My Childhood Years in the Pyaskes

Author: L. Hindes

Link to the book: Mayne kinder-yorn oyf di Pyaskes zikhroyneṣ fun mayn heym-shtot Byalistok fun di yorn 1882-1905 | Yiddish Book Center

Translation from Yiddish to English: Beate Schützmann-Krebs

Project coordinator: Dr. Susan Kingsley Pasquariella

NATIONAL YIDDISH BOOK CENTER
AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS
413 256-4900 | YIDDISH@BIKHER.ORG
WWW.YIDDISHBOOKCENTER.ORG

•

MAJOR FUNDING FOR THE
STEVEN SPIELBERG DIGITAL YIDDISH LIBRARY
WAS PROVIDED BY:

Lloyd E. Cotsen Trust
Arie & Ida Crown Memorial
The Seymour Grubman Family
David and Barbara B. Hirschhorn Foundation
Max Palevsky
Robert Price
Righteous Persons Foundation
Leif D. Rosenblatt
Sarah and Ben Torchinsky
Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation
AND MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE
National Yiddish Book Center

•

The *goldene pave*, or golden peacock, is a traditional symbol of Yiddish creativity. The inspiration for our colophon comes from a design by the noted artist Yechiel Hadani of Jerusalem, Israel.

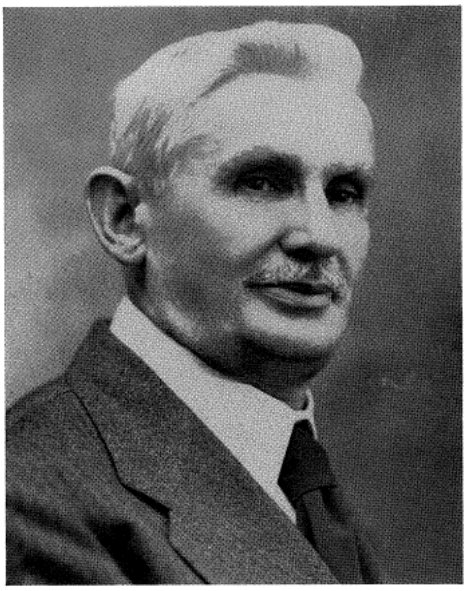
STEVEN SPIELBERG DIGITAL YIDDISH LIBRARY
NO. 07367

MAYNE KINDER-YORN OYF DI PYASKES

L. Hindes

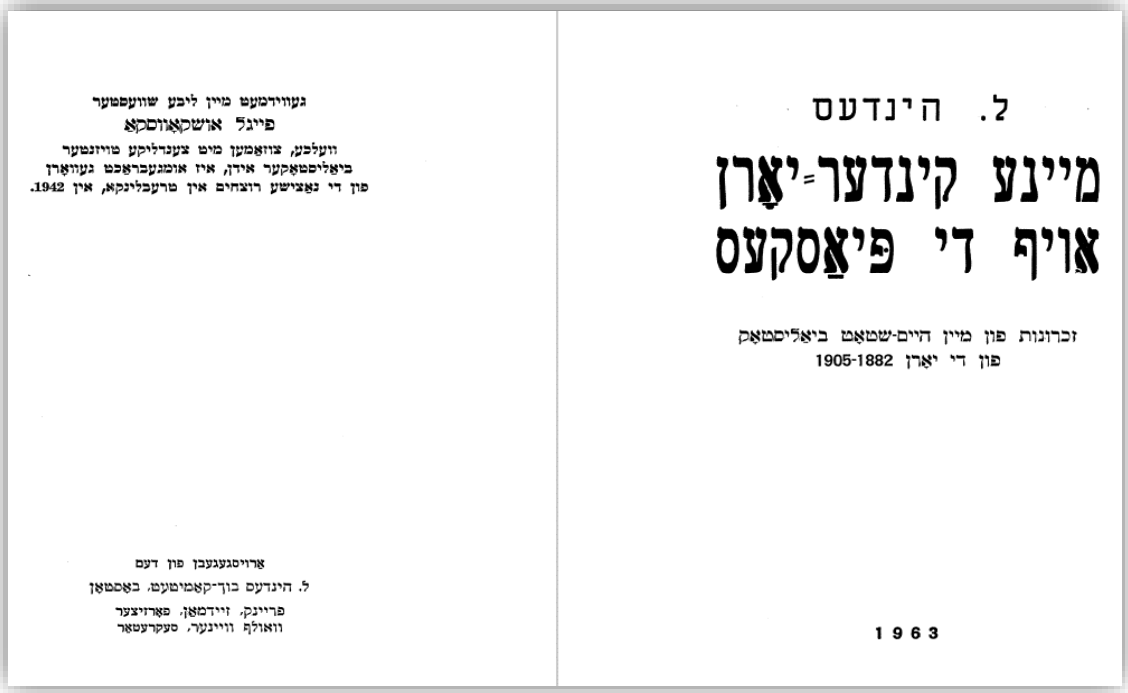
•

NATIONAL YIDDISH BOOK CENTER
AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS



ל. הינדעס

Leybl Hindes, Boston, October 1963



ל. הינדעס

מיינע קינדער־יאָרן אויף די פּיאַסקעס

זכרונות פון מיין היים־שטאָט ביאַליסטאָק
פון די יאָרן 1882-1905

1963

געווידמעט מיין ליבע שוועסטער
פייגל אושקאָווסקאַ
וועלכע, צוזאַמען מיט צענדליקע טויזענדער
ביאַליסטאָקער אידן, איז אומגעבראַכט געוואָרן
פון די נאַצישע רוצחים אין טרעבלינקא, אין 1942.

אַרויסגעגעבן פון דעם
ל. הינדעס בוך־קאָמיטעט, באָסטאָן
פרייַנק, זיידמאַן, פאָרזיצער
וואולף ווייַנער, סעקרעטאַר

My Childhood Years in the Pyaskes

Memoirs from my hometown of Bialystok from the years 1882 – 1905

L. Hindes

1963

Dedicated to my dear sister, Feygl Ushkovska, who was killed by the murderous Nazis in Treblinka in 1942, together with tens of thousands of Jews from Bialystok.

Published by the L. Hindes Book Committee Boston, Chairman: Freink, Zeidman, Secretary: Wolf Weiner

Translator’s Foreword

With a good portion of humor, but also with a drop of melancholy and a touch of bitterness, Leybl Hindes describes his childhood at the turn of the 20th century in one of the poorest districts of Bialystok.

His personal depictions are a wonderful complement to three other biographies by his contemporaries from Bialystok and nearby Krynki:

"Memoirs of a Bialystoker Woman" by Rachel Kositza,

"Memoirs and Writings of a Bialystoker" by Jacob Jerusalimski and

"As It Happened Yesterday" by Yosl Cohen.

My translations of the three mentioned books can be downloaded here for free:

Memoirs of a Woman from Bialystok translated from Yiddish - Społeczne Muzeum Żydów Białegostoku i regionu (jewishbialystok.pl) [also available as a printed book at JewishGen JewishGen Press - Memoirs of a Woman From Bialystok (Białystok, Poland)]

Translation of the memoirs of Jakob Jerusalimski - Społeczne Muzeum Żydów Białegostoku i regionu (jewishbialystok.pl)

Krynki - Krynki Memorial Book "Vi Nekhtn Geshen" translated into English and German - Społeczne Muzeum Żydów Białegostoku i regionu (jewishbialystok.pl) [also available as a printed book at JewishGen JewishGen Press: "As it Happened Yesterday"

As always, I would like to thank my friends, Dr. Susan Pasquariella [NY], Johanna Czaban [Krynki] and Dr. Tomek Wisniewski [Bialystok], for their great support.

Beate Schützmann-Krebs

Translator's note:

Contents in [ ] are mine.Contents in ( ) are by the author.

Foreword

Duży rynek na Piaskach. *The great market on Piaskes.*

Source: Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf (wirtualnie.lomza.pl)

Pyaskes [פיאסקעס] comes from the Polish word "Piaski", which means "sand".

When Bialystok became a part of Poland about 250 years ago (it had belonged to Prussia before) and began to grow, the whole area of Pyaskes was sandy as far as the village of Slabode [Słoboda].
And from this sandy area the city authorities of that time "cut" three whole streets (which is recalled in the book). The three streets ran under one name - *"Piaski" in Polish and "Pyaskes" in Yiddish.*

Under the tsarist regime in 1795 all three streets were given the name "Pestshanaya Ulitsa". Why the city officials of that time gave all three streets a single name was not known, nor did anyone care to know.

I was born on the long Pyaskes, with its sparse development of a few one- and two-story wooden houses with deep courtyards, where Jews, Germans, and [non-Jewish] Poles lived.

I grew up in the family of a small manufacturer of cloth and "shody" [1]. Like most small businessmen in those years, my father was often "nod konyom i pod konyom" (over the horse and under the horse), which means that sometimes he was doing well and sometimes not so well. Nevertheless, for ten years my father was counted among the rich people of Pyaskes.

During the 23 years I spent on my street, I had the opportunity to observe the way of life of our Jewish neighbors.
On Shabbat, the shops and taverns were closed with "seven bars".

It was as quiet

6

as the (lehavdil) [2] cemetery. The only grocer who kept his shop open was the soda water vendor. (He did not take money, but instructed his customers to put the copper coins on the "tubank" [counter]).
On Shabbat I saw a few "balebatishe" [3] Jews coming from the Bes-Medresh with their top hats and heads held high. And I also saw the Hasidic Jews running to the bathhouse very early in the morning to take a ritual immersion bath for Shabbat [4] .

In Friday nights, after dinner, I saw the "challah girls" of Pyaskes walking in a tight line under the light of the full moon-almost the width of the street-and talking and talking.

I also saw the boys and the maids picking up the "tsholent" [5] from Malke-Reyzl's bakery, and the workers' wives carrying clay pots of "cooked food"- hidden under their headscarves- to their husbands in the factories.
I saw starving Jews in worn, long caftans wandering around the market trying to make some money, as well as other scenes of poverty.

At the same time, however, one could already see the fruits of the emerging new political, economic, cultural, and social life, not only in Bialystok, but throughout Russia.

People were no longer afraid to talk about "**him**" (the Tsar). People were already using words like "parliament", "open elections", "secret elections", "cooperation", "trusts", "autocracy", "bureaucracy" - words that were completely unknown to the Jews before.

What we call "strikes" today were called "statshkes" or "zabostovkes" then. There were [secret] meetings behind the city, large demonstrations, clashes with the police, boys shouting in a round dance: "Doloy samodyerzhaviye, doloy samodyeyzhavets merzavits!"[6].
And the anti-tsarist and anti-capitalist songs that could be heard through open doors and windows or during walks in the woods - these very events, which were truly

7

the signs of the dawning of a freer and better life for all the oppressed masses in the great Russia, these are forever etched in my memory.

And now, at my advanced age, I am happy to share my memories with my contemporaries, or with those who have heard about these events in our hometown of Bialystok.

My book should not be considered a "work of art" or a "novel", where the names of people, cities and situations are invented. No, not at all. It is just a record, if you will, a description of the Jewish way of life on my street and of the events that were a proclamation of new and better times. I saw these events with my own eyes and heard them with my own ears.

It is quite possible, dear readers, that after reading this book you will want "more"...so you may want to know what happened next? Or why I settled down in another country? Unfortunately, I couldn't include your legitimate questions about "more" and "what happened next" in this book.

But if you want to satisfy your curiosity, you'll have to make the effort to read my first book: "Fol River, Amol un Haynt" [Fall River, Then and Now] [7] .

The author
Boston, Massachusetts

[1] shody= cheap fabric made from pulled wool, which was obtained from fabric remnants, see page 39

[2] An expression to distinguish the profane from the sacred

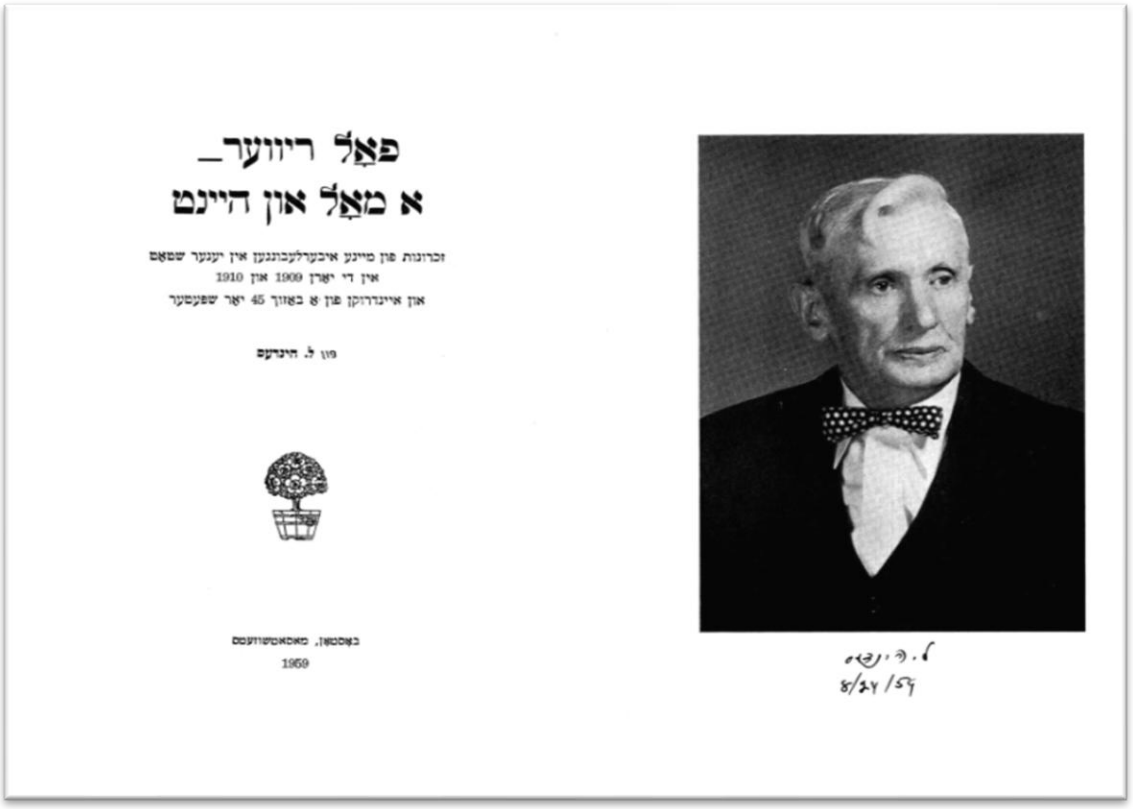
[3] The word "balebos" [plural: "balebatim"] refers to the head of the family, but is usually used to refer to the boss or owner of a house or factory, or someone who is in a better financial situation. The derived adjective is "balebatish".

[4] a typical Shabbat by chasidim, see A Typical Shabbos By Hasidim in Bialystok Before the Holocaust - YouTube

[5] tscholent= the traditional meat and vegetable stew prepared before Shabbat and usually kept warm in the large ovens of bakeries.

