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THE SHADOW
OF THE CROSS

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THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

Translated from the French of
JEAN & JÉRÔME THARAUD
by FRANCES DELANOY LITTLE



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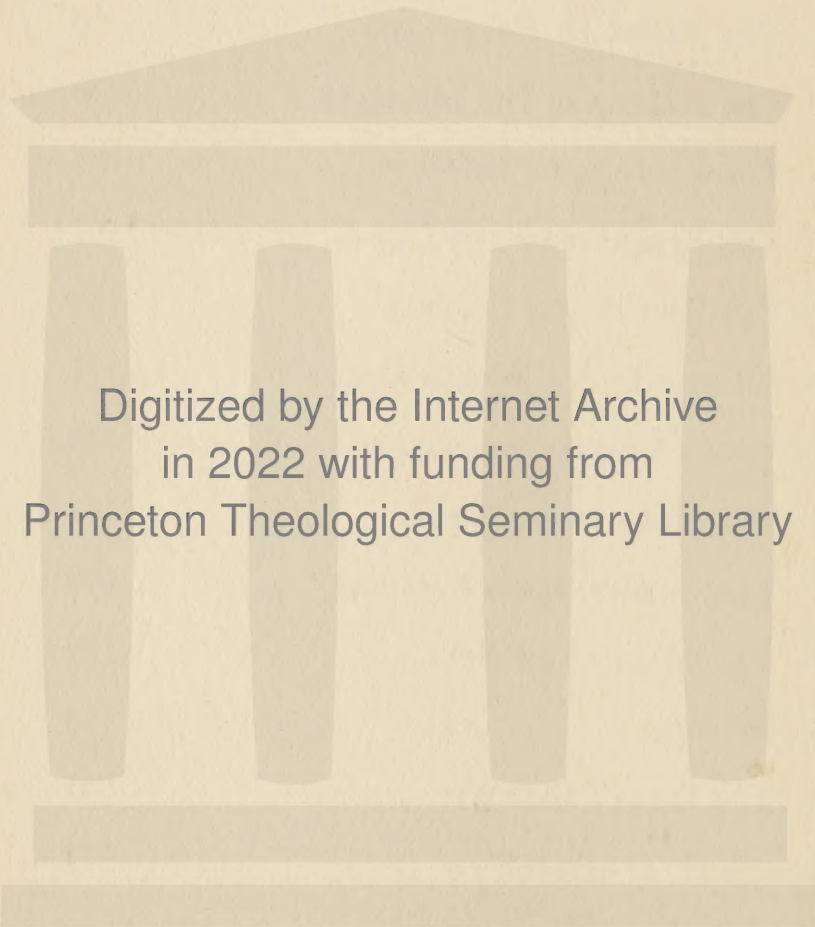
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THE SHADOW
OF THE CROSS

CHAPTER I

THE THORA OF HOUNFALOU

This little Carpathian village, built beside a rushing stream on the borders of the sombre forest and the great Hungarian plain, is the village of Hounfalou. Except to the eyes of those who dwell there, it looks exactly like a hundred other villages of Upper Hungary. Here, as elsewhere, are the tall, dark, melancholy fir trees; here, too, the overhanging woods of beech, hornbeam, and birch; on the steep hillsides the new-mown grass is drying on the stakes, and through the fine autumn days the storks are sitting on the same dead trees. Here are the ramshackle hovels of the Gipsies, or Tziganes, noisy always with sounds from the forge, with crying of children, and the shriek of violins. Here are the Hungarian houses with narrow windows which look out for five months on a world of green and all the rest of the year on snow, while between their double sashes the plants of carnation and geranium are growing in pots; there is the church-square with its sweet-smelling lime tree and the prosperous

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abode of the Headman of the village, whose wide-open door seems crying to the traveller: "Enter here, stranger, and be welcome; the cards and the brandy await thee." Here are the Jewish houses, distinguished from others by holy mezuzzah, the sacred zinc phylacteries nailed against the doorposts. And here is the beloved synagogue.

Ah, how poor is the synagogue of the Jews of Hounfalou, there in the market-place, close beside the village church with its bulb-shaped steeple, so high that it is often struck by lightning, and its rich windows, painted like those in a prince's palace.

The synagogue is nothing but a dull house, hardly distinguishable from the other peasant dwellings; it has no magnificent roof, but a wretched covering of thatch; no flooring but the trodden earth; and in the entrance is a puddle formed by the water spilt from the pail for ablutions. Instead of the perfume of incense there is a horrible smell of poverty, of tobacco and of damp clothing. It has a few benches, a few desks, some seven-branched candlesticks of iron, a wooden stand filled with old burnt-out candles hanging from the cross-beam, and, far at the back, against the west wall, a deal cupboard covered by an ancient crimson velvet curtain upon which are embroidered the two Lions of Judah. But, amid all this poverty and frowsy filth, within the

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little cupboard, behind the two Lions of Judah there rest the holy Thora, the sacred Books of Moses, the Word of God to His people whom He guided in the wilderness and still guides through the world: and that Word is as faithful and as precious among the burning sands of Horeb, of Egypt, and of Sinai as among the sodden plains of Poland or the wild Carpathian valleys.

This morning the September sun was shining with its ancient, immemorial rays upon all the Jews of the village assembled together for prayer.

There were about fifty of them, dressed in their long straight garments, spotted and mudstained; miry boots, and round hats worn on the back of the head, or bonnets of moth-eaten fur. Strange people of a far-off age and a far-distant country! Long locks of hair hung in ringlets on their cheeks, sometimes in lank wisps, sometimes in well-arranged curls, and formed a frame for the large and regular features of faces in which the quick-flashing jet-black Eastern eyes expressed in the same glance furtive apprehension, good-nature, and cunning. Over their head-gear they had placed the taliss of white wool, the prayer-scarf with fringes of blue and embroideries of silver; on the forehead was fixed, like an enormous wen, the little square box, containing the precepts of the Law; round the left arms were tied the sacred bands; for the Lord had said: "Thou

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shalt bind My Commandments as a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be as a frontlet between thine eyes."

All, with feet firmly planted on the ground, were swaying with a rapid movement backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards as if in the frenzied agitation of epilepsy or convulsions, in order to associate the whole body with the soul's effort of prayer. A clamorous chant issued from these bearded mouths and noses muffled in the filthy scarf, an imploring cry which broke forth suddenly into a wild howling that rose and fell, burst forth, and sank, and was lost in a hubbub of voices. Some smote hard upon the book of prayer lying on the desk before them, thus affirming their faith in what was written therein; others seemed as if explaining some confused matter to a judge or a friend whom one seizes by the skirts of his garment; others lifted a clenched fist towards the roof of thatch, in a gesture that looked more like a threat than a supplication; and others raised their arms to heaven as if to uphold their prayer and bring it near unto the Lord.

On a sudden the rocking movement stopped. The prayers and the moaning ceased instantaneously. The misery, the anguish, the mortal grief all at once vanished. An air of content and

blessedness appeared upon every face. The prayer was finished.

Each man folded up his taliss, black with the dirt of several generations, took from his forehead the little sacred box, and turning back the dingy sleeve from his thin and pallid arm, unfastened the leathern armlets. Pipes and tobacco were produced from the pockets of their caftans, and soon the smoke was curling among the motes of the sunbeams. A noise of conversation, almost as turbulent as the prayer itself, filled all the synagogue.

At this moment the *Schames*,¹ having opened a recessed cupboard in the wall, drew forth a bottle of brandy and a basket filled with spiced bread, and then in a loud voice announced: "Kadok Meyer requests the company to do honour to this breakfast."

The man Meyer had, on that very morning, completed his study of a chapter in the Talmud, and in order to celebrate the happy event he offered this treat to the pious assembly.

The Jews, who had not yet broken their fast, and whose appetites had been whetted by their holy gymnastics, all rushed to the cupboard and flung themselves upon the brandy and the new-baked rolls. In less than a minute both the bot-

¹A sort of sacristan or beadle.

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tle and the basket were empty. But instead of dispersing, according to their usual custom, to pursue their various occupations in the village, they remained in the synagogue that they might hear from Reb Jankele, President of the Community, what announcement he had to make touching the will of Faïbisch Ungerleider, who had passed into Abraham's bosom the week before.

"Hush, Jews! Silence, silence!" the Schames cried again, not from the brandy cupboard this time, but from the press containing the Thora.

At once they all raced in that direction, pushing and hustling one another, with the true Jewish eagerness to seize whatever there is to be had, even were it only a piece of news.

In the midst of a hubbub which in any other place would have seemed a frightful tumult, but which in the synagogue appeared comparative quiet, Reb Jankele began:

"Sirs, what have I to tell you to-day? I have to tell you that Faïbisch Ungerleider died last week——"

"We know it! We know it!" was the cry from all sides.

"May it please the Master of the world, the Holy of Holies (blessed be He!), that he may sleep well in his grave, and this I wish also to every good Jew——"

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"And I to you, Mr. President," interrupted a little man hidden in the crowd of caftans.

"Faïbisch Ungerleider, gentlemen, bequeathed at his death three times one hundred and eighty florins to the Community——"

"Long life to him!" shouted the assembly.

"You mean to say 'Good rest to him!'" squeaked the little man once more. But he had been rash enough to slip in amid the front row of the faithful, just within reach of the President, who gave him a box on the ears, and continued:

". . . for the purpose of making a copy of the Thora, and assuring to himself a joyful resurrection in the holy ground of Jerusalem."

Whereupon, these fifty Jews, who demanded nothing better than an opportunity of quarrelling among themselves and displaying their cleverness, began to dispute interminably, with that furious ardour which gives to the most simple conversation between two Jews something of the appearance of a battle. Had the deceased done well or ill in bequeathing a sum of money to the Community for the purpose of making a copy of the Thora? Were there not already enough sacred books in the cupboard? Would it not have been better to devote this money to the rebuilding of the ritual bath? Was three times one hundred and eighty florins a great sum or a small one? Would Faïbisch Ungerleider come to life

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again or not in the holy ground of Jerusalem?

Such were the questions bandied about to and fro in an inextricable confusion of explanation and argument. But that which raised the most passionate interest of all was the question which illustrious copyist, which famous Sofer, of Presburg, of Koloszvar, of Lemberg, or of Bels in Poland, should be entrusted with the honour of copying the Thora bequeathed by the lamented Faïbisch Ungerleider.

It is no easy thing, even with three times one hundred and eighty florins, to obtain a Thora without a defect. In order that a Thora may be perfect, that it may be pleasing to the Master of the world, it is necessary that the three thousand eight hundred and forty-five lines of which the Book of Moses is composed should be written, according to the ritual law, upon a roll of parchment that has never been defiled by any unclean touch. It is necessary that the copyist, throughout the whole course of his work, should wear upon his person the attributes of the morning prayer, that he should envelop his head and beard in the woollen taliss, that he should wear upon his left arm and hand the holy bands of leather, and that he should have upon his forehead the little square box in which are enclosed the Commandments of the Law.

Moreover, it is necessary that he should dis-

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place certain letters in certain words in a cabalistic manner, and that he should write others in such a way that they should fill the end of a line. Finally, it is necessary that he should use a special pen and special ink to inscribe the name of Adonai, under whichever form it may appear. And each time that the dreaded Name recurs in the sacred text, the copyist, before writing it, must pronounce a benediction and even repair to the ritual bath. Every day he is obliged to dip himself in it more than thirty times, and there are some Thoras which are said to have occupied the caligraphist ten years. On these conditions alone, the sacred Book sanctifies the Sofer who has copied it, the Community which possesses it and the Jew who touches it.

They all shouted together, in that composite language, made up of German, Russian, Hungarian, Spanish, and their ancestral Hebrew. Their dazzlingly white teeth flashed between fast-moving lips; their eyes darted glances sharp as arrows, then suddenly were veiled and turned inwards as if seeking in the depths of their souls some new, more subtle arguments; with wild and rapid movements they flourished their long nervous hands in a thousand varied gestures expressive of every shade of thought which was passing in their minds. Every one of those long, thin, black-nailed fingers performed its 'part be-

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fore their faces as if those fingers were marionettes, or tiny living creatures each endowed with an individual life; and if it happened that the hand for an instant ceased its work of explaining and convincing it was only to plunge itself feverishly in the beard in search of a louse or an idea.

And yet they were all of one accord! Every one knew that a Thora without a defect could come only from Bels, that holy village where dwelt the Zadik, one of the four miracle-working Rabbis of Eastern Europe. Every one knew, also, that among the Sofers of Bels none was to be compared, for scrupulousness and piety, to Reb Eljé Lebowitz. Besides this, a fire had occurred quite recently in a synagogue in the township of Marmaras, when twenty Thoras which were kept in the cupboard there had fallen a prey to the flames. One only had escaped, and that one by a miracle. One of the faithful had rushed to the burning cupboard, had seized the Book in his arms, and, in order to preserve it from the fire, had placed it on his head and carried it so. The silken sheath in which the Law was wrapped caught fire like a dead leaf; the cord which binds together the two wooden cylinders round which the sacred Book is folded was immediately consumed, the parchment unrolled and fell in two long silvery streamers on either side of the pious Jew from his head to his feet. He emerged from

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the fire as one coming out from a fountain, or from the ritual bath, purified and refreshed. Not one letter of the manuscript had been touched by the flames. Now, who had transcribed this marvellous Thora? The famous Sofer of Bels, Reb Eljé Lebowitz!

Nevertheless it required no less than an hour spent in chattering and telling of fabulous tales of the Sofer's saintliness before the conclusion could be reached that Reb Eljé should copy the Thora, and that one of the Community should betake himself to Bels in Poland in quest of the pious personage.

But who was to go to Poland? Who should be the delegate of the Community? Who should receive the small sum of money assigned by the deceased Ungerleider to defray the cost of the journey? Every one coveted this honour and the small travelling expenses attached to it; every one wished to see the Sofer; every one wished to see the Zadik and ask him for a miracle. Besides, the prospect of making this journey—and free of expense, like an ambassador—excited in the Jews their crazy vanity, their desire to be distinguished before their fellows, and the ancient travelling instinct which Israel has carried in his soul since the dawn of time and which drives him forth untiringly on all the roads of the world.

Each one strove, if not for his own success, at

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least to prevent his neighbour from being elected by the assembly. The discussion now became so violent that all the earlier disputation seemed in comparison mere amicable talk. To put one another out of the running they probed without shame into the secrets of their lives. Ah, how well they knew one another! When, once a year, on the great Day of Pardon, God passes before Him like a flock of sheep all the Jews of the earth, and reads in their lives and in their hearts all the sins they have committed or have wished to commit, that He may write them in the Book of Life or in the Book of Death; ah, surely if happiness is in store for the Jews of Hounfalou, or of anywhere else, there must be eyes less piercing and a judgment less severe than those which these fifty sons of Israel assembled in that synagogue possess for one another! This one neglects the ritual bath; that other is not punctual in the observance of the prayer of Min'ha; a third has never read one line of the Talmud; a fourth drinks alcohol in secret; Schmoul does not strike his caftan while he prays; Mosché opens his tavern privately on Saturdays; Nokhem Patzer eats pork; Baruch Teller mixes his alcohol with water; the daughter-in-law of Solomon Schwartz has kept her hair uncut beneath her wig; the son of Lilienblum wears shoes with laces, and, worse still, a starched collar! Ah, yes, if the Master

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of the world, the Holy of Holies (blessed be He!) knew but the half, or the half of the half of the transgressions of the Law which they are now casting in one another's teeth to prevent them from receiving the prize of this wonderful journey, not one of them, no, not one would ever be named in letters of gold in the Book of the Living!

It was past nine o'clock. The sun was now higher in the sky, and his burning rays drew forth a stronger odour from caftans, boots, bonnets, beards and ringlets. Profiting by the absence of their schoolmaster, a troop of children, escaped from the heder, or Jewish school, were running round and round among the excited congregation, knocking down the desks and benches, and chasing one another about the synagogue as if it had been the village square. Reb Jankele attempted in vain to enforce silence. Ever since the days of the Patriarchs an Israelite commands respect in greater or less degree according to the length of his beard, and the Lord had granted to Jankele only a few poor hairs on his chin. It was useless for him to stroke it with ample gesture as if caressing a full and luxuriant beard, no one paid any attention to his words. However, he made a sensation at last by shouting out in the midst of the din that to facilitate the Community's choice of a delegate, the ambassador of

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the Jews of Hounfalou should go to Bels at his own expense.

Had the Lord performed in that moment for Reb Jankele the miracle He did in past days for Rabbi Eleazer, who, at the age of barely fifteen, woke one fine morning to find on his chin the white beard of a Moses, the company of Jews would not have felt greater astonishment. There was one moment of stupor, almost of silence. Then tumult broke out once more. No one now wanted to go to Bels in Poland, no one wished to order the Thora, no one cared any longer to see the miraculous Rabbi. "A fine legacy," they said, "that is going to be nothing but a charge upon us! Just because the Jew Ungerleider chose to lie down in the grave, I must go to Bels at my own expense!" And no one had any difficulty in proving, to himself and to others, that his business made it impossible for him to leave it for so long.

Somewhat apart from the tumult a man with hair already grizzled, Amram Trebitz, the publican of the village, appeared engrossed in his prayers. He was deep in calculation of what advantage a journey to Bels, even at his own expense, might bring to him. Among innumerable transactions which he carried on in Hounfalou and the neighbourhood was that of a dealer in skins. Now every one knows that furs such as

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zibeline and wild cat are plentiful in Poland; besides, in the month of September the great feasts of Rosch-Hashenah and of Kippour bring to Bels thousands of pilgrims, among whom it would not be impossible to traffic.

His resolution once taken, he sprang forward, and pushing through the crowd, he cried:

“Hush, Jews! No more words about it! I will be the one who goes to Bels!”

And to the admiration of all, he told how, every Friday, he had, as the Law commands, set apart one-tenth of his income for the poor, and with this sum he would make the journey into Poland and order the sacred Thora.

The admiration was short-lived. Already every one was thinking that if Amram Trebitz, the most cunning trader in Hounfalou, offered to take the journey at his own expense, it was because he expected to find it profitable. And, the instinct for lucre being aroused, the dispute no doubt would have begun again had not Nokhem Patzer, who had been absent a few minutes, now entered, crying:

“There are no more eggs in the market! That rascal Solomon Schwartz has bought them all up from the peasants while we were chattering! All the hens in the country have been laying for that wretch! And at this very moment he is playing the same trick with the maize!”

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"May colic grip him in the belly!" shouted all the Jews together.

And hastening precipitately from the House of the Lord, they rushed into the market-place.

How remote, how far away, is that little Carpathian village! Yet life there, after all, is not unlike life in other places. The Hungarian tills the soil, fells the trees of the forest, and leads out his flocks to the pasture; the Tzigane works at his forge when the whim takes him, thieves all the year round, and scrapes his violin; and the Jew prays, carries on his business and makes his profit out of them both. Who would supply the Tzigane with old iron for horseshoes? Who would buy the peasant's corn, or his eggs and poultry? Who would lend him money? Who would make him tipsy on Sundays? Who would be the brain, the tongue, the lawyer, the doctor, the moneylender, the publican of this society? Who would be its Providence, its conscience, its vice, its good and evil genius?

Truly it is God Himself Who has given the Jew to the village for its ruin or its salvation. In this grotesque form, this meagre figure in the caftan, with uncut beard and long corkscrew ringlets hanging down his cheeks, civilization has embodied itself. Under this squalid garb are hidden all its novelties, its temptations and its knav-

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eries. Who could have believed it? That little Moses, that little Solomon whom one used to thrash when he was small, has now grown up and become a personage. He speaks, and people listen. One follows his advice; one almost feels a pride in him.

“Our village has twenty Jews.” “Yes, but ours has thirty.” “But our Jews have houses with red tiles on the roofs.” So talk the Hungarians. But should some accident happen, should a well be poisoned, should a wood take fire, or an epidemic break out among the cattle, should anything, in short, unfortunate and unaccountable take place in the village, then who is the guilty person? Who poisoned the well? Who started the fire? Who cast a spell upon the beasts?

The Tzigane perhaps is suspected, but it is the Jew who is accused. No one can grow rich as he does, no one can be so clever or so crafty or have so many tricks up his sleeve unless he's in league with the devil. This is not the first time he has harmed us, the ugly Jew! Abuse and blows are showered upon him, but they do not touch him very deeply, for he has too much contempt for the peasant who beats him, he considers himself too superior to feel humiliated. He smiles, he bows down his back to the storm; the wind passes and the reed stands up once more; the Jew too lifts his head and continues to live.

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Whence comes he, this caftan-skirted Jew? From unhappy Poland, most often, or from inhospitable Russia. One day, deserting the overpopulated Ghettos, he presents himself at the Hungarian frontier. Yet one more Jew, behold, Lord, coming forth out of Mizraim and fleeing out of Egypt! What deserts, what Red Seas await him; and what miracles also! His bag of prayers upon his back and his Sabbath garments wrapped in a kerchief are the whole of his luggage. But he has confidence in his breast and faith in the eternal miracle. And at once, on his very outset, a miracle takes place.

At the frontier a gendarme fixes an eye upon him. He is not a desirable, that fellow there in a caftan. "Dirty Jew, get back to where you came from!" And the gendarme has some forcible words in which to make clear this simple phrase to the man of Israel.

But from his doorway Jacob, Abraham or Levi sees his fellow-believer struggling in the hands of the gendarme. "Alas, Master of the world," he says to himself, "here comes another Jew! As if there were not enough of us here already! Why can't he stay in his Poland, cursed Jew in a caftan?" And even as he mutters these words, his flat feet slipping through his bursting shoes—those feet which in the day of judgment the Lord will surely recognize among a thousand—have

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set themselves in motion and carry him irresistibly towards his brother in distress. More loud than the voice of interest, the call of blood and of religion has sounded in his heart. Thus throughout all the ages it sounds with a voice that never fails. Jacob, Abraham or Levi goes up to the gendarme and says simply: "He's my cousin, he's my guest. Leave him alone; he is coming to stay with me." And that is the first miracle! The frontier is passed. Yet once more the Master of the world has vanquished the haughty Pharaoh in the form of a gendarme.

And wonder upon wonder is manifested on the path of the pious Jew! "I will never leave thee," declared the Lord of Sabaoth. Two days, three days, until the gendarme has forgotten him, the wandering Jew stays with his fortune-given cousin. Then, at one bound, there he is fifteen leagues from the frontier. He hurries, hurries through the country, whistling to call the women to their doors and sell them his trumpery, bartering a bunch of maize for a little mirror, or a bit of old iron for a handful of salt. He buys everything, he sells everything. He does not know one blessed word of the language spoken in the villages he passes, but in less than three months he can make himself understood in Hungarian.

It is a belief in Israel that every man is accompanied by ten thousand angels on his right hand

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and ten thousand demons on his left; and indeed to see him passing through the villages, a foreign vagabond with eyes ever moving, ears on the alert, and his air that at once betrays and causes suspicion, one would say that he was hearkening to those twenty thousand discordant voices speaking to him all together. This whistling, long-haired, bearded Jew, with caftan in tatters and boots thick with mud, looks to the little Christians like a bogey. The mothers say to them when they cry: "Be good, or the whistling Jew will carry you off." And the village boys run behind his skirt, singing the old song:

"The village lads eat bacon;
Why does the Jew eat none?
Jew, Jew, why can't you eat bacon?
See, the Hungarian eating bacon!
Spit! goes the Jew——"

But he, indifferent, with a smile upon his lips, goes into the house, drives his little bargain, and continues on his road.

So for months, often for years; he wanders about the country, wearing his hat on the back of his head, twisting his beard in his fingers as he ponders some magnificent scheme to gain four ha'pence, selling odds and ends and goods not worth a farthing, observing everything, reckoning

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up in his mind the value of the clothes of every passer-by. He is a merchant of the wind that blows, and the rumours in the air, accosting every one he sees with unvarying optimism; indomitable dreamer; knavish, yet honest; starving with hunger in pursuit of a fortune; his livelihood daily dependent on chance, he bears from village to village the bitter irony of the contrast between his claim to be a child of the Elect People and his actual condition of a beggar, a pack-bearer, a seller of rags. He suffers indeed in the immensity of the gulf between his desires and his indigence, but he never loses hope, for the vital essence of such lives as his is not so much the success they may attain, amazing as that often is, but rather something fantastic, unlooked for, abnormal, in short, a miracle, the perpetual miracle of the Jew.

And the miracle is always happening. The whistling Jew has scraped together some money. And there he is, setting up as a petty tradesman in some village such as Hounfalou, dealing in wood or in cloth perhaps, or buying furs or gelding cattle; he is good at all trades. He is zealous at his work, he pays his debts scrupulously, and his business increases. No one refuses credit to a man like that; he may borrow in fact where he will. For two or three years, until he has inspired confidence, he pays every quarter with great punctuality. The lender advances a larger sum.

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The Jew becomes more and more pious, appeals more frequently to the Thora, attends more assiduously than ever in the synagogue. "Come now, God of Justice! It is time to fulfil Thy promises! Turn not a deaf ear to my voice!" And then it is that the Eternal shows unto His servant the strength of His arm. The insured shop is burnt down; or a bankruptcy well managed leaves him in possession of the ten thousand francs which a trader must have, to be honest.

Honest! What a stupid word! Has he ever been otherwise? Has he injured his neighbour? What signifies to a Jew of Galicia, or of Bels or Zada-Gara, that society that insured his business, or that firm in Buda-Pesth which granted him a loan? What matters it to him what harm he does to those unknown people, that body of shareholders, nameless members of a joint-stock company? Are they real living men whom a Jew from the depths of Poland can take into consideration? Is he a social being? Has he any conception of the meaning of citizenship? How in the world should any such extraordinary notions as that of a duty to society get into his head?

And so he enters into the Land of Canaan. His affairs have prospered, and he buys land. God in His providence has placed at his side the Amalekite in the shape of some thriftless peasant

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or headman of a village, who sells him his property to make merry with the proceeds. Field after field and forest after forest he buys up their estates. At the end of the second generation, often in a yet shorter time, his sons have established themselves in New York, in London, or in Paris. They are people of importance. They wear gold chains upon their waistcoats and gold-rimmed glasses upon their noses; and if you talk to them of the little village of Hounfalou and describe the life there they will gaze at you and say: "How curious!"

For the final miracle from Heaven is accomplished. They do not even remember!

Two days later, all the Jews of Hounfalou, men, women and children, were gathered before the door of Reb Amram Trebitz, to witness the departure of the delegate of the Community.

The lean and long-bodied men, gesticulating and loquacious, their ringlets perpetually dangling against their hollow cheeks, were pressing round the carriage, examining the straps and the cords which harnessed the one horse to the pole. And around the beast's thin flanks there flew, like a buzzing swarm of flies, jokes in which nonsense and religion intermingled, and brought to the corners of those sensual lips and those eager eyes, not the coarse laugh of the peasant, but the

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grimace of the man who catches in its flight some malicious innuendo.

Even a Jew who has put on one side for the poor the tenth part of his income, even a Jew who is going to visit the great miracle-working Rabbi and to order a Thora, even he is not immune from the jests of his tribe. Which among these devout persons would have dared to say aloud that Reb Amram Trebitz had not put aside for the poor the sum that the Law prescribes? But which of them really believed it? And the buffoon, Nokhem Patzer, made every one laugh by saying that Amram's horse was as pious as his master, that it stopped of its own accord when Amram said his prayers, and that, like the mule of the famous Rabbi Phineas ben Jahir, it refused its feed of oats if the tenth part had not been taken away for the poor.

The women, whose figures through excessive fatness and many childbirths had lost all former grace, stood in a group apart that they might not defile the equipage by their unclean touch. The brightness of their eyes alone gave a passing animation to their heavy and regular features. Old, or prematurely aged, they had for the most part that striking ugliness in which a vanished beauty is yet traceable; and their appearance was not improved by the fact that instead of hair they wore on their clean-shaven skulls a sort of

quilting or peruke of black and brown satin, trimmed with bows of ribbon and a few imitation pearls.

A crowd of children was playing around them, scrambling into the cart and pushing under the tarpaulin cover. Some of them were dressed like the little Christian boys in jackets and breeches, but many of them wore already the funniest little black Jewish frocks fashioned out of cast-off paternal garments. Their tzitziss—a sort of scapulary made of two large squares of stuff from the four corners of which hung long white fringes—gradually emerged from beneath their upper garments as they played, and even, with a few of the most untidy, floated wide over their shoulders. The long ringlets which, in obedience to the ritual law, must never be cut—black, fair, or reddish, enframed their delicate faces, giving to their young countenances the charm of natural beauty and the symbol of religion.

It seemed strange that these attractive little creatures should one day become those gesticulating, garrulous, sordid men and women, that their sweet faces should acquire those expressions of restlessness and anxiety, that their light, dancing figures should be transformed into those long, hollow-chested, stooping, pot-bellied scarecrow shapes. Yet, observing them more closely for a moment, one marvelled no longer at the change.

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One discerned in the faces of most of them something too sharp and precocious, too early ripe and already faded, too much excitability and quickness, a twitching of the muscles, a worn look, and symptoms of fatigue and exhaustion. There was too much passion and exuberance of life in those fine flashing eyes and bright red lips. The long-past centuries had left upon their too finely cut features an inexpressible weariness such as is never seen except among children of the most ancient civilizations.

A few paces away were some Hungarian peasants, dressed in their summer costumes, which consisted of white linen breeches showing their bare legs, a short jacket with loose, hanging sleeves like the dew-laps of oxen, and a round hat smartly trimmed with a flower. They stood puffing leisurely at their pipes and gazing at the troop of black-clothed Jews who, in spite of the gloom of their sad-coloured garments, gave by their exuberance, the vivacity of their voices and the quick changes of expression in their faces an extraordinary impression of life, or rather of almost sinister liveliness. The very composure of the peasants seemed a sarcastic comment on the scene.

At length Amram himself appeared on the threshold of his door. He was magnificent to behold in his Sabbath clothes. His black caftan

shone not only with the brilliance of silk but also with the brightness of much wear; his grizzled locks hung down from under a velvet cap which was encircled by thirteen narrow bands of fur. Round his neck he had tied the scarf which indicated that its wearer was on pilgrimage to the miraculous Rabbi. Half emerging from his huge and swollen pocket were a checked handkerchief and the nose of the bottle holding water for private ablutions, which no good Jew must ever neglect on a journey.

