealism and beautiful faith which enabled him to loan money to his neighbors during the Middle Ages. It still requires fine imagination to do it to-day.

"Between the sordid and the sublime stands the Jew, who is either one or the other, or both, as circumstances shape his destiny. You can see this in all his literature, from the stories of Motke Chabad to the plays of Jacob Gordin.

"Is it not strange how quickly we adapt ourselves, and how soon we come up to date and ahead of date? But yesterday we had no literature except our religious guides, our only beacon lights in the old-world Ghettos; and now we have splendid modern works, both in Hebrew and Yiddish, all

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breathing the modern spirit. Many standard works from all European tongues have been translated for us; but we have a number of great masters of our own. It is such a short time ago that we had no fiction to speak of us (except the sermons of our preachers); and now there is Abromowitz and Peretz, Spector and Rubenowitz, and so many others. There is a whole group of modern poets, who have also grown up in no time. And the struggle between the old and the new, which this literature represents, the striving for the modern, and the longing for the ancient—that is what makes it so painful and pleasant—so stirring, and therefore such good art. All grades of feeling and believing, thinking and non-thinking, are in the books and periodicals that you find in this store. And the men and women who come here, living in the same Ghetto, are often millions of miles apart in their ideas."

My guide asked for his book, a Hebrew story, by L. M. Lillenblum. The elderly man, who is a relative of the family and a partner in the business, knew all about it, found it after a long search, and made my friend happy. The story, I was told, was written about twenty years ago by a native of Keidan. At that time there was a general literary awakening, and many talented men wrote profane and useful books in the holy language, and shocked the orthodox Jews of Russia. In Keidan, they wanted to excommunicate the author of "The Follies of My Youth"; but the rabbi of Kovno telegraphed, saying that the infidel was a great man, and should be left alone—with his book. An old man came in, and after much bargaining, bought a silk praying-shawl. Several persons came in for papers. A young man bought the "Zukunft" and "The Merchant of Venice" translated in blank verse, by Joseph Bovshover.

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He wore glasses, long hair, carried an umbrella and a green bag; in fact, one might have met him in a vegetarian restaurant. He was pointed out to me as a noted radical, a dreamer, who writes for the "Vorwärts," works as a tailor in a sweat-shop, and is said to be writing a book. A comely young maiden, with a madonna-like face, came near the store. She had a few mayflowers in her hand—and gave them to a ragged little child standing there. She came in and bought a paper. She did not read Yiddish; but it was for her father. She was a college student, I was told, of advanced ideas, but deeply in love with the people of the Ghetto and their beliefs—was planning to devote her life to settlements and social reform work—one of the many dreamers who came into this store.

"Once," said my guide, "I told her that I would put her into a book. 'Thank you,' she answered. 'I don't want to sink into oblivion so soon.' But she is an idyl of the Ghetto just the same. Look; here are the poems of David Edelstaat. He sleeps now in a lonely grave in the Jewish cemetery at Denver, Colorado, by the side of the fence, for he was a delinquent in Israel. He went there by way of the corroding sweat-shop and a damp cellar in New York, where he edited a little communist weekly. Many of our idealists go to Denver this way. It is the only time they travel and take a vacation. The hospitals there are crowded. But Edelstaat's poems, they are a sacred treasure among the Jewish working people."

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## XX

### The Purpose of Immoral Plays

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The smoke was so thick and the din so heavy, that I did not see him when I came in and barely heard his shouted greeting. Such was the crowded condition of the regular resort on Saturday night; yet I found Keidansky tucked up in a corner of the café, "oblivious to the obvious," around him, with a pile of newspapers in his hands. "The group" had not as yet assembled, so my friend was reading.

"This has been a great week," he said with gladsome emphasis, after we had exchanged courtesies. I at once suspected what he meant.

"A great week," I said, "because you have been able to see humanity piteously dissected, human beings mercilessly analyzed, souls stript of their raiment, wounded and bleeding, our fellow-men on exhibition, crippled by custom and walking on the crutches of convention, our best arrangements of life held up to ridicule and scorn. A great week," I said, "because you have fed on tragedy like a fiend?"

"Yes, there is something sad about tragedy," answered Keidansky, ignoring my bitterness, "but the man who sees things clearly, who looks a long distance behind the scenes, the man who sees the worst and does not die, but lives to cast his observations into a perfect work, and to lift you up to the mountain-top with him, is not this man great and gladdening? Is there not cause for exultation in a really big tragedy? And this is saying but little about the æsthetic pleasure of a story told in heart-breaking and soul-stirring manner," he added. "Some one must do this work, and it makes one feel real good when the right man comes along."

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"The saddest stories are yet to be told, before there can be much more happiness in the world. We can never reach the heights until we realize the depths. As for myself, I give all the world to the man who can make it better than it is. And such works are making the longed-for improvement, by performing the miracle of making men and women think, doing this, not by any pedantic preachments, but by the power of suggestiveness and the large vision of the newer and truer art. Art with a purpose? But all art has this purpose. And the less the purpose is consciously inculcated into art, the better is that purpose carried out. They call them problem plays, but was

there ever a great play without some sort of problem in it? Without some burning question of life, and love, and death? What's that? Immoral? Was there ever a masterly and mastering work that was not immoral, according to the popular judgments? Was there ever a work with a big purpose that conformed to the critics and to current lack of opinions? Could there be much of a purpose to anything that did not shock the world's conspiracy of cowardice they call morality? *Gott ist mit dir!* You must go abroad and take some cure. You have been reading the American dramatic critics. It was a great week, I say, with Ibsen and Björnson, Sudermann and Pinero, and two wonderful artists to interpret them, but the pleasure was very much spoiled for me by some of these critics. Ah, these poor critics. Here are the papers, and I can still hear them choking and croaking and cackling, and my heart goes out to them and turns sick. What a wonderful lot of fellows they are. What endless platitudes and empty phrases—full of nonsense—they have delivered themselves of this week, yet I don't think they are any the wiser for it. I know one of the fraternity (there is sufficient disagreement between themselves to be called a fraternity) who is a perfect genius. With one stroke of his mighty pen he once annihilated Ibsen, Echegaray, Astrowsky, Paul Hervieu and Edward Martyn. It was all 'morbid trash,' he said of a series of their plays, and it is strange that these men are still heard of occasionally. That was after the John Blair experiment, and I walked into this critic's office and made a few extemporaneous remarks. He said I ought to have more respect for a man who can get as much advertising for his paper as he can. Of course, this was indisputable. It would take so little courage to do it, yet they dare not think their own thoughts, the dear, dear critics. No, there is not any use in trying to reason with them, but I sometimes would like to get them all together in one room and give them all a sound horsewhipping.