[6] Something like: "Down with autocracy, down with the self-righteous bastard "

[7] see Fol River a mol un haynt ; zikhroynes fun mayne iberlebenungen in yener shtot in di yorn 1909 un 1910 un ayndrukn fun a bazukh 45 yor shpeter | Yiddish Book Center



"Fall River- Then and Now“, excerpt with a photograph of the author, see:

Fol River a mol un haynt ; zikhroynes fun mayne iberlebenungen in yener shtot in di yorn 1909 un 1910 un ayndrukn fun a bazukh 45 yor shpeter | Yiddish Book Center

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my friends and comrades for their financial and moral support, which made it possible for this book to see the light of day:

Shmuel and Rachel Westelman, Boston; Yitzchok Levin, Pittston, Pennsylvania; Hyman Shapiro, Boston; Mr. Phillip Lown, Newton Centre, Mass.; Mrs. Lioba Hurwitz, Los Angeles, California; Mrs. Meli Kaplan, Fall River, Mass.. Mr. Max Meizel, Belfast, Maine; Mr. Mike Tooz [?], Norristown, Pennsylvania; Ben Sohn, Jacksonville, Florida; Mrs. Mini Sleiter, Hollywood, Florida; Sarah and Jack Finkel, Peabody, Mass.; Shloyme Fisher, Peabody, Mass. Benny Sklar, Bangor, Maine; Sidney Sheinfeld, Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania; Morris Gorfinkel, Alentown, Pennsylvania; Arnold Sukenik, Hazleton, Pennsylvania; William Toker, South Norfolk, Virginia; Dr. Harry Blok, Chelsea, Massachusetts; Dr. Chaim Zhitlovski Reading Circle, Chelsea, Massachusetts. Izidor Thomas, Baltimore, Maryland; Sonia Sokol, Chelsea, Massachusetts; Yosef Shneider, Boston, Massachusetts; Dr. Yosef Weinrebe, Boston, Massachusetts; Herbert Heler, Boston, Massachusetts; Nathan and Jenny Winkler, Miami Beach, Florida; Lipe Hendeliowitz, Copenhagen, Denmark.

I would also like to thank the authors:

S.D. Levin, who went out of his way to negotiate with the printer in New York on my behalf, also to Mr. David Sohn, editor at the "Bialystoker Shtime". He proofread the prints, pointed out misprints and suggested corrections.

My Childhood Years in the Pyaskes

Memoirs from my hometown of Bialystok from the years 1882 – 1905

There were three Pyaskes in Bialystok[1]:

1) The wide, straight Pyaskes, where Malke Stire's soap factory, Nathan Surazki's cloth factory, Yankel the mirror-maker's workshop, and Shimenshtshkhe's wood yard used to be. It was also the home of the famous and beloved midwife Rive the Heybe. This tall, middle-aged woman with black, gentle eyes delivered the babies of poor mothers without asking for money. There lived also the Choroshtsher [2] "moyel" [circumciser], the tall Jew with the thin gray beard, who "cut" (as he put it) the poor boys from the Pyaskes and Khanaykes, and he did it for free (they were two good neighbors...).

2) The long, somewhat crooked Pyaskes, which stretched as far as the village of Slabode, and from which branched off in later years the "Argentine Alley", and even later Rebbe's Alley, Malinovskiy Alley, and Flaker's Alley. All these "Argentine Alleys", as they were called, stretched across the wide field to the forest, past the wooden barracks of the "Vladimirsk[aya] Regiment".

3) The "other" Pyaskes. It turned off from Surazer [Suraska] Street and went all the way to Bozhitarne, past Meshl's steam mill and the two windmills belonging to Khone the miller and Madame Tshekhovski (the latter was known as " vevekhe" [3]) From the high hill in the "other" Pyaskes one could get to the "Kraitshak's Alley". All these alleys

10

were lined on both sides with low, dark wooden houses and led to the area around Khanaykes [4]. Next to the last two Pyaskes were German graves on a long, divided section, surrounded by a high, dark brown wooden fence.

And on the long Pyaskes section, on the side of the graves, there was a long and wide marketplace where farmers from the surrounding villages would set up their carts every Thursday to sell their produce, but also to buy salt, tea, sugar, kerosene, candles, wicks, lamps, iron, leather and other items for their own use from the Jewish grocers.

At this market, Jewish women would sit at the "baydlekh" [market stalls] and sell Jewish breads, such as "rozavanke" [black bread], "gebaytlt broyt" [rye bread], as well as "bulkes" [bread rolls], cakes, rolls, bagels - and on Friday evenings, also tortes.

During the cold months, the women who sold bread used to sit on "fire pots" to avoid freezing.

Every year in July, fairs or carnivals were held on the wide and long market. Among the visitors from other cities or countries, the Hungarians were particularly conspicuous, dressed in their national Bohemian costumes with colorful feathers tucked into their green plush fedoras. They were specialists in disciplining unruly horses through "operations"...

[1] There are three streets, all of which have the same name

[2] he came from *Khoroshtsh [Choroshtsh]*, which is between Trok (Trakai) and Grodno, Choroszcz - Wikipedia

[3] The term is possibly derived from "ververke", squirrel

[4] Khanaykes was considered the poorest district of Bialystok. I recommend reading a contemporary of the author, Jacob Jerusalimski, who writes extensively about Khanaykes in his memoirs, you can find my translation here:Translation of the memoirs of Jakob Jerusalimski - Społeczne Muzeum Żydów Białegostoku i regionu (jewishbialystok.pl)

The Second Day of Shavuot, 1882

On the long Pyaskes mentioned above stands the one-story, dark gray wooden house of my aunt, Tsvia Kaplanski. It was there, on the corner of Meshl's wide, humpbacked street, that I saw, as they say, "the light of the world" on the second day of Shavuot in 1862.

I remember when I was about

11

three years old. Our family moved two yards away, to Gretshko's houses. Our Polish landlord, Gretshko, was one of six "goyish" [gentile] landlords on our street with Jewish neighbors. The others were:
Katshinski, Kasperovitsh, Malinovski, Gelert, and Dzhevinski.

They all spoke Yiddish quite well and were very friendly to Jews.

You could even see them at Jewish weddings and other celebrations. I remember how the eldest son of our new landlord, Matshek, a tall, healthy, broad-shouldered "sheygets" [farm boy] with thick, curly black hair, greeted my father with "Gutn morgn, Reb Elye!" [1]

And regardless of whether he was called Reb Yoshe or Reb Elye [2], a Jew in a long black kaftan was usually very happy to hear a "goy" pronounce the word "reb" while the other non-Jewish neighbors used the [Polish] word "pani".

[1] "Good morning, Mr. Elye!". The term "reb" means Mister.

[2] There appears to be a small mistake in the original, so I have translated according to the meaning. Original: "... whether … my father or Reb Elye..."

In Aba's Houses

By summer, about six months later, our apartment was already in a house of Aba the melamed [1], in the same long Pyaskes, five houses away, on the other side of the street. Aba's yard consisted of a long, dark gray, one-story wooden house for three neighbors. Each apartment had a vestibule. Further back in the yard was a small white wooden house for one family. And still further back was an old, wide wooden house that housed a weaving mill with six hand looms.
And behind this sad-looking building was a long, green garden planted with potatoes, beets, and cucumbers.

When I think of the few years we lived in Aba's houses, the following stories come to mind:
One evening, as I was lying on the couch dozing, I suddenly heard

my mother screaming:
"It's stabbing me in the stomach! It pierces my stomach!"
When I opened my eyes, I saw our good, dear neighbor standing next to me, Sore, the "Amdurerke"[2] . She was middle-aged, with beautiful blue eyes, and said softly to me:
"Sleep, Leibele, sleep on."
None of our family was at home, neither my father, nor my sister Feygl, nor my brother Hendzel.

The next day, early in the morning, I was already shown my new little sister, Khanele, who had dark brown eyes and black hair. But unfortunately I didn't see her for more than a week...

A Polish family with four small children lived in the small white house mentioned above. One of them, the boy Antusch, was four or five years old, had blond hair, blue eyes and round, full red cheeks, a real little peasant boy, a personality...
I played "bol un palant" (ball games) with him. When he caught the ball, he said, "Ja mam!" [3] . And I would say, when the rubber ball came into my hands, "Ikh hob!" [3] .

Once, on a hot afternoon, while I was playing "palant" [bat and ball] with my Polish friend, a terrible downpour broke out. It really poured down like buckets.... Since we Jewish children were taught not to go into "goyishe" houses and not to enter a house when we were soaked, I hid in our stable, right across the street from the white house. I covered myself with sacks and waited for the rain to stop.

I felt so comfortable and protected from the rain under the sacks that I almost fell asleep...

But all of a sudden I heard my father calling desperately: "Leybl! Leybl! Where are you?" "I'm here, I'm here!" I reassured him.

13

Soaked to the bone, we both went into the house...
I played with Antush on sunny and dry days; and from him I learned to understand and speak Polish even before I became a "kheyder-yingl" [4].

[1] "melamed"= Teacher at Jewish elementary school

[2] She or her husband may have come from Amdur.

[3] The Polish and Yiddish versions of "got it!"

[4] a schoolboy. Boys were usually enrolled in the Jewish elementary school, the kheyder [cheder], very early, often at the age of three, at the latest at the age of five. See I Always Wanted to Learn: Memories of Heder (youtube.com)

Overheard Conversations

One warm autumn noon, Alter, the teacher, a tall Jew

Page 14

with a short light brown beard and glasses, came to our landlady and asked her:
"What do you think, Sheyne-Tsirl, should I go and wash my hands to eat, or should I fast for the day?"
The wise Sheyne-Tsirl instructed him to do what he thought was right, and Reb Alter did indeed wash his hands to eat.
Later I learned that it was a "fast day". But not one of the regular fast days like "Shivah Asar b'Tammuz" [1] or "Assara b'Tevet" [2] and others, but a special fast day. The rabbis proclaimed it because Tsar Alexander the Third [3] - may his name and memory be blessed - was saved from an assassination attempt on October 17, 1887, but remained ill. At that time, the Russian revolutionaries, then known as "narodovoltses", used a bomb to blow up the railroad in which he was traveling from St. Petersburg to Warsaw.

This terrorist act was the Russian freedom fighters' way of getting back at him for his tyrannical actions and the abolition of reforms to benefit the poor peasants. They also wanted to avenge the fact that he had denied all rights to the Jews and other minority peoples and had organized pogroms against the Jews in Kiev and surrounding towns in 1881.

In other words, Jews had to fast and pray for the health of the Russian tyrant and pogrom instigator...

Incidentally, it is worth noting that Alexander, Lenin's elder brother, also took part in the failed assassination attempt on Nikolai's [Nikolach's] father. He was hanged.

The third conversation I overheard took place on a warm summer morning, in the small store in Aba dem Melamed's long house at the front of Pyaskes Street. I was awaiting my "next conversation" after a tall woman entered. She had black eyes and sadly asked the shopkeeper, who was called Saryekhe Yakov [4] :

15

"Have you heard the news?"
"What news?"
"Four people were hanged in Chicago," was her reply.

As a little boy of four or four and a half, I didn't dare ask who these four people were and what they were hanged for. But in later years, when I was already in America, I found out that these "four" were the Chicago Martyrs. They were labor leaders against whom the enemies of labor waged a smear campaign. They were said to have thrown a bomb at a group of policemen, killing eight of them.

This momentous event is known in the history of the American labor movement as the "Haymarket Affair" [5].
However, the woman who announced the news in the store got the date wrong. The four labor martyrs, Albert Fassons [6], August Spies, George Engels and Adolf Fischer, were actually convicted that summer, but were not hanged until November 11, 1887.

[1] Seventeenth of Tammuz - Wikipedia

[2] Assara beTevet – Wikipedia

[3] Alexander III of Russia - Wikipedia

[4] יקעבֿ סאַריעבע

[5] Haymarket affair - Wikipedia

[6] The name is said to have been Albert Parsons.

The „Choroshtsher“ [1]

Six months later, when we moved to one of David Furye's houses - it was a few yards away, on the same street, but opposite Aba's houses - I was old enough to go to the cheder. Our house was large and wooden, with three rooms on the second floor.

And so I was given away to study with the Choroshtsher dardaki melamed[2] , who had his "school" in a small, dark alley, a side street of the wider Shmuel Shmid's street.
This small alley with its dark gray one-story "palaces" was called "Knup's Gasse" after a Jew had hanged himself in one of the houses there - hence the name "Knup" [knot].

16

The Choroshtsher cheder consisted of a long and wide room with several chambers. About thirty or forty boys were taught the "Alef-Beys" here. I put the word "teach" in quotes because the rabbi [3] used to beat the students more than he taught them.
The " Choroshtsher", a slender Jew in his forties, with a short reddish-blond beard, was, one might say, an " akhzer", a cruel, evil man, who never laid down the whip.

Once, when I came to the cheder early in the morning, I saw a strangely sad picture:
A boy of four or five was sitting on the hard bench, his shirt rolled up over his shoulders to his neck, and his bare buttocks peeking out. Above him stood the melamed with the whip, beating him every time the frightened pupil could not read a word as the teacher had taught him.
But the Choroshtsher was wise enough not to beat the children of the "balebatim", the rich...

The sadistic melamed liked to whip [red] stripes so much that he even beat his own son, Alter, when he was a already a young man. Alter had a noble appearance and wore golden glasses over his gray eyes. Of course, we boys didn't find out why he beat his only son.

The "rebetsn", the rebe’s wife, a Jew in her forties, had black, evil eyes in her broad face. Apparently she was imitating her husband, for she beat her daughter, a grown girl, who always looked a little confused with her disheveled black hair and evil looks...

The Choroshtsherke had another indecent passion: she used the yard as a toilet when the children ran around playing. The group of children were busy chasing each other and probably didn't notice - or they noticed but didn't care.

But I wasn't playing at that moment

17

and I noticed it very well! And she saw me looking... She gave me the evil eye and I was really scared...

I was simply disgusted with the whole environment of the Choroshtsher cheder - with the gloomy houses in the alley where the gutters stank, with the unhygienic conditions in the yard, with the rabbi's whip, with the evil looks of the daughter and the "noble" behavior of the rebetsn.

In addition, Shloyme, the water carrier, an elderly, thin Jew with a yellowish face and a short gray beard, always sat in the vestibule. He complained to everyone that he couldn't sleep because of the bugs that plagued him, and that he couldn't carry the water over the "hosheles"[4]...

In the cheder there was also usually a very badly dressed mute woman who kept shouting "na, na" which was the only word she could pronounce. In short, I decided not to go to cheder anymore. My mother tried to persuade me to go until the end of the semester. But I didn't want to:
"No, Mom, no!" I begged her, "I don't want to go to th i s c h e d e r anymore! I don't want to!"

[1] a man from Choroszcz Choroszcz - Wikipedia

[2] a teacher who taught young children their first lessons

[3] Yiddish „rebe“, the “rabbi” in the sense of a teacher at the Jewish elementary school

[4] Unfortunately, I don't know what is meant by "hosheles". It could be a misprint. Obviously he had trouble carrying the water out over the bumpy lanes.

Student at Aba the Melamed

Since I could already say "ivre"[1], perform a blessing like "hamoytse" [the blessing over bread], and also knew "moyde ani" [the morning prayer after waking up], I no longer had to go to a "dardaki melamed". I was given to Aba, our former "landlord", who was considered a good teacher of the "Khumesh" [Pentateuch] and the "Tanakh"[2], which we called "Svarbe"[3].