There was a general rush in his direction, as though he had been the great Rabbi himself, a screaming uproar of voices, a torrent of words and messages entrusted to him. Every one slipped into his hand a silver florin or two, as a gift to the Zadik and a reminder of the affair for which the Rabbi's miraculous intervention was desired. One had a lawsuit on hand, another a cow which had ceased to give milk, another a wife who was childless, another had found his vinegar gone bad. Not one of them doubted that, thanks to the Zadik of Bels, his lawsuit would be gained, his cow would give milk, his wife would bear children, and the vinegar would satisfy his customers. He—with kindly and dignified air and a countenance filled with pride in the mission entrusted to him—slipped the florins into his pocket, vowing to forget nothing and to bring good

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fortune for every one back with him in his cart.

During this time the old Hannah, his wife, and Guitelé, his daughter, were packing in the carriage the traveller's cloak, and some bread, brandy, and hard-boiled eggs for his provisions. He in his turn examined the harness, assured himself that there was sufficient straw beneath the tarpaulin for him to lie and sleep on, and then returned to kiss the sacred mezuzzah on the door-post.

On the threshold the old Hannah pushed towards him Guitelé, a girl still wearing her beautiful dark hair which the stern marriage law would one day require to be shorn.

"Give her thy blessing," she said.

And she instantly covered their daughter's head with her apron, for in those distant Jewish communities a Jew must never touch the hair of a woman even though she should be his own child. Amram placed his long hand, which the labour of many generations of his fathers had not coarsened, over the old woman's apron.

"And do not forget," she added in an undertone, "that she will soon be seventeen."

This, to put it in plain terms, was a hint to the traveller that it was time for the Zadik of Bels to take steps towards obtaining from the Eternal the favour of a husband for Guitelé.

The young girl took her father's hand and raised it to her lips. Old Hannah did likewise.

Amram kissed the zinc phylactery, climbed into the cart and called out to the Jews: "Besitchem!"

A hundred voices answered, giving him the blessing appropriate to a journey. "May God bless thee and keep thee! May His face shine upon thee! May He give thee peace. Amen."

A smart cut of the whip set the horse trotting off in triumphant departure. The Jewesses all drew together at one side that the traveller might not set out driving between two rows of women—this being of bad omen—and also that the carriage might not be made unclean by brushing against the dress of one of them. The troop of children ran behind, looking, in their round hats, like a party of gnomes escaped from the forest.

"There is the Bent Jew starting for Poland!" said the peasants, as they saw Reb Amram go by. They spoke of him by his nickname, for no peasant of Upper Hungary will ever call a Jew by his proper one, but they waved to him from behind the acacia trees a sincere and friendly good-bye.

After passing the Tziganes' houses at the end of the village, the road ran through cornfields where nothing was now left standing except the tall sunflowers from which the peasants make their oil.

The Jewish children were still running in the

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dust behind the cart, but as soon as they came in sight of the terrible Cross with the iron figure of Christ which stood at the entrance of the forest they prudently abandoned the chase and returned to play in the cool shade of the synagogue.

Amram passed before the Cross, and as he passed he spat; he turned away his head; he pronounced the ritual formula: "Cursed be thou who madest a new religion!" Then from the pocket of his caftan he drew forth his book of psalms and began the prayers appointed for a journey. "In the name of the Eternal, the God of Israel, let the angel Michael be ever on my right hand, Gabriel on my left, Uriel before me, Raphael behind me, and over my head the majesty of the Almighty."

So the carriage, the horse and the Jew all vanished in the Carpathian forest.

CHAPTER II

THE RABBI AND HIS MIRACLES

(“The Jews seek after a sign”)

From Lemberg to Cracow there stretches, beneath its grey and heavy sky, the melancholy plain of Poland, a landscape of rain-sodden meadows, desolate pools, tracts of mud and mournful woods of fragile acacias, delicate shivering silver birches, and fir trees whose drooping branches seem even in the height of summer to be always waiting for the snow. Light wagons drawn by small horses go jolting through the deep mire of field-roads which lead apparently to nowhere. Here and there, at long intervals, one comes upon a few thatched houses plastered over in vivid colours half washed off by rain; or perhaps some straw-mill under a rotting roof supported on four posts; and at every cross-road and on every low mound that varies the monotony of the plain there stands a high, roughly fashioned Cross with its Christ of painted sheet-iron. These tall crucifixes, visible symbols of solitude and

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patience, cast their sorrowful spell over all this land of Galicia. This country is their country, they dominate, they populate, they possess it; they are its soul. It is as if that low and rainy sky was upheld from the earth by those great outstretched arms alone.

Is it the God of long-past ages, the God of Abraham, of Israel, and Moses, Who spoke from Horeb and from Sinai, is it He Who in this Christian country, this very Calvary and endless Way of the Cross, has planted the unchanging type of that ancient people out of Egypt and Babylon, to preserve for ever among strangers their own customs, thoughts and feelings? Or is it the God of the New Covenant Who has decreed that there shall dwell here for ever beside these Crosses those who of old time were the witnesses of His Passion?

Be that as it may, the Jews are here in vast numbers: four or five million, or perhaps six million Jews, for a population so continually changing and wandering can scarcely be accurately numbered. They are poor as Job, their life as precarious and unstable as that of the water-spider on the pool; all traffic, all petty industries among the Christian peasants, Polish or Ruthenian, are in their hands; and here in their provincial Ghettos they carry on an existence so alien, so strange, so regulated in its every detail according to the strictest Hebrew law, that it

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still presents the unchanging picture of life as it was in a suburb of Jerusalem two thousand years ago.

Among many another small, unknown town, and looking to the rest of the world as dirty, as verminous and insignificant as they, the holy place of Bels shines forth to all these Eastern eyes like a palm tree in the desert. Every year, at the time of the great festivals, pilgrims from the remote parts of Russia, Austria, Germany, Rumania, and Upper Hungary, gather beside that marshy meadow and that lonely river, seeking the miracle-dealing Rabbi.

In the soul of these practical business-like Hebrews, to whom the buying and selling of a rabbit-skin, or an old hide, or a worn-out coat, is a matter for profoundest calculation and cunning, there is an irrepressible craving for something marvellous, miraculous, something, in short, of the other world. That continual agitation and restlessness of hands and faces is a sign not only of the feverish temperament of their race, but of a fanatical enthusiasm, an excitability, a wild desire for something new, astonishing and impossible which, even more than the love of lucre, is characteristic of these Jews. Consequently they never rest content with their present condition, but escape from it when they can, sometimes to seek enormous fortunes in our Western towns, or even

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in America, sometimes to confide blindly in the promise of a Zadik who will change everything for them by a word.

The pursuit of vast wealth and the appeal to the miraculous have the origin in one and the same sentiment, the Israelite's eternal hope of entering the Promised Land; it is the ancient instinct of his race persuading each individual that his dreams and his imaginations are on the point of being realized. The inexhaustible strength of that hope which guided the Patriarchs, Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, has lost nothing of its antique power. The same insatiable desire which led Jehovah's people of old time in the deserts of Arabia leads these fanatic multitudes to-day, in crowded trains and carriages to this poor town of Bels to see the Rabbi who can work miracles.

In this month of September, on the eve of the first of Tischri and the festivals of Rosch Haschanah which mark the beginning of the Jewish year, a crowd of pilgrims arrived in the little Galician station. Each carrying the enormous bundle with which a Jew always burdens himself when he travels, trailing their caftans in the mud, or, like old women, holding them up in both hands, they streamed out, passing in line before the great figure of the Christ set up opposite the station. Chattering and gesticulating all the while, they walked along the few hundred yards of broken

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road which leads from the railway to the town, which consists of a few hundred low houses on the level of the meadow beside the undyked river.

It had been raining all the night. The narrow windows, piled up with packets of poor village groceries, seemed to be shrinking back in a vain attempt to find shelter behind the high pathways made of planks in front of the houses. The mud, the dreadful mud, had crept up the rails and lay thick upon the boards, at first sloppy and then caked hard, until these wooden paths became as miry as the roads. It penetrated into the shops and spread its own dampness and dirtiness over the crude-coloured woollen and cotton stuffs, the hides, the furs, the eatables and even over the coloured sweets in the glass jars.

In the market-place, between the wooden arcades which form a sort of cloister round a swamp of mud, the carriages of those pilgrims who had come from a long distance by road were grouped like a camp of savages. Sunk in mud to the axle, they served by day as mangers for the horses and by night as a refuge for their owners. The noisy crowd of *Kachlavniks*, poor officious wretches who make a living out of the pilgrims, hovered about them; children played under the tarpaulins; flocks of geese marched gravely about among the wheels of the carts, and their daz-

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zling whiteness seemed the one thing spotless amid the filth.

But the true Bels, the sacred place, is neither the market-square nor the caravansary. Close by it is another square, equally muddy and crossed from one side to the other by the same wooden pathways. But here are neither carts nor shops nor any secular houses. On the right is the house of the Zadik which, with its modern air and its two stories, looks strangely out of place among these others built on the level of the ground and oozing damp through all their crumbling bricks. At the farther end is the synagogue, whose great walls, without windows, are splashed at the foot by waves of mud, and crowned with fantastic crenellated ornament. On the other side is the *bethamidrasch*, a kind of hall dedicated as library, refectory and dormitory in one, to the use of the pious multitudes. And on the fourth side of the great square formed by these buildings, between which wide silent spaces of green and marshy meadow are visible, stands the Catholic church with its bulb-shaped steeple assuring to the peasant in the distant plains the presence of his God in the midst of this Jewish town.

This town, though peopled solely by exiles from the East, is strangely unlike any village of Syria or Arabia. Every characteristic of those is here, as it were, reversed. Instead of dust and sand is

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mud, everlasting mud; overhead is no blue sky, but the low moving cloud; and in place of white floating burnouses are these sad, black robes, and boots clogged with the mud of winter. How should one dream of the East in a scene like this? In what Oriental country has one ever felt this menace of rain upon one's head, this heaviness in one's feet? In what Oriental land has one ever seen men with high bonnets of moth-eaten fur like these men?

Over all things here is the breath of cold and misery. Yet here is this wonder of wonders, that no sooner shall you enter this land of Galicia than a sense of glowing heat from some far country shall strike you. It may be in the grace of the children, their beautiful eyes and their scarlet lips; in the soft massive figures of women; the majestic air of the old men; or something in their mobile countenances and the brilliance of those eyes giving to these people an air of intelligence greater than they actually possess. You are in Poland no longer, but in Judea. Life has changed its colour and taken the sombre tints of the North. But the spirit which dwells here is not the soul of this cloud-wrapped country. The vital fire which gave it birth in the far East is inextinguishable. Winter may follow winter, the snow may fall, rain pour in torrents, the mire grow deep in the market-place; but even as the plumage of

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these geese who live in it can take no stain from the mud, so this poor village, in spite of all the power of the elements, remains yet a village of Palestine. No rain can dull the brightness of those quick-glancing, anxious or solemn eyes; all the mud of Poland may be heaped upon those boots and caftans; with the first sunbeams it dries into the dust of Judea, and those black, melancholy caftans still recall visions of the sweeping robes of Esther or of Ahasuerus.

When, at the end of a ten days' journey, the delegate of the Jews of Hounfalou made his appearance in the market-place, the whole tribe of *Kachlawniks* rushed toward his cart. One of them, jumping up beside Amram, settled himself upon the seat and proffered his services. Fifty kreutzers to keep guard over his carriage—five kreutzers and a glass of brandy to water his horse—twenty kreutzers to give it a rub down—ten to feed it—six to take care of his overcoat—three to show him the way to the bath—two florins to introduce him to the miracle-working Rabbi. While talking he had seized the whip and with it he dealt out smart blows to his fellow-believers who were tugging at his caftan, trying to pull him down, while with the other hand he grasped the reins and steered the carriage in among the labyrinth of carts until presently its wheels, shafts,

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horse and all were so intermixed with other wheels, other shafts, other animals that it was impossible either to advance or recede, and the equipage became fixed in the mass of carriages like a ship among icebergs.

Amram agreed, for the price of sixty kreutzers, to have his carriage guarded, his overcoat taken in charge and his horse cared for. Then, tucking up his fine silk caftan to his knees, he hurried through the mud to the house of the Zadik.

In the Zadik's house, from the worn brick steps of the landing with its broken iron rail, even to the end of a long dark passage leading to that mysterious chamber which held the miracle-working Rabbi, there was a seething mass of caftans, of boots, of moth-eaten bonnets, of beards and ringlets: a crush, a mob, a din altogether indescribable, poisoning the air with the odour of stale tobacco and damp underclothing. The assembly, shouting, spitting, gesticulating, pushing one against another in a frenzy of excitement, filled the spacious waiting-room; four secretaries, wearing the high kolbacks on their heads, sat at a white wooden table writing down in Hebrew the requests of the audience and the favours desired by the pilgrims; at the same time they received the offering which the suppliant made to the Rabbi. The most pious and the most worthy

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vied with one another who should present the most magnificent donation, and the amount of their gifts excited to madness the unashamed interest of the crowd. An ardent curiosity, almost feminine in its character, and a passion for any matter in which money is concerned, flamed in all eyes.

From mouth to mouth flew words of admiration at each large sum which the rich pilgrims handed over to the secretaries that they might be admitted to the holy personage. At the moment when Reb Amram penetrated into the hall, a fat merchant from Kieff had just presented eighteen times eighteen roubles (eighteen being a cabalistic number signifying life), and this liberality aroused among these poverty-stricken people, always hungry for occasions for enthusiasm or astonishment, so much pious and servile admiration that the donor was surrounded by a compact mass of pilgrims and a whole tribe of mendicants, imbeciles with red-rimmed eyes, and ragged urchins on the watch for halfpence.

At the end of the long, dark passage which led to the Rabbi's room the crowd was so dense that it offered the unprecedented spectacle of Jews haranguing one another without either waving their arms or shaking their fingers, or even pulling at their beards or their hair. Two secretaries, stalwart fellows, defended the door by kicks and blows

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from the assaults of these crazy folk who would gladly have spent the whole of the day in that dark, evil-smelling hole, if they could but catch one glimpse through the half-opened door of the marvellous personage.

Although Amram was burning with eagerness to approach the mysterious door, he could not for one moment hope to find a way through the thick caftaned, befurred, bearded and ringletted rampart. He was pushed, he was struck, he was bruised; and though, with devout energy, he made play with his elbows, he tried in vain for two hours to work himself a passage to the table where sat the secretaries in their kolbacks. It was of no use, night was falling. He had only just time for the ritual bath before the evening prayer.

Oh, that bath! in which since the morning hundreds of pilgrims had dipped themselves and had washed their snuff-stained handkerchiefs! That warm damp chamber, that black glutinous mud; that steaming fetid water, covered with a scum of grease, from out of which appeared shaven heads, limp locks, beards streaming and bodies reddened by a too long immersion! Those who had not yet bathed were undressing on the edge. Clad only in their beards and their ringlets, emaciated, stooping, white like linen, or rather like tallow, with bellies swollen and ruptured above

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their too thin legs, they presented the most lamentable spectacle of ill-proportioned bodies, in which all the life seemed concentrated in the lips and eyes.

Before throwing themselves into the holy water they pronounced the ritual benediction, "Praise be to Thee, Eternal, our God, King of the Universe, Who hast commanded us to plunge into the water of purification." Then, with mouth neither open nor tightly shut, with fingers disjoined, and limbs outstretched that every part of the body might be touched by the cleansing water, they glided beneath the greasy surface. Amram in his turn dipped, reappeared steaming and crimson, donned his clothes, knotted round his waist the girdle which divides the noble upper parts of the body from the lower, and dirtier than when he entered it, left the ritual bath.

Outside, it was already evening. This hour of the declining light is counted by the Jews as the ending of a day and the beginning of the next. It is not the sun but the moon which fixes for them the days and the seasons. With the first star there would presently dawn the five thousand six hundred and fiftieth New Year of the Hebrew calendar and the festival of Rosch Haschanah.

From the bath, from the Zadik's house and from the *bethamidrasch*, the black flock of Jews streamed out across the square towards the syna-

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gogue. It was a high, long building with heavy pillars of whitewashed brick; within it there was rising already a droning sound like the roaring of a forge. Great copper lustres, and wooden stands filled with lighted candles whose wax dipped down upon the caftans, illuminated the sombre, thickly-packed crowd, which in one solid mass swayed to and fro in the movement of prayer like a strange human harvest-field under the rising wind. Minute by minute the noise of groans and entreaties grew louder, until it seemed as though the wind had become on a sudden a furious tempest. The field bowed down and uplifted its innumerable heads, possessed by a spirit of frenzy.

Here and there some pilgrim who, irritated by vermin, had scratched some part of his body, pushed his way, regardless of abuse, towards the water-butt in the entrance, or else towards the little tanks that made a green damp stain along all the length of the wall, hastening to dip his fingers and purify himself in the holy water from the unclean touch. Children slipped in and about among the high boots of the faithful, getting some sounding slaps as they passed. Yet nothing disturbed the deep rhythm of those wildly waving forms and those imploring voices. Sobs broke in upon the prayer; soon, indeed, many appeared to be praying no longer: they howled, they sobbed convulsively. A voice of anguish and lamenta-

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tion arose from the crowd, a cry in which were mingled the wailing of infancy, furious weeping, and groans of the dying.

For the first day of the year is not a festival of hope, but of repentance and mourning. On that day all the Jews of the world must pass like sheep before the eyes of the Eternal Who holds open before Him three books: the Book of the Righteous, the Book of the Wicked, and the Book of those who are neither altogether righteous nor altogether wicked. The names of the just and of the unjust are written down at once, the first in the Book of Life, the others in the Book of Death. But the doom of those who are neither entirely just nor entirely unjust remains in suspense. God grants to them ten days more for repentance before their fate is decided. Therefore, during these ten days, prayers and supplications must without ceasing be raised to Heaven with inexpressible earnestness until the great fast of Kippour when the divine verdict is irrevocably pronounced.

For three hours longer the prayer was poured forth, three hours of wild lament, of unrestrained commination, of furious entreaty, three hours of pious mendicancy and appeals to the divine mercy, in which it seemed that the enraged suppliants would gain their salvation by violence from Heaven.

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Suddenly, as is the custom at the conclusion of these ceremonies, the holy frenzy was ended.

The Rabbi's servants brought into the synagogue tables, benches, plates and glasses for the feast which the Rabbi was giving to his followers; for even these festivals of repentance are accompanied by the joy of a plentiful repast round a brightly lighted table. As soon as each table was laid the pilgrims rushed to get a place at it with the same passionate eagerness as they had lately shown when imploring the divine pardon. The scene of a few minutes before, when beneath this vaulted roof and the light of dying candles, prayers, lamentations and sobs had resounded, had vanished as if it had never been.

When, to the number of more than two thousand, they were at last all seated before five or six hundred plates, the Zadik entered. He was preceded by four secretaries in kolbacks, making way for him through the press; after them came his eighteen sons, richly dressed in caftans of black silk, from the eldest who wore already the beard of an Isaiah, to the youngest whose age was about eight years. Lastly came the Zadik himself, calm amid the bustle and the tumult of acclamation.

He only, in that black crowd, was dressed in white. His hair, as white as dazzling snow, hung from beneath an enormous bonnet of fur, which

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covered his head almost to the level of his brows; his beard, which fell in two silver streams to his wide sash, was only distinguishable from the silk of his caftan by some faint tawny tints, recalling the colouring of his youth, and by the innumerable grains of snuff which powdered it with black dots. But the most striking point in all that face, so admirable in regularity of feature and kingly majesty of expression, was an empty eye-socket, red with blood, and impossible to behold without a shudder.

There was a perfect mellay around him as he came. Some even, who by free use of their fists had acquired a fifth share of a plate instantly abandoned it and rushed to touch his caftan. Those who were too far away, or who wished to keep possession of their places, stretched out a hand towards him and then kissed it as though he had been the Thora.

Surrounded by his eighteen sons, he stood still beside the table reserved for him. One of his secretaries poured water over his hands from a golden ewer into a golden dish, while the rest of the faithful washed their fingers under the tables and dried them on their caftans. Then he pronounced the benediction for the day, seated himself, cut the bread, blessed it, and the feasting began.

His servers set before him the first course of

the dinner, the fish ordained by tradition in the Hebrew feasts, a carp stuffed *à la juive*. With his fingers the Zadik took off a portion of the carp, placed it on his plate and put a mouthful to his lips; then, as though this one mouthful sufficed him, or as though he were superior to the weakness of hunger, with a lordly gesture he pushed away the fish and signed that he had finished.

Instantly the faithful standing behind him flew at his plate to divide what remained there. They swallowed it as quickly as they could to incorporate it with their own being, or else stuffed it into their pockets to give to their wives as a charm to bring good luck. Others who had not managed to seize a piece, flung themselves upon their more fortunate neighbours, trying to tear out of their mouths or their fingers those priceless scraps that the Zadik had sanctified. But he, impassive throughout the mellay, as if withdrawn into some distant sphere, appeared not even to see the battle raging over his plate.

The servers, meanwhile, were presenting to the guests the same ritual dish, the same carp *farcié à la juive*. Black-nailed hands rummaged in the dishes, tore up the fish, and plunged into the sauce, which was soon running over caftans and beards. All at once there broke upon the hubbub of these two thousand hungry mouths a sound of

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celestial voices. Instinctively one thought of heaven and angels, ready to imagine that the Eternal had recompensed the Jews for their weeping, by sending to them His musicians.

It was a treat the Rabbi offered to his guests, a choir of Russian Jews chanting edifying songs to airs from the Russian Steppe. Those songs, those voices, carried with them for a moment into the midst of the pious carousal a fragrance from the prairie, from rivers and forests: something of youth, innocence and love, passing like a cool breeze through that hall polluted by the odour of burning tallow, of steaming food and unwashed humanity.

When there was nothing more left of the fish but the bones and the heads, the servers set on the Zadik's table the second course: a huge tureen brimming with vermicelli soup. This time also the Zadik put one spoonful to his lips, and with the same lordly and wearied gesture pushed back the soup. Once more the faithful standing behind him made a rush at his plate and the battle raged anew with the same fury over the sticky vermicelli.

It was the vermicelli now that was hanging from every finger, streaming down the beards and over the glazed cotton or the silk of the caftans. No one, as yet, had had anything to drink; throats were parched with thirst, and no wine had

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appeared on the table. But the servers now came in once more, carrying by their ear-like handles enormous pitchers capable of holding from fifteen to twenty quarts each; these they arranged in a pyramid in the middle of the hall. As each one was added to the pile a secretary announced in a loud voice what was the quantity of wine contained in the pitcher, from what country it came, and the name of the generous donor. "Such a one offers thirty bottles of a wine of Bessarabia which has been frozen several times!" "So and so, ten bottles of Tokai, as you see here!" "So and so, fourteen bottles of Bordeaux: there they are!"

All the wines of the world were cried in this strange proclamation: wines of France, Spanish wines, Italian wines, Rhine wines, Hungarian wines, wines from Greece and the Archipelago, wines from America and from far Australia; for where is the country in which there are no Jews? or is there any corner of the universe in which not one of the pilgrims in this hall could claim a relation or a friend?

The crying being done, the secretary presented to the Zadik a flagon of wine and a golden goblet. The Rabbi pronounced the benediction for wine, and took one sip from the goblet; after which a drop of the sanctified liquid was poured into every pitcher and, as at the Marriage of Cana,

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the enormous amphoras passed round the tables.

Soon afterwards came a course of fowls. Beef followed, and then compôtes. The singers from Little Russia continued their lovely impassioned nightingale songs, but the clamour which had broken out on the arrival of the wine completely drowned their voices. It calmed down only after two or three hours, when one of the secretaries, standing on a table, gave notice of the benediction for the conclusion of a meal.

It was a custom of the Grand Rabbi of Bels that this benediction should be pronounced, not by himself, but by the youngest of his sons. At the old man's side a child was now standing, a boy with crimson lips, dark eyes and brilliant, fine straight nose, beautifully arched eyebrows, and complexion warm and creamy like a flower in the sun. With his long auburn curls that clustered beside his delicate cheeks, he appeared in the crowd of black caftans like an enchanting vision of youth and grace, carrying away the mind into the long-distant past, to the time when far away in Judea there was seen a Child like this child, standing among the doctors.

His little hand, in which some one had placed his father's golden goblet, trembled with the emotion of speaking before all these people, and some of the wine brimmed over upon his fingers and dripped upon the tablecloth. Pressing round be-

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hind him, the faithful reached out eagerly to dip their fingers in those precious drops which were as holy as if the Grand Rabbi himself had spilled them. In a scarce audible voice the child pronounced the appointed words: "With the permission of my father and of the guests, let us praise Him to Whom we owe our subsistence." In an outburst of enthusiasm the whole congregation fervently replied: "Praise be to Him to Whom we owe our subsistence! Eternal, King of Kings, the God of Abraham and of Jacob, just and merciful Lord send to us blessing, salvation, gladness and plenty. Send to us the prophet Elijah of happy memory, our messenger of joy, of salvation and of comfort! Build again, and in our own time, the holy city of Sion. Praise be to Thee, Eternal, Who in Thy mercy wilt build again Jerusalem!"

With these words, bawled out at their utmost force by two thousand half-intoxicated voices, the feast came to an end. It was past midnight.

Satiated, for the time being, with food and prayer, the pilgrims dispersed. Some went to stretch themselves upon the straw of their carriages, others to the inns and the private houses where they had beds, others again to the *bethamidrash*. Many passed the night in the synagogue, lying on the tables or benches. Amram Trebitz had intended to return to his cart, but exhausted

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by his ten days' journey, and by the prayers and the feasting, he let himself sink down against the wall near the tub of holy water, and fell asleep instantly.

By six o'clock next morning the synagogue was filled once more with the clamour of prayer. But to-day the excited congregation was no longer a mass of black-robed figures; they were white, the white flock of the Lord's fold. Over their mournful "levites" they all wore the shirt which clothes them on the days of their marriage and of their burial. Their faces, according to the custom at morning prayer, were hidden in the white woollen taliss. Standing on the tables, still covered with the remains of the feast, the beadles were summoning such of the faithful as had paid for the honour of standing close beside the Thora during the reading of it. Each man listened to the portion of the Scripture he had paid for, then taking off his taliss and his shirt, went out to breathe the fresh air and to talk in the market-place, or to pass a little time in the house of the Zadik, or to dip in the ritual bath, perhaps for the fourth or fifth time since sunrise.

Towards eleven o'clock, the reading being finished, every one returned to the synagogue. The solemn hour was approaching when the Sofer

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must sound the hoarse notes of the ram's horn which was blown first upon Mount Sinai amid lightnings and thunderings; for on that first day of the year, even as a shepherd calls his scattered sheep, the Holy of Holies (blessed be His name!) gathers together before Him the vast flock of His Jews.

Distinguished by his tall figure among the Jews who were pressing around him, the great Sofer of Bels mounted to the almémor, the square platform like a pulpit in the centre of the synagogue, and with a wide sweep of his arm lifted the silver-mounted horn and set it to his lips. Immediately the vast building rang with wild notes, each prolonged to the utmost power of the human lungs, bellowings and roarings succeeding and repeating one another without end, as if calling ever louder and farther some strayed sheep who had not heard.

During this barbarian music shoulders were bowed and heads sank deeper under the muffling taliss, and for three hours the prayers continued with redoubled earnestness.

But Amram was not praying any longer. From the moment he beheld the tall old man on the almémor he could not take his eyes away from him.

"There he is, then!" he said to himself. "Reb

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Eljé Lebowitz, the man whose breath can terrify Satan, and whose hand will copy the Thora of Hounfalou.”

He continued to gaze at him, noting carefully in his memory how many times the holy personage smote his breast, whether the blow of the fist on the caftan was audible or not, how quickly and how often he bowed himself, what were the modulations of his chanting, whether he prayed aloud or in an undertone, what gestures he made with his hands. And though little inclined as a rule to an attitude of reverence, he watched the old man at prayer with such intense emotion that he himself forgot either to pray or to groan.

Since the banquet of the night before no one had yet eaten anything. At last, about three in the afternoon, the benches were brought in and the tables were laid. There was again a solemn entrance of the Rabbi, more quarrels over the *scheraim*,¹ more crying of the wines, more songs, and more drunkenness. The September twilight was already falling rapidly in the synagogue. There remained only time sufficient to recite the two prayers of the afternoon and evening, with which every good Jew must consecrate his day. Tables and benches were pushed back against the wall, and a storm of supplications and groanings mounted once more towards the throne of

¹ The sanctified broken pieces left by the Rabbi.

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Adonai. When the tempest had at last died down the darkness of night had fallen. But the ceremonies of the day were not ended.

In the house of the Zadik the Rabbi's wife was standing, surrounded by great cases of Syrian fruits. She wore a robe of fur and silk, her close-cropped head was covered by a wig of dead-leaf coloured satin and crowned like that of a barbarian idol by a marvellous diadem of diamonds and pearls. The pilgrims passed, or rather bolted, before her. To each one she handed a New Year's fruit, some fine fruit of the East, pomegranate, orange, or grape, and each as he received it said: "May a happy year be appointed to you!"

When the cases were empty the Zadik himself appeared. The same good wishes greeted him, in a tremendous clamour of: "May a happy year be appointed to you!" and these words of blessing, repeated over and over again, followed him all the way to the synagogue, where the third ceremonial banquet of the festival was served.

Still surrounded by his secretaries in their kol-backs and his eighteen sons, he seated himself at his table. The majority of the guests were still in a state of repletion after the feasting of the days before, but they ate, nevertheless, for the glory of the Eternal, and snatched as though they were famishing at every eatable morsel within their reach.

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All through the night and another day the old synagogue rang with prayers, with lamentations and with the joy of banquets. The festival only came to an end on the evening of the following day at the hour of the first star. Amram Trebitz was then at liberty to attend to the business which had brought him to Bels; he could visit the Rabbi, the worker of miracles, and order from Reb Eljé Lebowitz the five books of Moses bequeathed to his Community by the deeply-regretted Faïbisch Ungerleider.

However famous a Sofer may be for piety and accomplishment in his art, the copying of the law is not in itself sufficient to gain him a livelihood. Reb Eljé Lebowitz therefore combined with his pious industry a small commercial business in religious objects: the taliss of Berchet, the tzitziss of Colomea, Talmudic writings, doggerel books of devotion for women, and collections of legends were his stock-in-trade, besides lemons, pomegranates, grapes from Corinth, loulebs or palm leaves, myrtles, citrons from Corfu, all Eastern fruits recalling to the exiles the past days in Palestine; so that the Sofer's house resembled at once an Oriental bazaar and a fruiterer's shop.

Beside a narrow window looking out into the miry lane was his desk, on which were neatly ar-

ranged his pens and his various inks; there the old man was at work once more after the temporary interruption of the festivals of Rosch Haschanah. His head was covered by the taliss embroidered with silver, the bracelets were wound about his left arm, and his long beard was hidden in a fold of the holy scarf, that not one hair should defile the sacred parchment by its unclean touch.