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"One of the critics, who writes in silk gloves, swears in the most perfect, correct English, and compares every play he sees to something of Shakespeare, objects to 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray' as an immoral play. The dissection of this woman's heart and mind, he protests, is not the proper business of the dramatist, nor is the inspection of his dissecting table after the job has been done a proper amusement for theatrical spectators. 'A process of repentance and purification' and that sort of thing, on the part of this unfortunate, must be indicated, if art is to approach this kind of life. The entire scheme of ethics is bad. Yet the critic admits that the performance was terrible and touching, and that Mrs. Campbell—Heaven bless her for coming to see us—won a remarkable and complete victory in the part; altogether he praises her very generously.

"Now, what I say is this. If we can be moved and stirred by an immoral play, there is either something the matter with our morality, or there is something radically wrong with our hearts. I must recall to you the lines of Stephen Crane. 'Behold the grave of a wicked man, and near is a stern spirit. There came a drooping maid with violets, but the spirit grasped her arm. "No flowers for him," he said. The maid wept: "Oh, I loved him." But the spirit grim and frowning: "No flowers for him."

"Now, this is it. 'If the spirit was just, why did the maid weep?' If our standard of morality is right, why do our hearts go out for Paula Tanqueray, for Nora Helmer, for Mad Agnes? Is it because we have become so humane as to be far ahead of our morality? What does it mean, anyway? We are told that the contents of the plays seen here last week, are not fit subjects for the drama. Well, art might as well go out of business, if it is not going to look life squarely in the face, if it is not going to sound the very depths of things, and mirror conditions as they are to-day, for modern humanity. The play in particular, it is clear, must deal with the intense efforts, the dramatic essences of life; the play in particular will have nothing to do unless it takes up the crucial conditions, the large realities, the stirring struggles, the sterling aspirations of the clashing life of to-day under the new and as yet unadjusted surroundings. The drama must take up shame and crime, error and suffering, or there is no plot for a great play anywhere. The few pretty, romantic, silly stories have been told over and over again. Now we have grown. There is a larger life before us, and we want something stronger. We must have plays to educate our critics,—if that is possible.

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"'He who is without sin among ye, let him cast the first stone.' If Christ had said nothing else, would not this have made him a great man? Yet after eighteen hundred years it is necessary for another Jew, a Portuguese Jew named Pinero, to say the same thing through the medium of a play, because the Christians say that Christ's teachings are immoral. And then the stones of the critics are thrown at Pinero."

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Here I said something about the relation between art and morality, but Keidansky protested.

"Art has nothing to do with morality," he said, "and therefore it teaches such great moral lessons. It re-creates and reproduces Nature and life in forms of beauty and power. And because it approaches elementary conditions without bias and preconceived notions, and illumines its material with the touch of human genius, it shows us life in its largeness, right in its relativeness, and raises us above our established moralities. Because art is the spontaneous expression of the humane, the true, the good and the beautiful in our souls, it helps us to see the larger rights, the greater justice, and helps us to make, change and advance our morality. Art touches the commonplace and makes it divine. It makes a saint out of a sinner by showing causes, and casting a kindly light over human weakness.

"In real life 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray' is a shameful scandal, to be exploited by sensational newspapers, and we avoid the parties concerned and run away from them; but art raises the story to the height of the tragic and the epic, and we suffer and grieve with Paula, and even the

cold critic, who tries so hard not to be humane, is moved. In life we are even afraid to mention the names of such people; but art makes us weep for Camille, sympathize with Sapho, be sad, or gay, with the vagabond François Villon, sigh for Denise, grieve with Don José, and follow Manon Lescaut through the desert of North America. Art helps us to realize that there is no sin but error, no degradation but dulness of the mind, no vice but lack of vision.

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"I don't want to speak to you because you did not go to see Björnson's 'Beyond Human Power' and Mrs. Campbell's acting in that piece. Yet since you did not go you ought to be enlightened. You have read the story? Did you see how the critics dodged the issues of the play, beating about the bush and puzzling each other? A case of faith and reason, you know, and you mustn't talk about these things. A blind leader of the blind, a man who 'lacks the sense of reality' and sees only what he wishes to see; a woman of intellect who wastes her love on him; unbelieving children of a miracle worker; the clash between the new and the old; the decrepitude of orthodoxy; the contrast between the master and his disciples and who can never realize the impossible, unnatural ideals; the faith that kills. The play has all the tragedy of a dying religion, and the last act is as powerful as anything I have ever seen anywhere. What does it mean? To me it indicates the dying of the old Christianity, and I believe that Björnson, unlike Ibsen, is a Christian. The quiet, subdued, subtle work of Mrs. Campbell was worthy of the play.

"And there was Henrik Ibsen's 'A Doll's House.' I shall never forget the performance of it. What a simple story, how concise and terse, not a superfluous word in the whole of it, yet how strong and stirring! It is primarily a picture, a powerful dramatic picture without a shadow of preachiness in it. You say there is a problem in it? Yes, but it's in the picture, the picture is the problem. Here is a perfect work of a great master, if there ever was one. There are whole cities made up of such dolls' houses, with women as playthings, toys, means of amusement, slaves of conventionality and of slavish men, yet the critics are croaking and raising the cry of 'immorality.' Save on the New York East Side Ghetto, Ibsen is comparatively unknown in America, but it is not true that the American people are not interested in his plays whenever they are given and that they would not go to see them if more of them were performed. In saying so the critics say what is not true, as was manifest from the enthusiastic audiences at the last week's performances. There is a Yiddish translation of the play by the poet Morris Winchewsky, and it was performed by Mr. and Mrs. Jacob P. Adler, but I have never seen it. Mrs. Fiske's 'Nora' is positively great. Her delicacy, her mastery of light and shade, her manner of speech and poise, and on the whole her perfect conception of the character is a stroke of genius. Why did you not see it? Do you want to go? You can pay for my lunch. Ibsen and Björnson have impoverished me this week."