My new rabbi, a Jew in his late thirties, heavyset, with a thick, broad black beard, used a strange "didactic" system: he would deliberately mistranslate sentences from the Khumesh or Tanakh, expecting one of the boys to point out the errors.

But when none of them did, he would get up from his chair and start beating the students' heads while shouting, "What fools you are! I led you astray, but you didn't even realize it!" And he would blame them for not using their heads to learn.

Aba's cheder was in the same apartment where we lived: A large, long room with a chamber separated by a white sheet.
Eight or ten boys studied there. Including his own son, Yankele [4],Yankele was a handsome boy with soft, red cheeks and beautiful black eyes. He was blessed with a very pleasant voice. However, he had one weakness: he liked buttered cakes (the well-known Bialystoker round cakes with a hollow in the middle, sprinkled with poppy seeds) [5].

His mother, Sheyne-Tsirl, apparently did not give him enough of this food to satisfy him. So he began to beg from his father's students, but they were not generous and already knew what to say: "Sheli, sheli (what is mine is mine)!"

Yankele, however, ignored the answer, and he knew where to find the "cakes" when the students were absorbed in their studies...
And so scandals broke out; people called each other names, shouted words at each other, and [eventually] Yankele was nicknamed "Yankele kukhn-puter" [butter cake].

But the anger didn't last long, we became good friends and played together. And he remained a beautiful boy with a sweet voice.

19

A few years later, after we had already left Aba's cheder, misfortune struck Yankele. He developed a leg ailment. Dr. Prage was called (a former military doctor who used to drive to his patients dressed in the uniform of a general. Only the epaulets were missing).

Dr. Prage was a specialist in leg disorders. When he saw that his young patient was not improving, the "Doctor General" ordered to go with him to Warsaw. Yankele returned from Warsaw, leaning on two large crutches. He wore a nice plaid shirt and looked even more handsome than before, so he showed off proudly to us.
We were "envious" of him because he walked on crutches....

It didn't take long for Yankele's condition to worsen. He suffered frequent convulsions and passed out from the terrible pain.
Dr. Prage advised him to go with him to Königsberg, Germany. "Maybe," he said, "the doctors there can help him."
But unfortunately, Yankele never came back from Königsberg...

[1] ivre zogn= say elementary prayers

[2] tanakh= the Hebrew Bible, abbreviation of the canonical collection of "Torah-Neviim-Ketuvim"

[3] svarbe= a "mumbled" version of "esrim-vearbe", twenty-four; meaning the twenty-four books of the Tanakh

[4] We later learn that it was an exception for a melamed to teach his own son in his cheder.

[5] Bialystoker kukhn, Bialystoker pletsl, tsebularsh or Bialy= Flat rolls with a golden brown crust and a small depression in the center, often sprinkled with onion and poppy seeds. The dough is made with butter, not oil.

Mordekhay Gimpl

It was a kind of tradition among parents not to leave their child with the same teacher and in the same cheder for more than two semesters. So I left Aba and went to another rabbi named Mordekhay Gimpl. His cheder was in a long, dark wooden house on the densely built Yeshive Street that led from the old cemetery alley down the hill to the wide Khaye-Odem Street.
My new rabbi - a Jew in his early forties, of medium height, with a short red beard and the face of an innocent lamb - was not a hot-tempered man. He never held

20

a whip in his hand and did not scold the students as "fools"...
The cheder, which was also his home, consisted of a long, wide room with three windows facing the courtyard (and it was such a "courtyard!").

The sleeping area was in the same room and was "separated" by a long white sheet down to the floor. In the bed was a crippled three-year-old boy with dark brown eyes. He did not speak and could not stand up. His name was Yosefke.
He lay there looking back and forth with his eyes, but he didn't speak or laugh - a terrible picture of an unhappy boy!

The melamed's wife, tall with black eyes, was heavily pregnant, and we boys "accused" her of eating too much and causing herself a lot of grief.

The rabbi's table was very long, almost from the front door to the windows. Two "kites" ["classes"] sat at the table: the younger ones, from six to nine years old, sat at the very front next to the rabbi and learned Hebrew and the beginning of "Khumesh". The others sat near the door and were considered "Gemore-bokherim" [1].
I, a six year old boy, already became a "Gemore-bokher" here...

As far as I can remember, the first "mesakhte" [Talmudic tractate] we were taught was: המניח את הכד ברשות הרבים [2].
We "bokherim" [lads] did not understand the meaning, and so we used the "theme" for a game: While walking out of the cheder, one of us lay down in the middle of the Yeshive Street - he represented "the jug" - and we walked up to him and gave him a push.
The boy pretended to scream, but we jokingly asked him:
"Why did you do that? Who ordered you to do that? Who asked you to do that?"

But "the jug" didn't answer. "It" laughed…

We realized that we would never

understand the difficult content of the המניח [Hamaniach]. The rabbi then taught us Hebrew. For this purpose he asked us to buy books on Hebrew grammar and "little textbooks", the "מסילת ישרים" [Mesillat Yeshorim] [3] by Mapu [4]. We didn't learn much from this little bit, but at least we understood more than from the "Gemore" Hamaniach.

[Usually], a modest and well-dressed young man, a teacher, came and taught us how to hold a quill in our hands. And in a relatively short time we were able to write an "antvor" (letter). It looked like we were growing into "educated young men".

But the atmosphere in the cheder was oppressive. The rabbi's hungry children were constantly begging us students for a piece of our buttered rolls or goose fat sandwiches [5] that we brought from home. This caused endless bickering in the cheder.

Once I saw a testimony of poverty among the "melamdim" [teachers] of that time, actually in Mordekhay Gimpl's cheder:

On a cold, wintry early morning, the melamed Zusman's eldest son, a ten-year-old boy with vivid black eyes, dressed modestly in a brown coat, brought up a large loaf of black bread and gave it to his father, who was sitting in front.

As he began to cut the bread, three younger children ran up to him and demanded only the top brown crust. The father had to give it to them. He gave the soft parts to his son. The son protested because he wanted the whole piece with the crust. When he didn't get it, the father and son argued.

But the son gave in. Holding his piece of "black bread", he growled, "Just the soft part, just the soft part!" and quickly ran out of the house to his cheder (for it was the custom of the "melamdim" not to teach their own children).

[1] Gemore-bokher= adoloscent boy who studies the Gemore [Yiddish for "Gemara"]. The Gemore is Part of the Talmud that explains the Mishna. Later, on page 24, Leybl reports that he actually became a "Gemore-bokher" at the age of 9.

[2] from Mishna II, tractate Bava kama, chapter 3: " If one person put a jug down in a public place and another person tripped over it and broke it, he is exempt from paying for it. …", see Baba Kama 3:1-2 - Mishna Yomit - OU Torah

[3] Mesillat Yeshorim= The Path of The Upright

[4] Abraham Mapu [1808-1867], known as creator of the modern Hebrew literature, see Abraham Mapu - Wikipedia

[5] There are small spelling mistakes in the book. I think it is not "broyt mit shtolts" but "broyt mit shmolts", which means bread with poultry fat. On page 24 we find the term spelled correctly.

Khone, the Prankster

In this tense atmosphere in the cheder, however, there was also fun. Among the more than twenty boys, there were four who looked like "bar-mitsve-bokherim" [1].
Our teacher called them "the four big goyim" [2]. We didn't know what they were doing in the cheder. We never saw them studying. They sat at the corner of the table by the door and talked.
Apparently, their parents had given them to the cheder so that they wouldn't roam the streets and, "kholile" [God forbid], go down a bad path...

Among these four boys was a student named Khone, who had the voice of a "khazn" [cantor], gray eyes, a red face, and a flat nose. And this Khone, according to his own words, was afraid of evil spirits. Once, when the rabbi, whom he called "Kayom", asked him to go to the grocery store to buy something, he wouldn't go for fear of the devil.

"Rabbi," he asked, "perhaps an evil spirit will get me?"
And a second time, when the teacher asked him to take a little boy home in the evening, Khone again refused and asked again:

"Rabbi, but maybe an evil spirit will get me?"

Many of us boys laughed a lot, but not Khone. He made a serious face, as if he believed in his own story, like a real actor...

Mordekhay Gimpl didn't laugh either, not even a smile. We never saw him smile.

Ten years later, when I met Khone on the street, he was already a tall young man. He was already in America, speaking English, and his first question to me was: "What do you think our former 'Kayom' is doing?"

I never found out

how he came up with the word "Kayom" and I don't know until this day...

[1] „bar-mitsve/bar-mitzvah-bokher“: Boys at the age of 13. When a Jewish boy reaches the age of 13, he becomes a full member of the community, which is celebrated accordingly.

[2] gentiles

The "Rutker"

I didn't study at Mordekhay Gimpel for more than one winter term. My father knew - although he hadn't seen the cheder himself - that the melamed had too large a school. Twenty boys was simply too many for a single melamed to give each student enough attention.

In addition, the unsanitary conditions in the courtyard were simply appalling...

My former rabbi came to visit us at "khalemoyd peysekh" [1] to beg my father for mercy. He should send me to him for one more semester. He cried and complained that he was a "mekhuser-lekhem", a needy poor man without bread. His sick child had died and he had other worries. But it didn't help him.
My father didn't want to change his decision.

And I got a new rabbi, who was known as "the Rutker", because he came from the small shtetl "Rutke", Łomża gubernye [2].

My new "teacher's" cheder was located in a narrow, dark alley to the left of Motl Water-Carrier's Street, in a white wooden house with upstairs rooms. The cheder, however, was not in the usual upstairs rooms with alcoves, but in a square, crooked upper room that protruded from the house and was supported by two long, rusty, square iron girders.

The " Rutker ", a Jew in his mid-thirties, of tall stature and with a blond beard, resembled the "Choroshtsher" not only in appearance but also in his attitude toward the students.

Very often we heard him say, "What fools you are!"

But like the Choroshtsher, he was wise enough not to

24

shout at the children of the rich, among whom were Peretz Amsterdamski and Ayzik Levisnki. Today the first is called Peter Amsterdam and is a chemist, and the second is A.V. Levin, an architect.
Both have lived in Philadelphia for more than half a century.

My new melamed had a wife who could not really be described as "krasavitse" [beauty]. A plump Jewish woman with sad gray eyes in a broad face. She always wore a white bonnet. But she was not a troublesome person. She never beat her fifteen-year-old daughter, nor did she cultivate the "virtue" of the Choroshtsher's wife.

The "Rutker" also had a ten-year-old boy, Shmuelke, with a big head, black eyes, and a pale face. Shmuelke also had the weakness of begging his father's pupils for a piece of bread with chicken lard, a "gribenye" [3], or a sip of kvass.
If a pupil didn't want to share the food he had brought from home, he would beg a second time until the "stingy" pupil chased him away with the words: " Get lost, you pale cow!"

I studied for two semesters with my third teacher. He concentrated on the "Khumesh" and the "Tanakh". He taught us Jeremiah, Job, Mishlei, Shmuel Alef and Shmuel Bet, Melachim Alef and Melachim Bet. We also learned Shir haShirim, Kohelet [Ecclesiastes], Megillat [Book of] Ruth, Megillat Esther, Perek[4] and other contents.
He boasted that his students understood the lessons he taught them. But this was just bragging - a "melamed'ish" boast, if you will - because neither I nor the other students later became "experts" in biblical matters...

[1] Yiddish pronunciation of “Chol HaMoed Passover”: The period of time within the Passover holiday

[2] state-level administrative district (Russian)

[3] „gribenye“. I think this is "gribene", a dish of chicken or goose skin cracklings, see Gribenes - Wikipedia

[4] A "perek", or in Yiddish, "peyrek" is generally a section of a book from the Tanakh or Talmud. It is possible that a subsequent word is missing here, namely what kind of book section is meant.

The "Vishonker"

When I left the "Rutker", I was already nine years old, and therefore old enough to become a "Gemore-bokher"...
And I was given

25

to a melamed who was known among the other teachers as "the Vishonker," because he came from the small shtetl of Vishonk, Łomża gubernye.

My new rabbi was in his mid-twenties, tall and strongly built, with big, black, dreamy eyes. He was a "Gemore" [Gemara] teacher in the truest sense of the word, for he taught only the "Gemore" [Gemara] and gave no other lessons.

He began with the mesakhte [tractate] "Gittin". Whether we nine-year-old boys really learned anything from the content of
" המביא גט ממדינת מעבר לים" [1], I don't know. But the rabbi "hot getreyet zayn best" (to use a "Yiddishized" English expression) [2].
And so he tried to instill the laws in our young minds, how a Jew is allowed to divorce his wife and when a divorce bill is "posl" or not and posl, that means "kosher"...
His dreamy black eyes revealed how annoyed he was that his students had "dull minds" and did not understand the "pshat", the interpretation of the "tnoim" [marriage contracts]. But he also suffered from another annoyance: he was angry with his father-in-law, who had promised him a dowry but had not given it. My fourth rabbi was one of those bridegrooms who were made fun of and about whom they sang:

"Ot azoy un ot azoy nart men op a khosn;
M'zogt im tsu a sakh nadn un m'git im nit keyn groshn." [3]

In fact, his father-in-law, a Gerer [4] Hassid of tall stature, with a long, reddish-blond beard, always dressed in a well-worn kaftan, had given his son-in-law a beautiful wife, one might say a "yefas-toyer" [great beauty], but no "mezumonem" [cash] - for unfortunately he didn't have any.
Neighbors told me that he, my rabbi, had hoped to open a shop with the promised "silver" so that he wouldn't have to continue teaching. But his hopes were not fulfilled...

The Vishonker had his cheder

in an upstairs room with alcoves and a window looking out onto the busy Surazer [Suraska] Street, into the houses of the "yoyreshte" [5].
The apartment was one long room. The "bedroom" was separated almost to the floor by a white sheet, as in Mordekhay Gimpl's house. The rabbi's young wife stayed in this "chamber" with her newborn daughter, who often "made herself heard".
But her crying didn't bother us students, on the contrary, her crying brought a little cheerfulness to the tense atmosphere in the cheder...