When the Jew from Hounfalou, supported by Tobie Gold, the Kachlawnik who had charge of his carriage, pushed open the door of the house and entered the room, Reb Eljé did not turn his head. He was preparing to write the sacred name of Adonai, and before taking the pen reserved for the Name of the Lord, he was bending down to cleanse his hand in a pail at his right side, when in the mirror of the water he saw the heads of the two Jews leaning inquisitively towards him.

Without seeming to perceive them, he finished washing his fingers, gave the appointed benediction, wrote the dreaded Name, and then, laying down his pen:

"Blessed be those who have entered," he said.

"Blessed be he whom we find in this place," the Hungarian replied.

"And whence comes the stranger?" Reb Eljé Lebowitz went on, gazing at his guest with his pale

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eyes, that looked as though they had been worn away by contemplation of the wonders related in the books of Moses.

"From the village of Hounfalou in Hungary," answered Tobie Gold, eager to put in his word.

A shade of suspicion came into the Sofer's eyes, for the Jews of Bels have small esteem for the Jews of Hungary, perverted as they are by the modern spirit and not infrequently preferring the Talmud before the Kabbala.

"Ah, well then," he said, with a touch of bitterness, "and the Sabbath, is it still the Sabbath over there?"

"The Jew is everywhere a Jew," Amram answered with some heat, "and the Sabbath is everywhere the Sabbath."

"I did not mean to offend you," replied the old man gently. "There are good Jews even in Hungary, and you have the beard of a good Jew."

Amram was opening his mouth to declare the object of his visit when again the Kachlawnik broke in:

"He has come from Upper Hungary on purpose to order a Thora from you—that is, if the Rabbi Sofer does not ask too much money," he added quickly.

"The Book is always dear, my son," answered Reb Eljé, taking off his taliss and folding it

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carefully to keep it apart from this profane conversation.

"No doubt," retorted Tobie Gold, "but he who buys may reason with him who sells."

"If Gold can diminish the sacred Book by one letter," the old man replied sententiously, "I will diminish the price of the Thora by a florin."

"And how much does the Rabbi Sofer require?"

"Six hundred florins."

"Six hundred florins, Rabbi! But no later than last week the price of calves went down again," replied the impudent fellow, meaning that since the price of calves had been lowered parchment was cheaper.

"It is not a question of calves!" Reb Amram cried impetuously. "Let not the Rabbi Sofer be angry at the words of the Kachlavnik! I know that when Reb Eljé inscribes a Thora its value is the double of what he demands. The Community of Hounfalou has placed in my hands three times one hundred and eighty florins for the purchase of a Thora. Not one florin more and not one florin less must I deliver to the Sofer."

"That is talking like a good Jew," said Reb Eljé Lebowitz. And, calling his wife, he bade her bring out the little glasses and the brandy.

A woman, beautiful once perhaps, but in her old age no longer so, wearing a satin bonnet which

looked as though it were glued to her temples, brought spiced bread and corn-brandy in which leaves of celery had been steeped. The three men lifted their glasses to the level of the eyes and gave the benediction, "Blessed be Thou, Eternal, our God Who hast created all things by Thy word." Then the Sofer said: "For life!" and the others answered: "For good and peaceful life." And the bargain was concluded.

As they went out into the lane they passed a thin, pale young man, with stooping shoulders and eyelids reddened for want of sleep. Such types are very common among his nation in Poland. They are some of life's failures, one would say, and yet with advancing years become, as if by miracle, such aged men with the air of patriarchs and prophets as Rembrandt loved to paint. It is one of the mysteries of their race. Their children are divine, their old men almost sublime, and their adults hideous. This man, whose red hair hung down over his hollow cheeks to a still ragged and youthful beard, shuffled past through the mud on his abnormally long feet.

"The son of the Rabbi Sofer!" Gold said to his companion. "A jewel of learning! A pearl of virtue! A treasure in a family!"

And, noticing that at these words the Hungarian turned to throw a glance at the lad, an

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idea quite naturally occurred to him: the Sofer had a son, the Hungarian had, perhaps, a daughter; then, taking in one stride (an easy matter to a Jew!) the step between hypothesis and certainty, reality and desire:

“With the rich dowry that Reb Amram Trebitz will give to his daughter,” he said, clutching at his companion by his caftan, “the son of Reb Eljé would be a splendid match.”

“Supposing my daughter had five hundred florins?” replied the Jew from Hounfalou.

“Five hundred florins is a round sum,” said Gold, pulling at his beard. “But the Rabbi Sofer is pious among the pious! His son will shine as a star in the house of his father-in-law.”

Accustomed, in the course of business, to the rôle of negotiator of marriages, he proceeded with gusto in this lyric style to prove that every circumstance contributed to render pleasing to the Eternal the union of this young man of Bels whom he scarcely knew with the Hungarian girl of whom he knew less. Then, in a more business-like tone, he asked:

“How much will Amram give me if I get the dowry reduced?”

“Three per cent.,” replied the other, who had had time during all this eloquence to consider how he stood to lose or gain in the affair.

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"*Mazel tov!* It's done! Nothing is impossible to Gold! All that he undertakes prospers. I'm going to speak to the Rabbi."

With a motion of his thumb he pushed his hat back on to the top of his head, like one struck with an idea, left Amram abruptly and re-entered the house of the Sofer.

"Rabbi," he said as he came in, without the least concern at disturbing the old man, who had put on his taliss again and resumed his work, "if I were not Tobie Gold but Eleazer in the Bible, and if the Rabbi were not Reb Eljé but Laban, the brother of Rebecca, what would he think of a marriage?"

Without showing more surprise at so sudden a proposal, the Sofer replied:

"I have not yet embraced thee," alluding in his turn to the legend which tells how, when Eleazer came to demand from Laban the hand of Rebecca for Abraham's son, Laban embraced the messenger in order to ascertain if he carried gold in his belt and pearls in his mouth.

"The daughter of the Hungarian is not portionless," replied the Kachlawnik, understanding his meaning perfectly. "But if the Rabbi asks six hundred florins for a Thora, doubtless he will consider four hundred florins a handsome price for his son."

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"My son is worth five hundred florins," said the old man placidly.

"Five hundred florins, Rabbi! I should be opulent if I had in my pocket the difference between five hundred florins and the value of Reb Eljé's son!"

The old man made no other response than to bring from a cupboard his great feast-day machzor (or book of prayers), printed three hundred years ago in the earliest printing press of Lublin. On the first page it was recorded that Trumeté, the spouse of the Sofer Reb Guedalié Lebowitz, on the 18th day of Nissam in the year 2326, had given birth to a child who received the name of Samuel—to whom might God grant that he should be educated for the Thora, for religion, for the pious life and for the glory of the People of Israel! And so through three centuries from Sofer to Sofer the saintly genealogy continued down to this tall, red-eyed boy with his stooping shoulders and long, bright red hair who was now sitting in a corner of the room copying mezuzzahs.

"I know, I know!" cried the Kachlavnik. "The family of Reb Eljé is *jichutz* (noble). But the Sofer, who is so wise and so pious, knows well that much money means much care. Four hundred florins, it's a million! What can one do

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with a fortune like that? It makes too much worry in a household. One never has a moment's peace of mind. Does the Rabbi really ask three hundred and fifty florins? Let us give him three hundred florins, and his son will have so much trouble the less."

The tall sickly boy listened to this discourse with eyes downcast and fixed upon his work as though the matter concerned any one rather than himself. As for the old man, he let Tobie talk on without interruption. For his greatest wish was to place his son in the family of some pious Jew where he would not be obliged to take up a trade immediately, but, exempt from worldly cares, could perfect himself in study of the sacred books, the Kabbala and the Zohar, during a few years longer. In short, he desired for him that situation which is not unknown, doubtless, in any country of the world, but among the Jews of Eastern Europe is recognized as a profession equal to that of a boot-maker, a furrier, or an innkeeper, and is called "being a son-in-law."

"If the boy might go on studying," he sighed, after a long silence, "we would reduce the sum. But in these days it is more and more uncommon to find a father who will support his son-in-law. And the daughters, especially in Hungary, are more greedy for money than for learning."

"The daughter of Amram is not of that sort!"

cried Tobie Gold with the conviction of a father. "We will give two hundred and fifty florins, and the son of the Sofer shall be son-in-law for three years."

"If she is as you say, she is suitable," said Reb Eljé gravely, passing his long hand slowly over his face as if seeking blindly for divine inspiration.

When he reopened his eyes, Tobie Gold was there no longer. He had already hurried off in pursuit of Amram.

In the Zadik's house, at the end of the long dark passage, before the door still guarded by the tall-hatted secretaries, a crowd was once more assembled; and in all hearts there was seething, as before, the same frantic anxiety, the same outrageous queries, the same hunger for a miracle, and the same insensate hope in the Rabbi's power.

Amid that delirious excitement he alone was calm and placid. Every now and then the secretaries' stentorian voices would call out the name of the pilgrim whose turn it was to be admitted to his room. On each new arrival his red eye glared and his blue eye pierced into the deepest and most secret thoughts in the soul of the stranger who stood before him.

One man says to him: "Rabbi, I have a shrewish wife. She makes my life unbearable; all

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the village mocks at me. When she begins screaming, people come out into the street and look on at the scene through the window. I can't stand it any longer. What must I do, great and holy Rabbi? Only last week again——”

But the Zadik interrupted:

“Return to thy house, my son, and say to those who come to look in at thy window or to listen at thy door that it is written in the Law: ‘Thou shalt not hearken unto the voice of the strange woman.’ ”

Another comes to ask him to intercede with the Eternal that his son may be exempted from military service: not that the boy is wanting in courage, but in barracks how can a good Jew observe his religious duties, the eighteen benedictions in the morning, the two prayers of the afternoon and evening, and the eating of the ritual meats? And, above all, O Master of the world, how shall he escape drill on the holy Sabbath day?

The Rabbi listens, and says to him:

“Has thy son planted a vine?”

“No, great Zadik, he has not planted.”

“Has he built a house?”

“No, he has not builded.”

“Has he taken a wife?”

“Yes, great Rabbi, but she is dead.”

“Then, my son, why hast thou come to me?”

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Dost thou not know the passage, 'When thou goest to war,' where Moses has declared that he only shall be freed from obligation to serve who has planted a vine or has built a house or has taken to wife within the year a virgin of Israel?"

Another comes to tell him of a grievous care that troubles him. He had wanted to pass into Russia, by contraband, ten thousand francs' worth of porcelain that he had bought in Carlsbad. But, lo, he has fallen sick and is obliged to entrust his son with this delicate operation. This son, however, is *schemil*, which means a maladroit and unlucky person. And if things turn out badly, he fears that the *schemil* will be thrown into prison and the merchandise confiscated.

"Fear nothing!" says the Zadik. "The King Solomon has written: 'God taketh the fools under His protection.'"

So, one after another the pilgrims come before the Rabbi, who deals in miracles, and all cry to him in turn: "Give us children! Make the rain fall! Keep off the hail! Drive away the evil spirits! Deliver us from wicked thoughts! Bring to confusion the schemes of my neighbour! Send thither the Angel of Death! Save the woman in travail!"

On all these fevered brows the Zadik of Bels scatters, like drops of cooling water, words of good sense appropriate to each case. Then, mak-

ing some concession to the folly of these people, he gives to every one a bit of parchment bearing one or two words of that mysterious Kabbala whose very obscurity enchants them, or else he permits them to rub against his caftan some coin, which will henceforth be to them a talisman far more precious than his words of wisdom or good counsel.

At last the name of Amram Trebitz was suddenly shouted out amid the agitated, long-haired and bearded crowd. At this summons some unknown force uplifted on its wings the publican of Hounfalou, carried him at one bound through the dense barrier of caftans which separated him from the door, and set him down, as if by a miracle, in the wondrous chamber.

It was a small, bare, whitewashed room. Four secretaries in kolbacks stood against the wall. In the middle of the room, on a table covered with a dingy cloth marked with rings by coffee cups, there was a plate overflowing with bank-notes and gold and silver coins. For to this Zadik of Bels, whose house of brick is founded in this mud, his disciples every year bring more than a million marks, and his agent may well say that when he celebrates the marriages of his children money-orders by the pound weight are sent to him from all parts of the country.

Behind the table, in an armchair covered with

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leather from which the horsehair stuffing was bursting in places, the Zadik was seated.

But was this the scene which Amram saw?

Though he was by no means of a mystic temperament and was accustomed, at one glance, to estimate the worth of a man, to guess and to calculate how much he had in his mind and in his pocket, he now beheld neither that dull, bare room, nor that soiled cloth, nor that wretched chair in which sat an old man who had lost one eye and whose beard was covered with snuff. He saw nothing but a kind of cloud in which there floated confusedly between the monstrous kolbacks a plate, an enormous plate heaped up with pieces of gold, and a being half divine, enveloped in a radiance which veiled him from bodily sight. It was not human thought, but the Shekinah, the Glory of God, which shone from that countenance; and the words which would fall from those lips had already for him that magic force possessed by certain groupings of letters and numbers in the Kabbala, whose mysterious power can govern men's destinies and command the future.

He came forward as if in a dream, touched the old man's long hand with the tips of his fingers, and with a swift, Oriental gesture carried his fingers, sanctified by the miraculous touch of the Rabbi, to his lips. A secretary handed to the Zadik a paper which contained the request of

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the pilgrim from Hounfalou and his offering folded inside it. The Zadik took the paper and with a disdainful gesture, without appearing even to see it, let the small gold coin fall out of its folds into the plate.

At the clink of the gold Amram recovered his senses and was opening his mouth to declare his wishes and those of the other villagers of Hounfalou. Alas! the offering had been so small, the messenger so unimportant a person, and there were so many people waiting at the door, that permission to speak was not granted to him. With one glance of his blue eye the Zadik stopped him short.

"Go, my son," he said. "I will pray for thee among all other Jews."

Already one of the secretaries had seized him by the shoulders. The innkeeper had only a moment in which to fish out from his pocket a fine silver florin and to rub it against the Zadik's sleeve that it might become an amulet of which he could say to the Jews of Hounfalou: "It has touched the hand of the great Rabbi of Bels!"

Pushed forward by a vigorous arm, he was thrust out of the room and found himself in the corridor, radiant, exultant, perfectly assured in his own mind that the hopes of all his village would be fulfilled. Jacob's cow would give milk again, Schmoul's vinegar would satisfy the customers,

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Nokhem Patzer would win his lawsuit, the wife of Reb Jankele would be barren no longer, and he himself would find a husband for his daughter Guitelé.

At this moment Tobie Gold, who had been seeking him for an hour, caught sight of him among the Jews who thronged around him to hear what he had said to the Zadik and what the Zadik had replied to him. Working his way through the crowd by blows from his fists and his elbows, with his hat pushed back and his beard thrust forward, the Kachlavnik reached the Hungarian's side.

"Amram Trebitz may pronounce the benediction for one who hears good news," he whispered.

"Praise be to thee, Eternal, our God, King of the universe, Who art good and gracious!" the other murmured instantly.

And making play with his elbows like the rest, he followed Tobie Gold as he would have followed an angel from the Lord.

A few minutes later they were crossing the threshold of Reb Eljé Lebowitz.

"May I say *Mazel tov?*?" said Amram, as he entered, without scruple this time at interrupting the Sofer in his holy toil.

"If the thing is from God, *Mazel tov!*" answered Reb Eljé, laying down his pen.

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"It comes from God I am sure," replied the Hungarian. "I promise two hundred florins; and for the space of three years the son of the Rabbi Sofer shall be son-in-law in the house of Amram Trebitz."

"The two hundred florins are two hundred and fifty," the old man corrected him.

"The two hundred and fifty are two hundred," returned Reb Amram, "but the three years are three years. I shall keep the agreement to the very last day."

Then, turning to the young man who sat in a corner of the room, still copying his mezuzzahs, he said to him:

"*Mazel tov!* I will feed thee for three years, and, if it please the Lord, thou shalt become in my house *naguid* among the *naguidim*, honoured among the honourable."

As he was speaking these words the wife of the Sofer came in; her features were convulsed with grief and her eyes filled with tears.

"Eh!" said Reb Amram, "is then the wife of the Rabbi Sofer so sorry at the marriage of her boy?"

No, it was not the sad thought that her son was about to leave her that had brought tears to old Sarah's eyes. But she had been busy in her kitchen, making the candles which on the Feast of Kippour, the Day of Pardon, must burn

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for twenty-four hours, and custom requires that, before laying the long wicks of plaited cotton in the hot wax, she must shed abundant tears over these wicks while thinking of her sins.

"Besitchem! God keep you!" said she to the Jew of Hounfalou.

Then she went back to her kitchen from whence she presently returned, bearing in her outstretched arms a great candle, still warm, a beautiful Candle of the Soul, which she gave to the stranger.

CHAPTER III

THE FESTIVAL OF KIPPOUR

That morning, with the first faint light of dawn, the holy village of Bels presented an extraordinary aspect. From under the wooden shelters against the small low houses there shone a strange illumination: and behind the yellow window-panes of every house the same curious scene was taking place. Jews and Jewesses were seated together round tables upon which the lighted candles were burning. In their hands they held a barn-door fowl tied by its legs; they swung it above their heads, singed its wing-feathers in the candle-flame, and then threw it on the ground, having by this magic process loaded it with all the sins of Israel.

By and by there appeared in the square a long file of women and children carrying all these cocks and hens, which if sin has any weight must have been heavy enough, that the sacrificer might kill them in the manner that the ritual ordains. Round the butcher at his sacred office blood was streaming down into the mud. The birds flut-

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tered and shrieked, and some of them, though half dead, and their necks almost cut through, still squalled horribly and struggled to escape.

The dying yells of the poor creatures were echoed in the synagogue by screams from the pilgrims who were being scourged by the beadles in punishment for such transgressions of the Law as they had committed in ignorance during the year. They crouched, kneeling on all-fours and calling out loudly as the blows fell upon them. Pain could not have wrung from them such cries: such screams could come only from remorse for their sins.

Beaten, dripping with holy water, their ringlets out of curl, and their hearts filled with gladness, they returned at last about three o'clock to their houses or to the Bethamidrasch. Here they would regale themselves upon the magic fowls, and prepare by a plentiful repast for the Fast of Kippour which would presently begin, and end only with the appearance of the first star next day.

But how quickly a good feast is over! Too soon the night was approaching and they must rise from the table. All the Jews of Bels then repaired to the synagogue, going, in spite of the falling rain, with their feet in slippers as it is commanded, wearing their white shirts over their caftans, and carrying in their hands some queer

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vessel, a broken pot or some old box or a saucepan or an oil can.

To protect the feet of the worshippers from the dampness of the ground a litter of straw had been laid down in the synagogue, giving it the appearance of an immense stable. On the desks and on the benches and on the projections of the walls, wherever a box or a pot might be set, the faithful had placed their vessels, filled with earth or sawdust in which was firmly planted the enormous Kippour candle. It was like a forest on fire over the straw, a forest of candles sputtering on all sides, and making tiny explosions each time that the flame reached a grain or two of salt deposited in the wicks by the tears of the pious housewives who had made them. All the congregation groaned and bowed down to the earth. The austere prayer, *Al Eth*, the prayer for sin, arose intermingled with sobs.

“Eternal, our God, deign to pardon our sins;

The sin we have committed through necessity or by
our own desire;

And that which we committed through wicked-
ness;

That which we committed through ignorance.

The sin we have committed by our words;

The sin we committed in public or in secret;

And that which we committed deliberately and with
cunning.”

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So the confession continues, frenzied and interminable. For although one may be a good Jew, celebrating the Sabbath regularly, and constant in attendance at the synagogue and the ritual bath, how can one be assured that on the great Day of Pardon the Master of the world will enter one's name in the Book of the Living? Forced as we are in these unhappy times to dwell in exile among the Christian nations, we are beset by a thousand occasions to transgress the Law, scarcely knowing what we do. How often, for example, as one passes through the villages buying eggs, or scrap-iron or geese, a peasant invites one to sit down at his table, and gives one pork! One accepts out of good nature; and that is a deadly sin. How often one drinks of wine that was not trodden by Jewish feet! And that is a deadly sin. How often, meaning no harm, one presses a little on the scales in which the peasant's corn is being weighed! One is only cheating a Christian, and yet it is a deadly sin.

Who, then, even among the most pious, can boast that he has never failed in one of those minute observances which regulate all Jewish life down to its smallest details: in birth, in death, from sunrise till sunset, ruling and ordering all one's doings, whether with masters or with servants, with children or animals, with one's home

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or food or clothing, and making of every thought and every deed and almost every movement a religious action?

The list of transgressions recited in impassioned monotonous tones was emphasized by heavy blows upon the breast, and the clenched fists of the multitude beat upon their caftans with a powerful, sombre and savage rhythm.

The confession was followed by the psalms.

The officiant recited one verse and the crowd of the faithful shouted out the next. So they went through the hundred and fifty Psalms of David, one moaning tearful voice dying away like a solitary sob through the synagogue, alternating with an outburst of yells that seemed to pour forth in haste to drown the sound of the sobbing.

Until the middle of the night those ancient hymns of Judea were continued with vehement shouting and endless lamentations. After a time the frenzied worshippers, exhausted by fatigue, sank down one after another in the straw, where they settled themselves to sleep. By two in the morning the synagogue resounded like a barrack-room with snores amid the crackling sputter of the still burning candles. The thick waxen stems were bending in the heat and drooping over the prostrate bodies: drops of melted wax fell upon beards and caftans, and hung upon them like stalactites, and if by chance one dripped upon

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a hand or a face, a shriek of pain interrupted the snores. Here and there some still sleepless old men, with shaking heads and bodies untiringly rocking to and fro, went on humming the psalms, ramming their nostrils with snuff, beating time on their books, and raising their voices suddenly in some particularly moving verse; then they would fall into a doze, and wake again with a start to begin shouting once more.

The chill of dawn wakened the sleepers. They sat up in the straw, rubbing their eyes, half blinded by the candle light, and then took their way to the ritual bath. They were not chattering any more; they hardly gesticulated at all. All of them seemed oppressed with a profound sense of desolation and infinite melancholy. It was not the sadness of early twilight, nor the night they had passed in that damp straw, nor the twinges of an empty stomach which had made them so mournful and so silent; it was the thought that when evening had come, and the bright star appeared in the sky now whitening in the dawn, God would have judged them irrevocably.

All their faces were ghastly pale from the effect of long fasting and fatigue in that foul air of unclean bodies and burnt wax. Now and then one of the faithful would fall down fainting in the straw, and the others would carry him out into the square. Some who felt themselves reel-

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ing held to their nostrils a little flask of ether, spreading the odour of a hospital in the musty atmosphere. But as the day wore on the prayers increased in intensity and fury. Before the divine sentence should be finally pronounced the Jews would fain throw into the judgment scales of the Lord a heaped-up weight of prayers and tears. Again and again the prayer of Al Eth broke out, and the blows on their chests sounded more hollow and more violent. Outside the daylight was fading, and a heavy rain had begun to fall. The cloud-laden sky was dark, and in the synagogue the dazzling candles, which had been burning for more than twenty hours, were no longer a forest, but a low shrubbery of light just above the level of the tables. Then at the ending of the day there arose the sublime chant of the prayer Neila.

“Praise be to Thee, Eternal, from Whom cometh the night.

Open to us the gates of heaven when the gates of the day are closing.

In the moment when the night spreads out her veil and the day passes away, hear our prayers, O Lord.

The daylight fails, the sun has set, Eternal! Open to us the doors of Thy dwelling.

Have mercy, have mercy, Holy of Holies! Wipe out our misdeeds and our iniquities.

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Let our sins vanish away like smoke;
Let our faults disappear like a cloud;
Let the sins of Thy elect be melted away like snow."

With tears and sobs they said the prayer of the dying: "Abinou Malkenou, our Father, our King," then the Schema Israel: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One God," which is the daily prayer, the great prayer of the Jewish people. And hardly had the last words mounted through the gathering darkness to the throne of the Lord when there burst forth the sound of the Schofar's trumpet. But this time he blew through the ram's horn, not the oft-repeated brayings of the Day of Rasch Haschanah, but a single long drawn-out note, one last supreme appeal to the divine mercy.

The sound of the horn ceased; God had pronounced sentence. But the rain was falling in torrents, and there was no star in heaven to mark that the festival was ended and the sublime moment of pardon arrived when he who has been offended must forget his injuries, and all men are reconciled in the eternal mercy; those who were most excited, therefore, maintained that the fast was not yet over, that the Lord had not yet given judgment, for no star had yet appeared in the dark sky. So in the house of the Lord, instead of the calm scene of reconciliation, a furious bat-

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tle began between those who asserted that the end of Kippour had come and those who wished to prolong it.

Even these fanatics, however, were at last forced to acknowledge that night had fallen. A few minutes later the Rabbi's servants brought in the benches, the tables, the glasses, and the plates, and with this final banquet the holy village of Bels celebrated the end of the Terrible Days.

At sunrise next morning the encampment of carts in the square was beginning to break up, and in the station, before the eyes of the great image of Christ, the pilgrims were taking by assault the trains which dispersed them far and wide to the distant towns and villages from whence they had come. Among the mingled sounds of cracking of whips, and creaking of cart wheels in the deep ruts of mud, Amram Trebitz was harnessing his horse. Poor beast, he too had been keeping the Fast of Kippour! Tobie Gold was not content with abstracting a tenth part of his food for the poor, but had taken the whole! And as Amram observed the sorry condition of his steed he wondered anxiously whether it would have the strength to carry both himself and his son-in-law to Hounfalou.

When he drew up his carriage before the house of the Sofer he heard him saying to his son, "I

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will bestow on thee, my child, an incomparable treasure, a lantern of diamonds, the lantern of Gam Zou——”

Trebitz in some excitement listened attentively.

Gam Zou, he knew, was a Talmudist, subtle among the subtle, a sage among the sages, who had acquired his name through his habit of saying on every occasion, “Gam zou letova! All’s well.”

He was on a journey once, when night overtook him in a forest, and in order to frighten away the wild beasts he hung a lighted lantern round his ass’s neck. The wind blew out the candle, so the traveller said, “Gam zou!” and did not try to re-light it. Next morning as he set out again he found close by the place where he had slept two hapless merchants, plundered and murdered by robbers, to whom the light of their lanterns had revealed them. The traveller said, “Gam zou!” once more, and continued his journey.

“I give thee,” Reb Eljé was saying, “the lantern of Gam Zou. It is the lamp of wisdom. Even when extinguished, even when invisible, it will guide thee through life.”

“Well spoken, Rabbi,” said Amram, slightly disappointed, nevertheless, at the unsubstantial nature of the treasure.

Old Sarah, meanwhile, was placing in the cart her son’s modest baggage, which, not including

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the precious lantern, consisted of one "best" shirt, his Sabbath caftan, a taliss, and the tephilim carefully wrapped in a chequered handkerchief. Reb Eljé blessed the travellers. Amram chucked at the cords which served as reins, and the carriage launched forth into the mud.

Since the journeyings of Abraham and Jacob, how many sons of Israel have departed in like manner! How many wagons have carried Jewish children far away from their fathers and their mothers through the wide world! O Holy of Holies, blessed be Thou! Thou hast made them prosper among the strange people. May this one also perpetuate through all ages the names of Abraham and Isaac. May he multiply and increase among the nations!

Thus the old Sofer prayed in his heart while the carriage moved off, carrying into Hungary the child whom perhaps he would never see again. In the little chamber, which suddenly appeared to him larger than it used to be, the parchment and the ink and goose-quill pens awaited him.

He sat down at his table, wrapped himself in the taliss, and began copying the Thora of Houn-falou.

CHAPTER IV

THE BREAKING OF THE CUP

When they had traversed the melancholy plain of Poland, that great endless Way of the Cross through the marshes and the birch woods, Reb Amram and Hertz Wolf, the son of Reb Eljé Lebowitz, entered at last into the Carpathian forest, the abode of eagles, bears and chamois. Often at that season there is heard here the ringing blast of a horn, telling that some great Hungarian or Polish lord is going hunting. There, too, may be seen the equipages of rich Israelites, who wear fine boots and aigrettes in their hats, and only in their secret hearts still resemble the poor Jews in caftans.

The son of Reb Eljé had never seen mountains nor woods like these, with rushing streams in every direction and magic castles hidden in the depths of the forest. It must not be imagined, however, that he found any pleasure in contemplating these new scenes of nature, nor in the beautiful autumn already touched by the approach of winter and dying in these solitudes, nor in the quiet

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lakes lying in the folds of the mountains, nor the sapphire and silver waterfalls, nor the dream castles suspended in the mist between earth and heaven. And not for one moment did his heart flutter or his eyes grow dim at the thoughts of love awaiting him. No, neither nature nor love has ever occupied the mind of a Jew of Poland or Upper Hungary. Hertz Wolf did not look at the woods. Hertz Wolf did not think about love. But he inquired anxiously of his future father-in-law how many Thoras the Community possessed; he asked where they came from, and by whom they had been copied; whether there were many persons learned in the Law at Hounfalou; whether they assembled in the evenings to discuss the Talmudic questions, and whether the Talmud was preferred there to the Kabbala. At this discourse Reb Amram privately congratulated himself on giving his daughter so perfect a husband.

It was when evening was approaching that they both felt most anxiety, for it was necessary then to meet eight other Jews with whom they might offer up the prayer of Min'ha, to which the Lord listens only if ten Jewish mouths repeat it together. But there are not many villages in this lonely country, and many a time the travellers would have been unheard by Adonai if the Holy of Holies (blessed may He be!) had not dis-

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persed His Jews on all the roads of the world. In the forest they encountered pedlars wearing caftans, with packs on their backs; or merchants in a cart, seeking like themselves in the gathering dusk for companions to pray with them: "Schalem aleichem! Peace be with you." "Aleichem schalem! With you be peace!" they cried joyfully as they saw one another in the distance. And there, halting for a moment in the twilight of the woods, they all repeated the evening prayer.

Thus conversing and praying, with eyes half shut to all around them, they arrived at Hounfalou. It was the season of the Feast of Tabernacles. The Jews leave their houses for a whole week, and live in huts made of branches, in remembrance of the forty years that Israel passed in the desert. The people of Hounfalou were camping in such lightly built shelters in their courtyards. The sound of the carriage drew them forth from their leafy dwellings, and when they recognized Reb Amram they welcomed him with transports of joy. The whole Community had already been feeling the good effect of his journey and the beneficial intervention of the miracle-working Rabbi. Schwartz had won his lawsuit; the Sacrificer's wife was cured; Schmoul's vinegar had improved; the cow of the "Melamed" (the schoolmaster) was giving twelve quarts a day.