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"So you don't think much of the American critics?" I asked at this point.

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"On the contrary," he said, "with the exception of some, I think they are all good advertising agents."

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## XXI

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### The Poet and the Problem

This time I met Keidansky in front of the Jewish theatre. He had just left the rehearsal of a play which he had translated from the German into Yiddish. As I approached he pointed to a huge sign on top of the building across the street advertising, in a pretty jingle of rhymes, a new biscuit of undreamed of deliciousness.

"I have solved the problem," he said proudly. This was not such a surprise to me. To solve problems was my friend's business.

"What problem is that?" I asked.

"The problem of the poet," he answered. "After the ages of oppression, persecution and poverty, after the exiles, insults and negligence of centuries, the poet will at last come into his own, into bread and butter and a respected position in society. Immunity from starvation, peace, prosperity will at last be his. His worth will be recognized and he will be put to work and made a useful member of society."

"What will he do?" I asked.

"He will write the advertisements for manufacturers and storekeepers," said Keidansky; "he will sing the song of the products of modern industry, chant of the wonderful performances of the age and glorify the fruits of our civilization, extol the things of use and of beauty that serve the needs of to-day's humanity. This will be an ample theme for his Muse and the guerdon of his song will be tangible. His talents will serve a great practical need. He will prove at last that there is some advantage in genius. The world, the world of reality, of facts, figures and statistics will no longer ask, 'What's the use of poetry?' The world will recognize its usefulness, and commerce and trade and capital shall become its friends. In graceful rhymes, in silvery stanzas, in beautiful verses will the poet voice the marvels of all the results of the inventiveness, ingenuity and skill with which our era is so richly blessed. And whatever article on the market will be the burden of his song, it will bring good prices and make easy the life of the singer. And people will no longer have to strain their eyes to find the poet's lines in an obscure corner of a magazine, or in a little volume of tiny type; the bards will no longer have to depend upon such poor methods of attracting

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attention.

"In great, glaring, garish and golden letters their poems will look down upon people from the rooftops, from the high walls of factories and barns, from fences and huge signs by all the roadsides, railroad sides, mountain sides, seashores, and all sides, and people will be compelled to look up to them, because there will be nowhere else to look. There will be no escape. The large letters painted in glowing colors and with their artistic arrangement will arrest the attention of all. And when a foreigner will come here to study this country and write it up, he will not be able to see anything on account of these signs which will cover the land, and after reading the inscriptions upon them, he will go forth saying that it is the most poetic country in the whole world. So inspired will the stranger become that he will go forth and tell the world of the wonderful things we make and advertise here. Thus poetry, at last, become useful, will help us conquer the foreign market. After all, the bards will come down from the clouds and the garrets of starvation, and in their song embrace the whole world; celebrate the things concrete, material and real. Poetry and the world will at last become reconciled; spirit and substance will be united to the practical advantage of the spirit.

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"For too long a time has the poet wandered about in distress, begging for a pittance, persecuted everywhere, singing his song for nothing, with starvation and inspiration as his only rewards. For too long a time has the poet, 'the unacknowledged legislator of the world,' been subjected to all manner of scorn, persecution, calumny, and been compelled to seek in vain some one who will pay well for a dedication of his work. His own lot was ever hard, and, besides, he suffered all the sorrows of humanity. He lived with all and grieved with all. He put his life into his songs, yet few paid any heed to them. Poets have ever been the victims of the prosiness of things. The world was ever ugly to them because they made it so beautiful. No matter how great their immortality, they never could pay their rent. 'A genius is an accused man,' said Victor Hugo in his book on Shakespeare, and then he goes on to enumerate all the banishments, persecutions, imprisonments and outrages that were heaped upon the poets of all lands and all ages, including Victor Hugo himself. Yes, a poet has ever been an accused man, and nearly every one has found him guilty. But as I say, these cruelties had for too long been practised upon the singers and the time has come for a change. With the advance of civilization he will be given useful employment, a decent wage, and thus enabled to make a living without working overtime. Richard Le Gallienne shall weep no more for a government endowment for the poet. The poet shall become self-supporting. He will sing of things whereof the owners can afford to pay for the song. Whether he will create immortal works or not he will work, and work is immortal. It will continue unto the end of time."

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Here I wished to remonstrate, but Keidansky would not permit me. He continued, as we walked along through the Ghetto.

"The human and other machines of the age are bringing such wonderful things into existence, and the poet will lift his voice in praise of them. It really takes the imagination of a poet to picture and glorify the countless commodities that are manufactured and put upon the markets of our time. It takes a poet to point out their usefulness. What will he not sing of on those huge street signs and in the double-page advertisements in the newspapers? Of pre-digested foods, of squeezeless corsets, of baking powder that bakes the cakes without any form of heat, of ink that endows the pen with brains, of cigars that are conducive to health, of watches that make people up to date, of a hair restorer that keeps the hair you have, of shoes with which you can walk in the air, of clothes that make man and woman out of nothing, pianos that make Paderewskys, of bicycles and typewriters, and razors and house-lots and furniture, and peerless, rare, surpassing, extraordinary everything mentionable. What will he not sing of? These things will be. God will send us a Bobby Burns and he will sing the song of the best steamship company, and he will not only be able to go abroad often, but he may in the course of time even become the general passenger agent. It takes a competent fortune to escape the materialism of the age, and to acquire this the poet will associate himself with the material interests of the time and become as free as a bird in the woods.

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"The process has begun, and already one finds pretty little poems and fine sentiments in all advertisements, particularly those that meet one's eyes in the street cars. I usually have a book with me on the cars, but of late I find the advertisements more amusing. Pretty soon the best literature will appear in the advertisements of all publications. One firm advertises in choice epigrams, which show the possibilities for some future wits. I do not know whether they are written by Elbert Hubbard or not, but they sound like it and show which way things are going.

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"This is the solution of the problem of the poet. I pondered over it long, but found it at last. Our hope comes from Parnassus. The poets will help us conquer the foreign market."