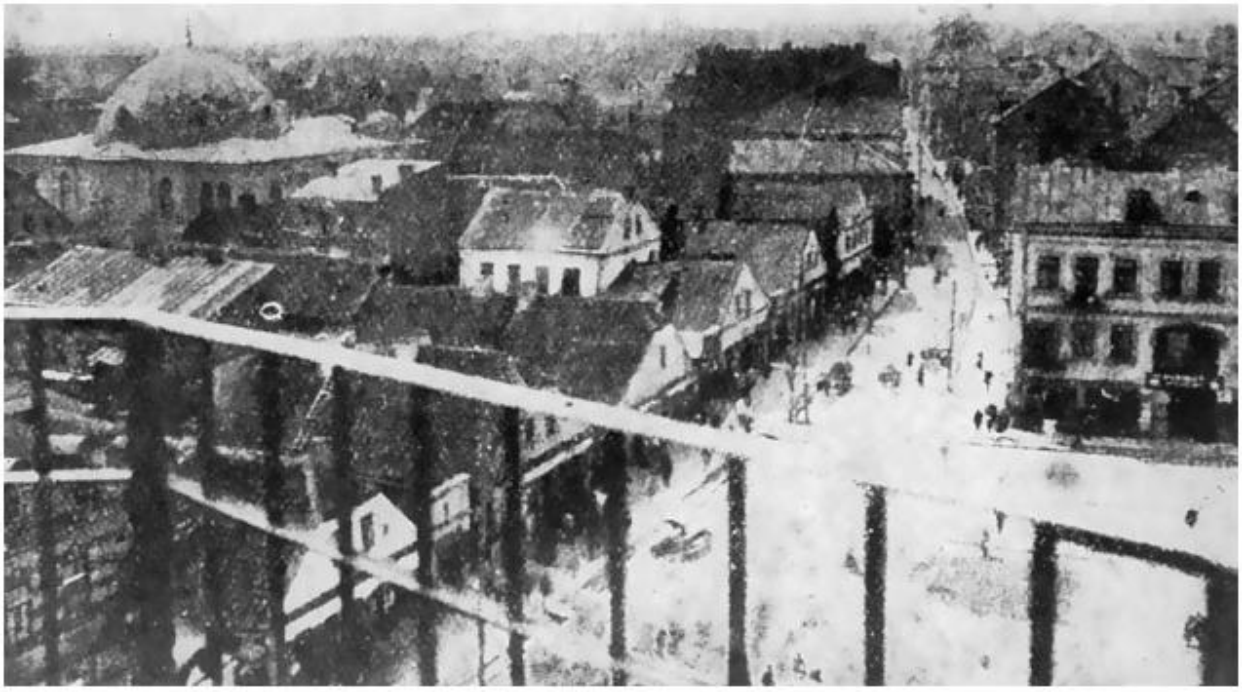
[1] Excerpt from tractate Gittin [plural of the word "get"= bill of divorce], chapter 1, Hamevi get me'medinot me'ever la'iam, " A person who brings a bill of divorce [from a husband to his wife] from a country overseas…"

[2] He tried his best

[3] "This is how you make a fool of a bridegroom; promise him a large dowry and don't give him a penny."

[4] large Hasidic community, originally from Góra Kalwaria [yiddish="Ger"], a town in the Masovian Voivodeship

[5] yoyreshte= heiress



ULICA SURASKA I PODWÓRKO SYNAGOGI

Surazer Street and the synagogue courtyard – A view from the balcony atop the Town Clock; below, length-wise, the famous Surazer Street, which once served as the starting point of the Revolution against the Czar. On the left the large Synagogue may be seen, as well as the adjoining courtyard, which was the center for the religious life of the city.

Source: Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf (wirtualnie.lomza.pl)

The Cholera in Bialystok 1891- and How I almost Drowned

If I am not mistaken, it was in 1891[1]. During the summer when I was studying with the Vishonker Gemore melamed, the cholera epidemic broke out in Bialystok (it was the second one, the first one had broken out twenty years earlier). There was a terrible panic in the city. Many people fell ill and died.

Those who somehow had the opportunity fled the city.
In the schools, however, people studied! The epidemic mainly affected the poor population living in the narrow streets around the courtyard of the shul [synagogue] and in the area of Suraska Street. The police ordered the owners of these streets to whitewash the gutters to prevent the spread of the epidemic.

Once, on a very hot day, our rabbi decided to take us to the forest to study. He, the melamed, was a Gerer Hassid like his father-in-law and wore a long black kaftan and a small cloth hat with a visor.
He led us pupils - with our Gemore's under our arms - into the forest, along some narrow

and wider roads, crossing Mirtshe's and other roads, until we came to the wide Malke die sheynkerke's [innkeeper's] road, which was right at the edge of the forest. Where the forest began, there were two hills, and between these hills there was a long lake where you could bathe. This lake was known as "the second lake" because the first lake was Elye Tsitrinik's [Citrinik's] pond on the Pyaskes.

[1] The outbreak of cholera in Bialystok was in 1893.

How I almost Drowned

As soon as we reached the water, I wanted to show my friends that I was a good swimmer. I decided to swim across the entire width of the lake. When I had swum to the middle, I realized that the "second lake" was much deeper than the first and that I was running out of strength to swim any further. I started to kick down with one foot to see if I could already feel the bottom. Then I could have stood up and rested, but I didn't step on anything. Instead of a bottom, I could only feel water and I started to sink... The water was already above my head.

Then I managed to emerge from the water. I spat out the salty water and
began to swim again, searching for the bottom with my feet, but again
in vain.
And I sank again, and again the water came into my mouth.
It was as the verse goes:
„כי באו מים עד נפש“ [1]

But miraculously, I managed to swim ten steps from the shore, where the water was not so deep. And I was able to get up. By a hair's breadth, these lines would not have been written... For I would have been the victim of my boyish, foolish recklessness.

Neither dead nor alive, I fell on the green hill by the lake and gasped for breath. I was as pale as white paper (or so I was told at the time).
The rabbi

sat with the other students a short distance from the lake and waited for me. The whole tragedy, which seemed to take forever, lasted only five minutes. When the rabbi saw that I was still not with the other students, he came to me. And I told him about the danger I had just been in. He gave me the blessing of deliverance.

After that we stopped going to the forest. Years later, when I would occasionally pass by the "second lake", I would look in horror at the area of water where I had almost lost my young life...

[1] from Psalm 69 [the so-called Prayer in Danger of Death], "[Deliver me, o God, for] the waters have reached my neck“

The Free Kitchen and a Gentile Polish Woman Becomes a Jewish Daughter

During the months when the cursed cholera raged in Bialystok, in addition to my own "experience" of crossing the lake, I witnessed a strange "incident", if one can put it that way:
That summer, as every summer, Jewish university students came to town on vacation - the future doctors, lawyers, engineers, chemists, dentists, and other professionals.

This group had decided to do as much as they could to improve the bitter situation of the people suffering from the epidemic. They persuaded the rich and powerful of the city to open a free "kitchen" where the poor, both Jewish and non-Jewish, could get a full and healthy meal at least once a day in order to become resistant to the attacks of the dangerous cholera bacteria.

They opened the free kitchen in an alley across from the large shul [synagogue]. Unfortunately, I don't remember the name of the alley.

29

I only remember that the alley was lined on both sides with one- and two-story dark wooden houses and a few red "moyerlekh"[1]. In an open window of one of these brick buildings, two students in their uniforms were handing out slips of paper, i.e. tickets, to enter the large dining hall across the street.

I was interested to see how the free kitchen "worked". So I took my schoolmate Yudl Finkelshteyn, the son of Velvel the vapnik [limeburner?], and we both went to see how the hungry ate there at noon. We had already eaten at home.
When we got to the door, one of the "gaboyem" [charity overseers], a slender Jew with a short black beard, invited us to enter the hall to eat with the hungry men, women, and children.

We were reluctant to go in, thinking that it was not appropriate for "balebatishe" children to sit and eat with the poor. But the good-natured charity overseer just dragged us in...and we had to eat too...

There were about two hundred people in the large hall. The July sun shone brightly into the building from three sides, and the atmosphere was like that of a wedding...
The meal consisted of a bowl of barley soup with diced meat. There was also bread and tea, of course. After we had finished the meal, which is called "beef stew" here in America, a strange incident occurred that really amazed everyone present:

From a bench almost opposite us, a middle-aged woman with dark brown, gentle eyes suddenly stood up and shouted in Yiddish:
"Jews! I am a Catholic, Polish peasant. Now I want to become a Jewish daughter, a Jewess!"
She paused for a moment and continued:

30

"Just look, see what the Jews do for their own kind and for our needy brethren. Do "my" Christians do the same? Certainly not!"

As the sated crowd began to disperse, the two charity supervisors approached the Yiddish-speaking Polish woman and, as required by [Jewish] law, tried to dissuade her from changing her religion. But she insisted on carrying out her wish. And so, on the second day, she was taken to see Rabbi Chaim Hertz.

When I left the great hall, I heard a middle-aged, blue-eyed non-Jewish Pole say to another: "If she wants to become one of the Jews, she should become one.“

[1] moyerlekh= Wall or a building made from brick or cement

My Certificates and the "Korelitser"

At the end of the summer, a few weeks before the "Yomim Neroim" [1], the cholera epidemic subsided somewhat and there were no more reports of deaths caused by the terrible disease. The municipal doctor issued an order that the population should not eat cucumbers. And the next day there were piles of the forbidden food in the courtyards.

After Sukkot, I stopped going to the Vishonker. "He's been going to cheder long enough," my father said. He himself was not pious. If the "shabes-goy" [2] didn't come to heat the oven and prepare the samovar, he became the "shabes-goy" himself. My unobservant father once claimed to my very observant mother - the daughter of a Kotsker [3] Hasid from Krynki - that I had already learned enough Judaism:

"Why does he still need the cheder?" he argued with my mother, "he can already read a prayer book well, 'mayver-sedre zayn' [4], recite the Haftarah portion as a 'mafter' [5] , say Kiddush, so what more does he need? He's not going to be a rabbi anyway, and I don't want him

to be a rabbi. We already have enough "noble impoverished people" in the family.
However, my God-fearing mother, who fasted every Thursday, was afraid that once I stopped going to the cheder and started going to [regular] school, I would have to sit without a head covering and, G-d forbid, even eat without [the ritual] washing [of the hands] and the blessing...
So she protested strongly against taking me out of the cheder. But my father decided otherwise and sent me to Yofe's school, the "Yevreyskoye natshalnoye utshilishtshe", where Ilya Davidovitsh Yofe, an assimilated Jew from Vilnius, worked as a "zavyedyvayushty" (administrator).
Therefore, the only state educational institution for Jews in the city was called "Yofe's School", and every student of this school was considered a "Yofist".

Early one morning on "khalemoyd", I went with my father, who spoke Russian, to the uprave (city magistrate), got my certificates, and went to Yofe's school, which was on the same New Town street, to enroll. Yofe, the head administrator, a tall, compact man with a round brown beard and large round gray eyes behind gold spectacles, read my birth certificate and determined that I was too young for the class I was supposed to be in. He explained that since I could already read and write a little Russian (which my older sister

had taught me), he couldn't put me to the "prigotovishkes" (beginners). So I would have to wait a whole year before I could go to the higher class.

Needless to say, Yofe's message was a great blow to me. When we got home, I was very sad.

It had become a serious problem for me and my parents: What to do now? Now that neither cheder nor school was an option –

what then? Sitting at home made no sense either. My father wasn't able to hire a teacher for me.

A few days later, however, the problem was solved. My father happened to meet an old good friend, Todl Segal, who was also a small factory owner and had the same problem: his son, Shiye, was also unable to go to Yofe's school because of his age. So as not to leave him at home, he gave him to a melamed for the time being.
My father followed his friend's example, and I was lucky enough to get a new rabbi, the "Korelitser".

My new melamed was known as the "Korelitser" because he came from the small shtetl of Korelits, Vilnius gubernye. He was a Jew in his fifties, with a broad black and gray beard, glasses, and used to boast that he had once been a merchant in his hometown of Korelits. But when his business went bankrupt, he was forced to devote himself to Jewish scholarship. He became a "good" Gemore teacher in our town.

His cheder was located in a dark two-story wooden house at the back of a courtyard on the wide Povitshizne, directly opposite the "Sobor" (Russian Church). This was a white-painted, imposing building with wings that reached out to the wide Nowolipie, and with a huge "kolokol" (bell) that sometimes rang so loudly that it could have made you deaf. It disturbed our studies...

[1] Yiddish version of Yamim-noraim, the Days of Awe

[2] Non-Jew who performs the domestic tasks that are forbidden to a Jew on Shabbat

[3] see Menachem Mendel von Kotzk – Wikipedia

[4] to re-read the sedre of the week with emphasis

[5] Yiddish version of „maftir“, the person who recites the last reading of the Torah, see Maftir - Wikipedia

The beginning of Nowolipie Street, at the King's Gate – From the Railroad Station, one arrives at the beginning of Nowolipie Street, where, till the war, stood the King's gate, erected in 1897. Nowolipie Street led directly to the center of the city. On both sides of the street were some of the finest structures of the city as well as many public buildings.

Bialystok, Nowolipie Street
[source: Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf (wirtualnie.lomza.pl)]

Wąskie Nowolipie

Narrow Nowolipie – was the principal commercial center. Here was the famous Woroshilsky jewelry store, where many young couples came to purchase their wedding rings.

[source: Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf (wirtualnie.lomza.pl)]

KONIEC NOWOLIPIA

The end of Nowolipie – quartered many other well-known shops in Bialystok.

[source: Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf (wirtualnie.lomza.pl)]

Shnayim Ochzin Be-Tallit [1] and Shor She'nagach et Hapera [2]

My new (and second) Gemore-melamed chose as the theme for us two sections: שנים אוחזין בטלית [1] from the Talmudic tractate "Bava Metzi'ah" and שור שנגח את הפרה [2] from "Bava Kamma".

33

The Korelitser "ongekarelitsivet" [3] us so much with his two sections that it was already hanging out of our throats. "Shnayim ochzin be-tallit" - he explained to us - is when two Jews find a tallit [prayer shawl] and each of them thinks that the find belongs to him alone.

According to Jewish law, two people who find something must share the find (יחלוקו) [4] . But if it is a tallit, you cannot tear it in two without depriving it of its function. Well, well, - and a disagreement, a פלוגתא had already arisen.

We students discussed this question among ourselves: Since the two Jews went together and both found the tallit, what right did each of them have to claim the find for themselves?
Another student asked: Since you can't split up a tallit, would it be "legal" for the two of them to sell the object and share the money?
No one was able to answer these two difficult questions.
But no one dared to ask the rabbi either.

Well, dear reader, to this day I still don't know how the conflict between the two ended over the tallit they found.

The Korelitser also bored us with the "Shor she'nagach et ha'perach" (an ox attacking a cow).
The whole "subject matter" really touched our hearts (...).
And so we waited impatiently for the end of the winter semester. The atmosphere in the cheder was also very oppressive. The rabbis' hungry children were begging from the students. Once I saw two girls standing around their father as he ate his meaty meal, shouting:
"Mat, mat!" (instead of "meat") [5] , but their father pretended not to see or hear anything. After all, he needed his portion of meat to cram into the "incomprehensible minds" of his pupils the "important" topics of the two Jews who had found a tallit, and

34

and the ox that had attacked a cow…
And the appallingly unsanitary conditions in the yard with the open privies were simply unbearable...
In short, we breathed a sigh of relief when the rabbi announced a few days before Passover that the semester was over.

[1] שנים אוחזין בטלית= shnayim ochzin be-tallit

[2] שור שנגח את הפרה = shor she'nagach et ha'pera

[3] A humorous word creation by the author, in which he transforms the name "Korelitser" into a verb.

4] יחלוקו, yachloku= they should divide

[5] The children literally said "feysh, feysh" instead of "fleysh" [=meat]

The Conversion Epidemic in Bialystok

During the few semesters that I had studied with the "Vishonker" and the "Korelitser", two great events occurred in Bialystok that really shook the whole city.