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"Are you bringing us the Thora?" Reb Jankele shouted.

And Amram, pointing to his future son-in-law, replied: "I am bringing you the Thora and the Talmud in person."

At the door of his house he got down from the wagon, and greeted his wife and daughter with a joyful "Schalem aleichem," without embracing them, however, or even taking them by the hand; for on returning from so long a journey how can one tell whether a woman has lately performed the ceremonies of purification, without which it is not permissible to touch her even with the tips of one's fingers?

He kissed the mezuzzah, and then entered with Hertz Wolf into the hut of foliage, which was all hung with white cloths, and magnificently decorated with apples, nuts, lemons, grapes, many-coloured garlands and Lions of Judah, and stars cut out of gilt paper.

Old Hannah set before the travellers some milk soup thickened with bran. Hertz Wolf ate with his eyes cast down and his long red ringlets almost dipping in the soup, so much he feared to catch sight of Amram's daughter. Is it not written in the Talmud, "He who casts even one glance at the little finger of a girl has sinned as a libertine"?

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And what need was there to look at her? She was a girl, she was a Jewess, was that not enough? The choice of one's bride is made only by the Master of the world, and this choice is fixed from all eternity. Whether her nose be thick or thin, her figure upright or crooked are details to which only a coarse peasant or unclean Tzigane would pay any attention. And what sensible man would care whether her hair is long or short, thick or thin, fair or dark, when immediately after the wedding her head will be shaved, and she'll put on a wig of quilted satin?

"Is it a husband for our daughter," old Hannah asked herself as she looked at the stranger, "or some *Yechiba bachour*¹ whom Amram has met on the road and brought along in his carriage?"

"Is it a bridegroom for me?" Guitelé wondered: not that she was any more concerned with thoughts of love than the son of the Sofer, but because it is a shame to a woman and a sign of divine malediction if she grows old without a husband and children.

When the soup was finished Reb Amram said to his wife, "Go to Solomon Schwartz, and ask him to let the bachour sleep in his house to-night." Then at last they knew that this was no ordinary visitor; it was he whom the sacred Law forbids

¹ Student of a Talmudic school.

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to pass the night under the same roof with the young girl who is to become his bride.

The old woman at once hurried off to neighbour Solomon. And Guitelé, having heard her fate, folded her hands over her stomach, and left the hut of branches without once glancing at the unknown man with whom she was to pass the rest of her life.

The wedding was celebrated eight days afterwards. Once more the antique rite which has been repeated millions and millions of times was performed for the glory of the people of Israel. A pious Jew, wearing over his caftan the white shirt which will clothe him in the grave, and a young Jewess, with her beautiful black hair unfastened and floating over her shoulders, stood together under the marriage canopy. Seven times she stepped in a circle round her bridegroom; he put a gold ring upon her finger; they drank from the same cup to testify that they were united for life and for death, and once more the cup was then broken in remembrance of the old days of mourning and of the fall of Jerusalem.

Then, led by the violins, men and women in silk caftans and in satin perukes formed into the joyous procession of all weddings since the remotest ages.

If there be any country in the world where

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marriage is unaccompanied by revelry, it is certainly not here among these Jews, whose life is a series of violent alternations between fasting, ordained by law or by necessity, and feasting in their poor ritual banquets.

With us, however, the conversation at a wedding will run upon affairs of the world or on gallantry, while the chief pleasure at these Hebrew nuptials is to engage in some senseless discussion of a problem in the Talmud, a fine "pilpoul" as they call it, such as might have been heard in the streets of Jerusalem in the days of Hillel and Reb Akiba. Then they forget everything, the tribulations of past centuries, as well as their troubles of yesterday and to-morrow.

And in these endless debates they practise passionately that subtle irony of theirs, that cleverness in turning a question inside out in a thousand ways which makes them such formidable opponents when they direct against the beliefs of other nations that critical and argumentative spirit they have exercised so long in their remote villages upon subjects which amaze us by their silliness.

The servant had no sooner placed the soup tureen and the vermicelli on the table than Amram, wishing to give his son-in-law a chance of distinguishing himself, provided his guests with this problem. Supposing that one of them had

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dropped into the soup tureen the little box of parchment which is worn on the forehead during prayer, could the soup be eaten?

All fell upon this theme as greedily as they did upon the soup. Without pausing an instant in the business of eating, their voluble tongues shot forth fierce arguments across the table; heads were wagging, arms waved in the air, and all the black-nailed fingers bore their part in the action to uphold or to beat down an argument.

Of course when an unclean article has contaminated a dish, this dish may still serve as nourishment to a pious Jew, provided always that only one-sixtieth part of the unclean article has touched the food into which it has fallen. But is it right to apply this rule of the sixty parts to the box of parchment? and if right, is it possible? Who can estimate the quantity of perspiration accumulated in the box which one generation after another has worn while they prayed and sweated with it upon their foreheads? Besides, must the whole volume of the box be considered, or only the presumed volume of the perspiration with which it is imbued?

While they were discussing this grave problem three old women led Guitelé from the festal hall, with her beautiful hair still loosely flowing over her shoulders. They made her sit down in a chair in the middle of the dust-heap, and snipping

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with their scissors brought the heavy locks falling to her feet. Under their quick fingers her poor head soon became nothing but an ugly dark-coloured ball.

But she looked not sadly at her long tresses strewn on the dust-heap. Instead of the lustrous braids that had framed her face the three old women placed on her head a wig of brown satin, such as pleases the Master of the world. Then, with a smiling countenance, delighted to be numbered now among the married women of the village, Guitelé reappeared in the feast-room.

The guests were still eagerly debating, and no one noticed her return. Hertz Wolf felt no more regret than any one else did for the sacrifice of her beautiful hair. Oh, wonderful people, impassioned, insensible people of Israel! How many tongues you have mingled in your grotesque jargon, how many sentiments and how many ideas! And you have forgotten only one single word, one word that you might have found everywhere, in the East, in Germany, in Poland, in Spain, and even in your sacred books. The word that signifies the love of man and woman you have neglected as a thing that your heart had no need for!

Henceforward there will be one more Jew at Hounfalou to worship the Eternal. But some name must be found for this newcomer from

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Poland whom we shall meet every day in the village streets. There are plenty of names that would suit him, of course. We might call him the Red One, for his hair and his beard are the colour of fire; but that is the name of the Sacrificer. We might call him the Fine Stranger, but that is the egg-collector's name; or the Stooper, but that is the name of his father-in-law. Ah, why trouble about it any longer? Just look at his feet; his name is there plain enough. He is no longer Hertz Wolf Lebowitz: he is the Jew-with-feet-that-reach-to-his-neck.

CHAPTER V

THE GIFT OF THE ETERNAL

Perhaps some day we shall see the Jew-with-feet-that-reach-to-his-neck following the trade of his father-in-law, hurrying from fair to fair, from village to village, from market to market, wearing his hat on the back of his head, and whistling at the doors to call out the housewives. Meanwhile he is a son-in-law. While every one around him is busy, while Amram scours the country in his cart, and Guitelé pours out drink for the Hungarian and the Tziganes, Hertz Wolf sits bent over the Talmud, the Kabbala, or the Zohar, humming mysterious texts. Venerable indeed is Israel's respect for piety and learning, and his undying remembrance of an eternal mission. Rare and pathetic idealism is this which can cause these starveling wretches in their remote Communities to prize the study of their sacred Books above gold itself!

Not for one moment did it occur to Reb Amram that his son-in-law might help him in his trade. He had agreed to give him food and no

work for three years, and the thunderbolt of the Eternal would fall upon his house if he failed in his promise. Not for one moment did Guitelé feel it surprising that her husband did nothing in the house where she was toiling like a servant. What would all her exertions weigh in the balance of the Holy of Holies against a single letter of the Law which her husband was studying? Was it not he alone who was really working? Was it not he alone who was hastening the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom of Jerusalem? And since nothing is so exhausting as the study of the sacred texts, she was careful to help him always to the best pieces at dinner-time.

Every one, therefore, would have been happy in the house of the Jew-with-feet-to-his-neck: Reb Amram because he was doing business, and his son-in-law because he was doing nothing, if the Holy of Holies (blessed be He!) had but deigned to look favourably upon poor Guitelé.

"Master of the world," she moaned in her prayers twice daily, "why dost Thou leave me barren? Have I not always kept Thy Holy Commandments? Have I let one Saturday go by without lighting the Sabbath candles which are as pleasing to Thy heart as the great lights shining in heaven? Have I ever sat beside my husband or even touched his caftan with my finger

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when my body was unclean? Have I not always bathed at the appointed times in the water of purification? And when I bake the bread, have I ever failed to throw into the fire the morsel of dough which must be offered to Thee as first-fruits? Lord, have I not done all this? Why dost Thou leave me then without children?"

"Gam zou letova!" said Hertz Wolf. "If the Lord left Abraham and Sarah, or Isaac and Rebecca so long without posterity, it was to call forth their prayers."

And he plunged into his books once more, and only broke off from his chanting and his swaying to and fro to go into the synagogue and there discuss for hours some points of the Law with the Sacrificer, the Melamed, or the Rabbi.

So the days passed, marked by nothing but the returning festivals, and the funerals, marriages and circumcisions in the neighbours' houses, until one day there arrived at Hounfalou a Jew in a clean caftan.

He was one of the collectors whom the grand Zadik of Bels sends round into these mountain villages gathering contributions for the marriages of his daughters. He drew up his carriage at Amram's tavern, and came into the house, carrying in his arms as carefully as if it were a baby a long wooden case.

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"You are welcome, Reb Joel!" said Hertz Wolf, who knew him at once, having seen him many times in his father's house at Bels.

And he invited him to sit down and lay aside his package.

"I can't put it down just anywhere," replied the collector, throwing a glance of disgust at the table, where several dirty glasses were still standing.

"Is it something so precious then?" asked Hertz Wolf inquisitively.

"It is the Thora from Reb Eljé."

At these words the whole household, as if by a stroke of magic, was thrown into agitation. The broom went racing about the floor; the can of petrol on the window-ledge found a hiding-place under the bed; caftans, shirts, boots, and furred bonnets bundled into the cupboard; the wreaths that decorate the huts at the Feast of Booths emerged from their drawers, and displayed themselves on the ceiling; green branches clothed the walls; the pots of geranium shivering by the door leaped on to the mantelpiece; the blinds shut out the glaring daylight; the flies left off buzzing, and on the table covered with a dazzlingly clean cloth Reb Joel placed his priceless burden as gently as one lays down a sleeping child in a cradle.

With infinite care they took out the nails of

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the box. There lay the Thora wrapped in a white woollen taliss. Like a mother unwinding the swaddling bands of her infant the collector unfolded one lap of the sacred scarf, and the holy Book appeared in all the splendour of its new parchment.

Soon the excited villagers came running to Amram's house. Their beards and their ringlets bent eagerly over the table as they admired the beauty of the parchment, the length of the rolls and the magnificence of the caligraphy. What town of Hungary or of any other country could boast of possessing such a Thora? The accomplished hand of Reb Eljé Lebowitz alone could be seen in the endless maze of glorious letters. According to custom the last letters at the end of the roll were traced in pencil only. The Rabbi put them up to auction. Every man among the Jews of the Community wished to buy one of those words, or at least one of the letters which are a breath from God, that he might ink them over, and thus share in the honour of writing the Thora. With cries and gesticulations as if at market they disputed who should buy this divine merchandise; and over the final word, precious among the most precious since it is the last breath from the mouth of Adonai on Mount Sinai, a pious duel was waged between Reb Jankele and Fine Stranger the egg-collector. These

two haughty personages went on bidding against one another higher and higher, amid the admiration of the company. And Fine Stranger was on the point of beating the other when his wife, who thought he was going mad, flung her satin wig at his head.

When all the words had been allotted, those who had secured possession of them inked over the pencilled letters, following carefully the long loops and twirls. This took a considerable time. It required a whole hour to write the last verse of the Law: "The great and terrible works which Moses did in the sight of Israel." The text was complete. The Thora was then arrayed in its robe.

Wishing to do honour to his son, and his family and descendants, Reb Eljé had not been content with lovingly copying the Thora; he had added to it a silken sheath embroidered with an escutcheon bearing the two Lions of Judah, and also two rich crowns from which hung silver bells. Hertz Wolf slipped the parchment into the sheath, and set the tinkling crowns upon the boxwood cylinders; the Thora being thus adorned, he then placed it standing upright on a shelf of the great open cupboard.

The men then passed in line before the sacred roll. Covering their hands with the taliss, they touched the Thora with the tips of their fingers

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and then kissed them. The women, who are admitted only once a year to the synagogue, and behold the marvellous Book on that occasion alone, now gazed at it at leisure with rapture. Amram had broached a cask in his courtyard, and every one now went to drink there in honour of the Eternal. Until late in the evening there was drinking, singing and dancing as in ancient days before the sacred Ark.

Inside the room the hymn of joy was sung:

“Happy are the people who are in such a case;
Happy are the people who have the Eternal for their
God!

Some put their trust in chariots,
And others in their horses;
But as for us we will call upon Thy name,
O Eternal Sabaoth!”

Gradually, however, the visitors returned to their houses. Hertz Wolf and Guitelé reverently shut the door of the cupboard, and went to bed in the chamber which had become the sanctuary of the Holy of Holies. The house was now all dark and silent. But for Guitelé the darkness was turned into light and the silence was changed into music. All night long through the close-shut doors of the cupboard she saw the Thora shining, and the little silver bells rang in her ears with a mysterious sound.

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For two days and two nights the Book remained in the home of the long-footed Jew, until Saturday when, triumphantly accompanied by all the Thoras of the Community, it was brought to the synagogue under the marriage dais like a crowned bride.

Since that day the caftans, the shirts, the boots, and the furred bonnets have taken their former places in Guitelé's room; the garlands have gone back into their drawer; the branches have withered on the dust-heap. But in the house of the Jew-with-feet-that-reach-to-his-neck there is still an air of festivity over everything, as though the Thora were still in the cupboard, the garlands still upon the ceiling and the foliage still green.

Hertz Wolf, bending over the Thora, finds out new interpretations, and, what is even better, he invents new problems! He is carried away by a holy enthusiasm; he cannot keep still, but gets up every minute, pacing the house with long strides, and then rushing off to the synagogue in the hope of finding some idler to whom he can tell his discoveries.

Amram has obtained the administration of the Bishop's estates, thus defeating two Christians who were applying for the stewardship, and in his joy at this success he has announced to Hertz Wolf that he will lengthen his term as son-in-law by five years.

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But what matter the problems of Hertz Wolf and the business of Amram? What strange light is this that is shining in Guitelé's eyes? She pours out drink for the Hungarian and the Tzigane, and suddenly she stops, taken with a kind of dizziness. A sound of bells is ringing in her ears as though an invisible flock of sheep or of Thoras were passing. Yesterday, as she went past the closed cupboard she saw it all lit up inside, as though instead of caftans, boots, and linen the holy Book were still there. What delicious languor weighs down her limbs? And at the same time what sense of lightness, what joy to be alive, what courage in her work!

The Shekinah, the Glory of God, radiates from her face. O holy Thora, thou hast heard then in that memorable night which thou didst pass in this chamber? It was not in vain that thou didst fill with thy presence in the darkness her heart and eyes and ears.

This evening she will tell Hertz Wolf whence comes her mysterious gladness.

Why is the Jew-with-feet-that-reach-to-his-neck coming out of his house at this late hour of the night? The village is wrapped in darkness and mist; Jews and peasants are at rest beneath their feather quilts; the carnations and geraniums are asleep between the double panes; some one

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blows out a candle in the Magnate's bedroom.

But he, in his ugly levite, with head and beard thrust forward and shoulders bowed, is striding along in haste towards the synagogue. Yet no Jew goes to that holy place, if he can help it, while night broods over the earth. For at this hour the dead meet together, and often belated passers-by have heard them muttering the Talmud and the Psalms. But what of that? For the sake of those who are to be born must we not overcome our terror of those who are dead?

Guitelé is in the pains of childbirth, and Hertz Wolf, shuddering with fear, is running to the synagogue to hasten her deliverance by untying the cords of the Law.

In the entrance he stopped. Surely there was a murmur of voices. He listened with all his ears, and then as the sound seemed to cease, his long feet moved cautiously forward. In the stand hanging from the ceiling two or three candles were burning themselves out. At the far end of the hall he could see the two Lions of Judah gleaming on the crimson curtain over the cupboard of the Thoras. He climbed on to a stool, and with a shaking hand drew aside the curtain grating on its rusty rod, and revealed the great rolls of parchment standing upright in their sheaths of silk and crowned with their silver bells. Hertz Wolf stretched out a timorous arm, and took down the

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Book which his father had copied. The little bells tinkled faintly, and it seemed to him that the sound rang through the synagogue like thunder. Trembling like a leaf, he kissed the sacred parchment, untied the cord which held the rolls together, and said very low that he might not frighten himself:

“Master of the world, deliver my wife as I deliver Thy Law.”

Having said this, he replaced the Thora among its holy companions. Then he went out, striding quickly towards his own house through the village, in which was no sound save here and there the squeak of a violin.

“Oh that the child may not be a girl!” he thought.

Well, there must be girls, of course! There must be some to light the Sabbath candles, to cook the ritual dishes and the innumerable kinds of cakes appointed for each festival, and to make the great Kippour candles. But it is with children as it is with the various trades: all are equally necessary, and the tanner’s, for instance, is just as useful as the perfumer’s, but who would prefer the stink of tanned hides to the sweetness of scents? Can a girl say the supreme Kaddisch, the prayer of redemption, over the grave of her father? Can a girl fulfil the everlasting hope of Israel who looks in each new-born son for the Mes-

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siah—the Messiah who wanders on the earth in the guise of a poor and unknown Jew, still dying and being born again, sometimes in the house of Jacob and sometimes in that of Levi, and who will reveal himself in his glory on the day when Israel has suffered and has prayed enough?

“Blessed be Thou, O Master of the world!” He arrived at his house to find that a child had been born. And that child was a boy. And he was born on a Wednesday, a day propitious above all others for bringing a son into the world; for it was on Wednesday that the heavenly luminous bodies were created, and it has been proved hundreds of times that he who is born on this day is gifted with understanding and great power of memory.

Hertz Wolf lifted up his voice in the beautiful canticle of Israel:

“Behold the gift of the Eternal!

The reward which He gives is the fruit of the womb.

Like the arrows in the hand of the warrior,

Even so are the fruits of youth!

Happy is the man who hath his quiver full of them.”

But the matrons who guarded the young mother roughly bade him to be silent, and sent him to sing his canticle outside in the street.

Wearing their holy wigs, which every time

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they stooped showed their old shaven crowns, they were mounting guard round Guitelé, to drive away the bad angels who hover round in invisible hosts ready to snatch away the new-born babe before he is admitted by circumcision into the community of Abraham. All that week, at the hour of night-fall when the nocturnal deities have power over the darkened world, the little boys of the village invaded the bed-chamber to dance and to sing round the infant's cradle. "Dance, let us dance, little Jews!" they seemed to say. "Rare in our lives is dancing and gladness! Let not Gamaliel, Diana, nor the fairy Lilith break through our youthful chain! May Adam and Eve remain here, and as many good angels watching over the cradle as there are nails in the roof. May all the legions of the angels go with us circling round. May life go always dancing round about our little brother. Let no harm have power to reach him. Let the chain of our circle still go round his life."

And while the singing children circled round her, Guitelé lay in a kind of torpor, repeating rapturously to herself the beautiful name which she had given to her son. She had chosen neither Benjamin nor Solomon nor David; she had chosen Reuben, that cry of triumph signifying "Behold, I have a son!"

The matrons had watched eight nights. The

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chain of children had encircled her eight days. There were but a few more dreadful hours, and on the morrow the knife of circumcision would scatter the shades and drive away the phantoms. In that final night when the defeated angels would venture their last attacks the Sacrificer brought for the defence of mother and child the knife of sacrifice, the antique knife of the Covenant, such as that which the angel of the Lord held back from the head of Isaac. He slipped it into the bed under the mattress where the mother lay. What demon would be so bold as to touch a child protected by the knife of Abraham?

All night until the morning its presence daunted the infernal spirits: and the dawn of the glorious day completed the discomfiture of the genii of the night. Reuben, safe and sound, was carried to the synagogue with his head well wrapped up in a silken bonnet, for a head uncovered is an offence to the Lord. Yet once more the knife of the Hohet (Sacrificer) performed its sacred office. The toothless mouth of an old man, acting as godfather to the child, touched the fresh wound to suck the young blood. O Israel, how pure and strong thy blood must be, if after so many ages in which thy new-born sons are thus welcomed by the mouths of toothless age, there is yet one vigorous healthy Jew upon the earth!

CHAPTER VI

A CHILD LIKE A WAXEN DOLL

“The world is upheld by the pure breath of children studying the Thora” (*Talmud of Jerusalem*).

A child of the Ghetto seldom knows anything of the flowers and fruits of the fields. How should he, indeed, when he lives in some sordid urban district, redolent of poverty and rancid goose-grease? But ‘upon these country Jews Nature, surely, might make some impression? Surely, there, some village poet might be born. For the Jewish child, as well as for the little Hungarian and gipsy, the wind whispers in the branches: for him, too, the brawling torrent comes rushing down the slopes, and the mountain wraps itself in clouds at night-time, and shines out splendid in the sunrise. Not for the Christian alone are the mists that rise in the steep meadows, or the sweet scent of the acacia, or the pinks and geraniums that flower in the windows.

The little Jew-boy has only to open his eyes, he has only to come out upon his doorstep to gaze upon the lower mountain slopes where the forest

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ends, and upon the sunlit plain that stretches far away into the distance. But his eyes are shut, his ears are deaf. Not in vain was it written in the Talmud: "He who turns from the study of the Law, and says 'How lovely is that tree! how straight is that furrow!' that man is worthy of death."

Out of doors there were neither mountains nor tumbling streams nor carnations nor geraniums for Reuben. There was the dog that barked, the pig that rushed at you like a wild beast, the hens and the geese that ran after you with their long outstretched necks, and, more dangerous even than the beasts themselves, there were the children, the wicked Christian children! But oh, what harm had he done to them? Why did they chase him away each time that he ventured into the street? Oh, how they shouted in his ears that terrible song of the bacon! How they pulled his long locks of hair which his mother oiled with plum-juice every morning! Holy ritual curls that grow longer and longer as children grow more pious and good! Holy ritual curls, the livery of the Lord; how should the Master of the world recognize His Jews if there were no hair to be seen beneath our hats?

But what did the Christian children know of these mysteries? They laughed at them. And

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what do you think they called them, those loved, sacred ringlets? The lice-walks!

Outside the house was nothing but fear and horror and a world of devils. The best way by far was to stay indoors and keep near the stove. There were no dogs there, no geese, no pigs, no children, and there would have been nothing at all to fear if the house were not full of invisible spirits. One's knees knocked against them all the time when one was walking, and that was why one felt so tired at the end of the day. Clothes wore out quickly because of those evil spirits rubbing against them night and day; nails got black because they hid themselves in the smallest folds of the body, especially the finger-ends. And what would have become of him if every Saturday his mother had not cut his nails carefully and burned the little pieces?

Never mind! There was always one good peaceful day; that was our beautiful Saturday. On Friday evening ordinary life which had been going on all day suddenly stopped. The room smelt deliciously of goose-grease; the ritual fish lay spluttering in its pan on the stove, and the cakes were keeping hot under the feather quilt. The table was bright with the silver candlestick, the two Sabbath loaves, the vessel filled with spices and dried roses. His mother lighted the

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candles and, to glorify the Lord by turning her eyes to something bright which she was not accustomed to seeing, she looked at the light transparent through her fingers. Reuben too lifted his hand between his eyes and the flame to gaze at the beautiful rosy light. Of all things that the Lord had created was there any more worthy to be praised than the light of candles?

The splendour of the Shekinah, the Glory of God, shone through all the house: it seemed as if the harp of David were floating in the air. Dressed in their silk caftans, and wearing on their heads not the round hats of ordinary weekdays, but the velvet bonnets encircled with thirteen bands of fur, Hertz Wolf and Reb Amram came in from the synagogue, bringing with them from her land of pearl and emerald where she dwells beyond the forest the Princess of the Sabbath.

"A good Saturday!" they would say as they entered.

And the feast began. Amram lifted a glass filled with wine in his right hand, pronounced the Kiddousch which sanctified the feast, put the glass to his lips, drank a little more than half of it, then passed it round; and every one in turn drank to the drunkenness of Israel, the immense joy of living and breathing still after the trials of so many centuries. And they sang the old song, accompanying themselves by clapping their hands:

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"How admirable is thy peace,
Beautiful Princess of the Sabbath!
We go forth to meet thee,
We invite thee: come, oh crowned bride!
All care is ended, all toil cast away,
And we rejoice around thy table
Where the candles shine,
And eat of pullet, meat and fish."

The invisible Princess rested, stretched out softly on the feather quilt. Her body was so light that the eiderdown took no print of her form, her countenance was so bright that it could not be distinguished from the shining of the candles. Out of doors, the moon, the friend of the Jews, performed her sacred office, journeying through heaven to mark the sequence of the years and the days and the dates of festivals, and to guide the Jews on their road to Jerusalem, and the poor wanderers.

For Reuben the whole of the next day would pass in marvellous repose. The dogs, the geese, the pigs, and the little Christian boys—God only knew what they were doing! he was at peace. His mother would not touch a needle, nor light a candle, nor throw one piece of wood upon the fire, nor sell one glass of wine, nor even kill one louse, for to kill a louse on the Seventh day, as Reb Akiba had said, was as much as killing a camel.

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A poor old Christian woman came in to attend to the stove and to light the candles. The child thought that old Christian women existed for the purpose of looking after fires for Jews on the Sabbath day.

Those were blessed hours in which, sitting between his mother and the Princess, he learned those things which the soul grasps with such ardent strength that in after years it seems to us that we brought the knowledge of them with us into the world: he learned that mysterious numbers rule the destinies of men; that the number three brings happiness and the number nine misfortune, as is proved by all Jewish catastrophes, which happen invariably on the ninth of the month; that the figure seven is neutral, sometimes good and sometimes bad, and that the lot of mortals changes every seventh year; that the Christians are abandoned to heathen worship and adore three gods at once, a dove, a man, and a lamb, and that one ought to turn away one's face when one passes a church; that all the misfortunes of the Hebrews come from that man hanging on the great wooden crosses that one sees at every turn of the roads; that the Lord punishes the Jew who dares to lift his eyes towards them, and for forty days afterwards does not listen to his prayers.

Softly the night came down, the sad and splen-

did hour when the Princess must depart from the house.

Holding a glass of wine in his right hand, and in his left the little silver flask perforated with holes and filled with spices, Amram bade farewell to the invisible Princess. The flask was passed round, and every one breathed in the odour of dried roses as he would breathe the odour of the Sabbath. Reuben, standing beside the old man, lifted as high as he could reach a long burning waxlight, for his mother had often told him that he would grow to be as tall as the height at which he held it. His grandfather then took it from him, and moved it first to the right and then to the left side of his face, to divide the sacred from the profane, and the holy day now ending from the common days which were beginning; then he drank the wine, and having spilt a few drops into the plate in front of him, dipped in the lighted taper. So, in the sizzling of the wax, in a spiral of smoke, with the departing light, the crowned bride vanished from Reuben's sight as mysteriously as she had come.

Yet sometimes, one couldn't tell why, there would even come a weekday when nothing went wrong. One might venture out upon the road, and the dogs lying round the doors would not bark at you, the geese were not fierce, and the

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little Christians themselves forgot to persecute you or to pull your hair.

One of these golden days had dawned for Reuben. He had gone off on a marauding expedition with a party of Christian children, and now they had stopped beside an orchard wall over which raspberry bushes were climbing. There is nothing sweeter, nothing nicer than a raspberry warm with the sun. Micha, the baker's son, pulled down a bending spray towards him. The other boys did the same, even Denis the cripple. Reuben looked on enviously, but did not dare to touch the red fruits.

"Why aren't you eating?" asked the bold Micha.

Ah, yes; why? How should that little Christian know that for every act in our lives there is an appointed benediction: the benediction to be said on getting up and lying down, at the beginning of a meal and the end of it, on taking rest and on starting our work; one to be said when we see the lightning, one when we hear the thunder; one when we stand before a tree or a flowering bush; another when we breathe the scent of an aromatic plant or the perfume of spices; one to be said when we see the rainbow or look upon some very beautiful thing; another when we put on a new garment or throw away an old caftan; one to be said on seeing an eminent rabbi, a distinguished scholar, or a king or a giant or

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a dwarf (praise be to Thee, Eternal, for the diversity of Thy creatures!), and among a thousand more there is one to be said before eating the fruit of a tree and another for the products of the ground.

Now, raspberries; are they the fruit of a tree or the product of the ground? Which of the two benedictions should be said before they touch one's lips? Reuben did not know. And having already learned subtilty, he asked with a careless air:

"Is the raspberry bush a tree or a plant of the ground?"

"The raspberry is a tree," answered the baker's son, for whom the world had no mysteries.

"Blessed be Thou, Eternal, our God, King of the universe, Who hast created the fruits of the tree!" the pious child murmured in his heart.

And having said the benediction, he joined his comrades, and plundered his neighbour's raspberry bushes without remorse.

These were rare interludes of concord and forgetfulness. Those little Christians were so ferocious! So long as the great iron Crosses stretch their menacing arms beneath the lime trees in the square and at all the crossings of the roads, there can be no peace nor truce between the children of Christ and the children of Israel.

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It was especially at the festival they called Christmas that they grew so terribly overbearing! To hear them singing the dreadful song of the bacon! And their behaviour became perfectly outrageous. They got up at midnight and went into their church, and took to singing crazy hymns. Till daybreak they worshipped a doll, an ass, an ox, and a star. Next day it was almost beyond belief how wicked they had become; it seemed as if the ass and the ox had bestowed all their bad qualities upon them.

On that day certainly it would be wiser to stay indoors beside the stove. But those Christians enjoyed themselves in ways which, even to a little Jew, were deeply interesting. The magistrate's steward and his wife had a great fir tree in their house; there were hundreds of lighted candles among its branches: a thousand splendid things wrapped in gilt paper were hanging on the boughs; the effect was astounding!

How could one resist the wish to have a nearer view of such marvels? Reuben, with his feet deep in the snow and his nose pressed against the window-pane, watched the children, boys and girls together, hand in hand, dancing round the beautiful shining tree. The village priest chatted with the women and caressed the children; his caftan was almost exactly like the rabbi's, but

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had one ever seen the rabbi talking to women?
had he ever been seen to smile?