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## XXII

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### "My Vacation on the East Side"

"Green fields, fair forests, singing streams, pine-clad mountains, verdant vistas—from the monotony of the city to the monotony of nature. I wanted a complete change, and so I went to the East Side of New York for my vacation. That is where I have been."

Thus did our friend explain his strange disappearance and unusual absence from Boston for a whole week. For the first time since he came here from New York he had been missing from his home, his regular haunts, such as the cafés, Jewish book-stores and the debating club, and none of those whom I asked knew whither he had betaken himself. The direct cause of his disappearance, explained Keidansky, was a railroad pass, which he had secured from a friendly editor for whom he had done some work. He went on explaining. "I wanted to break away for awhile from the sameness and solemnness, the routine and respectability of this town, from my weary idleness, empty labors, and uniformity of our ideas here, so when the opportunity was available I took a little journey to the big metropolis. One becomes rusty and falls into a rut in this suburb. I was becoming so sedate, stale and quiet that I was beginning to be afraid of myself. The revolutionary spirit has somewhat subsided. Many of the comrades have gone back on their ideas, have begun to practise what they preach, to improve their conditions by going into business and into work, and I often feel lonely. Anti-imperialism, Christian Science and the New Thought are amusing; but there is not enough excitement here. Boston is not progressive; there are not enough foreigners in this city. People from many lands with all sorts of ideas and the friction that arises between them—that causes progress. New York is the place, and it is also the refuge of all radicals, revolutionaries and good people whom the wicked old world has cast out. America, to retain its original character, must constantly be replenished by hounded refugees and victims of persecution in despotic lands. To remain lovers of freedom we must have sufferers from oppression with us. Sad commentary, this, upon our human nature; but so are nearly all commentaries upon human nature. Commentaries upon the superhuman are tragic. New York with its Germans and Russians and Jews is a characteristic American city. Boston and other places are too much like Europe—cold, narrow and provincial. I came to Boston some time ago because I had relatives here—the last reason in the world why any one should go anywhere; but I was ignorant and superstitious in those days. I have since managed to emancipate myself, more or less, from the baneful influences of those near; but meanwhile I have established myself, have become interested in the movements and institutions of the community, and here I am. The symphony concerts, the radical movement, the library, lectures on art, the sunsets over the Charles River, the Faneuil Hall protest meetings against everything that continues to be, the literary paper published, the Atlantic Monthly, Gamelial Bradford, Philip Hale and so many other fixtures of Boston have since endeared it to me and I stayed. Besides, it would cost me too much to ship all my books to New York.

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"But wishing a change, I wanted to go to the big metropolis. No, not to the country; not for me those parasitic, pestering and polished summer hotels, where a pile of people get together to gossip and giggle and gormandize and bore each other for several weeks. An accident once brought me to one of these places. I went out to see some friends, and I know what they are. They spend most of their time dressing; these vacationists dress three times a day; the green waist, and yellow waist, the brown skirt and the blue suit, the red jacket, the white hat, and the gray coat, and then the same turn over again; they fill themselves with all sorts of heavy and unwholesome foods brought from the cities; they sit around the verandas and talk all day, never daring to venture into the woods; they do no good to themselves, coming home tired and sick, and they do unspeakable wrong by turning good, honest farmers into parasitic, sophisticated boarder-breeders, and by turning them away from the tilling of the soil. No more of these places for me. Of course, if one could go into the woods and live as simply as a savage for awhile it would be fine; but one needs a tent, and I never did own any real estate.

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"But this time I wanted a complete change; I wanted something to move and stir me out of the given groove, the beaten path I was falling into, some excitement that would shake the cobwebs out of my brain, so I turned towards the East Side.

"They are all there, the comrades, the radicals, the red ones, and dreamers; people who are free because they own nothing. Poets, philosophers, novelists, dramatists, artists, editors, agitators and other idle and useless beings, they form a great galaxy in the New York Ghetto. For several years, ever since I left New York, I had been receiving instruction and inspiration from them through the medium of the Yiddish and the Socialist press, where my own things often appeared beside their spirited outpourings, and now I was overcome by an overpowering desire to meet them again, talk matters over and fight it all out. There is no sham about the East Side branch of the ancient and most honorable order of Bohemians—the little changing, moving world that is flowing with the milk of human kindness and the honey of fraternal affections, where those who live may die and those who die may live. Here among the East Side Bohemians people feel freely, act independently, speak as they think and are not at all ashamed of their feelings. They have courage. They wear their convictions in public. They do as they please, whether that pleases everybody else or not. They talk with the purpose of saying something. They write with the object of expressing their ideas. They tell the truth and shame those who do not. Hearts are warm because they own their souls. Those who really own their souls will never lose them. As Joseph Bovshover, the fine poet of the East Side has sung:

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*'Beauty hideth,  
Nature chideth,  
When the heart is cold;  
Fame is galling,  
Gold's enthralling,  
When the mind is sold.'*



"They all assemble in the cafés, those universities of the East Side, and in these places of judgment all things are determined. Is there a great world problem that puzzles and vexes all mankind? The debaters at one of these tea-houses take it up at their earliest discussion and soon the problem is solved and the way of human progress is clear again. Is there a question that has troubled the ages? Come and spend fifteen minutes on the East Side, and the salvation of humanity will be assured to you. There is so much squalor and suffering and sorrow here that nothing can overcome the optimism of these chosen people. Their incurable faith cannot be shaken even by their religious leaders, and when they become atheists they are the most pious atheists in all the world. But in the cafés the great issues given up in despair by famous statesmen are met and decided upon. The trusts? Are they not paving the way for the realization of Socialism? Not until all the industries have been concentrated by the trusts will the people through the government be able to take possession of them. Otherwise, how in the world will the new régime, for instance, ever organize and take hold of all the peanut stands of the land? You do not understand the question thoroughly if you have not read the articles of I. A. Hurwitz in the 'Vorwärts.' The future of war? There will be no war in the future. The workingmen of all countries are uniting and so are the capitalists. The international movement is not laboring in vain. Socialism is spreading in the European armies. Every government will have enough trouble in its own land. Others come here and say that every government will have to fight for its own life and will not be able to do anything else. People will take Tolstoy's advice and cease to pay taxes and withdraw their support from the powers that rule. Tolstoy, say some, is a masterful artist, but puerile as a philosopher, a curious mixture of genius and narrow-mindedness, a man, who once having erred, now sins against mankind by denying it the right of erring. The red-haired ragged orator with blue eye-glasses and the face of a Hebrew Beethoven quotes Ingersoll. 'Tolstoy,' said the agnostic, 'stands with his back to the rising sun.' And did not Edward Carpenter say of Tolstoy's book, 'that strange jumble of real acumen and bad logic, large-heartedness and fanaticism—What is art?'