One winter day it was announced that the only daughter of a prominent businessman, Khaykl Grave, from Gumienna Street, had converted and married the municipal doctor Glovatski. And a few months later the whole city was astonished again when it was learned that Reyzel, the beautiful and educated daughter of the "moykher-sforim" [lover of Jewish books] Tykotshinski [Tykoczinsky] on Khaye Odem Street, had also converted and fled together with the "starshi gorodovoy" [chief officer] of Pyaskes and Sukhazer [Suraska?] Streets. He was tall, brunette, with two black evil eyes, poorly educated, and a strict policeman, nicknamed "Cossack". (He was really a Cossack and not a Bialystoker).

As I said, Reyzele's conversion was a painful experience. No one could imagine that a beautiful and educated daughter of a Jew who sold seyfer-toyrim [Torah scrolls], as well as khumoshim [Pentateuch], sidurim [prayer books], makhzoyrim [prayer books for the high Jewish holidays], tefillin [phylacteries], tallits, shofars, parokhes [curtains in front of the Torah shrine], bone-made pointers for teachers, and other religious makhsirim [utensils] -

such a Jewish daughter should adopt the Orthodox faith and flee the city with an almost illiterate, lousy, unlikable goy! ?

35

The two conversions were talked about for a long time. Everyone asked, "Where did Reyzele actually meet the 'Cossack'? Where did he go, and where did she go, and where could they have met?"
Well, it was said that Khaykl Grave's daughter had met Doctor Glovatsky at the "Vetsherinskes" in the house of the assimilated Jewish lawyer Fridberg in "New Town". But where had "Madmoiselle" Tykoczinsky met her "future husband"?
That remained a mystery forever.

The tragedy in the Tykoczinsky family naturally hit the parents and their other children hard. Father and mother sat shiva, as is customary, and during the week the rumor even spread that the old man had committed suicide. People sympathized with the moykher-sforim's family. Therefore, his shop was not boycotted. On the contrary, people bought not only things they needed, but also things they didn't need in order to somehow comfort the parents.

But no one took pity on Khaykel Grave. He was a "miserly gvir[1] ," did not give to any charity, and did not show his face anywhere. Four years later, his converted daughter suffered a great misfortune: her husband, Dr. Glovadski, died. But she could not return to her parents, and the Orthodox Church would not allow her to become a Jew again. She remained "vi oyfn vaser"... [2]

[1] gvir= a powerful, rich, distinguished man

[2] literally, "as if on water", meaning that she remained alone, cut off from her family and her religious roots

ULICA GUMIENNA (na pocztówce: Kupiecka)

Gumienna Street, source: Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf (wirtualnie.lomza.pl)

The Drama and the Song

A group of Russian-speaking Jewish intellectuals decided to commemorate the events connected with the two conversions and wrote a drama together under the name: "Sila Predrasudka" (The Power of Prejudice).
I didn't know what the

36

drama was about. I only saw the flyer that my sister brought home. However, the police forbade the performance of the play, and it is still not known what happened to the manuscript.

Some joker wrote a song about the converted Reyzele Tykoczinsky, which was sung by little girls:

"Reyzele, Reyzele, kum, kum tsurik,
Kh'vel dir geben a sakh nadn,
Un a sheynem yungen man".

"Reyzele, Reyzele, come back,
I want to give you a big dowry,
and a handsome young man."

On "my" Pyaskes, that is, the long Pyaskes, there were quite a number of male and female "meshumodim" [Jews who had converted] in those years.

Two former Jews with long white beards, dressed like beggars, roamed the streets trying to turn the Pyaskover Jews into "goyim"...
On market day, they made their living by going around to the farmers who had come in and begging them for a piece of brown bread, a few potatoes, a bit of cheese, or a piece of pork.

There were "Jews" hanging around with certain badges. They were converts who had taken positions in the government. They used to roam the streets cheekily, and when they saw a box or a chair next to a shop, they threw it away with their foot and shouted: "Nem tsu!" [1]

One of these "noble" converts with a badge on his hat, a lad in his early forties with a brown beard and a bulbous nose, liked to rip the hats off the heads of elderly Jews who didn't want to stand with their heads uncovered when a Christian funeral procession passed by.

But Bialystok Jewry regained some of the "deficits" it had lost in the course of the "conversion plague". In addition to the Christian Polish woman who had made a "religious speech" in the Jewish free kitchen, a Russian, a compact man

37

of about forty with a thick brown moustache, also adopted the Jewish faith. He had settled on the long Pyaskes and waited a few weeks. He was seen going in and out of the house of Aba the melamed, where he had serious conversations with him- my former rabbi.

We boys knew from the conversations we overheard that the "goy" was waiting to have "the operation" performed in secret that would enable him to become a full member of our "Akheynu-bney-Yisroel" [Jewish brothers].

Gradually, Jews and converts learned to live together in peace. The Jews who had adopted another faith came to the Jewish shops and gave something to redeem [2]. The converts no longer tried to turn the Jews into "goyim," and the Jews no longer punished the "apostates" for leaving Judaism and converting to the Christian faith.

A middle-aged convert, tall and with a thin gray beard, used to come to our house. His name was Yakov Shor, and he came from the Kiev gubernye. He was a policeman, first in a small shtetl in the Syedlyitser [3] gubernye, and later in Bialystok.

His wife, a Polish Christian, was a laundress. He used to come to us to take the [dirty] "gret" [laundry] with him and bring it back cleaned. As a result of these two "business" visits, he usually spent several minutes talking to us. Once our neighbor asked him:
"How is it possible that Jesus was born without a father?"
The "old meshumed" [4] - as the people on the street called him - immediately replied:
"על הסלע הך ויוצא מים" [5] (When Moyshe struck the rock with his stick, water came out). And seriously he remarked: "If that was possible, why shouldn't it be possible in the case of my 'Redeemer'?"

The "laundryman" Yakov Shor also recounted an interesting conversation he had with a "sudya", a judge in a small shtetl.
The policeman, Shor, complained

to the judge that there were too many "gvirim" [rich and noble] in the shtetl.
"Moltshi! (Silence!)," said the judge, "if it weren't for the gvirim, you and I would have already croaked of hunger!"...

[1] Take it!

[2] „zey flegn gebn tsu leyzn“, an ambiguous sentence

[3] probably today's Siedliszce

[4] the old Jew who had adopted a different faith

[5] Al Hasela Hoch Vayeitz'u Moyim- he struck the rock and there streamed forth water

Two Prominent Jews are Sentenced to Siberia and to Prison

Two or three years after the "conversion plague", the whole of Bialystok was again shaken by two sensational events: two prominent Jewish "gvirim" were found guilty of two very serious crimes.

The first, Leon Markus, a wealthy businessman from Vashlikover Street, was sentenced to five years in Siberia for whipping his maid, whom he had accused of stealing silver valuables from his house. However, she refused to confess.

In the highest court of the Vilnius Governorate, called "Sudyebnaya Palata" [Chamber of Justice], it was proved by witnesses that Markus had whipped the poor, unfortunate girl while a feldsher stood by and felt her pulse to determine how many more blows her body could withstand...

The "Markus Trial", or "Dyelo Markusa" in Russian, which took place in Bialystok, lasted a full three weeks. The defendant, Markus, had brought the two most important Jewish lawyers - Gruzenberg and Shlosberg from Petersburg - who managed to convince the judges to give the defendant only a light sentence. In fact, he received a mild sentence - five years of "Volnoye Posyelyenye" (free settlement) in Siberia.

The outcome of the sensational trial was long discussed in the city. Opinions were divided. The shameless sycophants of the "gvirish" ruling system, who believed that a gvir could and should commit the greatest of crimes without fear of sanction from the guardians of the law or public opinion,

took pity on the brutal gvir and gave the unfortunate maid a bad name. "Because of such a person", they were angry, "two people have to die"...(the feldsher was sentenced to two to three years in prison).

Others, however, who had a sense of justice, argued that deporting him to Siberia for five years was no punishment at all. He deserved eternal imprisonment for his heinous crime.

There was also talk in town that Markus had suffered no financial loss from his crime. He did big business in Siberia and became even richer. But he never came back to Bialystok.

UL. WASILKOWSKA (Mikołajewska)

Vashlikover Street, source: Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf (wirtualnie.lomza.pl)

The American

The second arrested "gvir" was Yakov Levi, known as "The American". This "American" had an interesting background. As a young man from a small shtetl near Bialystok, he had fled to England in the 1950s and from there to Canada, where he was a "rag-peddler" (a buyer of rags).

Once, when he arrived at the factory where he sold his wares, he realized that soft down wool could be made from washed rags and pieces of cloth that had fallen from the tailor's table and were fed into a ripping machine. The material could be spun and used to weave cheap fabric for winter coats.

This type of "wool" was called "shody". The Canadian rag trader Levi knew that the *Jewish* textile manufacturers in Bialystok would be interested in this type of raw material. (I emphasize the word "Jewish" because the German manufacturers such as Moes, Hasbach, Henrichs,

Richter and Komichov produced expensive fabrics from pure wool).

So he moved to Bialystok with his whole family, consisting of his wife, three sons and two daughters, who all had English names - Harry, Frank, John, Sarah and Lena. There he opened a "shody" factory and after a few years he became a rich man.
Actually, it was not so easy for him to return to Bialystok because he "already was a Canadian (English) citizen"[1] . But since he introduced a new industry to the city, the tsarist government allowed him to become a "Russian" again.

So what was the crime for which the rich shody factory owner was imprisoned? As I learned from my father, who knew him well and often visited him in his office, the crime of the "shody" king was the following:

He had a conflict with a small merchant named "Motke" (I can't remember his last name). It seems that the two didn't get along. My father told me that once Motke got on the "gvir's" nerves so much that he grabbed Motke by the hand and threw him out of the store. But the pressure of Yakov Levi's strong hand made the little ragpicker's hand swell up so much that he sued the important "gvir" for a large sum of money.

However, the rich "shody" manufacturer categorically refused to give him a single kopeck. Levi consulted Moyshe Rubn to find a solution to the problem. Moyshe Rubn, or "Moyshe Ruve" as he was called in the Pyaskes, was a stocky, middle-aged Jew with a red face and a red, close-cropped beard, a real "royter idl" [2] . He was the Bialystoker "tshong-ramer" [3] , but he had another "business" as well:

He was also the intermediary between the thieves and the people who were robbed. He knew all the thieves in the city and where they went to steal. When a major theft occurred, one knew where to turn - to Moyshe Ruve...
This Moyshe Ruve advised the "gvir", Yakov Levi, to slander the plaintiff, Motke, as a member of a gang of thieves, in order to get rid of him once and for all. A "learned" person from the criminal underworld named Yoske Shvarts appeared and wrote the "donos" (the denunciation).

But the slander was immediately exposed, and the investigator, Pyotr Povlov (who was called Peter Fayvl), ordered the arrest of the rich Yakov Levi. The latter had to spend four weeks in Bialystok prison, among all kinds of criminals.

The arrest of the American shook the whole city. People asked, "How could a Jew like Yakov Levi get involved in such a thing? - Such a dignified personality with a beautiful black and gray beard - a great benefactor, a man so pious that he kisses the mezuzot [4], a graduate of the Adath Yeshurun school and private seminaries, and a constant reader of the Hebrew newspaper HaTsefirah (a rarity among Bialystoker factory owners and large merchants)! How could such a Jew commit such a heinous crime and try to discredit a poor Jew whom he had almost crippled?

The only answer outsiders could give was: the rich, powerful man gets away with everything because he hopes his money will protect him. And this was indeed the case. The "Yakov Levi Affair" was played down. And so the Russian proverb "rub govorit, rub maltshit"[5] came true. Or in Hebrew: "כסף וזהב מטה ממזרים"[6] .

These two rich Jews – Leon Markus and Yakov Levi –

tainted the good name of Bialystok Jewry for all eternity with their rotten crimes.

[1] To avoid misunderstandings, please see History of Canadian nationality law - Wikipedia

[2] royter idl= little „Red Jew“, a humorous reference to the Red Jews, see Red Jews - Wikipedia

[3] I don't know whether this is a stovepipe cleaner or a chimney sweep, but the aim seems to be to ensure good ventilation and good extraction of pollutants.

[4] mezuzah, plural mezuzot, see Mezuzah - Wikipedia

[5] где говорят деньги, там молчит совесть= where money speaks, conscience is silent.

[6] Silver and gold purify bastards.

The "Linker Khalfn" [Wrong Money Changer]

But these two rich and mighty Jewish gentlemen were not the only ones who disgraced Bialystok Jewry. On the Pyaskes and on Suraska Street there was a tall Jew who went by the name of "The Linker Khalfn".

This guy knew how to use various strange tricks and barter deals to rob poor peasants of the few hard-earned rubles they needed to buy the things they needed at home.

Once, along with some boys from the Vishonker's cheder, I had the opportunity to see the scoundrel at work on Suraska Street. We shouted: "This is 'khilel-hashem'! A 'khilel-hashem'!" [1]

But the bad guy didn't hear us. (Needless to say, the police got a nice cut of his "legitimate earnings").

The same lousy guy was seen going to prayers on Shabbat. In his long black caftan, with a soft black fedora (ma'aseh rav) [2], with his red face and a little gray beard, he looked haughty, as if to say:
"I'm going to ruin you, and you can't touch me!"
However, he did not dare to enter the large shul. He prayed in a small minyen [prayer quorum] somewhere on Rofisher Lane. [3]

[1] khilel-hashem= Blasphemy, desecration of a Jewish name, public sinning

[2] „great deed“, Apparently he scammed this hat; perhaps also a humorous allusion to a halachic principle of decision-making, „מעשה רב“= "an act is weightier"

[3] I cannot rule out the possibility that this is a typo.

In Yofe’s School

Finally, in 1893, I entered the school of Yofe, where I spent five years. In this school I learned Russian, grammar, arithmetic

43

(up to algebra), geography, Ilovayski's History of Russia, natural sciences such as physics and chemistry, astronomy, "tshistopisanye" (calligraphy), singing in the school choir, which was conducted by the famous Bialystok musician Yakov Berman, who had taught the celebrated opera singer Roza Raiza (Reytske Burshteyn of the Pyaskes) [1] . We also learned "Khumesh" (the Bible in Russian).
Of course, we students needed this subject, which was called "predmet," as much as "a hole in the head," because everyone in the class had completed the cheder, as had I, even before we entered the state school.

But as we found out later, it was an order "from above" that we had to learn the Bible in Russian. The order came from the "Ministry of Education" and was part of the "program" of Russification.
Together with his "chief minister", the sadly famous anti-Semite Pobedonostsev [2] - may his name be blotted out - Tsar Alexander the Third tried to impose the Russian language on all non-Russian Orthodox peoples in Old Russia.

In those years it was rumored that Gemore teachers would eventually be forced to study the Talmud in Russian with their students - if not, they would no longer be allowed to be teachers!

[1] Rosa Raisa, see Rosa Raisa - Wikipedia here you can see another photograph Rosa Raisa - Społeczne Muzeum Żydów Białegostoku i regionu (jewishbialystok.pl)

[2] Konstantin Pobedonostsev, see Konstantin Pobedonostsev - Wikipedia

My Teachers- "Rusakes"

My teachers at Yofe's school were: Mosei Bogdanovitsh Zhmudski, a tall man with glasses, a thick dark brown beard and a serious look; Klyatshko, a tall clean-shaven young man in his thirties, with beautiful big black eyes; Yakov Solomonavitsh Pruski, with dreamy black eyes, frizzy hair; and also the tall gentleman Ilya Davidovitsh Yofe, a man in his late forties, with big round gray eyes behind his "golden" glasses, with a big belly and a round blond beard.