And all of them, boys and girls, had their heads uncovered! No one, not even the priest, had kept on his hat; as if a pious man must not always have his head covered at least with a silk skull-cap.

The little Jew stared at all this with admiration and disgust. Evening fell, and a thick mist gradually filled the square; the houses seemed to grow lower and the church bigger. Through the open porch he could see the glitter of innumerable candles down the nave. He would have turned homewards, but curiosity drew him forward. He went on, up to the threshold of the church, and there, amid a forest of candles, he saw a wilderness of rocks and branches, inhabited by a crowd of funny little sheep, and shepherds, and people riding on camels, and the doll that they worshipped.

Ah, if his father had seen him there, what a stroke of the leather strap he would have had when he came home! And then, suddenly, the cradle, the fir tree, the children and the priest all disappeared. He was seized, lifted from the ground, and carried off swiftly by cruel hands, unhappy wretch that he was! through the fog. By his shock of red hair and his hangman's face,

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he had instantly recognized Micha, the baker's son, who was holding him by the legs. But the other, whom he had never seen before, and who had seized him by the head? That must be the angel Gamaliel. He did indeed look frightful! What did they want with him? Where were they taking him? Terror clutched him by the throat so that he could not cry out. And now he might scream if he would, and no one would hear; he was outside the village, right away from the houses in some lonely place.

The baker's son threw him down on the snow, and pressed his knee upon him. The angel Gamaliel drew a knife from his pocket. Half dead with horror, he saw in a flash his mother sitting by the stove, his father bending over the sacred books. He called to them, but in vain. All round him there was nothing but the snow, the white fields, and over there in the square the Christmas tree glowing red through the fog. Then everything vanished. It was all over with him. He felt the ice-cold blade of the knife against his cheek!

When he recovered from his mad terror and opened his eyes, the baker's son and the angel Gamaliel were taking to their heels, but his two long ringlets lay beside him in the snow like dead birds. An immense, an infinite despair over-

whelmed him. The road to heaven had been cut off from him!

How could he go back home? What was he to say to his father and mother? And why had he lingered to look at the cursed tree, and that cradle with its star, its doll, and the ox and the ass?

He picked up the loved ringlets, and with hanging head and a bursting heart he took his way to the house. Avoiding the church, he cut across through the fields. But in escaping from the church he came up against the crucifix at the cross-roads. He turned away his head that he might not see the great iron figure of Christ. But there it was, the terrifying dead body, hanging there amid the drifting snow-clouds. Its huge arms stretched out over the road ready to fling themselves upon him. He ran; the cross pursued him! He ran till he was out of breath, stumbling in the snow; but at each step the cross gained upon him. He felt an icy breath in his neck and a dreadful hand coming on behind him. A few more paces still, and there was the door! He gave a cry and threw himself into Guitelé's arms. Master of the world, it was time! The terrible ice-cold hand had already seized his tzitziss.

But Hertz Wolf did not unbuckle the formidable leathern band which divides the noble and su-

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perior parts of the body from the inferior, to administer the dreaded chastisement to his son. There was not one word of reproach nor one gesture of anger; only silence and the heavy grief that comes with inevitable misfortune, and the sadness of eyes uplifted saying to the Lord, "Eternal, Rock of Ages, behold the first step of my child Reuben on the hard road of adversity. A thousand and a thousand others he will make, but the first is the most grievous. Receive it as firstfruits from the hands of thy poor servant."

Then turning to Reuben, who was more agnized by his silence than he would have been by his anger, he took from the child's hands the locks still warm with life, and opening the Testament used only on days of festival, he placed them between the leaves of the Book of Judges, like flowers of remembrance and of lasting enmity.

What Christian can understand the deep significance that there is for a Jew in the process of learning to read? Reading, to a Christian, is the same kind of thing as eating, drinking and sleeping; he uses his tongue, as animals do, merely for material ends, for gaining his livelihood, for brawling with his neighbours in the tavern, or for insulting the Jew.

But for a child of Israel, learning to read means casting away like a worn-out garment the old

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every-day language, the dear familiar Yiddish, made up of all the dialects of the world and words borrowed from every nation among whom the Israelites have journeyed during their tribulations; it means learning to speak as King David and King Solomon spoke in the ancient days of glory; it means learning the sacred language in which the Master of the world gave the Law to Moses, a language of which each syllable was actually formed by the breath of God, a language of which the lightest sound has power to shake the foundations of the earth. Learning to read is to pray.

So the first day that Hertz Wolf-with-feet-that-reach-to-his-neck took Reuben to school he wound the taliss very carefully round him, that on that blessed day when his son should spell out the first letters of the Hebrew alphabet he might be, so to speak, entirely enveloped in prayers. Besides, these Hungarian peasants always allow their swine to wander about at will in the village streets, and one may as well do one's best to avoid the painful sight of a pig on first setting out to read the holy Thora.

The house in which this wonderful language was taught was quite the poorest and the most sordid in the village, and looked indeed more like a stable than a house. It was a low building, with a roof of thatch nibbled at by the sheep; there were stagnant puddles in the floor, and the

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cobwebs trembling and swaying in the draught were the only ceiling beneath the thatch. On the east wall hung a card with the Hebrew inscription: "From this side blows a life-giving air." Over the door on the west side there was a black gaping hole intended to recall the destruction of the Temple, and through this hole came an icy wind and a strong smell of goat.

It is not very pleasant to have a billy-goat in one's stable, and the Jews of the village had delegated to the schoolmaster the duties of educating their children and of keeping the he-goat necessary for the flocks of the community. But although it is written that those who are studying the Law exhale a perfume more exquisite than incense and myrrh, the combined breaths of the Melamed and his scholars were not sufficient to overpower the forcible odour of the animal.

In this retreat of Hebrew learning there were about fifteen children stammering in the sacred tongue. Solomon's Temple would not have appeared more beautiful to Reuben. From the main beam there hung at the end of a long string a cake soaked in honey, which signified the first letter of the divine alphabet. Never in any language has there been so splendid a letter! To the child's dazzled eyes the yolk of egg that it was smeared with shone like gold through the murky stable. His mother had been right when

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she told him: "There is nothing in the world more beautiful than learning to read the Thora!"

When the sparkling letter had been swinging long enough above his nose and when he knew that it was called "Alef," the old schoolmaster untied it from the string, and put it into his hand. It was made of the dough from which the Saturday bread is kneaded, and its taste was delicious. A second letter followed: he ate it like the first, and that day he left the school convinced that there was nothing so nice as the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

But it was only the letter Alef which was made of Saturday bread. The others were not golden: they did not shine at the end of a string, coated with beautiful yolk of egg; there was more often the taste of tears in them than of honey or of the Sabbath dough. And the knowledge of divine things is not acquired in a day! Every morning he had to get up before dawn, and go to the Heder through the mud and snow while the little Christians of the village were still fast asleep. The forge was not yet alight, only a feeble glimmer of morning appeared far away behind the fir trees of the Carpathians. The waterfall had a threatening sound. What had it been doing all night long? Reuben could not guess.

But however soon he arrived, the old schoolmaster was already there at his table, reciting his

prayers. Evidently he never went to bed! He was old, extremely old, as a true Melamed ought to be: for he who learns from a young master is like to a foolish man who eats green grapes and drinks wine as it pours from the wine-press, but he who has a master of ripe age is like to a man who eats fine grapes and drinks old wine. The two locks that hung beside his hollow cheeks were only two thin corkscrew ringlets, but their length testified to his piety and learning. The scanty hairs of his beard that he was always pulling and dragging hung in long threads over his worn caftan; and when one came out in his hand, rather than throw on the ground that hair from his chin which had sung the glory of the Eternal, he laid it piously, as it is commanded, between the pages of his precious Talmud, which in the course of fifty years had become a hair cemetery, a hideous herbal.

Under his reddened, sleepless eye and his ever vigilant rod, the little scholars sat rocking themselves to and fro, and chanting in a din of discordant voices the words of the unknown tongue. It mattered little whether or not they understood the ancient mysterious speech. It was enough to recognize the signs, to know the verses by heart, to read them, to drone them out in the unchanging traditional sing-song. And so from dawn to dusk the phrases of the incomparable Scripture

were recited unceasingly by infant lips. Day after day was passed in tireless rocking to and fro and noisy chanting, under the menace of the rod, ever ready to wake the sleepy, to stir up the lazy, and maintain in every corner of the room this precept—"Be diligent in thy sacred occupation, for if thou shouldest add or take away one letter, thou wouldst cause the ruin of the world."

Fortunately the Melamed was very fond of snuff. Solomon, Moses or Jacob having two kreutzers in their pockets, would break off suddenly in the sacred reading. "Reb Nathaniel," they would call out impudently, "tell us a story, and we will give you two kreutzers." Then the hesitating voices of the smallest boys and the chant of the others who were reciting the Talmud and the Thora ceased, as when a stream runs dry, or the wind dies down in the forest and the fir trees all grow silent. The pitiless rod seemed paralysed; heavenly magic descended from the cobweb roof; the whole room was perfumed with snuff.

And Reb Nathaniel, in a nasal voice whose ironic intonation the children were too young to perceive, would relate some beautiful tale that has enchanted the imagination of Israel for centuries, especially that called: "When the Messiah comes," which sounds like the dream of a

man whose stomach is empty and his mind filled with hope.

When the Messiah comes it will be on a beautiful Saturday morning. On the highest peak of the Carpathian mountains the prophet Elias will blow the trumpet, and then the miracle will come to pass! The Messiah, who ever since the fall of Jerusalem has been wandering over the earth in the disguise of a poor unknown Jew, will suddenly reveal Himself, wearing a breastplate of silver and a rich velvet mantle. And there will be the end of all suffering for the Jews. A great shower of wine will fall like rain upon the earth, the rays of the sun will be as thick as spears, and at the end of every ray will be hanging something very good to eat; the earth will cast up Leviathan, the marvellous fish which supports the world and will be the food of all mankind. The angels will bring great golden cups to the feast, and the wine of the first vintage which the Master of the world has been keeping in the celestial cellars will be poured out into the cups. All good Jews will sing, all the children will leap and dance. Ah, when will that day come?

These many mornings in the snow and mud, these many chantings and many strokes of the rod, have at last borne fruit. Those trudgings through the dismal dawn while the pale light

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glimmered in the fir trees, those tedious days on the benches of the Heder, are now all forgotten.

In the house of the long-footed Jew radiant faces of friends and visitors are seen round the well-spread table. The beadle of the synagogue has come without waiting to be invited. The Melamed has put on his least threadbare caftan and his high furred bonnet full of moths. The candles light up the tablecloth as on the most splendid Saturdays. But what matter the Sabbath candles to-day? He, Reuben, is a brilliant star! He himself is the candle that shines most brightly. He is the purest and the whitest wax. To-day he is to recite in public for the first time a passage of the holy books of Moses!

His father lifts him in both hands, and makes him stand on the table with the candles all around him. The Melamed pulls out a hair from his beard and takes a pinch of snuff. Now you shall see what he can make of his pupils!

But patience! one moment! This child of God, this gift of the Thora, must be made to shine more brightly yet in the eyes of the Lord. For is he not to-day His Ark and the Sanctuary of His Law? Let him be covered with all that is most precious. Let him be adorned and sparkling like the curtain of the Tabernacle. Let him ring with silvery sound like the Thora with her jingling bells. Is he not the very living Thora?

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Every one takes from his pocket his silver watch and chain, and hangs it upon the child, that he may be splendid as the sheaths of the richest Thoras, and all his movements be accompanied by the music of bells. He shines, he flashes like the window of a Viennese jeweller's shop.

"Now then!" says the Melamed, and sniffs at his broad snuff-blackened thumb.

It is a charming scene, always, when a beautiful child, his heart swelling with emotion, comes forward into a listening circle to sing his song or recite his fable. But in this tavern-parlour in this lonely spot among the Carpathians, that little Jew standing among the candles, saying divine verses in his tremulous voice; these attentive Hebrews drawn by the ancient sound of the chant to accompany him in an undertone, with their ritual curls hanging against their cheeks; this is a picture of antique Judah hearkening to the voice of God. With head bent sideways and ears alert, the Melamed leans over the table to make sure that his pupil shall not miss out one word of the incomparable Scripture. Adonai (blessed may He be!) is listening also from the height of heaven. He has no need to bend down to hear.

The recitation being ended, applause broke forth. Joy and pride filled the little palpitating heart: it was that purely Jewish joy and delight, honour and praise for that which from childhood

A CHILD LIKE A WAXEN DOLL

upwards these people, attached as they are to miserable earthly goods, yet esteem as a priceless treasure; the treasure of knowledge and understanding.

“May God make thee grow like Ephraim and Manasseh,” said each guest, taking back his watch.

And the matrons who had saved him from the terrible Lilith embraced his mother, who had turned pale with pleasure, and declared—in the usual complimentary phrase—“The child is like a waxen doll.”

The faded carnations flower again, the shorn-off ringlets grow once more. But the disappointed dreams of a child?—What bulky Talmud has pages numerous enough to contain between them all those heavenly curls which fall from a young forehead as the winds of life blow over it?

For a long time he believed, when on a Friday evening the rumbling carriage rattled into the yard, for a very long time he had thought that his grandfather was bringing under the tarpaulin of his cart the beautiful Princess of the Sabbath from the land of pearl and emerald where she dwelt beyond the forest. And on the following evening, when he saw Amram harnessing his horse as soon as the sputtering candle had been extinguished in the spirits, he had been quite persuaded that the old man was setting out to escort the

Princess to her enchanted palace. Alas! he knows now that the carriage is loaded, according to the month or the season, only with scrap-iron, old clothes, newly flayed sheepskins, or poultry or feathers. How could the crowned Bride be there?

And how many other tresses, life—more cruel than the most wicked Christian child—shears day by day from his temples!

Every evening on returning from school he used to find his father in his room, bending over the little table and reading the sacred texts. And this constant study had inspired him with an admiration mingled with fear of Hertz Wolf which he did not feel for his mother nor for his grandfather, who filled the house with his loud voice, and chatted familiarly with the village folk, Hungarians, Slovaques, Tziganes, Christians or Jews, not even disdaining to tipple with them. Amram used to go and come and start off again, never sitting still, and not much frequenting the synagogue: he would disappear for a week, and return suddenly on a Friday afternoon at the hour when the Schames cries: "Schoul herein! To the synagogue!" just in time to change his caftan covered with mud and snow if it were winter-time, or thick with dust in summer, and put on his Saturday garment.

But his father! His father, who did nothing, who only used his feet for walking from the house

to the synagogue and from the synagogue to the house! His hands were occupied only in prayer, his tongue was loosened only to chant the Law, his eyes were employed only in reading the holy Scriptures. His father hardly ever talked, his mind being sunk in the depths of unfathomable thoughts; he rarely spoke a word to a Hungarian and never to a Tzigane; he wore out his eyes night and day over the obscure Zohar, and seemed to carry about with him in his beard or the folds of his caftan something of the miracles and the piety of the holy town where he was born. His father, in short, was the son of the grand Sofer of Bels, and merely by sitting over his books he was hastening, upon the mysterious paths of heaven and earth, the coming of the Messiah.

And then, one Saturday evening, after the adieu to the Princess, Amram, in a hurry as usual, had harnessed the horse. Hertz Wolf had got up beside him on the seat of the carriage, and they both vanished in the darkness.

After that day Reuben, when he returned from the Heder, no longer used to find his father in the little dark room behind the tavern, reading at the window. Neither did he find him in the dear synagogue. But on a Friday evening he would see him coming in, covered with mud like the grandfather himself. What was the meaning of such a change, such a revulsion in the order

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of things? He wanted to ask his mother, but timidity restrained him: it was as though he dreaded to touch on some very terrible problem.

Alas, the Jew-with-feet-to-his-neck was a son-in-law no longer! Seven years had passed since the day when the bishop had entrusted to Trebitz the administration of his affairs, and the extended term which Amram had granted to Hertz Wolf for continuing his studies had expired.

Uncomprehending, Reuben gazed at his empty place, and with a heart divided between shame and grief he dimly felt that misfortune had fallen upon the household.

CHAPTER VII

“NEXT YEAR, AT JERUSALEM!”

The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.
The fig tree putteth forth her tender buds,
And the vines with the young grapes give a good smell.
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Tender hands uplift the benumbed, unconscious world; a divine breath revives it; winter flies to take refuge on the highest Carpathian mountains and in the icy hearts of Christians. The traces of care disappear from Israel's wrinkled brow.

In every house the walls are newly whitewashed, and the busy housewife searches every cranny with her broom to sweep out the smallest crumbs, for it is written in the Law, “He who eats leavened bread, or drinks fermented drink, or keeps any of it under his roof in these days, he shall be cut off from the Community of Israel.” So, to make sure of having nothing leavened in his possession, every one hastens to make a fictitious contract with the poorest Christian in the village for the

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sale of his shop and all that it contains. The baker transfers to him his flour, his oven and his kneading-trough; the publican gives up his bar and the grocer his stores, and even those who do not trade in any fermented food sell their shops like the rest, for how can they swear to the Holy of Holies (blessed may He be!) that no mouse has dropped a crumb of leavened bread or any unclean scrap in any corner?

Oh, miracle, no more traffic and no more bargaining going on at Hounfalou! A table is set up in the middle of the synagogue, and the corn for the special bread which alone is permitted in these days is poured out upon it. Young and old come crowding round the ritual corn, sifting the grains one by one to make sure that not one of them is sprouting. Long ringlets, white or black or tawny, dangle from the bent heads over the beautiful golden heap. It is like a revival of half-fabulous days when Israel was a pastoral and agricultural people.

In the streets of the village there is not one Christian child to be seen. For while there is joy in the Jewish houses over the final arrangements for the feast, horrible stories are being told that make the children shudder with fear in the Tziganes' huts and the Hungarians' cottages. It is said that in the celebration of their feast those cursed Jews require the blood of a little Christian.

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Every year they steal one away, carry him into their synagogue, prick him in a thousand places, and drain off all his blood into a great red vase which is held by a little Jew. Then at last they kill him by driving a great nail into his head and another into his heart, and mix his blood with their bread of damnation; for they know well enough, those Judases, that they crucified the true God, and they hope that by mingling a little Christian blood with their own they may participate in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ah, they are not so eager now, those little rascals of the village, to sing their famous song of the bacon! They don't run after Reuben now, as they did at Christmas-time, to cut off his ringlets. All through this week they take care not to pass by the Jewish houses or to play near the synagogue, and if they should see even in the far distance that Red Jew whose office it is to kill the hens and geese and any other creature needed by the Community, they take to their heels, and prudently seek refuge behind the railings in the yards of their houses.

The splendid evening had come at last. Round the bright table in the house of the long-footed Jew six kings were sitting, or rather reclining on soft down pillows and crimson eiderdowns, leaning negligently on the left side with elbow bent

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and the head supported in the left hand, in the noble attitude of the Princes in old pictures. The party consisted of Amram Trebitz, Hertz Wolf, an old beggar invited for the feast, Reuben, Hannah and Guitelé, all wearing bonnets with thirteen bands of fur or wigs of satin, just like those of King Solomon and of Queen Esther. On the white cloth shone the silver candelabra, the flowery plates, the many-coloured glasses, and the richly gilded cup to which presently the great prophet Elias would come, and touch it with his lips. And before each guest, between two plates, one empty and the other filled with salt water, there was a little pile of three unleavened loaves upon which were balanced a goblet of sugared wine, peeled almonds and gingerbread, the gullet of a fowl, horse-radish, bitter herbs, and an egg roasted hard in the ashes.

Shyly and without an effort, Reuben brought out the well-known ritual questions by which every good child of Israel opens the great feast of the Passover. "Why is this night distinguished from all other nights? Why on other nights may we eat as we please either of leavened or of unleavened bread, but on this night of the unleavened only? Why on other nights may we eat of what herbs we choose, and on this night of bitter herbs only? Why on other nights do we never dip our food in salted water, and why on

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this night do we dip it so twice? Why on other nights do we eat either sitting or leaning on one elbow, and on this night only leaning on one elbow?”

Then in a voice of triumph Hertz Wolf-with-feet-that-reach-to-his-neck replied by reading the old legendary story: “We were bondslaves with Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Eternal, our God, brought us out from that land by a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm.”

Weighted with antiquity, filled full with histories, loaded with the sorrows and the joys of Israel, that ancient Scripture related the afflictions of their ancestors and the favours heaped by the Eternal upon His elect people: the boils which He sent upon the Egyptian tyrants, the blood and the wild beasts, the hail and the frogs, and the murrain upon the animals, the grasshoppers and the lice and the ulcers, and the darkness and the death of the First-Born. At each one of these plagues recorded in the ancient writing Reuben dipped his finger in his glass and let fall a drop of the joyful wine of the Passover as a water of gladness, an elixir of hope. Hertz Wolf only interrupted his recital to swallow at one draught one of the four glasses of wine which must be drunk during the feast; then he resumed the ancient chant: “What does the wise child ask? What says the simple one? What is this?”

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What is the meaning of these laws, these statutes, these ceremonies, which the Eternal, our God, has appointed for us on this day?"

If bitter herbs were eaten, it was to recall the memory of the bondage in Egypt, the labour with clay and with brick, the slavery in the fields and the other burdens laid upon their ancestors; if they ate of unleavened bread it was because the dough was not yet risen in the ovens when the King of Kings, the Holy of Holies (blessed may He be!) showed Himself to His children, and bade them haste out of Egypt; if they set before the guests the gullet of a fowl, it was in memory of the lamb which their ancestors killed while Jerusalem was yet standing, in gratitude to the Lord who spared the houses of the Jews when He smote the Egyptians. The hard-cooked egg and the salted water also recalled the mourning and the destruction of the Temple. And there in a corner of the room were the traveller's staff and the little bundle to symbolize that Israel was ever an exile among the nations and always ready to set forth.

But at last came the eagerly expected words: "Here they stop speaking, they drink and give themselves to pleasure." Guitelé set the steaming carp on the table, and immediately there broke forth the mad gaiety so quickly excited among these high-strung and often-fasting Jews

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merely by the odour of meat and wine; and the legendary story gave place to jokes and witticisms directed equally against Hebrews and Christians, which, first uttered in these remote villages, will be echoed far away in sordid garrets or luxurious chambers by the laughter of the exiled Jew.

Reuben was still too young to share in that laughter, that strange, cruel, bitter laughter which from century to century has been the surest shield and the sharpest weapon of Israel. Although he was already aware of the presence in his life and in that of his people of a mystery which was a source at once of pride and of pain, he was still untouched by that cruel irony which spares nothing, pierces everything, even what lies deepest in the heart. The day would come, and soon enough, when he would laugh in his turn.

Against his sleepy cheek, half hidden by the curls escaping from his velvet bonnet, blew the breath of that jeering laughter, not without leaving its invisible trace. He lay on his crimson eiderdown, struggling against sleepiness, for the moment was approaching when the Prophet Elias would enter the room and drain the sacred cup which had just been filled with wine.

The long tale of the Passover was taken up once more, and the imposing verses of the Psalms sounded in his drowsy ears like the blows of a hammer on the anvil:

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“Give thanks to the God of all Gods,
For His mercy endureth for ever!
Who smote the Egyptians,
For His mercy endureth for ever!
And slew mighty kings,
For His mercy endureth for ever!
Sihon king of the Amorites,
For His mercy endureth for ever!
And Og the king of Bazan,
For His mercy endureth for ever!”

But now, from the abyss of shadows and old time, out of the wind and the snow, the Prophet had arrived. The old beggar got up to open the door to him, and the others all rose to their feet. The night air blew into the over-heated room; the flame of the candles wavered. Reuben felt the mantle of Elias brush softly against his cheek! He did not take his eyes from the cup the great Prophet was to drink from. He had drunk! Reuben was sure of it. He had seen the wine sink in the glittering crystal.

Every one emptied at one draught his last ceremonial glass, and Reuben himself put his lips to the magic cup which Elias had touched with his own.

With that last drop of wine he quite lost his head. As if in a dream he heard the company exchanging the salute repeated among the dispersed People every Passover night since the Exile and

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the Fall of Jerusalem. “Next year at Jerusalem!”

It is the adieu of a faith without assurance, the word of invincible hope and of bitter irony, falling like the leaf of the willow upon the mirror of a sleeping pool; a ripple moves for a moment, and is lost in the silence and the night.

His mother carried him away in her arms. Just for an instant he opened his eyes. And as the old beggar went out he saw the Prophet Elias himself departing from the room.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROAD TO THE CROSS

Where then art thou, Jerusalem? Could one see from the summit of the Carpathian mountains thy shining golden houses? How shall one reach thee? Is it by the path that passes the Tziganes' cottages, or the winding road by the house of the village Magnate? How many towns, how many villages as large as Hounfalou must be left behind before one arrives in the Holy City where for hundreds and hundreds of years a Virgin has wept over the fallen ruins of the Temple?

So mused the child like a waxen doll.

But he who goes on such a journey must have a courageous soul and a heart that nothing terrifies. Reuben, it is true, had long ago ceased to be afraid of the geese; for among all the animals God has made, the goose is an excellent creature. What would become of the Jew without the goose? Who would give him feathers for the Passover cushions, and fat for the Saturday dinner and for the cakes for the feast of Esther? The goose is the Jew's pig. The Christian children, of course,

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are as fierce as ever, and still shout in his ears the terrible song of the bacon. However, when we are three or four against one we can tackle them! But two things still inspire him with irrepressible horror: dogs, and the Crucifix on the cross-roads!

Oh, those Crosses that cover the face of the earth! Why is it that as you pass them they cast on you a shadow so different from the shadow of houses or of trees? Why is it so cold and so freezing? Why has the Lord forbidden us to lift up our eyes towards them? Why for forty days will He not listen to the prayers of the Jew who has been so rash as to look at them?

And yet it seemed to him that if he dared once stare into the face of one of those iron Christs he would not be afraid of it any more. "Master of the world!" he cried one morning at his prayers, "every night I will rise, as my father does, at midnight, to recite the psalm of the destruction of the Temple; and besides this, twice in the week, on Mondays and on Wednesdays, I will not spread any goose-grease on my bread. But I will look at the Cross."

He had made this promise, and now he was on the road. Under a sky heavy with thunder the village lay as if asleep among the sweet-smelling lime trees. The dogs, curled up in the dust with their heads between their paws and their tongues

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lolling out, lay motionless, dozing in the shadow of the houses. The sunflowers with their wide-open faces stared upon him as he went by. With his little round hat pushed back and his hands in the pockets of his caftan, he marched on with a firm step towards the great Cross that stands at the entrance of the forest. But as soon as he got beyond the Tziganes' huts, and found himself alone on the road, his fine self-confidence deserted him. He sat down on the bank, and gazing straight before him, he looked long without seeing them at the great billows of corn undulating far into the distance, at the villages enclosed in their belt of acacias and the thick coppery clouds piling themselves up above the fields as though they would set the crops on fire.

Ah, how far away is Jerusalem! Neither his father nor his grandfather had ever undertaken so long a journey. What is the use of going even as far as the Calvary? If any harm should happen to him, who could protect him in that lonely spot? But in that solitary place no one could surprise him in the act of lifting his eyes to a Cross; this thought reassured him.

With a tightening of his heart, half ready to turn back upon the way, he moved on with faltering steps in the direction of the forest. Above his head the coppery clouds had turned a glowing red, revealing within their cavernous depths huge

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furnaces in which the storm was brewing. A light caressing breeze began bowing the tall heads of corn in the plain; and along the edge of the wood it stirred the leaves of the beeches and the horn-beams that had been so still all the morning.

He hesitated; he dared not go any farther. He wished he were that tree he had just passed which stayed there quietly behind him, or those red and blue flowers blazing in the corn, or that pebble that he kicked, that rolled a moment and then stopped. But in vain did the ten thousand Angels on his right hand endeavour to hold him back upon the dusty road; ten thousand Demons on his left were still pushing him forward. One step compels another on the path of the forbidden Tree. That lurking curiosity which has led so many children of Israel along that path, and on others like it, seemed drawing him by the hand. With uneasy mind and downcast eyes he went. And suddenly, there in the dust, a great shadow stopped him, the frightful shadow of the Cross.

There it was, standing close beside him. Now he had only to lift his eyes to see towering into the sky that terrible Crucifix. A moment longer he hesitated; then gathering up his courage he exclaimed under his breath: "Cursed be thou who madest a new religion!" In the same instant

he turned round. And they two, the Christ and the child, stood face to face.

It is a poor village image of Christ, painful to look upon, hanging forward as though bowed down beneath the heat of the day. The crown of thorns is all sideways on the head, the rains of innumerable winters have so effaced the colours with which some peasant artisan had daubed it that it has actually a corpse-like air. A little dark blood is still to be seen upon the side pierced by the lance; the eyes are half closed, and on the lips there hovers something which makes them seem to smile at the child.

For a long while Reuben gazed at the great crucified body upon the oaken beam, as though, knowing he should never in his life behold it again, he would impress it upon his mind for ever. All fear had departed. Like the thistledown floating hither and thither in the summer wind, little thoughts came and went in his tranquillized heart.

"But he does not look wicked! Why did he do us so much evil? What made him think of inventing a new religion? Perhaps when he was little some one cut off his ringlets? Or did his mother forget to cut his nails on a Saturday? Perhaps he did not say the benediction commanded when one eats the fruits of the earth or when one sees a holy Rabbi? Perhaps he too went into a church; and did he look at a Cross?"

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While he was thus thinking, suddenly it became night. Thick darkness descended over all things. Lightnings flashed from heaven, the ancient thunders of Sinai shook the world, and the rain of the Deluge burst in a flood over the Cross, the child, the forest, and the wide plain of corn-fields. One lightning flash followed another, and the noise of the thunder rushed after them so quickly that he had no time to finish the benediction for lightning before he had to begin the benediction for thunder. And soon he thought no more of making a benediction at all. He fled at his utmost speed towards the village, whose roofs he could see shining behind the curtain of rain. He ran, and this time also the Cross came flying in pursuit of him. Behind him was the ice-cold breath, the dreadful outstretched hand. . . . Was it the Christ, was it the wind that carried away his hat? . . . Ah, now his head was bare before the Master of the world! He crossed his hands over his forehead, not so much to shield it from the wet as to hide from the Lord the shame of his uncovered head, and redoubled his speed through the storm-tossed billows of corn, which rocked like furious waves of the sea, breaking upon the edge of the path as though they would submerge him before he reached the village. Everything was cracking, groaning, streaming with water. . . . Could it be possible

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that in the midst of this deluge there was the sound of a violin? . . . It was the everlasting *crincriu* from the Tziganes' cottages greeting his entry into the village. The courtyards were all strewn with branches broken by the wind, the dogs were shivering under the carts, the sunflowers bowed their heavy heads, jets of water poured from the church gutters into the middle of the square, forming a river that swept away the scented flowers of the lime trees. The poor synagogue with its roof of thatch looked like a haystack half demolished by the rain. He reached it, he rushed in, mad with fright and dripping with water.