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"Ibsen is somber because he is almost alone in seeing the most tragic phases of life, because he feels compelled to treat what all other artists have neglected. Many of his plays are too much like life to be acted, and we go to the theatre only to see plays. One of the listeners speaks of the appreciation of Ibsen in 'The New Spirit,' by Havellock Ellis, and of the analogy that he finds between Ibsen and Whitman. Zangwill places Ibsen above Shakespeare, and more recently he has bestowed great praise upon Hauptmann. Rather strange of Zangwill, who is himself not a realist and has gone in for Zionism, to like Ibsen so much. And who is greater than Ibsen? some one asks. 'Perhaps it is I. Zangwill,' says the cynical, frowzy and frowning little journalist. G. Bernard Shaw is mentioned as a candidate, and his great little book on Ibsenism comes in for a heated discussion. Brandes is quoted, and several of his admirers present go into ecstasies over his works and almost forget the writers whom he has treated. The pale-faced, wistful-eyed poet with the Christlike face rises high on the wings of his eloquence in praise of the Danish critic's appreciation of Heine, and Brandes is declared to be one of the greatest Jews in the world. What was it Brandes said about Zionism? Zionism, Socialism and Anarchism come up in turn, and so many trenchant and vital things are said on these subjects. Will the novel pass away? The dramatist—bulky and bearded, impressive and strong-looking, with wonderful piercing eyes—the dramatist is inclined to think that it will. The short story is the story of the future. Long novels give one a glimpse of eternity. By the time you come to the last chapter, conditions have so changed in the world that you do not know whether the story is true to life or not. It is the necessarily historical, the long novel is. Old Jules Verne has won the East Side over with the fine words he has said on Guy De Maupassant. Some admirers of Z. Libin say that the Frenchman is too romantic, but on the whole he is the favorite story-writer. 'Yes,' says the Jewish actor, 'De Maupassant writes for all the Yiddish papers'; and in fact all the East Side dailies have for years been treating their readers to his charming tales. He may be imagined to be a constant contributor. Did not an old Israelite walk into the office of the 'Jewish Cry' and ask to see Friedrich Nietzsche? And then the problem of Nietzsche comes up; whether he was, or was not a reaction against, or the opposite extreme from, the meekness of Christianity, the weakness of his time. Wagner's music, Stephen Phillips's poetry, Zola's essay on realism, Maeterlinck's transcendentalism, Gorky's rise in letters, the Anglo-Saxon isolation in literature, Ludwig Fuldas's latest play, all these things are decided upon by people who understand them, more or less.

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"I cannot tell you more, but these meetings and these talks at various times and in various places made my vacation on the East Side delightful. Then there were lectures and meetings and social gatherings of the comrades. The sun of new ideas rises on the East Side. Everywhere you meet people who are ready to fight for what they believe in and who do not believe in fighting. For a complete change and for pure air you must go among the people who think about something, have faith in something. Katz, Cahan, Gordin, Yanofsky, Zolotaroff, Harkavy, Frumkin, Krantz, Zametkin, Zeifert, Lessin, Elisovitz, Winchevsky, Jeff, Leontief, Lipsky, Freidus, Frominson, Selikowitch, Palay, Barondess, and many other intellectual leaders, come into the cafés to pour out wisdom and drink tea, and here comes also Hutchins Hapgood to get his education. Each man bears his own particular lantern, it is true, but each one carries a light and every one brings a man with him.

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"There was that memorial mass-meeting in honor of Hirsh Leckert, the Jewish shoemaker, who shot at the governor of Wilna, who took his life in hand to avenge a hideous outrage perpetrated upon his fellow-workers by a despicable despot. The Jewish working-people of Wilna organized a peaceful procession, and at the behest of the governor hundreds of them were mercilessly flogged—flogged until they fainted, and when revived, flogged again. Then came this lowly hero,

Leckert, and made a glorious ascent on the scaffold. In the afternoon news reached the East Side that Leckert was hanged. The same evening the working-people, just out of their factories and sweat-shops, in overwhelming numbers assembled in New Irving Hall, and the fervor and enthusiasm, the sobbing and the sighing, the tear-stained faces and love-lit eyes—the soul-stirring eulogies delivered—I shall never forget it. I tell you no man ever saw anything greater or more inspiring on his vacation.

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"Mr. Jacob Gordin gave me a memorable treat, took me to see his latest and one of his best plays, 'Gott, Mensch, und der Teufel.' I have seen many of his works and it is hard to decide which is the best because they are nearly all so good. But this strange story of a Jewish Faust, the pious, saintly Jew who, tempted by Satan's gold, step by step loses his soul and cannot live without it; this wonderful blending of modern realism and supernatural symbolism, this superb summary of man and the new problem of life, the beauty and the strength of the work, is remarkable, to say the least. 'As in times of yore,' says Satan, 'the sons of Adam are divided into Abels and Cains. The former are constantly murdered and the latter are the constant murderers. Gracious Lord, in the new man there dwells the old savage Adam.' Sorry I cannot tell you more about it now, but the last words of the play have been ringing through my mind ever since I saw it.

*'All must die, all that is and lives;  
Life alone is immortal.*

*That only is mortal that desires and strives,  
The striving and the desire immortal.'*

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"Why," added Keidansky, as a final thunderbolt, "I have gained enough ideas on the East Side to last me here in Boston for ten years."

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## XXIII

### Our Rivals in Fiction

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"After all, what is man when compared to the hero of romance?" asked Keidansky. "Beside the dashing, dauntless, duelling cavalier that now moves through the popular novel and struts our stage," he said, "the ordinary, mortal man of mere flesh and blood pales into insignificance. Beside the extraordinary exploits of the storied hero, the doings of the every-day man are like the foolish games of little children, only not half so graceful. Beside the strange adventures of the leading character, the simple efforts of earthly man are accounted as naught. It would not be so bad if no one ever made comparisons, but women do, and so men are always found wanting, and have a harrowing time of it.