44

All my teachers were graduates of the Vilnius Institute, the "Utshityelski Institute," a public educational institution that, in the time of the tsars, prepared teachers specifically for Jewish schools, which were paid for by the government.
All these teachers who taught us were, as they said, "Rusakes," strict patriots of the Russian language. We never heard a word of Yiddish from them.
We students were afraid to speak Yiddish in their presence...

One of these teachers, or Russifiers, in fact the initiator himself, Ilya Davidovitsh Yofe, went so far with his "Russification" that he often conducted surveys in the classes to find out how many of the students' fathers spoke Russian with them at home. Before the survey, he would give us a "lesson" and explain why the Jews were being persecuted.

"The Jew," he said, "suffers because of his language." (It was obvious to us that he did not dare to use the offensive term "zhargon" [slang].) He continued, "And he suffers because he wears an unkempt beard."...

None of us students raised our hands to answer his question. Only one, a blond boy, stood up and said:
"If my father hears me speaking Yiddish with my brother, we'll both get slapped!"

"Khorosho!" Yofe rejoiced, "Well done, that's the way to do it!" And he urged the students' parents to follow the "good example.

Does God Really Look Like a man?

Personally, I had a couple of run-ins with Yofe. The first time it happened in the "biblyeyski urok",

45

the Bible lesson, when we were learning the first part of the Torah, the verse from Khumesh "נעשה אדם בצלמנו" [1]. He translated it into Russian as follows: "sotvorim tshelovyeka po abrozu podobyu nashemu" [Let us make man in our own likeness].
I raised my hand and asked, "Ilya Davidovitsh, does God really look like a man?"
"Yedinitsu yemu" [a 1 for him], he said angrily, issued me a "1" [the worst grade] in the class register, and warned me never to ask such questions again in the future, "Vperyod takikh voprosov nye predlagai!"
This strict action of my teacher annoyed me a lot, because the "1" lowered my average grade.

[1] Genesis 1:26 [Parshah Bereshit], Let Us *make man* in *Our image…*

How many of you wear tefilin?

Six months later, I had a second run-in with my "educator" Yofe, when he tried to find out how many of his students put on tefilin every day.
The students were in no hurry to answer his "question" because in the courtyard for the school classes, the "bar-mitsve-bokherim.
[13-year-old boys] had discussed that the one who puts on tefilin is a "yold" [fool]. Now, of course, those who put on tefilin did not want to be labeled with such a title, which is not exactly a compliment. But those who did not put on tefilin were afraid of the "rabbi"...

However, there was a black-eyed "yat" [1] in the class who told Yofe that the student sitting on the other bench to his left was putting on tefilin for Shabbat ("po subotam")... [2]

The whole class immediately burst out laughing...
The teacher did his best to hold back his laughter, but it didn't help, he laughed too...

A few minutes later, he became

46

very serious and shouted: "Shut up, shut up!"
But as soon as the laughter died down, I started laughing again. I imagined the image of a young boy coming into shul or his minyan on Shabbat with his tefilin bag, and starting to unravel the black leather straps with the "shel rosh" [3] , causing a ruckus in the prayer house, and everyone there ending up laughing at the boy. ....
Yofe, however, was immediately angry with me. "Look, look," he grumbled, "he's found something to joke about again ('vish nashol nad tshem nasmyekhatsa')!"
And I was afraid that he would write me another "1". But - he didn't...

Some time later we learned that Yofe no longer did such "question campaigns"...

[1] The meaning of the Yiddish word "yat" has changed over time. At the time of the author, "yat" referred to a young boy, later the term took on a negative meaning.

[2] Tefilin are only put on on weekdays, but not on Shabbat and [intermediate] holidays.

[3] shel rosh: Prayer capsule worn over the forehead

I Leave Yofe's School

In 1898, I left Yofe's school and also took off my student uniform, which consisted of a black suit, a belt wrapped around my shirt, and a cap with a leather peak, and became a "civilian" again.

The reason I left school without graduating was because I didn't pass the exam to enter the last class and I was ashamed to sit in the same class for another year.
My father didn't object to my decision: He thought I already knew enough Russian; I could already read a newspaper and a book, write a letter, understand a bill and short legal papers. He liked the fact that I could calculate percentages. He started thinking about a kind of work for me. But what profession

47

could a fifteen-year-old boy with only an elementary school education think of? The answer was: accounting.
However, to be an accountant in Bialystok you had to know German, because the books were kept in German. So my father hired a German teacher for me, "Mr. Beder," a Jew in his forties, tall, with a red face and a short brown beard.
I was not unfamiliar with the German language because, as I have already mentioned, I had spoken to the German non-Jewish "rascals" in our neighborhood in their language since childhood. However, when I started to learn German, I realized that there is a big difference between "speaking" and "being able to read and write"...

For two years the "Beder" taught me the language of Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Moses Mendelsohn and other great Germans. He took me through all of Schiller's famous poems, as well as a textbook with many beautiful stories. In the most

beautiful of them, however, the accursed German militarism was very much emphasized. The "soldier" was praised to the skies in these stories...
He was usually idolized!

After two years, Mr. Beder began to teach me bookkeeping, according to a certain textbook known as "Oto Zyedes" [Otto Siedes?]. He taught me very well to understand the theory [and specialized terminology] of "debit and credit", of "an" and "per", to prepare a "trial balance" every month and a "general balance" every year, as well as other basic accounting rules.
My teacher was known and respected in the town as a good teacher. However, I had a confrontation with him as well as with Yofe. I think it was in the summer of 1900. At that time a bitter and prolonged strike of the girls in Yanovski's

cigarette factory had begun. In the presence of my father, he [my teacher] once said: "Why do the girls have to go on strike? They're going to get married soon anyway, so what's the point?"
And I immediately remarked:
"And if they are going to get married, who are they going to marry - Mordekhay Gordon's son, for instance? They will have to marry a poor laborer, and both will have to fight bitterly for their existence!" (Mordechai Gordon was the most powerful and richest man in the city at that time.)
The two of them, my father and my teacher, looked at each other and smiled...

Troubled Times in Bialystok and on the Pyaskes

In the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, the city fell on hard times. In the fall of 1899, the first major general strike of all textile workers - weavers, winders, spinners, dyers and finishers - took place.

Huge meetings were held in an open square near the "stav" [artificial pond] opposite Berl Polyak's factory.

It was said that 20 to 22 thousand workers took part in such a mass meeting - Jews, Christians, men and women. The strikers' demands were as usual: higher wages and shorter working hours. (At that time, they worked twelve hours a day for a wage of five to seven dollars a week).
Small textile entrepreneurs on the Pyaskes and small factory owners argued at the time that the inspections introduced by the Russian government in the early 1890s had "spoiled" the workers. This was not true.
The inspection had nothing to do with wages or

the number of hours worked. Through my personal contacts with the inspectors from Łódź and Bialystok, I had learned that they had a different function than helping to fight for better working conditions for the terribly exploited masses.

The inspectors, trained engineering technicians, used to inspect the machines and check that they were in good working order to prevent breakdowns and accidents.
If a worker had to wait for materials, the factory owner was not allowed to assign him to another job in the same factory.
The inspectors ordered the employers to build separate toilets for men and women and to provide them with statistics on the production of the factory in question, as well as the number of foreigners working in the factory (in those years, the foreigners employed in the textile industry were Germans and Austrians).

But these officials of the tsarist regime also allowed workers to be punished by deducting half an hour from their wages if they arrived at the factory two minutes late. They also allowed penalties for workers who sat on the toilet for more than ten minutes - or for other trivialities.

As I said, the Tsar's inspection machinery did absolutely nothing to help the oppressed, hard-working masses improve their economic situation. On the contrary, the possibility of punishing workers (which Lenin fought against with all his might for many years before the October Revolution) actually helped to oppress the workers.

Shootings and "skhodkes" in the Woods Next to the Pyaskes

In the early years of the twentieth century, in the woods near the

village of Slabode, not far from my street, there were already skhodkes [meetings] of workers, where speakers addressed the assembled workers and discussed their painful problems. People who were not affected, who were not workers, were not allowed to listen to the speeches and discussions. A guard stood around the "skhodkes" and made sure that no strangers approached. One of the guards, a well-known Polish weaver, once told me in no uncertain terms that the son of a factory owner was not allowed to attend such a meeting and ordered me to leave immediately.
Needless to say, I obeyed...

Police shootings of workers gathered in the woods and on the outskirts of the city were so frequent that they were considered normal events
that few people noticed.

I came to know about a bloody clash between the workers and the police by a strange coincidence: once, when I was walking on Vashlikover Street on a cold early morning, I met my friend from the cheders and Yofe's school, Simkhe Tsfat, a clerk, accompanied by a worker.
When I asked him why he was in such a hurry, he whispered in my ear, "We are visiting doctors and instructing them to treat the wounded from the night shooting. We tell them not

to give the police the names and addresses of the wounded workers they are treating. And if they don't obey us, they will soon regret it"...

Almost every day we heard about strikes and resistance. In the courtyard of the shul, at the beginning of Suraska Street, there were dense crowds of workers every evening - so dense, in fact, that it was impossible to squeeze through and move on...
From the unorganized gatherings in this courtyard of the shul, cries could be heard that the "balebatim" [factory owners]

were exploiting them in an inhumane way. And with raised sticks they threatened to settle accounts with them soon.
In the years of strikes with work stoppages and meetings, the revolutionary workers distributed anti-tsarist and anti-capitalist proclamations. Small factory owners and small textile businessmen who opened the shutters early in the morning found such leaflets in the cracks and crevices. One of these leaflets called on the masses to celebrate May Day. (My father used to tear up such leaflets and wouldn't let me read them. He also tore up a book on the history of the French Revolution).

The first and public appearance of the revolutionary workers and intelligentsia against the Tsar took place in the empty squares of the burned houses, on Pyaskes and Suraska Street, where boys "danced a corridor" and sang: "Daloy samodarzhavye!" "Daloy samodyerzhavets merzavets!" [1]

[1] Something like " Down with autocracy, down with the self-righteous bastard "

The Funeral Procession of the "Bershter" and the Demonstration at Tishebov

One of the greatest manifestations of the unity of the Bialystok workers in the struggle against tsarism and capitalism was the huge funeral procession for the "Bershter"[1] , who had also been an active Bundist and agitator. The funeral took place on a cold, wintry afternoon in 1902 or 1903. The procession made its way uphill from the "Old Jewish Cemetery - Sreet" to Surasker Street. The mourners, men and women, marched quietly and calmly in closed rows, six in a row, across the trampled white snow of Gumienna, Yurovitser [Jurowiecka] and Vashlikover Streets to Bagnowka, the site of the new and third Jewish cemetery.

This was the second

largest funeral in the city. It was estimated at the time that at least four to five thousand people took part in the funeral march. An elderly Jew standing next to me on Suraska Street told me that he had not seen such a large funeral procession since the funeral of the Bialystoker rabbi, Rabbi Lipele, twenty years ago.

Khone, the mortician, complained that he had not been allowed to see the body. [His friends] had buried their Bundist leader themselves and without prayers. One of the speakers at the grave claimed that the revolutionary "Bershter" had not died, but that the "elektrye" [electricity] had gone out of him. From then on, cynics labeled every revolutionary a "Lektri".

The second Jewish workers' demonstration that I happened to see was on the evening of Tishebov in 1902 or 1903. It was a hot evening. The sun was already setting. Jews, exhausted from fasting, slowly dragged themselves home from the bote-midroshim [houses of study] and the minyonim (prayer quorums] to have a bite to eat.

As I stood on the "Long Pyaskes", next to my house, I saw a large, dense mass of people, young men and women, coming from the direction of Slabode. They were marching in closed ranks toward Surasker Street, led by a young blond girl holding an umbrella.
Near the house of Elye Tsitron [Citron], the march suddenly stopped. The marchers in the rear did not know or understand the reason for the stop.
But those at the front knew very well: the leader's topknot had come undone, so she stopped, took the red handle of the umbrella in her mouth, and quickly rearranged her undone hair with both hands. Then the march began again.
When the people came to Zaviker's yard, the "okalodotshnik"[2], Khodorovski, a tall goy with a short dark brown beard and evil black eyes,

appeared out of nowhere and began to shout:
"Razkhodis!" Then the people began to disperse.

But before the whole crowd had gone, a small, skillful boy hit the "kolodotshnik" with half a brick, causing his face to bleed. Holding a small cloth in his hand to stop the bleeding, he shouted in his bass voice:
"Svolotshi! Svolotshi!" [3] and waved his saber...

Outsiders who watched the march admired the courage and fearlessness of the Jewish girl who walked at the head of a workers' demonstration, unafraid of the brutal police and their hidden spies. This is one of the brightest chapters in the history of the Jewish labor and revolutionary movement in Bialystok at the beginning of the twentieth century.

[1] The name may be related to his profession, perhaps he was a manufacturer of brushes or carried out cleaning with a brush

[2] I think he is an officer of the tsarist police apparatus, later referred to as a "kolodotshnik"

[3] "Bastards, bastards!"

Yurowtzer Street – On this street the foundation for the famous textile industry were laid, and here the wealthiest and most prominent citizens had their properties.

Source: Księga-album-pamięci-gminy-żydowskiej-w-Białymstoku-część-1.pdf (wirtualnie.lomza.pl)

The Son of a "Gvir" Leads a Crowd to an Expropriation

On a gloomy, cold autumn evening in 1904, I had the opportunity to see another strange activity of the oppressed and exploited workers on Tiktin Street, a street of rich shops. Almost along the entire length of the street, about a hundred poorly dressed young men with stern faces were marching in pairs along the sidewalk (on the right side) of the street, pushing passers-by along the side and into the middle of the street...

And the leader of this relatively small demonstration was, to my great surprise, none other than Shmerke, Yakov Levi's youngest son, born in Bialystok. He was a lad of twenty, of medium height, with lively dark-browed eyes in a vital face, and dressed in poor

clothes. Yes, it was indeed a big surprise, because I couldn't imagine that a son of such a big "gvir" as Yakov Levi, the biggest "shody" factory owner in the city, would lead a workers' demonstration!

In fact, he kept his head down a bit, but I recognized him immediately, because I had seen him a few times in his father's factory and also in his office on Mazer's Street.
I didn't know where Shmerke was leading the march. I didn't follow him; I was just afraid...

Only a few days later, when I told some of my close friends about the extraordinary demonstration, they told me that the anarchists had planned to raid Muravyov's large and rich grocery store, located on the corner of Vashlikover Street opposite Vilbushevitsh's pharmacy.
And Shmerke, I was told, was the leader of the "avant-garde ". However, the planned raid, or as it was called at the time, "ekspropryatsye" [expropriation], was not carried out because such a daring action required a large mass of people, and only a small number of fighters came.