It was the hour of the prayer of Min'ha. A few pious folk were at prayer there, shouting and waving their hands and arms in the air as though to conjure away the tempest. Drenched with rain, wet through, shuddering, he crouched against the wall, and wondered in his terror whether it were the Christ who did not look wicked who had sent the storm against him, or whether it were the Eternal Sabaoth who considered that in return for looking at a Cross it was not enough to offer Him an hour of his sleep and two days' allowance of the goose-grease that his mother spread upon his bread.

Gradually the thunder receded into the distance,

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as if it gave up the attempt to reach him in the house of the Lord.

Oh, how merciful is the God of the Jews! How good it is to be in His Temple! Prayer enfolds him and lulls him to sleep with its monotonous roar. Is it a dream? The tempest has ceased all around him. Even the prayers have ended. What a wonderful silence! . . . Why is the Melamed carrying him in his arms? . . . Is it his mother who is undressing him, and drying him with her apron? . . . His teeth chatter; his whole body trembles. Oh, how cold it is under the thick red eiderdown!

All through the week the fever has not left him. But as Hertz Wolf and Guitelé watch by their sick child it does not for one moment occur to them that it is not healthy for a little boy to spend all his days in the Heder, in the draught of life-giving air which blows through the western wall, or that such an existence is the cause that their Reuben's little body is so frail and excessively nervous. Do not all the little Jews of Hounfalou live so? Does a little Jew need fresh air, exercise and play? Is not the study of the Thora sufficient to keep him in health? Hertz Wolf and Guitelé do not trace his illness to the school, or to over-work, or the rain of a few days ago; for sickness, according to a pious Jew, is

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never sent except as a punishment for sin; death itself is always a chastisement for some transgression of the Law. They consider, therefore, the six hundred and thirteen commandments, the neglect of which may lead to death, and ask themselves which of these they have broken, that the Lord should send the Angel of Death to their house. Have they let the child wear material woven of cotton and wool together? Have they let him eat a piece of meat cooked in a vessel that once contained milk? or given him milk in a vessel once used for meat?

Ah, if they knew that their child had gone to the forest to look at a Cross, they would not have been so long in perplexity!

In the village every one is saying that the son of the long-footed Jew is past hope. His poor face against the pillow seems nothing but two great miserable eyes that recognize nobody. Before him are villages in which each stone, by some frightful miracle, has turned into a dog, and forests where every tree changes into a Cross. And amid the lightning and thunder a tall old man with ram's horns and a white beard like a new taliss reaching to his knees is presenting to him his mysterious Podzuka upon a table of stone.

What, then, is the Podzuka? It is a bouquet of the most beautiful flowers of the world. And which are the most beautiful flowers? The pink,

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the rose, or the geranium? None of these is sweet enough or bright enough to make a bouquet fit for God. The most beautiful flowers in the world are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and the Podzuka is composed of those words from the holy Thora that you must say in answer to the Eternal when He calls you. For in everyday life one may very well be called Reuben, or Israel, or Moses. Those are good Jewish names such as your parents use when they say: "Reuben, Israel, or Moses, get up, and go to the Heder." But on Saturdays do you wear your ordinary clothes? And when you appear before the throne of the Eternal shall you say simply: "My name is Reuben, or Israel, or Moses"? No, one must tell Him one's Podzuka.

And Reuben sees the tall old man presenting to him his divine name, sometimes in the shape of flaming letters coming nearer and nearer till they settle on his forehead and burn him, sometimes in the form of Sabbath bread as the letter Alef was, on his first day at the Heder. He stretches his little arms to seize the moving letters floating past him; sometimes he thinks he has caught one, but just as his hand is closing on it the old man pulls the string, the letter vanishes through the ceiling, and burning with fever he falls back unconscious on his bed.

It was in vain that his little comrades, like those

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who had danced before round his cradle to drive away the Fairy Lilith and the troop of bad Angels, formed once more a circle round him, each one offering to the Eternal one minute of his existence to prolong the days of their poor companion. In vain his mother had daubed his face with a coal dipped in water. In vain Hertz Wolf hastened to the Rabbi and asked him to change Reuben's name to David—God having resolved, perhaps, that a little Jew called Reuben should die, without deciding anything about one who bore the name of David.

The keen-eyed Angel of Death would not be duped by such a clumsy subterfuge; he did not relax his hold upon David any more than his hold upon Reuben, and Reuben-David was dying.

But oh, not yet, Master of the world! There still remained one last resource. That was to sell him to a Christian peasant, as at the Passover one sells the leavened bread, the alcohol and other fermented products. But this barbarian method, though commonly employed in the Carpathians where many children of Hounfalou and of other places have been saved by it, is held in horror by the Jew from Poland. His whole soul revolted at the thought of selling his child like an unclean thing and expelling him, even for a moment and by a feigned contract, from the Community of Abraham. The Melamed, however, with the

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Rabbi, the Sacrificer and the influential Jews of Hounfalou generally, maintained that the thing was lawful.

“Follow my reasoning, friend,” said Reb Jankele, pulling at his scanty beard. “If God sends you sickness it is because He wishes to break the tie which binds you to your child. But if Hertz Wolf himself should break this chain, and if he sell his son to the Schabès goÿ, does he not thus testify that he has comprehended the will of the Lord, and that he bows down and humbles himself? Concerning your repugnance, friend, to selling your child like a fermented product, I reply, with the Scripture, that a live ass is better than a rotting Solomon. The Thora tells us that Life is the first gift of God and the most beautiful of His creatures: the first duty of the Jew is to defend a thing so precious against all that may attack it, and against the wrath of God itself. Such is the opinion of Reb Siméon, Reb Jehuda, Reb Eliezer and of many illustrious doctors beside. And Rabbi Ben Bag Bag did not hesitate to write that in order to save a human life it is permitted even to infringe the Law.”

Hertz Wolf cited texts to the contrary, opposed doctors with doctors, and in the heat of the *pilpoul* he almost forgot his child and gave himself up entirely to the pleasure of disputation. He overwhelmed the ignorant men of Hounfalou

under the weight of his arguments, regardless of the fact that he was battling against his own last hope and triumphantly destroying the forlorn chance of recovery that still remained for his son.

In the street he continued disputing with the Melamed, combative, gesticulating, fertile in fresh arguments. How great was his erudition! How subtle his intellect! Still thrilling with the excitement of the debate he reached his door, kissed the *mezuzzah* and entered the room. But there suddenly, with one stroke of his wing, the dreaded Angel of Death cast all his pride to the ground.

There was no sign of life in Reuben any more, except his faint breathing. Poor Guitelé wept tears into the brandy that she was serving to the Tzigane and the Hungarian. Silently in his own heart Hertz Wolf continued the pilpoul, but as his eagerness to prove himself in the right gave way before sweet hope, the words of Reb Jehuda and of Reb Eliezer, the pronouncements of Reb Ben Bag Bag recurred to his memory, and the plaintive moanings of the child gave them an extraordinary emphasis and a power that the lips of the Melamed, the Rabbi or the Schames did not possess. Whom should he believe? What course should he take? Whose counsel should he listen to?

All at once, through the darkness came a flash of heavenly lightning. The famous golden lan-

tern, the lantern of Gam Zou, illuminated his perplexity; its magic rays told him in letters of fire, "Hertz Wolf, leave the Talmud alone, leave the pilpoul alone, and let thine own heart speak."

At daybreak he quitted the house, trembling even more than he had done on that night when he went in the dark to the synagogue to unloose the cords of the Law. The young day, sparkling with dew, was rising slowly from the green depths of the Carpathians, and the geranium flowers and the carnations in the windows were waking from their dreams of the night.

One has small chance, in the courtyard of the peasant Pavlik, of admiring pigs and geese and fowls, or the horse or the cow—God's beautiful creatures that speak to us of prosperity. The Schabès goÿ have nothing but one poor hound, who at the approach of the long-footed Jew, came to sniff at him disgustedly, and then returned snarling to his bed as if disappointed at his leanness.

Pavlik, warned by his dog, appeared on his threshold. He, too, was but little pleased at the sight of the publican's son-in-law. Hertz Wolf wished him good morning very politely; the peasant replied with an indescribable mixture of haughtiness and apprehension.

"I come to sell you something," said the Jew, without further preamble.

"And how can I buy, Jew-with-feet-to-his-neck?" retorted the Schabès goÿ, throwing over his wretched empty yard, his dilapidated house and his own person a glance, mutely eloquent, that cried: "You are mocking me, cursed Jew! You know well enough that your father-in-law has taken all that I had, my horse, my pigs, my geese, and my wife, poor Marinka, who died of starvation! You know well enough that I drank it all away in the tavern of the Stooping Jew, your father-in-law, and that he still has me down in his account-book to the tune of forty florins!"

The dog, as though he understood and shared all his master's resentment, got up once more and walked round the long-footed Jew, showing his teeth. Hertz Wolf said prudently: "Let us go into the house."

And as soon as they were in the parlour:

"Listen, Pavlik," he continued. "Our son Reuben is sick. Buy him from me for two silver florins and you will owe only thirty more to the Stooping Jew, my father-in-law."

Shadowy thoughts drifted like clouds through the mind of the peasant. Queer people, these Jews! Why at Easter-tide did they make over their shops and their houses to him? And why did they come when their children were sick and sell them to him for a few silver florins?

THE ROAD TO THE CROSS

But these ideas, passing among the vapours of his brain, did not occupy him long. Accustomed from childhood as he was to the madness of the Jews he saw one thing only: that in Amram's book, that terrible account-book which wielded over him the magic power of the creditor, which dragged him by the arm on Sundays into the tavern where there blazed against his name in infernal letters the cipher of forty florins, he should now be entered for no more than thirty.

They went towards the window to sign the paper by which Hertz Wolf Lebowitz gave up his son to Pavlik for the sum of two florins. Behind the filthy panes, between the geranium and the carnation, there glittered a bottle adorned with a label; over its cork was a cover of pleated pink paper such as one sees in apothecaries' shops. It was the drug that some doctor had given to poor Marinka, whose death had prevented her from drinking it. Pavlik had kept the bottle among the flower-pots as a souvenir as well as an ornament.

"That too," he said, "might do good to the little Jew. I will sell it to you for one florin."

Every father is weak in a matter concerning his child. Hertz Wolf bought the bottle. And with a mind distracted by fear of having sinned against the Law by delivering up his son to the

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God of Pavlik and of the Christians, he returned home and pinned upon the red eiderdown the contract upon which Schabès goÿ who could not write, had rudely traced a Cross.

CHAPTER IX

THE SUPERNATURAL STRANGER

Did the God of Pavlik and the Christians prove kinder than the irascible God of the Jews? Or was it the effect of that mysterious liquid in the bottle whose name and composition no one had ever known? Gradually the fever abated. The Angel of Death, as if regretfully, turned away on his dark wings from the little too-inquisitive Jew upon whom had been set the sign of the Cross.

The things about him resumed their familiar friendly air. No longer among insane delirious dreams, he felt himself, merely with a mild surprise, floating as it were between heaven and earth.

On this warm afternoon he was in the yard, sitting on the tree-trunk which served as a bench. His mother, to amuse him, had hung round his face some of the long golden-yellow tufts which grow on the bearded maize-pods, and the simple pleasure of wearing on his chin this flowery beard like King David's led him for the first time to look with a smile at the things around him: the acacia in the yard, the distant forest, the plain,

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the great cloudless sky, the creaking wagons passing behind the palisade loaded with the beautiful sheaves from the harvest field, and the Jews, God's people, hastening home to the village because the day was drawing to its end and soon the bright star of the Sabbath would appear.

To a child who is coming back to life all things are miraculous and new. Where is that man going? Where has this dog come from? Whither goes the wind and the leaf that it carries away?

The Schames was going from house to house shouting his old familiar summons, "*Bad herein! To the bath, Jews!*" Chattering, gesticulating groups went past on their way to the mikwa (the ritual bath), every one carrying in a handkerchief clean linen and his Saturday boots and caftan. There was the distant sound of a creaking axle coming from the gipsies' quarter. Was it the cart bringing home his father and grandfather from their weekly round in the country? or the egg-collector's trap? or the carriage that brings the Princess of the Sabbath from the land of pearl and emerald? or the chariot of the great King Nebuchadnezzar?

It was neither Amram's cart, nor the egg-collector's trap, nor the light carriage of the Queen of the Sabbath yoked to twenty pairs of mules with tinkling bells, nor the chariot of the great King Nebuchadnezzar. It was a clumsy wagon

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such as may often be seen in Poland, with one horse harnessed to the pole, and an awning of dusty tarpaulin supported on hoops. It stopped by the palisade; an old man of gigantic stature got down from it; his eyes sparkled deep-set under the brows, his beard was long and white like a clean new taliss. And ready as Reuben was to take the greatest marvel as something quite natural, and the most natural events as marvellous, he was astounded to recognize in the old man the one he had seen in his illness, who had rams' horns and presented to him his Podzuka.

He would gladly have fled away from his bench and run to take refuge with his mother; but the stranger had already caught him in his arms, lifting him up and gazing into the dear little face with the beard of maize falling away from it.

"God has preserved thee!" he said.

Then turning his eyes toward heaven:

"Praise be to Thee, Eternal, our God, King of the universe, Thou who healest the sick!"

Guitelé, carrying the Saturday bread which she had just taken from the oven, was bringing it out of the kitchen to cool it when she saw the old man setting the child down again upon the bench.

"Enter, *Batsbi*," ¹ said she, giving him the greeting of all beggars who arrive on a Friday evening. "You shall pass the Sabbath with us."

¹ A friendly name, meaning "Little Uncle."

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

At this moment Hertz Wolf and Reb Amram arrived in their rattling carriage loaded with newly flayed skins. Hertz Wolf jumped out, in his surprise letting fall the skins he was carrying.

"Welcome, my father," he said, taking his hands and lifting them to his lips.

"Master of the world, it's the father-in-law!" cried Guitelé. "Excuse me, Rabbi Sofer; I took you for a beggar!"

"There is no offence in that, my daughter," replied Reb Eljé, "for you receive a beggar as though he were your father-in-law."

The three men kissed the mezuzzah and entered the house, whence they presently reappeared, on their way to the ritual bath and then to the synagogue.

Guitelé was busy in the kitchen making her final preparations for the meal. Reuben, left alone in the yard under the shivering lime tree, gave rein to the wildest fancies.

What was the mystery of his grandfather's resemblance to the man with rams' horns whom he had seen in his delirium? How had he passed through space, invisible to every eye? Why had he arrived to-day, telling no one of his coming?

Questions like these whirled feverishly through his mind still agitated by past terrors and the shock of illness.

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Then suddenly a terrifying explanation flashed through his head: his grandfather was aware of all that had happened on the day of the great thunderstorm; he had come all the way from Poland on purpose to tell his father and mother that Reuben had looked at the Cross!

Such anguish overwhelmed him that he dared not stir from the bench, but sat there as cold and motionless as the silver candelabra the servant was setting on the table. The long evening shadows already filled the yard when his mother came to fetch him and give him his Saturday clothes. Joyless, he put on his fine silk caftan and his beautiful new boots; and he who as a rule took such pleasure in the festal preparations watched his mother with mournful eyes as she placed the Saturday loaves on the table and lighted up the seven-branched candlestick: for him the candles shed no brilliant light and the odour of goose-grease and cinnamon and ginger did not gladden the house.

"What is the matter, my Rubenka?" asked the kind Guitelé. "Art thou not proud and pleased to see thy grandfather Reb Eljé? Come now; laugh, Rubenka!"

He was in no laughing mood. The prayer was finished and there was much noise in the yard. Reb Eljé, Reb Amram, Hertz Wolf, their beautiful angels, the Queen of the Sabbath and all the

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villagers with them, escorting the Sofer, invaded the tavern, pausing on the threshold to sing:

"A virtuous woman, happy is he who possesses her! She is a treasure more precious than pearls."

How beautiful and how comforting were those Sabbath songs! But only five minutes before the storm, the sun had been shining on the Cross!

What lightning, what thunder would presently burst forth anew upon his head? Would the grandfather speak now? Was he going to tell all these people how he had looked at the Cross?

Reb Eljé, meanwhile, had pronounced the benediction for wine. The cup went round from mouth to mouth, and songs rang out accompanied by clapping of hands to mark the time. A tranquil smile beamed on the face of the Sofer who, among these Hounfalou Jews so extraordinarily devoid of calm or serenity, still preserved as though by miracle the dignity of olden times.

"Ah, father-in-law," said Guitelé, noticing his eyes fixed on Rubenka, "he has been so ill! What a fright we were in about him!" At these words poor Reuben was bathed in a sweat of anguish.

"My daughter," replied the Sofer, with his unalterable smile, "let us not revive painful thoughts at this hour; to-day is the Seventh Day."

Guitelé hung her head, abashed at having for-

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gotten the command not to sadden the holy Sabbath with profane ideas or even by recollection of past griefs. And Reuben, delivered for the moment from his misery, felt himself come back to life.

The whole of the next day was spent either in the synagogue or in visiting, eating and singing.

The old man still showed a calm and pleasant countenance as though life for him were nothing but peace and happiness. Then came the evening and the adieu to the Princess. All the Community, men, women, and children, repaired to Amram's house to see the great Sofer of Bels performing the sacred rites.

Joining his fingers together over the flame of the candle he pronounced the benediction of Him who created fire and light, and his long hands shone transparent as though they were made of light and fire.

Then he took the box of perfumes and said the benediction of Him who created sweet-smelling spices. With what dignity he inhaled the dried roses and carnations and passed the box from one side of his face to the other! Then he poured into his plate the remains of the brandy, took the lighted wax taper, extinguished it in the spirit and said: "Blessed be He Who has made a difference between the Sabbath and the other days of the week." And although Reuben had been seeing

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these gestures and hearing these words ever since he was born, it now seemed to him that he saw them and heard them for the first time. Around that handsome countenance with its long snow-white beard there was an atmosphere of such profound peace that all his fear had forsaken him. Oh, what a beautiful Saturday! Never had candles shone more brilliantly. Never had the dried flowers in the perfume-box smelt so deliciously. When his mother put him to bed his heart was filled with but one feeling: pride at being the grandson of the famous Sofer of Bels.

The common folk among the Jews of Hounfalou departed with the Princess, but the more important persons remained to dinner with Amram. When the meal was finished they lingered for some time over their wine-glasses after the table was cleared.

Reuben, unable to sleep from agitation and the excitement of this great Saturday, listened to their talk of the holy town of Bels and the miracles of the Zadik. By and by they also took their leave, and when the last of the guests had gone he heard Reb Eljé say:

"Now that the Sabbath is over, it is time to speak about this child."

In a moment all his terrors reappeared. Guitelé gave the old man a detailed account of the inexplicable illness, told how the Rabbi had in-

tervened, and the children had danced; how they had prayed and fasted, and how, after trying everything to save him, Hertz Wolf had sold the child to the poor Schabès goj.

"Ah, Rabbi, Rabbi," she said, "we really thought we should lose him! How and why should all this happen to us? Neither Hertz Wolf, nor I, nor my father, has ever been able to guess——"

"I will tell you why," said Reb Eljé.

At these words Reuben leaped up in bed, beside himself with anguish. He tried to cry out, "Don't tell it, don't tell it, grandfather!" But no sound issued from his convulsed throat.

"Do not ask any longer what sin you have committed and why the Angel of Death has threatened your house," the old man continued. "Do not seek for one sin in particular: you have committed them all in one alone."

Then, after a silence:

"When, on arriving yesterday morning, I saw Hertz Wolf unloading the sheepskins from the cart, 'It is for this,' I said to myself, 'that my son has forsaken the study of our holy Law!' Hertz Wolf has left off being a son-in-law. There are not enough prayers now in your house. All your troubles come from this cause."

With a sigh of joy Reuben fell back upon his bed. The grandfather was keeping his secret!

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He knew and would not tell! With a sense of sweet relief and of boundless trust his whole body relaxed. Some few more words he heard, receding farther and farther as the thunder had died away after the storm, and soon he felt himself sinking into the depths of slumber.

Meanwhile the conversation round the table continued.

"One must live, Rabbi Sofer," said Amram timidly. "The wheel of time has been going round—the world has become ungodly . . . business has suffered also. . . ."

"Friend," retorted the Sofer, "if you forsake the Thora, your riches will become still less."

"No doubt, no doubt!" replied Amram, in a voice that grew less and less confident. "But the Sofer is my witness that I have kept my word and even gone beyond it. I promised Reb Eljé that his son should be a son-in-law three years. And when the bishop gave me the administration of his estate, in gratitude to Adonai I lengthened the time for Hertz Wolf to be a son-in-law by five years. Seven years he has lived under my roof doing nothing; I mean doing nothing else but studying our holy Books. But the difficulties of life grow greater every day. The peasants are not what they used to be. Those *Goim* grow more and more wary, and competition is increasing! Only ten years ago we were, at the most, fifty

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Jews at Hounfalou, and now there are a hundred of us! Oh, of course, Master of the world, one can never sufficiently rejoice that other Jews are arriving, but why must it just be at Hounfalou that they grow so fast, and that all the Jews of Poland have chosen this village to assemble? . . . Even here, there are more mouths to fill. Since our holy Thora gave us Reuben what miracles it has done! Adonai (blessed may He be!) sends children two at a time to Guitelé now, and all the family, Rabbi Sofer, wants goose-grease and beans. . . .”

“I make no reproaches, Friend,” Reb Eljé answered gently. “But however ruinous it may be a castle is still a castle, and however high it rises a dungheap remains always a dungheap. . . . The Hebrews of to-day have strange ways of giving thanks to the Eternal! For seven years Hertz Wolf has studied the Thora: for seven years the blessings of the Lord have fallen upon you. He has sent you Reuben; other children have followed him like the fruits of the vine and the olive branches. The bishop has given you the administration of his estate, in preference to two Christians who applied for it. And when the Lord has granted you such striking proofs of His care, how do you thank Him? By depriving Him of prayers, by tearing Hertz Wolf away from the study of the Law!”

How confute this evidence? Trebitz had nothing to say in reply to the Sofer's discourse. Hertz Wolf, hanging his head, listened to his father and his father-in-law discussing his downfall.

"But all that is as nothing," continued Reb Eljé after a moment's silence. "You have set upon the forehead of our child Reuben the foulest stain that can touch a good Jew. You have expelled him from the Community of Abraham, following the custom of Jews ignorant and barbarous . . ."

"My father," interrupted Hertz Wolf, "it was not without long hesitation and consulting of our sacred Books that I resolved to sell the child to the Schabès goÿ. And I also conferred for a long while with the learned men of the Community."

"Oh, there are words in plenty, my son, neither are sins far to seek," retorted the Sofer.

And suddenly abandoning the Yiddish, the vulgar tongue in which he was speaking, he proceeded in Hebrew:

"Folly is a clamorous woman, she is simple and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house on a seat in the high places of the city to call passengers who go right on their ways: 'Whoso is simple let him turn in hither.' And as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him: 'Stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in

secret is pleasant: the strange gods are mighty.' The fool gives ear and enters into her house. But he knows not that the dead are there and that her guests are in the depth of hell."

Amram and Guitelé did not understand a word of the sacred language, but the ancient rhythm of it stirred the depths of their hearts. Hertz Wolf however recognized the proverbs of King Solomon, and the reproach from so high an authority reduced him to silence.

"May it please the Master of the world," Reb Eljé continued, returning to the common language, "that this child may wipe out by an exemplary life the spot with which you have marked his forehead, and that he may escape the scourge which the Lord keeps for those who have denied Israel. I shall start for Bels again to-morrow. I will take the child away with me. In that pious town, uncontaminated by the Christian, I will educate him for the Lord, for the Thora, and the glory of the Jewish people. If it please God to grant me some more years of life, I will instruct him in my art. He shall become an eminent Sofer, and through him will be perpetuated the long line of Sofers which began three centuries ago with Reb Gedalié Lebowitz."

He spoke. They listened with a holy fear. Then, like people just escaped from deadly peril who begin to breathe freely once more and to look

about them, they all gradually came back to a sense of reality. Amram carefully recalling all the words of the Sofer noted that the old man had not demanded that his son should return to the study of the Law: this filled him with intense inward satisfaction. Hertz Wolf, whose mind had not been easy since his visit to Pavlik, welcomed with joy his father's proposal to take Reuben with him and consecrate him to the Lord. Poor Guitelé alone felt her heart swell, and her eyes filled with tears.

Reb Eljé saw her distress, and turned to her saying:

"Thou art grieved, my daughter, to part with thy well-loved son. And yet I do not ask of you the sacrifice of Isaac. And Sarah allowed her child to go. . . ."

"Yes, father-in-law," she replied. "But when Abraham returned, you know well that Sarah was dead."

An outburst of sobbing choked her voice. Had she then only saved her son to lose him for a second time? She left the table that she might hide her tears. And in that dark and quiet room that the Thora had once filled with light and mysterious sound of bells, while the three men continued their conversation she wept silently over Reuben's sleeping head.

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Next morning, as on Amram's departure a few years before, all the Jews of Hounfalou, filling the street with their cries and gesticulations, assembled round the cart which was to carry away the Sofer to the holy town of Bels. From Guitelé's heart one last anguished appeal flew towards heaven. The sacrifice is prepared! Isaac is laid upon the pile. Reuben is in the carriage. But no angel out of the blue flies down with an arm extended to arrest the blow of the whip upon the horse. The squeaking of the axle drowns the noise of voices and the benedictions for the journey. Reuben turns towards his mother one long piteous look. Adonai gave him, Adonai is taking him away!

Everything goes flying behind him, the valley square, the church and the loved synagogue, the Hungarians' houses, the acacias in the yards, the geraniums and carnations, the huts of the Tziganes, the orchard with its raspberry trees, the field where the angel Gamaliel cut off his curls.

Before him stretches the sunlit road leading to the great iron Crucifix; and amid the whirl of memories and regrets that each thing stirs in him as he passes it, a voice cries in his ear:

"If you do but lift your eyes to the Cross in passing, this beautiful day will change in an instant to rain and thunder, the horse will turn right

round upon the road and you will go back to the house."

Prudently he turns away his head. Beside him his grandfather murmurs: "Cursed be thou who madest a new religion!" And he, like a deep echo, repeats in a lower voice but with the same passion: "Cursed be thou who madest a new religion!"

Behind them the Cross recedes farther into the distance with each turn of the wheel. The forest trees are leaning over their heads: the birds, the waterfalls, the streams, the boughs, and a thousand invisible angels with the whole earth and heavens sing together in a marvellous harmony:

"The Lord is king, the earth may be glad thereof;
Yea, the multitude of the isles may be glad thereof.
Come, let us sing unto the Lord,
Upon an instrument of ten strings and upon the lute.
Thou art clothed with majesty and honour,
Thou deckest Thyself with light as with a garment,
Thou spreadest out the heavens like a curtain;
The waters stand in the firmament;
Thou makest the clouds Thy chariot,
Thou comest flying upon the wings of the wind.
Thou makest the winds Thy messengers,
Thy ministers the flame of lightning.
Thou bringest forth the water-springs,
The beasts of the field drink of the rivers
And the wild beasts quench their thirst.
The trees of the Lord also are full of sap,

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Even the cedars of Lebanon which Thou hast planted,
Wherein the birds make their nests;
In the fir trees is a dwelling for the stork.
The high hills are a refuge for the wild goat,
And so are the stony rocks for the coneys.”

Thus sing the angels, the earth, the heavens, and
the waters. The child falls asleep, the old man
prays. Hosannah to the ancient Israel bearing
away his child!

CHAPTER X

THE MARVELS OF BELS

Nothing has changed at Bels since the day when Reb Amram came to order the Thora for Hounfalou. How indeed can there be any change in the town of the Rabbi and his miracles? It is like those ragged silken wrappings of the Thora, or those stained and dirty caftans that you see in the streets there, or those moth-eaten fur bonnets: pull out one thread from the old worn silk, rub off one spot from the old filthy caftan, tear out one tuft of hair from the maggoty fur, and the whole thing comes to pieces and falls into dust.

In the muddy square, between the synagogue, the Zadik's house and the bethamidrasch there is still the same endless coming and going of noisy, gesticulating folk; still the same whirlpool of obscure forces that wait only the opportunity to burst upon the world, to overturn the universe, to spread abroad their feverish spirit of criticism and revolt; but here they consume themselves miserably in this narrow space, finding solace and satisfaction only in the festivals of the synagogue, the miracles of

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the Zadik, and in furious colloquies with the terrible Jahveh. From all hearts and mouths there still goes up the frantic appeal to the impossible and the miraculous; the Rabbi, dignified as ever, still deals out wisdom and folly to them all; and the old Rabbizine, aged by ten years since the day when Reb Amram saw her under her diadem of gold, still lets fall from her open hands the fruits of Judea.

The Sofer, wrapped in his great taliss, has once more taken his place at the window before his parchment and his inks of many colours. Beside him Reuben, with his drooping curls, bends over the little table, at which his father used to sit, copying mezuzzahs. On the counters at the end of the room the myrtle boughs and palm leaves repose peacefully under their covering of dust among the sepharims and the schalos-tchivos. Outside in the forest the snow-storm rages among the groaning fir trees and birch trees and shakes the iron Christs hanging at the cross-roads.

How sweet it is, while the tempest howls over the vast plain, making the old roof creak and threatening to engulf the holy town of Bels, when everything out of doors is cold and cruel, when through the little icy squares of window-pane one sees nothing but a black crow flying past or a pilgrim hurrying along the wooden footpaths; how sweet it is in the Sofer's house to listen to the old

man expounding the Thora! He makes it all luminous with a mysterious light. The old Bible stories, so simple, so human, so tranquil, assume as he discourses a fantastic air. In the wandering dove, in the springing well, in the angel like a falling thunderbolt who seizes the arm outstretched above the head of Isaac, in the smallest word of the holy Thora are hidden the thousand secrets of the visible and the invisible world. Letters and words are no more letters and words, but signs and ciphers which yield to him who can read them the meaning of the universe. Behind the allegory of old stories related by Moses lie the mystery of Numbers, of Earth and Heaven, of Angels and Men, of Thrones, of celestial Convocations, of the thirty-two Voices of Wisdom, the fifty Gates of Understanding, the attributes of Divinity, the Arcana of the ten Sephiroth, an extravagant cosmogony of the universe. They are coiled and folded one within another, from the world of the nebulosities, of the planets and the satellites, even to the infinite space where rests in its ineffable grandeur the Abysmal, the Immeasurable. Outside, the snow is still whirling; the black crow, carried along in the blast as he flies, seems a creature of the Deluge straying from the sacred Ark of Noah.