"In the epic, the drama, the novel, the hero has nothing else to do but to make love, to deliver pretty speeches, perform remarkable feats and look graceful, and so he is ever so attractive. He plays upon the hearts, takes hold of the minds, fastens himself upon the imaginations of the gentle fair and fanciful. He knows just what to say, just what to do, and just where to go, just when to return, and is always so punctual—appears just in the nick of time to save as many lives as are in danger. He becomes a model, a type, that the lady fair goes in quest of, when the play is over, or the novel is ended. She turns to life for the realization.

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"In real life the young man has other things to do than making love, posing prettily, whispering sweet somethings, framing compliments and acting the gallant and defender of the fair and perfectly safe. He has other things to do than wearing fine clothes and winning smiles. In real life he has a real battle to fight. In real life he cannot always look neat, act aptly, prate loudly, and say the improper thing at the proper time. The improper thing at the proper time—that is the secret of genius. Things are not so smooth in life. The guidance of Providence is not so clear as are the directions of the playwright and novelist. Hard to tell just what to do, just what to say, just where to go, and just when to swear with impunity. Human beings are clumsy, awkward, uncouth. Life is an embarrassing affair. To observe all the niceties is madness, not to observe them is to be sent to a madhouse. What can a man do against his all-powerful rival in fiction and the drama. His course is clear, but we walk in darkness. The ways of God are mysterious, the ways of men are crooked, and then—we are told to find the way. No matter how much you stand on ceremony you are likely to slip and fall anyway. Life is a labyrinth for which there is no specific geography.

"To state the matter more definitely, the problem is this: A young man spends a half of his week's wages, takes the lady of his heart's desire to the theatre—and she falls in love with the hero of the play—the omnipresent, omnipotent hero. His every look, every word, every gesture, every step, every venture—it is just too lovely for anything. Oh, it is adorable, entrancing! And the young man who took her to the theatre, the young man who really exists, what does he amount to? What a puny dwarf he becomes beside the great giant of the drama. Who can say things so sweetly, so smoothly, so sonorously, as the leading character or characters in a play? Who can do things so neatly, so masterfully, and surmount such overwhelming difficulties in the twinkling of an eye? Such magnetic, magnanimous, majestic figures! It was after a pretty love scene on the stage that I once heard a lady sitting near me say to her companion, 'Oh, if some one would say

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"my dear" to me in that manner!' And perhaps the young lady will go all through life without finding the man, who will know enough to imitate that actor.

"A young man buys the latest and most loudly advertised historical novel and sends it to the lady of his dreams. On the next evening when he calls she is so absorbed, so immersed in the book that she hardly has anytime to speak to him. When she does look up from the tome she tells him all about the hair-raising hero, Count de Mar. 'He is a man,' she says, and so goes on to relate about his mighty exploits. There is nothing worth while in all the world except a man like Count de Mar. Imagine, if you can, how the young man feels. And the lady chases the phantom of Count de Mar in real life until she becomes a shadow of her former self, and the young man goes through existence cursing the historical novel in general and Count de Mar in particular. What else but misery should there be for mere man of mere reality? What is he beside such lords of creation as Count de Mar, Richard Carvel, Ralph Percy, Ralph Marlow, Stephen Brice, Clayton Halowell, Charley Steele, Jean Hugon, Marmaduke Howard, Count Karobke, Boris Godofsky, Louis De Lamoy, General Kapzen, Prince Meturof—what is he beside these? Everything is so small in life, in books things are so big. The world is already created, but fiction is still being written. If Adam were created by a novelist he would have fared much better. The story would never have ended happily. These wonderful heroes, what fine means they have, what splendid opportunities, what glorious achievements, what great accomplishments are theirs. They can do just as they please, have fortunes to squander, and riot in luxuries. They are all born rich, or their rich relatives die early, and in good will.

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"In reality it is so different. We have to work for a living and poverty is our reward. In real life we have to write historical novels for a living. We have to write popular plays and pretty poems and sugarcoated stories. Yes, such is life, and there is poverty and the misery of the masses, and there are social problems and political evils—things unknown in the average novel, and in popular art generally. We must do so much that is irksome in order to have a pleasurable moment.

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"When Richard Mansfield was delivering those sumptuous stump speeches in Shakespeare's spectacular melodrama of 'Henry V.' and the soldiers were stirred up to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, the fair fraulein in front of me constantly kept saying, 'Who wouldn't fight for Harry?' Who wouldn't fight for Harry? A tremendous artist with superb words put into his mouth by Shakespeare, with a beautiful scenic background behind him, with gorgeous costumes and gleaming armor, with glowing electric lights, with an army of well-drilled, well-paid supers, with all the pomp and power of a king on the stage—who wouldn't fight for Harry? But the poor, obscure, unknown Harry of real life, who faithfully fights against poverty, disease, despair, who battles for the right, for his honor and salvation, without scenic effects, without any art, or author's directions, without any light or armor, without any aid or guides, without any one to show the way—this Harry, who will fight for him? Who does not fight against him? What fair damosel will deign to smile on him and shed some sunshine into his life?

"This was on a street car, and I overheard a young woman say to her escort, 'Ah, if you would only put your gloves on as Mansfield does in "Beaucaire"!' So this was the great thing in the play—the manner in which 'Beaucaire' donned his gloves. And yet—fool that I was—I had wondered why an actor of Mansfield's surpassing talent should put on the stage such a trivial, trashy affair. And I had gone without gloves all winter in order that I might be able to see Mansfield. Heavens! But see, how the little niceties, the small delicacies and the petty graces on the stage and in books eclipse all our drudging and trudging, moiling and toiling in real life. We are expected to observe them whatever else we do. Failing in these we fail to win affections and are voted dead failures. Beside these we are expected to do things that can only be done in books and on the stage, under the auspices of Alexandre Dumas the elder and Victor Sardou, for instance. We are expected to equal those magic creatures of the imagination, the heroes with their opulent supplies of good looks, words and wealth, and their strange power to do aught on earth.