Students, the Intelligentsia, "Tolstovkes" and Arrests

On the street and on the Pyaskes, university students who had come from other cities and were wearing ordinary student uniforms were particularly eye-catching. (They consisted of blue, knee-length "tolstovkes", a kind of shirts, worn under a jacket with a tasseled, braided belt. The "shirts" were called "tolstovkes" because the great Tolstoy had worn such a "shirt.")
Among the uniformed, bearded and bespectacled "intelligentsia" there were also a large number of scholars in "civilian" clothes. They could be seen on "my" road, on the way to Slabode, the first village one came to.

It was two vyorst [about 2 kilometers] from the town.

Near this village there were large clearings in the forest where trees had been cut down, and large workers' meetings were held there.
The aforementioned revolutionary "intelligentsia" went to these proletarian meetings and made speeches. Their faces showed the seriousness and determination to carry out their mission, regardless of the risk of being arrested or killed in a clash with the police or the "spikes" (as the Tsar's spies and provocateurs were called).

I didn't follow them. I was afraid...even though I had great respect for these great idealists. Highly educated young lads, most of them from wealthy families, were sacrificing themselves for the poorest of the poor, the robbed and oppressed masses, helping them to fight for a better and freer life! Later I learned that many of these noble and learned young lads I mentioned joined the common workers, went to work in the factories, and there, in front of the workers, proclaimed their ideals of freedom.

Once my father came in from the street and told me that he had just heard that a worker in a large leather factory had been arrested for agitating against the Tsar and the factory owner. Later it turned out that the arrested man was a student at the law faculty and had only one year left to finish his studies and become a "prisyazhni poverni," a lawyer who could have practiced in the highest courts of the land.

Neither my father nor I had ever heard of the "narodovoltses" - the sons and daughters of rich, highly educated families who left their universities and comfortable homes to mingle with the "strangers", the poor peasants in the village

56

and the workers in the factories, to teach them to read and write, but also to teach them how to fight against the tsarist regime and capitalism - for a free and better world. The arrested tanner-lawyer was one of these "narodovoltses".

Songs Heard through Open Doors and Windows

In short, the spirit of revolution hovered over the Pyaskes, over Khanayke's Suraska Street, and in the small side streets - in the area that was then densely populated by Jewish and non-Jewish proletarians. There also lived a small number of so-called "balebatish" Jews, small factory owners, owners of grocery stores, taverns, haberdasheries, as well as shopkeepers, overseers, bookkeepers, and other "dependent people", as Avrom Reyzen used to call them.

Three great teachers of Jewish scholarship lived there:
Reb Shmuel Fuks, the father of Abraham Fuks, the former editor of the Hebrew weekly "HaShavua", which was published in Vienna, Austria; also Motye ben HaRav and Reb Akiva (it was said of R‘ Akiva that he knew the "Shas" [1] so well that he could outclass the greatest rabbis).

Through the open doors and windows of the small factories and private homes, Jewish working girls could be heard singing Dovid Edelstadt's songs, such as "S'dreyen zikh reder, s'klapn di mashinen," [2] "Mir vern gehast un getribn," [3] and other Jewish revolutionary songs. Polish working girls sang "Tshervoni shtandard"[4], [and] in Russian, "Vozlye ryetshki, vozlye mosta, vozlye ryetshki vozlye mosta travka rosla"[5] .

These songs were so popular that even [pious] Jewish women wearing a "sheytl" [wig] sang them...
And on Shabbat evening, when you walked through the Pyaskes coming from the forest and Słoboda, working-class girls and boys sang "Vikhri

57

vrozhdyebnye veyut nad nami tyomnye sili nas tlobno gnyedut“[6].

They also sang Gorky's "Solntse vskhodit i zakhodit a v. tyurmye monyey tyemno" [The sun rises and sets, and in my prison it's dark], Nekrasov's "Ukazhi mnye abityel, ya takovo ugla nye vidal" [7] and other freedom songs in three languages. "Balebatish" girls also sang along.
In short, in 1902, 1903 and 1904 the "second half" of Bialystok was dominated by the spirit of revolution (the "first half" consisted of the aristocratic streets, such as Novalipe, Mazer's Street, "Nayvelt" [New World], Gumyener [Gumienna], Yurovtser [Jurowiecka],

Vashlikover, "Nay-shtot" [New Town], Daytshe [German] Street, and the small, narrow alleys around the rich streets).

[1] ש״ס= an abbreviation denoting the six sections of Mishna and Talmud

[2] also known as " Shnel loyfn di reder, vild klapn mashinen“ [Wheels are quickly running, machines are wildly beating]

[3] "We are hated and driven“, beginning of the Yiddish song "In Kamf“.

[4] Czerwony Sztandar, Red Flag

[5] "Near the river, near the bridge, Grass grew near the river, near the bridge", beginning of the Russian folksong „By the River, by the Bridge“ [„Возле речки, возле мосту“]

[6] ″Hostile whirlwinds blow over us, the dark forces are viciously oppressing us″, Beginning of the Russian song ″Varshavyanka“ [Варшавя́нка], ″Whirlwind of Danger″ or *″March Song of the Workers″,* listen to it here Варшавянка - Вихри враждебные веют над нами (youtube.com)

[7] Ukazhi mne obitel', ya takogo ugla ne vidal [Укажи мне обитель, я такого угла не видал] , *″Name me such an abode, I've never seen such an angle“, p*ossibly an excerpt from Nikolay Nekrasov's poetry, "Reflections at the Main Entrance" [or "Musing at the Front Door"]
Николай Алексеевич Некрасов Размышления у парадного подъезда Учить стихи легко Аудио Слушать Онлайн (youtube.com)

The Discussions

But in addition to the songs we heard, the "Long Pyaskes" also featured discussions and debates between members of different political persuasions, especially between Bundists and Zionists ("tsiunim" as they called themselves at the time). These discussions usually took place on Shabbat in the summer, after the meal, or rather after eating tsholent [Shabbat stew] and kugl [pudding].

From the houses deep in the courtyards, boys and girls would come out into the street to talk "politics" with acquaintances.
The revolutionary spirit had even taken hold of the coachmen and carters, who used to curse each other with such phrases as "May a revolution hit you in the stomach" or "May a strike hit you in the gut!".

One such Shabbat afternoon I found myself listening to a debate between a worker, a Bundist, and a "balebatish" fellow, a Zionist student. The latter, a handsome young man, was trying to persuade his interlocutor, a Bundist and carpenter-a tall fellow with reddish-blond hair-

that a separate country in Palestine, or a territory somewhere else, would certainly solve the painful Jewish problem and, consequently, the problem of the **workers**' situation.

The Bundist was in complete disagreement with his interlocutor.

"What good is a country of my own," he asked, "what difference does it make whether I am exploited by a Jewish capitalist in Bialystok or in Jerusalem? How do you know that I won't have to work hard and bitterly for a pittance in a 'country of my own' - just like here?"

And in presenting his arguments, the "Geler Stolyer" [red-blond carpenter], as he was called in the street, reminded his Zionist opponent of Karl Marx's immortal declaration that "the worker has no fatherland" [1] ; that thousands of people in Moscow had to sleep outside in the cold, and that thousands of people in America had to sleep under the bridges, in their "own country".

The Zionist dreamer agreed with him that the worker suffers in all countries. "But", he argued, " after all, it is written: 'כי ציון במשפט תפדה', Zion will be redeemed by righteousness [2], that is, righteousness will reign in "Eretz Yisroel" [the Land of Israel], and it will not be as in the days of Jesse and Jeremiah."

"Well, well, well!" said the carpenter impatiently. "Hardly any of what is written there, and hardly any of what is said there [will happen]. Who is forced to believe all that is written and said there? Only fools believe in all these scribblings and sayings.
And he quoted [to his opponent] a Tanakh saying from the holy books, in which it is said: "פתי יאמין לכל דבר"- a fool believes in everything.

Unfortunately, the young Zionist enthusiast found himself at a great disadvantage. He did not know what to say to his opponent. However, he was surprised to hear

that a simple worker was not unfamiliar with the "black dots"...[3]

[1] Quote from "The Communist Manifesto": "The Communists have also been accused of wanting to abolish the fatherland, the nationality. The workers have no fatherland; you cannot take from them what they do not have.

[2] Isaiah 1:27

[3] The saying expresses with a wink that the Bundist had a deeper knowledge and understanding of the sacred text - which surprised the Zionist very much.

Eretz-Yisroel? – For "Kabtsonim" [Paupers]

As I was leaving the Bundist-Zionist debate, I remembered an "experience" I had with a pious Jew to whom I had sold a "shekel". (My father allowed me to be a Zionist, but a socialist - a fighter against the Czar and against the "balebatim" - kholile [God forbid]!

The Jew, about sixty years old, with a black and gray goatee, could not refuse me, because my father bought goods from him and he was often a guest in our house for a glass of tea. When he took the silver half ruble from his coarse black wallet, he said to me:
"Leybl, so you mean I need Eretz Yisroel [a country of my own]? I don't know! But if the "kabtsonim"[1] from here could be taken there, it would be a **good** thing!"

When I pointed out to him that he says several times a day, "ועינינו תראינה בשובך לציון" [May our eyes behold your return to Zion], and every time on Yom Kippur, "לשנה הבאה בירושלים" [Next year in Jerusalem], my Reb Leyzer-Elye made a disparaging face as if to say (like the Bundist): "Hardly anything that is said there counts, it is just words that are said!".

R' Leyzer Elye's opinion that Eretz Yisroel is only good for the "kabtsonim" made me think of the story of two Jews who were traveling by train. When it was time to daven the "minkhe", one asked the other where "East" was. The other passenger replied: "You fool! How can you know where east is on the train, when the rushing train is turning in all directions every minute?" And he told him that the east on the train was where the "pekl" [luggage bundle with his belongings] was...

Yes, my father's friend, the merchant and the Jew on the train

were right: he who has a "pekl" (property or a secure income) does not go to seek his fortune in other cities or countries. A wealthy Irishman in America will not leave to settle in Ireland; a wealthy Italian in America will not go to Italy; a Pole will not go to Poland; and a Jew who has his "pekl" will not leave America and emigrate to Eretz Yisroel, even though the historic land is dear to him. He must turn his eyes to where his "pekl" lies...

(When an Irish prankster talked about emigrating to Ireland, he said, "May houm iz wher ay get may tri bips"-three meaty meals).

[1] kabtsn, Plural kabtsonim= Poor person, have-not, but can also mean miser.

Mass Arrests and Terror

In the weeks of 1903 and 1904, a large scale counteractions began to rage in Bialystok. The tsarist government sent a new police commissioner, Metlenko, to the city, replacing the former police commissioner, Malyevitsh, who was known in the city as "not a bad goy and a good taker[1]"...
The new police commissioner, tall and broad, with black Tatar eyes, a former colonel, had been sent to Bialystok specifically to suppress the workers and the revolutionary movement.

His first brutal act was to break up the workers' meetings in the yard of the shul. In these meetings, the workers of the cloth factories discussed their problems: the suffering they were enduring at the hands of their employers, the balebatim, and their supporters, the masters. The meetings, the "skhodkes" in the forest, were no longer heard of. Almost every day there were arrests of workers and intelligent people so that the white, two-story

prison was full of "politicals". Among the detainees were my two close friends, Zeydl Khabotski and Heshl Halpern (the latter, a dentist who had studied in America and lived in Chicago half a century ago; he died in Los Angeles in 1955; Zeydl lives in New York).

The mass arrests of activists, both workers and intelligentsia, were the result of criminal spies and provocateurs who infiltrated revolutionary organizations and later turned their leaders over to the police.

These "shpikes," as the spies were called at the time, even joined nationalist organizations such as Poalei Zion [Workers of Zion] and the "Socialist-Territorialists" ("s.s.ovtses"), although the Bundists and anarchists called the members of these two organizations "shtroyene revolutsyonern" [straw revolutionaries]...

In those years many people were suspected of espionage. Three Jewish feldsher were suspected - Shloymeke and Nokhem Ozder from Suraska Street and Turek from the Pyaskes. They were said to have given the police the names of the wounded workers they had treated after a shooting in the woods.

One of the suspects was the owner of a small pharmacy, Rakovshtshik, on Suraska Street. It was said that this man, Rakovshtshik, learned the names of the wounded and injured fighters from his innocent customers and handed them over to the "okhranke" [the Russian secret service].

I knew the suspected "pharmacist". A slender Jew in his fifties, with evil black eyes. His relationship with his customers, mostly poor people from Suraska Street and the Pyaskes, was insolent and brusque.
Once, as I entered his store, I overheard a woman asking him how to use the ointment or medicine she had

bought from him because she couldn't read the instructions. His curt reply was: "You can throw it out [of the window] for all I care!"...

This person, Rakovshtshik, mad with arrogance, used to walk the poor streets in his black cape with an expensive collar and hat made of Karakul sheepskin.....
He lived lavishly. Neighbors wondered how he could have such a high standard of living given his low income from the small "pharmacy" where he had products for "three pennies" ...

Someone else was also suspected of spying for the Czar's "Security Agency". This was a person who had come to the city from Slonim. His name, as far as I remember, was Marmlyevski. He was a tall Jew in his fifties, with a round black and gray beard. He was an assimilated Jew - he spoke only Russian.

A few months after he arrived in Bialystok, he opened a bookstore on German Street, next to Borekh Lipshits' wine shop. [It had a] library with a table and chairs, so you could read there.

But it didn't take long to find out that the "bookstore" with the "tshitolnye" [reading room] was nothing more than a trap to deceive progressive workers and intelligent people. He kept Marx's works and other revolutionary writings in his shop. He spied on those who read socialist literature and betrayed them to the Tsar's secret police, later known as the Okhranke [Okhrana].
How many victims fell to Marmlyevsky's nest of spies was never known. But the library was boycotted. Parents strictly forbade their adult children to go to this

"cultural center". My friends Heshl and Zeydl and I never went there.
After three or four years the bookshop with the reading table was closed. The owner obviously couldn't make a good "biznes" with it.

But the "clever" spy Marmlyevsky was not lazy. In cooperation with the municipal "sudya" [judge] Vedyenski, he organized a "ladzh" [association], which he gave the name "obshtshestvo vzaoymnovo vospomozhenye" [mutual aid association].
This, of course, was also a spy organization into which intellectuals and progressive government officials were lured and then handed over to the gendarmerie.

The success of the new "enterprise" was unknown. Its activities were conducted in strict secrecy.

[1] Presumably also in the sense of bribery

The First Terrorist Action- Mendl Kolner

The whole of Bialystok heard about the first terrorist action of the revolutionary workers. It was on Shabbat evening, a week before Passover in 1901, when Mendl Kolner, a "loynketnik" [a small textile entrepeneur], was found stabbed to death as he walked from Zaviker's yard to the other Pyaskes. It was later said in the town that Mendl Kolner, a tall Jew in his fifties with a broad dark brown beard, was one of the "loynketniks" who had overheard the weavers' and winders' conversations about revolutionary activities and then betrayed them to the police.

A few weeks after Mendl's death, I met Nokhem Esterkes, also a "loyketnik," actually

in the same Aleksandrovitsh street, a few houses away from Mendl's factory, and he told me that the [revolutionary] gang had been knocking on his shutters for half a night, threatening him with the words:
"Mendl couldn't eat the "alkes" (dumplings) anymore, and you won't be able to eat the blintzes!"
The threat was not carried out.