Like one who, hearing a strange language, listens for some word of his own tongue in the stream of unknown words, the child among these obscu-

rities groped after some enlightening thought, some drop of limpid water, some pearl of brightness from which illumination might break forth. As in his delirium he attempted to seize the floating letters of the Podzuka, so with the whole strength of his tender brain he tried to grasp these insane interpretations. The little dark room besieged by the tempest became another Sinai. And he, Reuben, stood there, open-mouthed, representing in his sole self the immense nation of the Hebrews.

When evening came, with shoulders bowed under the lashing wind, the child carrying in his pocket the candle and the brick with a hole in it which served them as a candlestick, and the old man holding his hat well down upon his head that he might not be uncovered by the blast, they went off together to the bethamidrasch.

In the enormous library furnished with Zohars, Bibles, and books of psalms, there is still the same smell of tobacco, of damp clothes and of paper rotting with age; still the same droning sound of reading and praying, pierced through now and then by the shrill voices of children. The candles sparkle in their wooden stands; the heat of the stove draws steam from the caftans wet with snow. The schamés pass up and down between the benches and tables offering their wax candles with importunate obstinacy; the long-haired beggars

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and the red-eyed idiots endeavour to snatch alms from generous strangers. Here an old man, stroking his long beard, the better to penetrate into the subtleties of the problem, is studying some question of casuistry, the product of a crazy brain. There, a boy leaning his elbow on the table and his cheek upon his hand, with his eyes uplifted towards the candles, loses himself in incommunicable dreams.

Farther on is a group of older men, their ringlets dangling together over some especially difficult commentary. Another comes hurrying up to pronounce on the question. He were no true Jew did he not contribute in his turn a solution unlike any that has yet been put forward. Fifteen or twenty of them now, with a sound like the roaring of a forge, are buzzing over a word as our peasants at home might over a couple of oxen. The noise they make does not rouse a child who, falling asleep, drops his candle on to his book and sets it on fire. One sounding slap at once awakens the sleeper and extinguishes the flame, and the boy begins again his chanting of the immortal poems, snuffling his tears as he sings.

Over there, in the darkest corner where the torn leaves of the holy books lie in a sacred dust heap which is burned every month, two or three young men are conversing with an air of mystery. No one guesses, as yet, what terrible thoughts are

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brooding under their black caftans, nor how heavy is the weight on their foreheads of the long curls which they shorten a little each day. They go to the synagogue, make their prayers and applaud the Rabbi, but their heart has already departed from Israel. They know that the rich universe contains other things than the Thora, the Talmud and the Zohar; they dream of escaping from Bels and of taking flight through the wide world. No one as yet has any suspicion of it. But one of these days, to-morrow perhaps, they will be seen no more.

Driven by the wild restless demon in their hearts, they will make their way to London, to Berlin, to New York, to those towns whither so many of their brothers have gone before them, never to come back again; for many miracles have been seen at Bels, but never a Jew once gone from it returning.

O sons of Israel, dreaming in your corner, talking in low voices of flight and of new or of modern life, bending low over your Zohar that no one may suspect you—you Jews who, holding little candles in your hands, have learned the Law in this library—you may leave it, may travel through the world, and become what you will in the cities of the West; yet for many years and many generations you will remain unlike the rest of mankind. In you there will be always something alien,

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something apart which neither others nor yourselves will be able to explain. That disquietude, that sense of want, that nameless regret which you will feel so often, that neurasthenia and sickness of the mind, are the trace that you will bear of these long evenings passed amid the snow-storms in this cage of prayers from which you so ardently desire to escape.

What was the heder of Hounfalou with its roof that the sheep nibbled at compared with this library bright with prayers and with fire?

And the old Melamed with his scanty beard and his terrible swift and ever-ready rod, what was he beside the Sofer who knew the mysterious letters which compose the sacred name of Adonai: those letters which have power to cause the Eternal to appear before him who pronounces them? What was that poor village full of dogs and pigs and cruel Christian children in comparison with this magnificent Bels where none but caftaned Jews were to be seen?

And when for the first time, in the synagogue thronged with hundreds of pilgrims, Reuben beheld the tables for the great feast of the Zadik, and the Zadik himself with his red eye and his blue eye, arriving, dressed in white, preceded by his secretaries, his eighteen sons and his grandsons; when he beheld the servers setting the steaming fragrant dishes on the tables, and the

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miracle-working Rabbi touching his plate and immediately pushing it away with his lordly and weary air, and the faithful quarrelling for the scraps; when he saw the great flagons of wine brought in, and heard the criers proclaiming that each flagon came from the fabulous countries of France or Spain or Italy; when he himself had wetted his lips in his grandfather's cup and had drunk a few drops of a Burgundy sent by Goldscheider, from Mâcon, and when above his reeling head there floated the melodious voices of the singers from little Russia: then Reuben knew that he had arrived—that he had reached Jerusalem.

When the wax candle that had lighted up their book had almost burnt out in its socket in the brick, the old man and the child tore themselves away from their reading, and carrying their lantern, returned through the darkness along the planks laid across the square between the walls of snow. Often, however, when the storm was raging too violently they remained in the bethamidrasch and slept upon a bench.

But for a child whom the Angel of Death has already brushed with its wing it is not at all healthy spending long days bent over the little table; nor is it healthy standing for hours in the bitter draughts in the great synagogue; nor sitting up late at night in the bethamidrasch; nor

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walking home in the cold and darkness, nor getting up in the freezing dawn.

Old man, do you not see that you are completing the ruin of the child's health? Do you not see that this life is killing him? See how hollow his cheeks are growing, how his nose is getting thin and his ears transparent. Feel under his caftan his little bones coming through his skin. Look at his great eyes too black and too brilliant, his too pale lips, and that red flush on his cheekbones that is not the flush of health.

Old man, he has been coughing. Did you not hear?

CHAPTER XI

POURIM

Two thousand two hundred and thirty-three years ago, on the twenty-fifth day of the icy month of Kislev, Judah, called Maccabæus, son of the High Priest Matathias, of the family of the Asmonians, having defeated at Bethoron in Gadara in the fields of Idumæa among the mountains of Betzura, of Jamnia and of Azoth, the generals of Antiochus Epiphanes, entered Jerusalem to the sound of trumpets, harps and cymbals, hymns and canticles; and lighted again the lamp of the sanctuary in the polluted Temple.

To commemorate this exploit all the little Jews of Bels, with their tzitziss hanging down their backs and their caftans tucked up above their boots or their down-at-the-heel shoes, pass through the village, carrying bows and arrows, like Judah's band of warriors. They march to the meadow and there wage battle, shooting into the air against an invisible Antiochus the arrows from their birchen bows.

From behind the shut windows Reuben watches

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them going past. He has neither the courage nor the strength to follow them. "Go and play with them," says the old Sofer. But he remains at his book, leaning over the white wooden table.

Nothing amuses him any more. In all his behaviour is a gravity that does not suit his age. And now in sad truth one might aptly say of him what was said by the matrons of Hounfalou: "The child is like a waxen doll."

And in the month of Adar, when, for the salvation of the world the people of Israel, thanks to Mordecai and his niece Esther, escaped the general massacre devised by Haman, what Jewish child does not rejoice in the feast of Pourim?

Then the housewives knead the cake mixed with poppy-seeds and honey which goes by the name of Haman's Pouch; and in the dough they draw artistically the Tables of the Law, the two Lions of Judah, the fantastic animals of Noah's Ark, or the seven-branched candlestick. Then the children, wearing masks, go carrying these cakes from house to house and singing the old song:

"Good people, here is a good angel
With squinting eyes
And a cotton beard,
And his wife is very sick.
Give him a kreutzer if you please,
And throw him out at the door."

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And in the synagogue, while the Hazen is intoning the Chronicle of Esther, they all shake rattles, or bringing out sticks and cudgels they had hidden under their caftans, they rain heavy blows on the desks and benches each time that the accursed name of the minister of Ahasuerus occurs in the legend.

But Reuben has not put on any mask nor any beard on his chin; he has not carried round to the Sofer's friends the cake that old Rachel has made; he does not shake a rattle, and the infernal noise of the sticks and cudgels rings painfully through his tired head.

He follows his grandfather, however, to the banquet given this evening by the Zadik to his flock.

This banquet of Pourim has not the grandiose character of the banquets of Kippour and of Rosch Haschanah. The festival falls in mid-winter when Galicia is covered with snow, and the season is not propitious for great pilgrimages. Round the table of the Rabbi there is hardly any one besides the village folk and his usual little court, his children, his secretaries, and those persons distinguished for piety and learning who fill some sacred office in the synagogue: these are called the Klé Kodesch, the "Instruments of Holiness," consisting of the junior Rabbi, the Precentor of the Community, the venerable Hazen, the Sacrificer, the chief Melamed, and of course the great

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Sofer of Bels. But precisely on account of the small number of pilgrims, the pious circle on this day has an air of greater intimacy; and there is more wild carousal and drunkenness in the synagogue than at the time of Kippour and Rosch Haschanah: for Mordecai himself, when he announced the fall of Haman among the Jews of the Empire of Ahasuerus, exhorted them to celebrate these days with feasting and dancing. And so on this joyful night every good Jew should be so drunk that he cannot distinguish "Cursed be Haman" from "Blessed be Mordecai."

The Sofer, in conformity with this devout custom, filled his glass from every jug which passed within reach. "Come, my child, we must drink," he said to Reuben sitting at his side, as he might have said: "You must say your prayer." The pious child drank. And, excited by the tumult of the banquet and the first glasses of wine, he was already beginning to turn giddy when there sprang upon the table among the plates and glasses a strange company of people. They were dressed in many-coloured clothes of silk and velvet whose shabby gaudiness made a vivid contrast among the black caftans; on their feet they wore white slippers decorated with pompons, and they danced about gaily upon the crowded table, or, pulling out coloured handkerchiefs from their belts, they threw them over their heads and with the action

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of their fingers represented the persons in old stories.

They were Jewish dancers from Palestine, or collectors rather, who go from village to village all through the world of Jewry from the Ghettos of Russia to San Francisco, taking money for the rebuilding of the Temple and the maintenance of The Weepers who lament at Jerusalem against the Western Wall. During the festival of Esther they become dancers and amuse the people by cutting capers which suggest to their imaginations the dances of the delivered Jews before the King Ahasuerus.

For a moment this striking interlude so forcibly arrested the attention of the guests that they all forgot to drink. But the Rabbi's servants were setting on the tables a wine of Bessarabia containing an enormous percentage of alcohol. This thick, dark beverage completed the intoxication of those who had still been able to hold out. The Sacrificer beat time upon the table as though it were the noise he was making that caused the dancers of Palestine to jump about on the boards. The venerable Hazen with his black-nailed hand and his snuffy handkerchief mimicked, though unskilfully, the figure of Queen Esther. The Melamed, staggering between the tables, was trying to pull out from the lining of his caftan some little packets of tobacco and bean-flour and sell them to

the company, but his faltering hands could not find the mouth of the rent and his long arms lost their way between his tzitziss and his shirt.

Reb Eljé still preserved his dignity, but his habitual feast-day smile was rather broader, his face rather crimsoned, and his eyes swam in gentle tears and in dreams. The Zadik alone, in the midst of his young children lying asleep to right and left of him like a flock of lambs, still seeming aloof from all that went on around him yet observant of everything, retained his perfect coolness, watching the crowd with his clear blue eye.

Reuben, quite off his head, was going from one table to another drinking from all the glasses held out to him as he passed, by the guests, who were amused to see him in that state—he, such a good child!

Then on a sudden, icy cold was around him: silence, and deep night. He had left the stifling, brightly-lit hall, he was walking in the darkness on the narrow footway laid down across the square and feeling his way with his hands along the bank of snow which formed a rampart on each side. Suddenly and miraculously the wall seemed to melt under his fingers and the footpath gave way under his feet: he was stepping on deep, newly fallen snow. Sweet and mysterious noises rang in his ear; in the midst of a blinding light the dancers from Palestine sprang before his dazzled eyes, then

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all things were covered beneath the trembling mantle of irresistible sleep. . . .

Meanwhile in the synagogue the banquet was almost done. Preceded by his servers who carried his youngest children fast asleep in their arms (the others were snoring under the table), the Zadik had retired. A few of the citizens of Bels were staggering towards their homes, but the greater number remained to sleep in the house of the Lord, and among these were the Instruments of Holiness, all thoroughly intoxicated, either because the pious wish to honour the Queen Esther had induced them to drink immoderately, or else because their habitual austerities and fasting caused them to succumb more easily to the influence of wine.

Beside the cupboard of the Thoras, a patriarch, glass in hand, was upholding the honour of Poland against ten or more of those Jews who are called "executioners of Christ" on account of their bushy beards, their flattened noses, and prominent cheek-bones and who can be recognized as Russians by the cap of black silk which they wear instead of the round hat or the fur bonnet. This old man, the pride of Bels for his faculty of carrying his wine, was the Rofé (apothecary) of the village. How, and by what chance, after being uprooted by conscription from a Ghetto in Transylvania, had he been cast adrift in Bels with a vaguely worded

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hospital diploma in his pocket beside his checked handkerchief and his ablution bottle? He himself, no doubt, had forgotten, for he was now at least eighty years old. His art was very simple. To patients in the prime of life he said: "It's nothing; drink some lime-flower tea, and put on leeches." For old people he advised the *tehilim*, the psalms that are recited at the bedside of the dying.

When the last jug was empty he went off, leaving the Russians dead drunk on the steps of the sacred cupboard. Never within the memory of any Jew in Bels had he been known to spend the night in the synagogue. Some shadowy notion of living at ease, something like an instinct for comfort always drew him back to his bed, or rather to his pallet, although he only turned it over twice or thrice in the year. And this was indeed providential for the unfortunate Reuben who, lost in the little square as if in the boundless Steppes, had sunk down in the snow and was still seeing in his dreams the dancers from Palestine leaping as high as the stars.

With his lantern in one hand while with the other he felt his way through the darkness with his long stick, the Rofé was going towards his house, when from the highest heavens the kindly Esther directed a beam of candle-light upon the little sleeping form. The Rofé followed the ray,

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and shaking the child by the shoulders and reviving him with warm words flowing in abundance from a heart full of wine, he dragged him to the Sofer's house, where the old Jewess who acted as housekeeper since his wife's death was dozing in the kitchen while awaiting his return.

When she saw the poor child half dead with drunkenness and cold she gave vent to the helpless screams of women easily moved by emotion and especially by the pleasure of going into a rage. But the Rofé, recovering at the same moment his clearness of mind and his professional art, said to her: "It's nothing. Rub with vinegar, give lime-flower tea, and apply leeches."

He stayed in bed for a whole month, not suffering any pain, not complaining at all, but always burning hot or freezing cold. Rachel rubbed him, put on leeches, and made him drink lime-flower tea as the Rofé had ordered. The Sofer redoubled his prayers and fasts, for Eliezer has said: "Have you headache? Apply yourself to the study of the Law; it is a crown for the head. Have you pain in the chest? Apply yourself to the study of the Law; it is a jewel for the throat. Have you pain in the whole body? Apply yourself to the study of the Law; it is refreshment to the bones." But since the Master of the world, Who sends death to His Jews only in punishment

for their sins, is always careful to warn them by terrible suffering, and the child was still without pain, Reb Eljé Lebowitz was not really anxious.

With the first days of spring, in which the cold of winter in Poland suddenly changes to warmth, Reuben seemed to come to life again. His cough was not so incessant, his hands and his forehead not so hot. "He is cured," said Rachel; and Reb Eljé fasted only three times in the week. He appeared once more in the synagogue and the bethamidrasch. Adonai, it was evident, looked with less wrath upon the child. And He would no doubt have pardoned him completely if on the day of Kippour Reb Eljé Lebowitz had not committed the most serious offence that a horn-blower can commit against the Eternal.

CHAPTER XII

THE SOFER'S CRIME

In the synagogue littered with straw and brilliant with the beautiful Candles of the Soul, the storm of Israel's confession had been raging for twenty-four hours. Once more these ancient People who invented the misery of sin, the ever-wrathful God, and redemption by penitence and fasting, were abandoning themselves to their old passion for humiliation, repentance and mourning. Since the night before, the stern prayer, *Al Eth*, accompanied by the dull sound of fists beating on the caftans, had resounded ten times under the roof. And now at nightfall there rang out the wailing harmonies of the prayer *Neïla*.

This prayer is not recited by the Hazen, the officiating minister who leads the choir in the prayers, but by the person reputed to be the most pious in the Community. At Bels, for many years it had been the Sofer who recited it. Gradually, as the verses of the sublime prayer succeeded one another, his voice, at first drowned by the deep basses of the Jews accompanying him in an under-

tone, regained its youthful vigour, descended into the gulf of lamentation, and then rose all at once through the seven regions of the heavens.

He who has never listened through the twilight hours in a synagogue of Eastern Europe to the singing of this prayer *Neïla* by the sobbing voice of one of these old cantors of Israel; he who has not heard these artists in groans and tears, these nightingales of grief—that man may pass long nights and days poring over the books of Israel, but he will not have heard the true accents of Judea, the voice of Jeremiah, of Job and of Isaiah reverberating through century after century and piercing to his heart.

Never had a more fervent prayer poured forth from the lips of the great Sofer of Bels; never had his faithful heart been closer to God. But death is close to life and sin is near to virtue. Job, from the height of his grandeur, is thrown down upon the dunghill; Moses from the mountain-top looks upon Canaan which he will not reach.

The prayer being ended, Reb Eljé Lebowitz with a sweep of his arm lifted the silver-mounted horn. But in this awful moment when no egoistic cares, no personal thoughts should remain in the heart of him who sounds the *schofer*, in this hour of crisis when the blast of the sacred horn should bring to the feet of the Lord all the misery of

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Israel and the sorrows of every place in the world in which a Jew is expiating his sin by sickness, or by mourning or by pain; in that moment he thought neither of the Jews of Bels nor those of Poland, nor of the Communities of Germany or of Russia, nor of those more distant in America and Asia, nor of those the most beloved among all who remain in the land of their forefathers near the fallen Temple: he thought only of his child. "Master of the world!" he exclaimed in his heart, "in this sublime hour of pardon I would fain send up to Thee an appeal so mighty that all past transgressions known or unknown for which my child now suffers may be wiped out of Thy Book; and Thou shalt permit him to live yet many days and years the life that is so sweet beneath Thy yoke, O Eternal!" A long blast filled all the synagogue. The old man was straining from his chest all the breath that remained to him, in order to sustain to the last possible moment this final, this supreme appeal to the divine mercy. The veins of his neck swelled, his eyes became injected with blood. The breath expired in his throat. He supported himself against the rail of the *Almémor* lest he should fall.

All round about him shouts of deliverance rose from the raving multitude. The eternal madness of Israel filled the synagogue with a roar of frenzy. And the joy of all these people who for twenty-

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four hours had not ceased howling, praying and groaning was increased by the fact that out-of-doors the moon was now shining and they might therefore offer to the Eternal the homage of yet more frantic cries.

In the old times, when the moon, as on this evening, was shining in her second quarter, sacrifice was made in the Temple of two young bulls, a ram, and seven lambs of the first year and without blemish. To-day the Temple is in ruins; prayers are the only offering. The immense crowd, clothed in white and carrying what remained of the great Candles of the Soul, had left the synagogue, and standing in the square, sent up towards the shining orb those hymns of love which in all ages the sons of Shem, whether Hebrew or Phœnician, nomads of the desert or of the restless sea, have addressed to the cold Goddess, the companion and protectress of their endless journeyings.

“O Moon!” they say. “In the beginning of time thou didst shine by day as in the night, equal in beauty with the Sun. But thou didst dream of becoming the only one and the greatest of the lights. God was wrath and said: ‘He who is not content with what is high but casts covetous looks at that which is yet higher, even he shall return to that which is common. Let thy height be made low, let thy greatness diminish, let thy light

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henceforth be pale and feeble.' He spoke, and it was done. 'Oh, pardon!' wept the Moon, 'Too late,' replied the Eternal. 'The envious may not obtain pardon save by good deeds.' Since that time, O fallen Star, thou wanderest in the darkened sky to comfort the unfortunate, to lead the traveller, to guide the lost; a ray of hope in the prisons and in the soul of the despairing. But the time, the time will come when the Eternal, touched by our prayers, will grant to thee, as to us, His pardon, O kindly Moon! Then wilt thou reign as of old, over the days."

The ancient litany floated out into the divine night. In the unclouded sky the immortal exile continued on her way and from the cold immeasurable heights shed down upon her worshippers scattered far below her like a white flock of sheep beneath a precipice her most tender brightness.

O Adonai, how heavy is Thine arm upon the servants whom Thou lovest! How swift is Thy judgment!

With his candle trembling in his hand, his face whiter than his shirt, his eyes turned up to heaven and his lips moving in prayer while he staggered as though drunken, Reb Eljé Lebowitz was exhausting himself in vain efforts to join in the discordant and passionate singing. No sound issued from his injured throat: it was as if God

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refused to hear the voice of His old servant.

The last words of the Noemenie had hardly echoed through the square when the famished pilgrims rushed into the synagogue to gain their place at the Zadik's banquet, while the Jews of Bels went homewards to celebrate in their own families the end of the Terrible Days.

Reb Eljé, leaning upon Reuben, reached his house with difficulty. Old Rachel had set the lighted candles on the table and arranged the fish and the beans and the fine whipped cake which is eaten on the evening of the Pardon, and called on that account the Cake of Pity.

"What is the matter, then, Rabbi Sofer?" she cried at sight of the old man. "How pale and how worn out you look!"

"Something broke inside me while I was sounding the schofer," he said in a faint voice.

In a moment the gay candles on the table were darkened and the Cake of Pity was as though it were covered with ashes.

"Run and fetch Herschel the Rofé!" cried the old woman to Reuben.

Reuben ran to his house, but found there only the Candle of the Soul which is burnt also in the houses during the twenty-four hours of Kippour, and was now giving out its dying light in the darkness. The Rofé was a widower and his eight children were dispersed through the wide world.

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Consequently, avoiding his empty home, he was taking part with the strangers in the great banquet of the Zadik.

In the synagogue the feast was already in full swing. Where and how should he find the Rofé among the multitudes at the tables? How should he make his name heard through the din of conversation, the clatter of plates and the singing? The child went from table to table, calling to the echoes for the whereabouts of Herschel the Rofé.

"Where do you expect him to be?" said some one. "He's among the pitchers, of course." And, in fact, he discovered him by the Almémor, where the Zadik's servants were bringing in the amphora of wine, and close to the secretary in a kolback who was beginning to proclaim to the crowd the names of the vineyards and of the donors.

"Come, quick, Herschel the Rofé. My grandfather is very ill!"

If that son of his who is now a ladies' tailor in New York had suddenly, on this night of Kippour, started up before him in the middle of the synagogue with his shaven face and his ringlets cut off, the Rofé would not have been more unpleasantly startled. He passed his hand several times over his enormous nose, which from abuse of wine and tobacco had acquired the colour of the leeches which he applied to his patients, gave a lingering look at the pitchers, and walked out of the syna-

gogue leaning on his staff like a Homer or an Æsculapius.

When he saw the Sofer lying unconscious:

"A bad business," he said, feeling his pulse. "The best thing is to say *tebelim*."

Having thus spoken, he took up his staff and without more delay returned to the synagogue and the pitchers.

It isn't a cobbler, it isn't a tailor or any common workman who must say *tebelim* when a pious Sofer is ill.

"Run and tell the Klé Kodesch!" said old Rachel to Reuben, who was in consternation at the oracle fallen from the lips of the Rofé.

The child rushed out into the street.

First he went and knocked at the Sacrificer's door. An exquisite smell of cooking came from the house. The housewives who had brought their fowls to be killed by him on the night before had paid him by leaving the necks and the livers; and his wife was famous ten leagues round for her manner of cooking necks with livers.

On the table was a dish piled up with all the necks minced in her incomparable hash.

"Ah!" said she, seeing the child come in, "thou shalt take a neck to thy grandfather."

"He won't eat any to-night," he answered through his tears. "Something broke inside him

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while he was sounding the schofer. I have come to fetch you, Reb Mosché, to recite tehilim."

Then leaving the savoury-smelling parlour he hurried to the Hazen.

The venerable Hazen, who during the whole festival had led the Jewish choir in prayer, and who for twenty-four hours had not ceased sobbing, shouting and wailing, was worn out, broken with fatigue, dead-beat. Seated at the well-spread table, but too much exhausted to eat, he had unbuttoned his caftan and shirt, and on his hairy chest where the red fleece mingled with his beard his wife was dabbing sun-flower oil and rubbing it gently to soothe his inflamed lungs. One of his daughters, meanwhile, held to his pale lips some hot chicken-broth.

Scarcely had the child opened his mouth when the Hazen's wife cried sharply:

"He can't go! See what a state he's in! They ought to be saying tehilim for *him*!"

But the Hazen, in a hoarse voice that sounded hardly human, said:

"Not say tehilim when Reb Eljé is ill! And on the evening of Kippour! . . . I'm going! I'm going! Give me my scarf."

Reuben was gone already to find the Rabbi, not the Rabbi of the miracles who must not be disturbed at the banquet, but the ritual Rabbi, the junior Rabbi of Bels. A few of his friends in

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the neighbourhood who had come to spend Kippour were with him; they were discussing vehemently the question whether a son who in a state of intoxication had robbed or beaten his paralytic father could be pronounced brutal, drunken and debauched by the judge, since, according to the terms of the Law, the father must go in person to make complaint before the magistrate—which under the circumstances he could not do, being paralysed.

In the heat of the dispute no one observed the entrance of the child, and he, startled, stood still in the doorway, not daring to interrupt the saintly discussion. But at last, gathering courage: "My grandfather is ill!" he cried loudly. "Come and say tehilim, Reb Jessel."

These words fell into the midst of the debate like the clod of earth which the Hungarian shepherd throws into the pot as a sign to the other guardians of the flock that the meal is finished, and that what remains is the dogs' share.

Every one rose from the table, and the pilpoul was continued in the street.

Meanwhile, Reuben hurried on to call the tenant of the Heder, the senior Melamed. He found him with his sleeves tucked up to the elbows, sitting before an enormous mortar filled with snuff and bean-flour which he was making up into little

packets he would sell by and by to the guests of the Zadik.

"You come just at the right moment," said he, holding open the large rent in his caftan which served as a pocket. And he made Reuben drop into this improvised pouch the two or three hundred packets that he had already prepared.

When the caftan was bulging with the precious goods they went off to Reb Eljé's.

The house was by this time full of people chanting tehilim. The Instruments of Holiness, Hohet, Hazen and Rabbin were not without posterity: their children had come with them, and their guests also, all of them from the bottom of their hearts giving thanks to Adonai for the exceptional favours which He granted them this evening; for after having gratified them with a brilliant moon by which to celebrate the office of Noemenie, He was giving them now on this holy night, when deeds of piety ought to be most numerous, an occasion to perform one of the three great duties imposed upon Israel—visiting the sick, attending the dead, and assisting the daughters of Sion to find husbands.

Many poor artisans likewise assembled, keeping modestly in the background and muttering psalms.

At the sight of all these pious Jews, swaying to

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and fro in the moonlight, in the movement of prayer a sudden thought came to Reuben whose memory was stored with miraculous histories from the Mischna and the Zohar; he recollected, too, his little companions passing one by one before his bed, each offering to the Eternal one minute of his existence in order to prolong his own. "Ah!" said Reuben rapturously to himself, "if every one of these people crowding into the room and the street would offer to the Holy of Holies only a few hours of his life, my grandfather would live still a long, long time!"

Gliding through the crowd, now absorbed in the joy of weeping, he went and took from the cupboard where Reb Eljé kept his store of parchment one spotless sheet; he dipped the quill pen in the ink, and like one soliciting subscriptions, gathering here and there copper or silver coins, he went to all the Jews present in turn, asking for the gift of one moment of life for his grandfather.

Which of them, on that evening of Kippour, would not have gladly signed? Who would refuse to the great Sofer of Bels one hour of his existence? Who would not give to Reb Eljé a mortgage on his destiny? What advance, what loan could be safer, what investment more profitable?

On the paper the child held out to them all inscribed their names and the amount of their sac-

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rifice, as joyfully as though they were drawing a cheque on eternal life. And when, from the Klé Kodesch down to the humblest artisan, there was none who had not opened an account on his span of life in favour of the great Sofer of Bels, Reuben took the parchment all black with the tokens of love and faith, and wrote his own name last of all.

It is usually on the tomb of some illustrious doctor or of some saintly Rabbi—one of those small simple Jewish tombs consisting of a mound on which is set a little wooden house like a dog kennel—that these requests are thrown; these supplications, these mad petitions which ever-trustful Israel addresses through all ages to the Lord. But it seemed to Reuben that not even on the tomb of the most illustrious doctor or of the most saintly of Rabbis would his request be near enough to the Lord; and with his precious parchment clasped against his heart once more he rushed into the street.

The Zadik's banquet was finished. Bels, which for twenty-four hours had looked like a town deserted, now in the bright moonlight was filled with an extraordinary agitation as though the whole of the inhabitants were on the move. Bands of pilgrims were returning to their carts to lie down and sleep there. Others, ready to depart, were harnessing their horses, tightening cords and

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straps by the light of lanterns, and engaging in disputes in which the loving-kindness of the Day of Kippour was entirely forgotten, with the Kachlawniks who were demanding outrageous payments. In the courtyards women and children were setting up poles for the booths of the Feast of Tabernacles, as the commandment for this night requires; the whole town rang with the sound of their hammers. And there in heaven was the same moon which of old time illuminated the desert when the tents were pitched in a square around the sanctuary with the Levites, the Priests, and Aaron and Moses next the Ark, and the men of war on the four sides. That same moon was shining to-night upon the pilgrims setting forth along unsure roads towards the distant villages, shining on the Jews as they planted their stakes in the courtyards, and lighting the great square where the faithful who had not yet obtained audience of the Zadik were waiting impatiently before the worn brick steps for the moment when they too might go in to ask of him a miracle.