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"James—we will call him that—is red-headed, freckled, plain, and generally not at all dudish. He is, however, true, loyal, devoted and determined to do some good in the world. He tries to meet her every day after work. He often brings a flower with him, tucked up in his sleeve. Once we saw him press it to his lips, for soon the bloom will be hers. But she is reading an historical novel, and even the flower fails to deliver his message and fades without fulfilling its mission. Of course, James has this advantage over the ideal hero in the novel: that he really exists; but what is reality to the glowing fancy of a youthful maiden? And in spite of his existence, where does James come in?

"These are local and popular incidents I have mentioned, but in a measure all literature, all art has created impossible dreams, unattainable ideals. This is probably the reason why so many aspirations have failed. They were not founded on reality. There are in life considerations 'without which the noblest dreams are a form of opium eating.' Who knows how many have gone grieving through life because they have followed the phantoms conjured up by the false standards of art? With all that is great and grand, heroic and epic in real life there is still such a thing as

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*'The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,  
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky.'*

"Anyway, it is about time to protest against the false heroes of paper and ink, who cut us out of

our earthly paradise, to give our rivals in fiction the death stab; about time to remember that that which is not cannot be great, and that all the beauty of this universe is in real life. It is about time to deny the existence of that which does not exist.

"This demand for the superhuman is inhuman. We are not what we are not. We cannot do what we cannot do, and these platitudes are as profound as they are obvious. The weakness of the world is pointed out by its heromania. That we look for our heroes not in life but in artificial creations shows how blind we are. The most striking sign of our imperfection is our longing for impossible perfection. Life has a great grudge against art. It has been slighted, disregarded, abused. With its misleading models it has set up an unjust competition against life. The hope is that the artists to come will give life a hearing and adjust matters. As for the novelists, every time the good Mr. Howells horsewhips the swashbucklers I heartily applaud him. But I am not going to lay down any principles. I don't feel like it to-day. Perhaps things as they were were for the best. Perhaps it is for the dreams of women that there are real men in the world to-day. Perhaps it is their longing for the impossible that made the best that is possible to-day. I sometimes think that a woman's reason is the very acme of all wisdom. But I am going to treat this thing more fully in my volume of essays—if I ever get around to writing them."

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## XXIV

### On Enjoying One's Own Writings

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I was alone, ensconced in a corner of the noisy, smoky café, perusing the pages of a valued volume. Keidansky walked in hastily, took up my book and looked at it.

"How can you read anything that you have not written yourself?" he asked, with surprising solemnity. "Why, I don't mind it any longer; I am used to it now," I mumbled in astonishment. But conversations with Keidansky are one-sided. Before I had formed half a thought he was all ready with speech.

"You are coming down, dear fellow," he said; "you are compromising and becoming reconciled to everything. You cannot supply your own demand, so you are going elsewhere for your literature—spending on others your days and your nights that you may devote to the excavations of the things that lie deep and dormant within thyself. I wager that before long you will even be reading the classics. You will abdicate from the sovereignty of your own genius, and measure life by the enjoyment that you derive from the things that other people do.

"Aliens, foreigners, strangers as far away from you as different individuals are, millions of miles of impassable icebergs impeding any possible approach. They were not born as you were born, they have not lived as you have lived, they have not loved as you have loved, they have not hated as you have hated, they have not grappled with the agonies as you have, they have not died as you have over and over again, and yet—you read their books and pretend to enjoy them."

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I asked my friend to be seated, but he preferred to stand up, and with a characteristic wave of the hand, showed his annoyance at being interrupted. "If you have not felt what I have felt," he said, "it is useless for me to speak to you, and for you to enjoy what I write is hard and tedious labor. You cannot get behind the things others say, and all that remains for you to do is to read the meaning in so many words; and no meaning is ever absolutely uttered in so many words. There is almost always something unsaid behind the thing that is said. There is as much in as there is out. Thought is an endless chain of which we only see separate rings. We are fortunate to see that in the case of other persons. Most often you only hear and read their talk. But when you read your own thought, you read so vastly more than you have written, and you read the history of your thoughts, their far-away causes, their prehistoric origins, and their subterranean sources—and you enjoy it. You enjoy it, if you are intimately concerned in one near and dear personality, in the greatest study in all mankind—yourself. Also, if you are interested in the evolution of human thought, and can see it through the operations of your own mind.

"We say in Yiddish about this or that person: '*Er kumt mit sich fun ein stedtel.*' Well, I, too, come from the same town with myself. I have gone through the dark labyrinth of life with myself in my hand. I have felt, experienced and known the same things that Keidansky has gone through, and—frankly—I enjoy my own writings. Sometimes my favorite works are my own. They move me, they stir me and they stimulate me to higher things. There is a quality about them, more human, more intimate, more personal, that brings them nearer to me than any other writings. The pathos is so touching, the humor so rollicking, the satire so pungent. It is all so effective, significant and strong. Words, lines, sentences, pages that fall flat on the ears of another, they are pregnant with meaning, choked full of suggestion, and often so thrilling. That one has felt, thought, said, given birth to these things, is so fine; so splendid to watch a grand procession of the children of your brain—particularly when you are intuitively convinced that they are, well, a goodly and well-formed brood, and worthy of you. They have to be quite robust to withstand that uncomfortable critical sense.

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"You see, I want a personality, a man, a certain mental attitude, a sense of reserve force, deep-rooted sincerity and determined intentions behind what I read, and I am sure of all that, in the case of my own writings. This gives one a feeling of gladness and joy. In the productions of others one must grope in darkness, painfully explore, and so often search in vain for these qualities

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through their mental manoeuvres and spiritual contortions.

"In our own work we can easily forgive the flaws, faults and shortcomings. We know why they exist, and to what to attribute them; we realize that they are not due to lack of talent or any cause like that. Our characteristic carelessness, our hasty manner, impatience at the slow accommodations of mere mechanical words, a desire to say too many things at the same time—if it is not the one, it is the other. But we know that we could do better if we wanted to; if we cared less about the matter than about the form. We know that the quality is there. There is nothing the matter with that. But somehow we cannot account so well for the crudities, defects and deformities in the performances of others, which jar upon us terribly and mar so much of our pleasure. Their failings are so flagrant, their meanings so nebulous, their ideas so hazy. It is all so far off and so unsatisfying. Why do people write things we do not like? Oh, the rogues, we answer ourselves, as the thought comes to us, they must be doing it for their own enjoyment. They can fill in the gaps, read in everything that is lacking; they can make masterpieces while they read their commonplace utterances—but we? We ought to read our own immortal works. We ought to, if we have any appreciation of great literature.