Many of the pilgrims who were to start at dawn, either by road or by train, remained in the synagogue giving themselves up to the delight of feasting. The heat and the smoke of their pipes made a thick fog overhead, obscuring the light of the Candles of the Soul which were burning low in the far corners of the building. All eyes were

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heavy with drunkenness; the snoring of the sleepers stretched out under the tables accompanied the songs. The floor, as far as the stair to the cupboard of the Thoras, was covered with prostrate forms.

Reuben passed through this agitation and noise as if in a dream. Jumping from table to table and striding over the drunken men, he reached the holy cupboard, mounted the steps, drew aside the velvet curtain embroidered with the two Lions of Judah, turned the key in the lock, and as if into a harbour of refuge, a port of salvation, among that silent assembly of the Thoras he threw the parchment charged with the sacrifice of life which the Jews of Bels had offered to the Lord.

Some days afterwards the last of the pilgrims who had remained at Bels for the Feast of Tabernacles were saying, as they returned to their distant villages: "We saw a great miracle there! On the evening of Yom Kippour the Sofer Reb Eljé burst all the veins in his body while sounding the sacred trumpet. We saw him lying lifeless on his bed, but it was not the Lord's will that Reb Eljé Lebowitz should die for blowing the ram's horn, and when we set out again he was saying the prayer with us in the synagogue."

Ah, if those travellers, those seekers after miracle, those familiars of the unseen, those in-

defatigable readers of the Mischna and the Zohar, had known the truth, how much more marvellous a story they might have told on their return!

Since the great evening of Kippour, when he ran from house to house in the night, the cough, the violent fever and all the misery that the Angel of Death carries on his wings had fallen upon Reuben with redoubled fury. As though there were some invisible bond that united the existence of the old man and the child, so that the same mysterious scales that lifted the one into the light plunged the other down into darkness, step by step as Reb Eljé recovered his lost vigour, Reuben day by day lost hold on the little that was left to him of life. Glass is not so transparent, the flame of the candle is less frail. But, blinded doubtless by the Divine Will, Reb Eljé appeared to see nothing. In thankfulness to Adonai for saving his son he had begun a splendid Thora destined for the sacred shrine of Bels. A Sofer wrapped in his taliss, with his tephilim and his pen in his hand—can he give ear to so profane a sound as the coughing of a child?

The birches cast their leaves, the fir trees bent under the snow; the wind of winter in its stormy course brought round the festivals which the Lord has sown in the dark season like flowers upon the ice, and that one revered among all others, when

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the Eternal dictated to Moses the Tables of the Law.

On that day, says the Mischna, all Nature became dumb; no bird sang in the branches, no leaf stirred on the still trees. In all the listening world not one beast uttered a cry. The sea was without motion, the voice of man was unheard, the Angels themselves kept silence, the Seraphim ceased their hymn to the Thrice Holy.

Bels and its meadows were submerged beneath a rain like a deluge and almost like a sacrilege on that solemn day. In the house of the Sofer, among the palm leaves, the myrtles and the seraphim, the tick-tick of an old clock ordered all things duly. Reb Eljé was reading the Zohar; Rachel was bustling in the kitchen; Reuben, more wasted by fever than on the day when Hertz Wolf hurried to sell him to the Schabès goÿ, shivered under the red eiderdown that could not warm him any more.

Then, all at once, as in olden times, all the noises grew still. The rain ceased to beat on the windows, the clock to measure the silence, the Sofer was no longer reading the Zohar nor old Rachel hurrying over her household affairs; and memories sounded no more in the soul of the child with that sweet mysterious murmur, so deep down, so continuous that one must needs bend low over the heart to hear it. That music, which

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is diverse for every man on earth, for him was composed of the songs that Reb Amram and Hertz Wolf sang on a Saturday, returning from the synagogue, the adieu to the Princess, the hissing of the lit taper extinguished in the wine, the sweet names that his mother called him in the evenings as she laid him in his bed, the thunder of the water-falls that roared so loud in the morning when he was on his way to the Heder; all these mingled with the scent of dried roses and carnations in the box of perfumes.

That music was the last to cease. Even Reuben's breath broke the silence no longer. Like the tuft of sheep's wool which a woman picks out of the milk, like a bird fleeing from the net of the fowler—oh, how lightly a soul departs from the little body of a child!—so, life went from him.

And now Reuben is lying in the little cemetery of Bels. Pieces of broken crockery cover his great Oriental eyes that on a day of madness were uplifted to the Cross; his head, that was bent too often over the sacred Books, rests softly on a little sack filled with earth from Palestine; his fingers, stopped for ever in their apprenticeship to the writer's art, now hold, instead of goose-quills, the little bits of match-wood which will serve him as crutches as he drags himself under-

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ground towards Jerusalem where the dead will rise again at the coming of the Messiah.

When will he see Jerusalem? For how many ages must he wait in that rain-sodden meadow? When will his eyes re-open? When will his ears hear the Messiah sounding the Schofer on the highest peak of the Carpathians?

For eight days, as it is commanded, Reb Eljé Lebowitz remained in his house without moving; the windows were shut, the candles lighted, the button-hole of his caftan torn in sign of mourning, and he ate hard-baked eggs which old Rachel cooked for him in the ashes.

In time of war, when Death mows down the young, the old folk in the villages crouch over their devastated hearths. They say one to another that they are old and useless, that their life is a burden, that it is they themselves who should have died. They reproach Heaven that had sacrificed the living shoot for the withered branch and wrongfully reversed the fair order of the world. Endlessly they weep, and when speech fails them their grieving silence far surpasses words. Their minds go seeking for the dead, to bring them near: they see them, they re-animate them, recall their past deeds and torture their hearts by imagining what might have been the future of those lives that fate has broken. So strong is their affection, so powerful their regrets,

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they feel themselves go astray in the desert of empty days, so bereaved, so lost, so impotent to perform what youth might have accomplished, that their immense lassitude becomes gradually shame, remorse for being alive.

“O Eternal! Rock of the Worlds,” said the Sofer weeping, “why hast Thou taken this child, and why hast Thou left me to live? In all the holy town of Bels was there a child known to Thee more good, more mindful of Thy commandments? . . . He was not yet thirteen, he had not yet performed his barmitzva, he was not yet responsible for his deeds before Thee. . . . It is I, then, Master of the world, whom Thou wouldst punish! . . . Yet I was bringing him up for Thee. I would have made of him a pious Sofer. He should have glorified Thy Name. But Thy ways are unsearchable, Thy decrees are ever righteous. Thou art the shield and buckler of those who put their trust in Thee.”

The men of Bels came to visit him, lamented with him, and as they went away dropped a piece of money in a bowl placed on the table; for he who is in mourning must live only upon the alms of his neighbours.

On the ninth day he rose and went to the synagogue to pray and to fulfil the duties of his office. It frequently occurs that the letters on the sacred parchments, written in thick greasy ink and stuck

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rather than imprinted on the impervious surface, become detached from it and drop off. And one letter fallen off is a member missing from the living body of the Law: the Thora becomes, as it were, dead, and cannot be used until it is restored in its perfection. Every week, therefore, the Sofer took one of the hundred and fifty rolls owned by the synagogue, carried it to his house, unrolled it, examined it, and if one letter had slipped off he re-wrote it.

After the morning prayer he mounted the steps to the cupboard of the Thora. Putting aside the sepharim which he had looked at already, he was reaching out towards a roll placed far at the back in the darkness of the sanctuary when his old fingers encountered a sheet of parchment, the presence of which in that place was profanation. With a hand that shook with indignation he seized the unclean thing and his eyes fell upon these words written in a childish hand: "O Holy of Holies (blessed be Thou!), deign to prolong the life of my grandfather Reb Eljé." Below were the names of all the Jews who, on the evening of Kippour, had offered to the Eternal a moment of their existence in order to lengthen his days.

It was not with indignation now, nor with anger, that his hand shook. Tears full of sweetness poured down his face and ran over his white beard. His old friends, the Rabbi, the Melamed,

the Hohet, the Hazen, had contributed each an hour of his life. Pilgrims unknown to him, dwelling in towns and villages of which even the names were unfamiliar, had given, one a whole week, another eighteen times eighteen hours, another eighteen times eighteen days. But however long the list, all these moments added together would not have prolonged his life for a great while.

Suddenly his hands trembled yet more violently, a veil spread before his eyes, the page slipped from his fingers. This, then, was the cause that his old heart was yet beating, that the blood yet coursed through his veins, that his child was no more: Reuben had given all his life.

CHAPTER XIII

“HEAR, O ISRAEL!”

How hard it is to carry on, in sorrow and mourning, the work undertaken in hope and joy! How hard it is to the Sofer's heart to continue the Thora that he had begun in thankfulness to Adonai for having saved his child! It is now that the earth may lie lightly upon Reuben, and that the little body leaning on its crutches may travel with ease towards Jerusalem, that the old man toils at his copy of the sacred Book. But in vain he bathes at dawn in the sanctifying water; in vain he covers his head with the taliss and wraps the tephilim round his arm; a memory, a too dear image, still comes floating like a mist between his eyes and the parchment. Why is Reuben not there beside his writing table? That footstep in the night—can it not be the step of the child carrying the candle and the pierced brick?

Was his voice not heard among the thousand singers in the bright candlelight of the Bethamidrash?

This is the day when he would have been thir-

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teen years old and would have made his barmitzva. This morning old Rachel would have brought him a new silk caftan and velvet hat. They two would have gone to the loved synagogue: together they would have prayed. The Hazen would have called him to his side on the Almémor and would have made him read a passage from the Sidra of the day. Thenceforward he would have been responsible for his actions before God: he could have made one among a group of ten Jews assembled for the prayer of Min'ha. And just at this hour all the Instruments of Holiness would have been gathered here around a brightly-lighted table to celebrate the happy day. . . .

Then suddenly, for the first time in the sixty years during which he had been copying the Thora, the old man broke off in the midst of writing the sacred name of Adonai which ought to be written in one stroke of the pen. . . . He saw the brightly-lit table! The Melamed, the Hazen, the Hohet, the Rabbin, all his friends were gathered round, and Reuben was in the midst of them like a young Doctor of the Law. He saw him! It was not a phantom, an illusion, a cloud. It was he with his dear face, his great watchful eyes, his glistening curls. . . . How long was his old heart filled by that ineffable joy? . . . How long did he gaze at that young face while his hand hung motionless over the unfinished sacred Name?

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Then like the shudder with which one starts from some long evening reverie, remorse at letting himself become distracted by a vain contemplation drove away the too sweet vision. Reb Eljé Lebowitz took off his taliss, untied his tephilims and, filled with consternation, hastened to plunge himself in the ritual bath.

Many a time since then the great Sofer of Bels has stopped in his holy work. An inner voice cries to him: “Be careful, Reb Eljé! A profane thought passes first by the door like a stranger, then it enters like a guest, then it takes possession like a master. Cease to pursue this shade, these vain regrets, the unsubstantial image of a joy that will never more return. Plunge thy hand in the ritual water, apply thyself to thy holy work. One letter missing or wrongly written in the Law thou art copying will make it useless to all the Jews who read it and thus by thy fault will be caused the ruin of countless generations.”

He hears that voice as one hears the singing of a bird and forgets it as soon as its warbling ceases. He dips his fingers in the pail, he takes up his pen; then again he stops and returns to his dreams.

Ah; but tell it to no one! His child is not dead. The Eternal (blessed may He be!) did not accept his sacrifice; only he lets him live elsewhere. Where? In what unknown regions?

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Oh, to see him once more, were it but for an instant. Oh, to lift this veil of darkness and break this dreadful silence! His imagination, in which the follies of the Zohar have taken root like a fig tree in a wall, flies away far from the narrow room where he sits copying the Thora. Like an eagle hovering over the landscape in search of a hare or partridge, he sees stretched out beneath him the whole country of Poland; he sees the plains, the forests, the lakes and the little woods, and all the synagogues and all the Bethamidrasch; he sees all the roofs of the houses, he counts all the inhabitants, he stares at each group of children seated round the hearths. But nowhere can he discover the beloved child who has vanished.

That little village hidden between the plain and the mountain where the storks are perching on the dead trees is the village of Hounfalou; that house and that yard surrounded by acacias is Amram's tavern; that old man is old Trebitz; that man with a burden of sheepskins in his arms is Hertz Wolf; it is his son. That woman pouring out drinks for the Tziganes and the Hungarian is poor Guitelé.

But Reuben is not in the yard, on the tree-trunk that serves as a bench, nor beside the candlestick that the servant has brought in; he is not in the tavern, he is not in the bedroom, he is not in the synagogue.

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Then taking flight once more, the old Sofer travels on fantastic courses through the clouds over every quarter of the world where children are assembled for prayer and for study. Sometimes he imagines himself arriving in the early morning, and already the noisy schoolboys are there round the Melamed; sometimes he comes in the evening when the whole school assembled in the courtyard is sending up towards the moon the songs of Noemenie. How many young faces in these nurseries of prayers! What glowing eyes! What lustrous curls! What eloquent lips are there! But one child he never finds; never that one!

O poor Wandering Jew, fugitive on all the roads of madness and of dreams! It is neither wealth nor power that he pursues. He seeks to break the laws of destiny, to bring to life one who has been, to re-animate one who is no more. Sublime attempt, a million million times renewed by impotent grief!

What power is this, O Lord, what strength of unavailing Love that can create out of a memory that living thing, and compel a vapour of the soul to glow with those warm colours of life?

It is night: it is night in Bels, night over all the country of Poland, night in the soul of the old Sofer. Snow is falling.

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Who knocks at the door on this night of storms at so late an hour?

No one has moved. The door did not open. But a young stranger appears in the room. He knows the house. Without hesitation he finds his way in the dark. What pain, what regret there is in his face! If there were not such sorrow in his eyes one might think them the eyes of Reuben: if the sacred curls hung by his cheeks, if his garments were longer, if he had a scarf about his neck one might believe it that dear lost one. . . .

"Ah, dear child, it is thou! How could I not know thee? Why is this sadness in thine eyes? What hast thou done with thy ringlets? Where didst thou find those strange clothes?

"Sit down, my little child. Shake the snow from thy clothing, come near the fire. Shake the snow and the cold from thy soul; come close to my heart. Whence comest thou? Where hast thou been? I sought thee in vain, from synagogue to synagogue, from heder to heder. What journeys I have made! What anxiety thou hast caused me! Speak, speak, O prodigal son!"

Reassured by such tender words the phantom comes nearer and says: "O grandfather, do not seek me any more. I am come to bid thee farewell. Great is the world, and our knowledge is little and lifeless. It does not suffice me any longer to know that which happened thousands of

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years ago between Horeb and Mount Sinai. I want to know now what men have thought in other ages and other civilizations.”

“O Reuben, O my child, cease to pursue these alien thoughts; they bring neither joy nor happiness. God in old times gave to our King Solomon the science of all the worlds visible and invisible. One of his familiars stole the secrets of profane science, and it is he who revealed them to the strange nations. But the divine science, the only one of value, that one has not been stolen. It is we, the Jews, who possess it. Outside our sacred books, thou wilt find only disquietude, sterility, deserts and perpetual change. Things will seem to be thus for one hour, and on the morrow they will appear to thee otherwise. The book which thou readest to-day will contradict that thou hast read the day before. But truth is one. Ours has not changed. The thing which it proclaimed once, remains unalterable, true through all eternity: the oneness of God, and faith in the coming of the Messiah who will bring one day the kingdom of justice and love among men. Why wilt thou seek elsewhere some other thing?”

Whether it be the persuasion of these words, or the tenderness of the voice, or the tears of the old man, the child leans upon his shoulder and appears to assent.

“Let us stand up,” says Reb Eljé.

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The Sofer rises, and in a loud voice, in the dimly-lighted darkness he begins the recitation of the Schema Israel. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God."

The room is lighted with a celestial brightness. All trouble has disappeared from the dear face found again at last. The old man passes his hand over the brow of the child, and the sadness vanishes; over his temples and the long hair grows again; over his clothes and the garment becomes miraculously longer. The scarf of Hassidem adorns his neck and the Thora is a crown upon his head. And the old man falls asleep with the child's cheek pressed against his heart, while over the Crosses of Poland the snow continues falling.

Alas, he has gone in the same manner as he entered, leaving no more trace than the sound of the "Schema"—if indeed he did repeat it?

Where shall he be found again now? Into what wild regions of the earth or of the soul has he ventured?

His child is gone, like one of those unhappy boys who leave the Bethamidrasch and are never seen again. O sorrow! O regret! His life, like that of Job, is but a succession of sombre and terrifying thoughts. Endeavouring to bring back peace into his heart he works day and night at his writing. He is still to be seen at the ritual bath,

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faithful to the synagogue, punctual at the Bethamidrasch. No one yet suspects what whirlwind of madness is carrying him away. People who see him behind his little window-panes, wearing the sacred attributes, with his pens and his coloured inks before him, say admiringly that he is writing the master-piece of his life, and that even the Thora of Lemberg which works miracles did not occupy him for so many years.

At last, with error after error, and sin upon sin, Reb Eljé arrived at the last verse of the Law: “The great and terrible works which Moses did in the sight of Israel.”

The famous Thora of gratitude and of mourning was completed. The whole town and the Zaddik himself, accompanied with great pomp by the Klé Kodesches and other devout persons carrying in their arms the hundred and fifty Thoras of the Community, came to his house to fetch the immortal Book. Reb Eljé Lebowitz, wearing the old taliss in which he had copied the incomparable text and dreamed so many profane dreams, took his place beneath the marriage canopy, holding the crowned bride against his heart. Behind him came the blessed company of tinkling Thoras wrapped in their worn silks, tattered like flags which are the glory of murderous nations. But Israel has no flag but the holy Thora! The shrill

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violins headed the procession, and the singing of canticles drowned the noise of the silver bells.

“Some trust in their chariots,
And others in their horses;
But as for us, we call upon the name
Of the Eternal, our God!
Lift up your heads, O ye gates!
Be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of Glory shall come in.
Who is the King of Glory?
It is the Lord of Sabaoth.”

Seven times the procession circled the Almémor amid the transports of the crowd, who pressed round to touch with the tips of their fingers the Thora of Reb Eljé. Amid that mad enthusiasm if any human sentiment other than insane grief could have entered the heart of the Sofer, he must have felt pride. But when the moment came for the new sheep to be received among the flock of holy Books in the shrine, and when, in honour of the Sofer, the venerable Hazen began to read the Sidra for the week from the new parchment, he was seen to turn pale suddenly and stop dead in his reading; he who, as it is commanded, stopped never except to take breath: he had found a wrong accent in the name of Adonai!

Every one in the town of Bels then said: “The Sofer has gone out of his mind.”

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Many a Rosch Haschanah and many Kippours have passed since the night when Reuben rushed through the town to fling his young life into the shrine of Thora. All those pious Jews who said tehilim at the bedside of Reb Eljé have long since departed from this world. The Rofé is dead, the Hazen and the Sacrificer are dead. The miracle-working Rabbi sleeps likewise beneath the soil; his son now works miracles in his place, but the Sofer continues to call him Reb Israel as he called his father. He alone lives on. A sad, a horrible youth has been infused into his veins; and when asked his age he replies in that phrase of the twelfth Sidra which Jacob, when a hundred and forty-seven years old, spoke to Pharaoh who came to visit him: “Few and evil are the years of my life.”

Ah, who would recognize the great Sofer of Bels whose Thoras are the pride of distant synagogues at Budapest, Kieff, and Prague in Bohemia, in the figure of this old man with his torn caftan and white stockings soiled with mud?

He is now one of that aimless company of imbeciles and beggars who wander from the Zadik's house to the Mikwa, from the Mikwa to the bethamidrasch and the synagogue. But under his ragged taliss where the embroideries of silver shine through the black dirt he is still magnificent with his spotless beard, his madness and his misery.

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There are always a few children about him; he is not like those irritable old men who cannot endure to be worried at their prayers and who, not ceasing for a moment to mutter their psalms, have a hand ever ready and a foot yet quicker. He is gentle and talks to them and says incoherent words to them. It is a game to ask him: "Well, Reb Eljé Lebowitz, and have you seen your Reuben to-day?" He answers with a mysterious air: "No, no; not yet to-day. But to-morrow, very soon perhaps." And he walks away, taking long strides like a Jew who is expected at a business meeting.

On a certain evening of Kippour the pious Jews of Bels, disburdened, purified of sin, were hastening towards their joyful homes, where the candles were burning brightly, and the cocks and hens which had been loaded with all the transgressions of Israel would presently serve to revive their energies exhausted by twenty-four hours of lamentation and fasting. Reb Eljé returned alone to his dark and empty house. There is no child's arm, no shoulder to be the prop of his old age; only a frail and mighty memory aids his steps. He enters. All is sad and sombre; not one candle lighted, not one feast-day cake. His sole repast is a wretched broth of chicken-meal and beans at the bottom of a porringer. But the old man

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has learned long since to feed on dreams alone.

How solitary, how forlorn it is beneath the old desolate roof among the dusty sepharims and citrons! Frozen, despairing, his most faithful friend, his last companion, the dream itself has fled. Cold hours of sorrow, when grief is so heavy, so weary of itself, so crushed by its own weight that it can devise no further torture for itself! The head sinks low, the heart surrenders, the worn and wasted soul breaks down and crumbles into dust.

Away in the town, the usual clamour of the night of Pardon was rising: shouts, quarrels, cracking of whips, rumbling of carriages, blows of mallets driving down the stakes for the tents. And in the old man's troubled mind the pious tumult of the festival became marvellously transformed.

Around him dead things are waking, slowly the shadow grows lighter. A shudder passes through the room, all things come to life again; and the dream comes back, and the soul revives, and the solitude is filled with living faces, and sorrow, flying on its tall black horses, flees away. Between the table and the wall there rises out of the deep shadow an enormous unknown town with men in wild and violent action rushing like hounds in chase of some invisible quarry. None wears ringlets, none is dressed in a caftan, none speaks the

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much-loved Yiddish! And among the crowd is a man like all those other men, shaven like those others, hurrying like those others, speaking the same hateful language. What resemblance is there between this stranger wearing gold-rimmed glasses on his nose, a gold chain on his waistcoat, a starched collar round his neck, and the child with the sacred ringlets and the long-skirted garment so foolish and grotesque?

Yet it is he! His heart knows him. "Reuben, Reuben!" he calls. But at that beloved name the unheeding passer-by does not even turn his head. He continues on his way. The old madman pursues him and clutches at his arm. "Reuben, Reuben, my child, dost thou not know me? I am thy grandfather Reb Eljé for whom thou hast given thy life."

"My life! What are you talking of, old man? What life have I given? I was never more alive than now!" And the mouth as it speaks, the eyes behind the gold-rimmed glasses draw away into the distance, grow dim and begin to disappear.

Then, in a despairing voice: "Reuben, my little child, hast thou then forgotten the holy town of Bels?"

At these words the other at last stops, and turning on the Sofer the vague look of a man who is remembering or dreaming: "Yes, sometimes, in days of weariness old scenes rise up, I know not

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whence, in my memory. A dear and far-off country comes before me, with fir trees very dark and tall; and there, as in a mausoleum, are preserved the things that existed long ago. I see it covered with snow, I see the house, I see the graves in which are buried past joys that can return no more. I remember a lighted hall and hundreds of heads bent over lunatic books. I remember tables and benches where I have slept and have been wakened many a time by the icy cold of the dawn. I remember a barn-like building filled sometimes with sobs and prayers, sometimes with a hideous din of famished people flinging themselves upon the food and wine.

“Sometimes in the middle of the night one of these memories wakes me. I seem to hear all round me, like the wind howling under the door, a noise of psalms. I fancy I see all about my room the Talmuds, the Zohars and the Tschalos tzhivos crowding upon me with their maddening problems. A smell of tobacco and stale pipes and old linen turns me sick. A cold sweat breaks out upon my temples.

“Then I wake, I turn on the light and the nightmare fades away.

“But what am I dreaming of? Why do you come recalling to me things I wish to think about no more? Long ago I shut them away in the double-locked chest where I keep the taliss and

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the tephilim of an old man whom I loved dearly. . . .”

Warm, fast-flowing tears pour down the cheeks of the old madman as he raves. Thoughts inexpressibly sad are whirling in his brain and through that tumult he still hears the voice: “And do you imagine, old man, that I shall go on living that old life yonder? If you did but know what a sigh I gave when I saw the last of the bethamidrasch and the synagogue! What freedom! What gladness! It was like a cool bright water that reflects calmly all the sky and earth, and the Crucifixes at the cross-roads did not terrify me any more. As soon as I had cut off my ringlets and shortened my long caftan, the world was my own. ‘How clever he is!’ they say of me. ‘How came he by that subtle intelligence that nothing can confuse?’

“Old man, how well you equipped me for life, never dreaming of what you were doing! How well you drilled me in searching for the hidden meaning of words, and how greatly I have profited by your saintly exercises! I bind and I unbind the most complex affairs; one word from my mouth will bring prosperity or ruin. The fables of a former world lie about me in the dust like the fowls of Yom Kippour at the feet of the Sacrificer, and men stand astonished as I present to them the Fruit of the New Year.

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“Next year to Jerusalem! That old cry of humiliated hope which through centuries of tribulation you have echoed in the darkness, I, too, have cried it in the night. And now the day has arrived. The gates of the City of Gold are opened before me. How long I have been a wayfarer in storm and tempest, and now in what glory of success! I have vanquished the Christian children, I have trampled on the shadow of the Cross, I have found Jerusalem, I have rebuilt the fallen Temple, but in my own fashion, Reb Eljé!

“O aged image of the past, old copyist of the Law, standing before the house of the Zadik at the foot of the worn brick steps, all your life long you have been calling for the miracle. But miracles, you see, don’t happen to-day in the way that our prophets prophesied them of old, or in the way you hoped for. Look no longer for the prophet Elias to sound the Schofer some day from the highest peak of the Carpathian mountains. The trumpet has sounded long ago, and the miracle is here. Look at me, Reb Eljé Lebowitz: the miracle is I, myself!”

“Listen, my little child, I am old, I am very old. There are things that I cannot understand now. The words go buzzing round me and do not enter my head. Listen, my little child, I would ask thee one thing. That alone concerns me. Dost

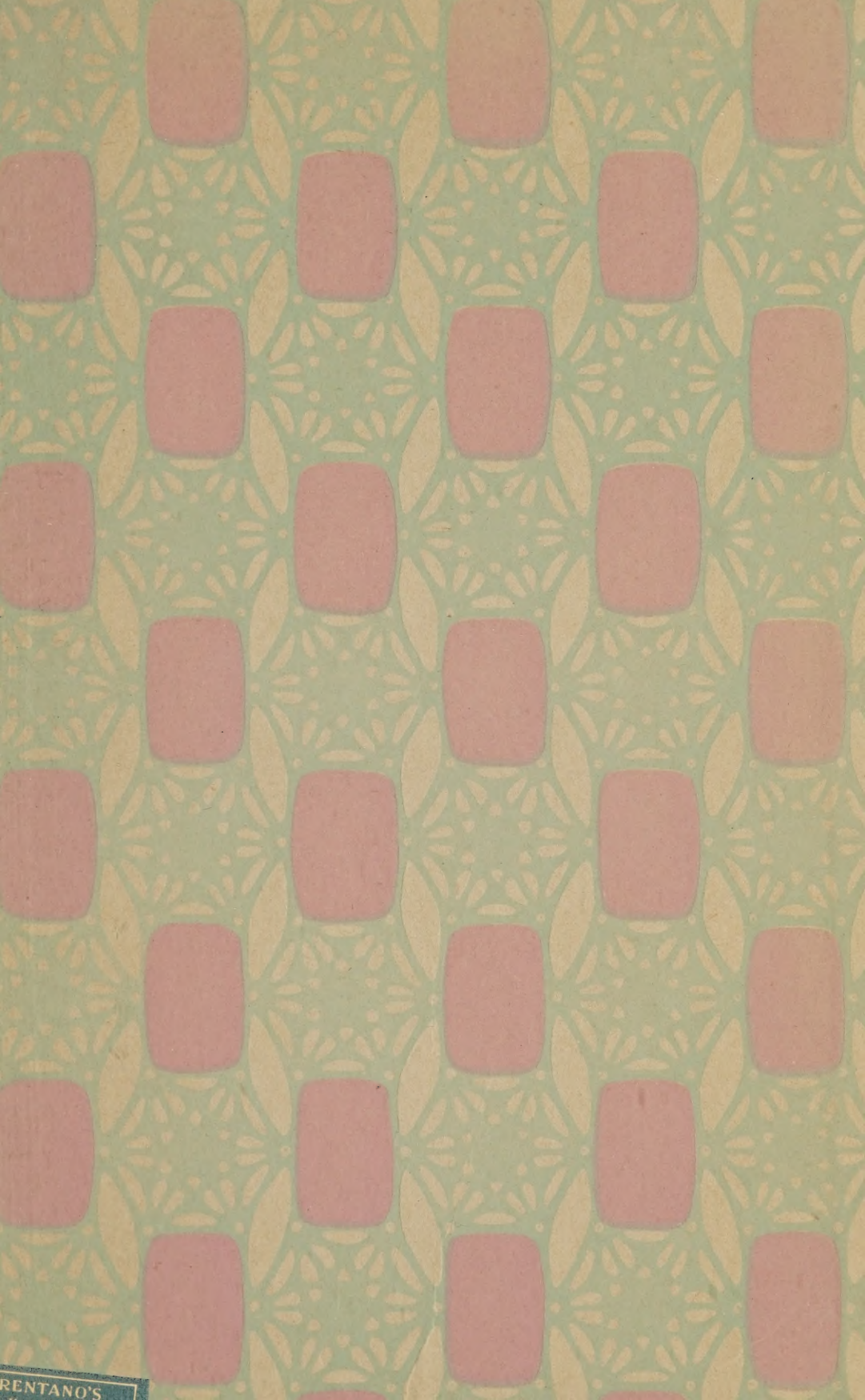
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thou still say the Schema Israel? This is what I long to know——”

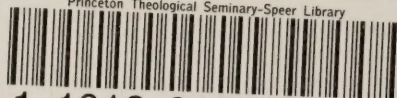
A cruel, heart-rending laugh bursts from the shade. Ah, this time his child is indeed dead!

The great Sofer of Bels stood up in the midst of the darkness, made a few steps through the room to the table where now he wrote only words without meaning; he beat the air with his hands and fell forward with his face upon the polluted Thora.

Through heaven the nocturnal weaver of enchantment and illusion, the moon of the Jewish nights and festivals, pursued her way amid the desert of stars. A carriage in the distance went jolting through the mud. There was still the sound of one or two mallets hammering on the tent-poles. The holy town of Bels sank to sleep in the peace of pardon, to resume on the morrow its strange phantom life.



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