"One great source of the enjoyment of our own writings is that as we read we remember when each thought came to us, whence each idea sprang into birth, how each flying fancy originated, and every vaporous whimsy took shape. We go over the old ground, tread the paths of the past again, the paths overgrown with grass, or covered with the moss of the years, and we live our life over again. Words, lines, paragraphs, pages; each turn of a phrase brings one back to some turning-point of life; each flash of thought is the reflection of some vital incident. Behind every revolution of mind was a distinct period of evolution. Every old cry conjures up a crisis. That epigram sums up an entire epoch. This page is a condensed history of your heart. Yonder little etching, who knows of what stuff you have woven it? It all comes back to you so vividly, so graphically, so impressively. You read the things that you have written, no matter how long ago, and you live your life over again. The past reaches out its arms and hugs you to its tender breast again.

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"One night, far away from the city, nigh by the sea, a painful silence was broken by agonizing speech. One word, and the world that God had created in seven days was annihilated for you in a second. When you came back in the silence of a sleepless night you wrote in your note-book. 'Our dreams are crimes for which we are punished by the harsh realities of the world.' See how ideas evolve! One day you were chided on the shortness of your stature. You said that you have not had any time to grow. Later you said to some one else that the shape of one's destiny depends on the management of his time.

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"The origin of a thought is greater than the thought. It is often an entire drama; and you see it performed as you read. The crowding multitudes of memories that your literary productions bring up! This was suggested at a social gathering, where you felt distressingly lonely, and it was such a soothing consolation. It was while witnessing a play that that idea came into your mind. The play was a popular success, so you were thinking your own thoughts. One night at a symphony concert you wrote on the edge of a programme: 'Music makes mute poets of us all.' You read it years after, and oh, the cherished recollections that it brings up! But no one else can ever know how great that line is. Here is an idea that illumined your mind while in conversation with ——. There were so many delightful conversations, stirring discussions, endearing episodes; there were scenes that you witnessed, events transpired of which you were part; there were little dramas of which you were both the villain and the hero. They have all passed away, and yet you have saved them from oblivion because you have written, and they cannot die. All things are immortal so long as you live. You read, and the old talks and the old walks, the things that you have seen and done, the joys you have felt and the sorrows you have endured come back and you enjoy them over again. You find this in your writings and so much more. The net results of your own ruminations are so large that there is no wonder all other writers suffer from the comparison. Your writings are the plants, the weeds and the flowers that have grown out of your life, and their aroma and fragrance of earliest bloom follow you to the end of your days. There is that in your inner consciousness which you cannot find anywhere else.

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"The whole universe is within yourself; in others there is only a queer notion of it. Your crudest expression has more feeling and thought behind it than the most beautiful expression of others. We all cherish and relish our own screeds. Are we not all convinced of their merits and superior qualities? Are we not all anxious to secure editors and publishers? And who rejects them? These editors and the publishers, the people who had nothing to do with the production of these undoubted works of genius. I have piles of scraps of old bits of paper and note-books up in my place, extending over a number of years. They contain stray fragments of thought that I have jotted down at all places and seasons and under all sorts of circumstances. As I come across them now and then, I not only re-experience what has long vanished, but I am again exalted unto all heights of human aspiration and inspiration. The foolishness and the follies, the faith and the fervor, and the blind hopes of my youth are mine again.

"Once I was with some Jewish actors, friends of mine, when a long-bearded, old-fashioned Israelite came in to offer them a play that he had written for production. It was such a touching, thrilling story, the old man said, that it made him weep every time he read it—weep like a child over the sad complications of the characters in his play. Oh, if he could only see it performed, it would melt, it would break his heart. Oh, if the actors would only take it! And as he began to read parts of the first act we actually saw tears in his eyes. There you have it. What Dickens, what Tolstoy, what Perez, what Gordin could probably not do for this man, he had done for himself. His

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own writings made him weep. Honestly, now," Keidansky broke out violently, "don't you enjoy your own effusions?"

I admitted that they often gave me pleasure, and that at other times I felt strongly disappointed over them. "Sometimes," I said, "I am puzzled and cannot account how I have done certain things. I say to myself that I must have been drunk to have been so witty; or I imagine that I must have been in the company of bright people to have been so dull. Often as I read I think that my stomach was out of order to make me so thoughtful. And again I am sure that I was awfully hungry to have been so ingenious." I confessed that I found it quite possible to overlook and forgive the faults of my own compositions, and that on the whole they were not infrequently a source of pleasure to me. I ventured to say that I also enjoyed a few things that other people have written.

"Well," said Keidansky, and then he became silent for awhile.

"Immortal works are good enough to kill time," he said after a pause; "but my own writings for real, downright enjoyment, every time. At the occasion of a big convention or political gathering in a certain city the newspaper correspondents, I am told, present a striking scene as they assemble in the lobby of their hotel when the newspapers arrive. Each man rushes to the newsstand and buys 'his paper,' and loses not a minute before reading his own report. There they sit all together, oblivious even of a good piece of news, should it happen to be near them, each one buried in his newspaper, intently reading his complete account of the stormy proceedings, and many of them cursing and swearing at the stupid editors, 'who left out the best things.' Editors are always stupid and always leave out the best things; but if they didn't they would be idiots. My point, however, is that this scene shows how much people enjoy their own writings. Each author has at least one great admirer.

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"And this is saying nothing of the gratification of writing, of the thrills of pleasure one feels, when a burst of inspiration breaks upon him, of the great, unutterable moments of exultation when a new heaven of thoughts opens before one's mind, of the joys of perpetuating the evanescent and the fleeting."

My friend was about to enumerate some more examples, but it was growing late into the night, so I said:

"But you do read some things that eminent authors have written, do you not?"

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"Yes," said Keidansky, "but merely for purposes of comparison. I want to see how total is their eclipse!"

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DISCOURSES OF KEIDANSKY \*\*\*

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