Avreml Parizher

A year later, on the second day of Passover, an attempt was made to kill the rich "loytketnik" Abraham Kahan (known as "Avreml Parizher") in the great shul [synagogue] of the city. I was in the shul at that time, in the big "cold" shul. When I went outside to "study" a bit, I saw Avreml standing at the glass door in the "palush" [entrance hall]. He was holding a white cloth to his right eye, which was bleeding. Jews in prayer shawls could not approach him, but his father-in-law, a thin elderly Jew with a pointed gray beard, came running out of the shul, and when he saw his son-in-law holding his bleeding eye, he asked him what had happened.

"Avreml Pariszher is still alive!" he replied in his strong bass voice, and repeated, "Avreml Parizher is still alive!"

Outside, next to the shul, a number of young people were standing in groups talking about the assassination. I couldn't hear what they were saying because I couldn't get close to them. Once again, I was just scared...

The man who was nearly stabbed, Avreml Parizher, a rotund Jew in his fifties with a broad black beard and large black eyes in his full face, was both a "loynketnik" and a lender. He lent money to factory owners, from whom he took orders for weaving.

65

He had no children, so he had plenty of time to devote to community activities. He was an active member of many of the charitable institutions of the day and was "everywhere". For this reason, he was considered a philanthropist. However, to his weavers, winders and other workers in his factory, Avreml was anything but a philanthropist. Among the weavers, he was known as a "bad employer. There were frequent and long strikes in his factory, but not all of them were won.

If you came to Gumienna Street, to the "birzhe" [1] of small manufacturers and loynketnikes, you would often hear:
"There's another "statshke" [strike] at Avreml Parizher's". And it was said that the rich "loynketnik" was a lousy person. He always betrayed the more determined, more militant strikers to the police. That was the talk of the working-class circles.

[1] birzhe: stock market, stock exchange

The Shooting at Volobrinsky

Another act of terrorism was perpetrated against the bad Jewish "balebatim" [employers], who did not want to meet the workers' just demands for higher wages and shorter working hours, and where long, bitter struggles took place. It was Mr. Volobrinski, the owner of the largest printing house in the city and the largest in the entire Grodno Gubernye.

The attack took place one summer evening in 1904. Our neighbor, Moyshe'ke Furye, who worked there as a "naborshtshik" (typesetter), told me personally all the details of the assassination attempt on his "balebos".

"It was," he began, "about 5 o'clock in the evening. Two young people came to the printshop.

66

Armed with revolvers ('shpayers' we called them then), they went to the 'balebos' and, shouting, 'You vile exploiter, you bloodsucker, you filthy dog!' they fired two bullets into

his hand. Madame Volobrinski, who heard the shots and saw her husband's bleeding hand, shouted hysterically to the stunned workers:
'Robbers!'

We took off our aprons, stopped working and went home.
(Both Avreml Parizher and Volobrinski later recovered from their injuries.)

A Bullet for Police Chief Metlenko

The "boyevoye organizatsye" [Combat Organization], which consisted of members of all the revolutionary parties-even the "Poalei-Zion" and the "Territorialists"-had not forgotten the "Great Lord", Police Chief Metlyenko. As mentioned above, he had been sent to Bialystok to "bring order" and to try to quell the growing revolutionary fervor of the hard workers and the masses.

One spring evening in 1902, as he was walking along Tiktin Street, a young boy shot him in the armpit. The boy had come out of a very narrow alleyway that connects Khaye-Odem Street with Tiktin Street, the street of fancy shops that starts from the wide Novolipe [Nowolipie], opposite the big church, and leads to the town clock.
According to the report in the "Bialystoker Listok [Leaf]", the wounded man ran after the shooter and tried to catch him. But the brave boy was apparently faster than him and hid in one of the small Yeshive Streets.

Nobody, not even the police, took the

shooting of Chief Metlenko to heart. He was an evil man. He had blamed the lowly policemen for not helping him to carry out his bloody mission. He failed to arrest the leaders of the revolutionary parties and the terrorists could not be caught.
It took him three months to recover. But he did not stay in Bialystok. He was never heard from again.

Before and After January 9, 1905

After the shooting of Volobrinski and the police chief, a hunt began for the hard-working masses and the intelligentsia, and right-wingers and left-wingers were arrested, simply anyone who was suspected of being a "parteyner" - a combatant.
The atmosphere on the Pyaskes was oppressive. Jewish parents lived in constant fear that one of their children might be arrested and deported (many were arrested and deported to Siberia).
We never found out how many victims were affected by this witch hunt, because there were no official trials for those who were arrested and deported.
It was said at the time that they were sent "Administrativnye Poryadkom", i.e. on the orders of a senior police officer or a colonel of the gendarmerie.

Lawyers for the detainees were not allowed.

The autumn days of 1904 were truly gloomy. The sun was barely visible in the sky. Jews and non-Jews on the Pyaskes and in the side streets felt depressed. Raids were carried out in the middle of the night, during which innocent young people were torn from their beds and sent off to unknown destinations.
Fathers and mothers

68

ran to Khayim, the son of Velvel the Sheynker [innkeeper]. Khayim was a "khadatay" [petitioner]; he had access to the "natshalstvo" [authorities] - with a bribe, of course. They asked him to do something to save their innocently arrested children from the clutches of the police.

The "Bloody Ninth of January 1905"

Well, a few months later came January 9, 1905, which would go down in the history of the Russian Revolution as "Krovovoye Voskresenye" ("Bloody Sunday").

On that day, the traitorous Christian priest Gapon led a demonstration of about a hundred thousand workers, peasants, and intellectuals to the Tsar with a petition to give the people more freedom and better living conditions.
But instead of the delegation being received, the whole huge crowd was hit by a hail of bullets from the soldiers of the Preobrazhensky Regiment, killing 248 people and wounding thousands more.

As a result of the murderous action of the bloody Tsar and his henchmen, a few days later the workers and masses of all Russia responded with a general strike that lasted for three days. Of course, Bialystok was not excluded from the strike.
Large "apishn" (posters) were pasted on the poles and fences of Pyaskes and Surazer [Suraska] Street with the following Russian inscriptions
"Treboyem svobadu slova, svobodu pyetshati, svobou sobranya i nyeprikosnovenosti imeni i zhilishtsha" (We demand freedom of speech, freedom of printing, freedom of assembly, and the inviolability of man and his habitat).

And the poster in Yiddish read:
"In the beginning was the deed - Goethe".

69

It was said that this appeal, quoting the German philosopher and playwright Johann Wolfgang [von] Goethe, had been issued by the anarchists, who believed in the "propaganda of the deed" [1], which included general strikes and terror.

During those three days, everyone went on strike: workers, "prikaztshikes" [merchant clerks], bookkeepers, even "izvoshtshikes" [wagoners] and coachmen. The latter left their empty carts and unhitched their horses in an open space between the German graves and the small "vodoprovodne" [plumbing hut].

Sitting on the carts, the wagoners held their meetings, where they discussed their own problems and demanded higher rates from the manufacturers and wholesalers, depending on the weight of the load and the distance to the place where the goods were to be transported.

On the street, that is, in the city center, opposite the town clock and Gumienna Street, it was lively and cheerful, the shops were closed and everyone was outside. People came from all corners of the city to hear the news. People felt very festive even though the weather was not favorable. The sky was dark gray and the ground was covered with trampled, dirty snow... But the working masses ignored the bad weather.
They rejoiced that the revolutionary workers movement had succeeded in calling a general strike throughout Russia that could overthrow the tsarist regime.

[1] see Propaganda of the deed - Wikipedia

The "Konstitutsye Konsiputsye" [Constitutional conception] Manifesto

On the third day, a rumor spread through the streets that the Tsar had issued a manifesto - with promises.

70

People were rather joking about the "manifesto," which others considered to be a constitution. Yakev [Yacob], the merchant's clerk from the Pyaskes, who was standing at the corner of the second Gumienna Street, walked up to a gathering of people. Yacob was a tall, elderly lad with wise, plum-shaped brown eyes, and he said to those gathered:
"Jews, we already have a constitution. They will soon want to approve it without permission; they will soon be able to fleece us if we don't have a plan."
As expected, the manifesto was a camouflage, a bluff. A few weeks later the following song was sung:
"Tsar ispugalsa dal manifest, myortvim svobodu zhivikh pod arest." (The Tsar was frightened and issued a manifesto: "Freedom for the dead and prison for the living").
On the fourth day the strike was over. Shops were open again, coachmen were back on the streets, wagons were transporting goods again, and life returned to normal.

The Cossack Pogrom at Passover, 1905

As we already knew, the manifesto came to nothing. The tsar‘s executioners were determined to crush the revolutionary movement in Bialystok and other industrial cities throughout Russia.
Since [the regime] had no confidence in the police, who were already tired of searching for the leaders of the strikes and demonstrations, and since they could not use soldiers, because among them were the sons of oppressed minority peoples, such as Jews, non-Jewish Poles, Ukrainians, "Latischen", Gruziner [Georgians], Armenians, Litviner [non-Jewish

Lithuanians], and other limited patriots of the "Father-Tsar“, [the regime] sent a whole battalion of Cossacks (real Russians) to the city, on whom

71

"one could rely“…
The whole battalion of Cossacks stood somewhere behind the city, but they appeared on their horses in the streets and alleys of the poor, one by one or in groups of two, casting angry glances at the shopkeepers and passers-by as if to say:
"Watch out, we're here! Be obedient, don't move, and don't talk [badly] about our dear Father...otherwise there will be the whip, or perhaps even worse - the gun"...

But the "task" of the Tsar's "most faithful" was not only to walk the streets of the poor and frighten the population, but also, and above all, to break up workers' meetings inside and outside the city.

One evening, a Cossack on horseback tried to break up a large gathering of workers in one of the alleys of the shul's yard. Without warning, a Cossack "hero" threw his "leaden nagayke" [1] at the assembled workers. But suddenly someone from the crowd fired. The [well-aimed] bullet hit the Cossack and he fell dead from his horse.
It was said in the city that the shooting of the Cossack was the third act of the "propaganda of the deed," or rather a "direct action," for which the anarchists were agitating in those years - to take revenge on the tsarist hangmen who'd shed the blood of the workers.

[1] During the tsarist era, lead balls were sewn into the "nagaykes" [whips], which led to serious injuries

The Provocative Funeral Procession

Three days later the shot Cossack was buried. He was carried on a bier with his face covered. From the "Letshebnitse" [hospital] on the wide Novolipe [Nowolipie] Street, next to the "Tsar's Gate", the dead man was carried all the long way to the Russian Church on the corner of Povitshizne Street.
In the front were

72

high-ranking military officials, such as generals, colonels and officers, and in the rear were detachments of soldiers and Cossacks. I happened to witness the funeral procession. The fact that the shot Cossack was carried with his face covered was undoubtedly seen as a provocation by all the spectators [1]. While I was standing in a group of people on the cemented pavement in front of Alter the pharmacist's shop, I heard people whispering about the danger that could arise from this funeral procession.
And Alter himself (the son of my former "Choroshtsher" teacher) whispered softly in my ear: "It doesn't look good. We are in danger. He told me to go home: "Go home, Leybl, go home as soon as you can!"
I complied.

[1] It is known that the Cossacks served as a kind of "watchdog" of the tsarist empire and were often seen as a symbol of tsarist rule. As a result, covering the face of a Cossack corpse was probably interpreted as a kind of political protest against tsarist rule and perceived as a provocation.

Unfortunately, What We Expected Happened!

Shortly after the funeral, on the second or third day of "Khalemoyd Peysekh"[1], the Cossacks began to rampage through Bialystok on a large scale. In the late evening hours they attacked the workers' quarters on foot with their "bleyene nagaykes" [whips with lead balls], grabbing and murderously beating innocent people; men, women, Jews, Christians, and whomever they found alone - for they were afraid of more than one person.

No one was spared. I myself almost became a victim of the Cossack murderers. Late in the evening I was walking past the German graves when a small " Nicholas' hero " came out of a hiding place and began to chase me. But fortunately I was faster than him. His whip only caught my umbrella and broke it.

73

I still don't know where I got the strength to run faster than the Cossacks.
The Cossack rampage, or as the newspapers later called it, "the Cossack Pogrom," continued throughout the second half week of Passover. People were afraid to go out into the streets. They were literally confined to their homes.

Protests against the murderous Cossacks came from all walks of life in the city. The Bialystok newspaper "Byelostoksi Listok" strongly condemned the colonels and officers for not keeping their Cossacks under control. Committees of workers and ordinary people went to the synagogue and the "Polkovoye's Bes-Medresh" and called on the wealthy citizens of the city to go to the chief of police and telegraph to the governor to get him to stop the Cossack attacks on innocent civilians. The protests were effective.

(Dear reader, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that the Cossacks, about whom it is customary to say: "I would rather look at a regiment of Cossacks than at you", or that "even a Cossack can blush with shame", have nothing in common with those former murderous Cossacks who have fallen into oblivion, just as Nicholas the Last and his bloody pogroms and oppressive regime are no longer remembered).[2]

[1] the intermediary, non-yontev days of the festival of Passover

[2] I have translated this somewhat difficult to understand paragraph of the author relatively freely. In general, it should be remembered that "the Cossacks" have always been a very diverse and disparate group of people, with a very varied history, who also were misused as "pawns" of power interests.

My Own Crisis

During the four to five years of turbulent times that Bialystok went through, I had my own crisis: I couldn't find a job. I had graduated in accounting theory, so I also had a good knowledge of Russian, German and arithmetic. But I just couldn't get a job.

74

I could do the bookkeeping for my father's business in less than half an hour a day, but the rest of the time I had nothing to do, which earned me the name "Balebatisher loafer", and this annoyed me greatly. A Russian proverb says:
"Ot prazdnosti roditsa mnogo gorya i stida" (Laziness leads to much suffering and shame).
And I myself realized how that felt...
So I tried my luck in Königsberg, Germany, where I went without my parents' knowledge - in other words, I ran away!

In those years, Königsberg was home to Jewish importers of grain and flax, and exporters in herring, sardines, and other fish. These importers and exporters employed bookkeepers who had to speak both Russian and German. I hoped to get a job there with one of the business people who traded with foreign countries. I had a friend there, Max Kalinovitsh. He promised to do his best for me.

After safely crossing the border through Suavolk and Filipove, I arrived in the second largest city in Prussia one fine morning in October 1902. But before I had a chance to look around, a scoundrel who had a quarrel with my "baleboste" [landlady], Mrs. Sidelski, informed the police that she was illegally letting in boarders who had entered the country without a governor's passport.
Half an hour later I was already a "guest" in the police station and spent a night among thieves, drunks and other outcasts, sleeping fully clothed on a hard wooden "sofa", without a pillow or blanket...

On the morning of the second day, I was escorted by two "guards" (wearing round brass hats with a candle-shaped top) to the railway station

75

where I was to catch a train to Prostken. While I was waiting for my train at the station, a tall policeman with a thick dark brown moustache and a leather whip came out of the "police station" and warned me not to come back to "his" town. If I did, I would get "this" - and he held his whip in front of my nose.

"Speck" - What Is It?

The train to the border town of Prostken was late, so I had to wait about an hour and got very hungry. I asked my "minder" if I could get something to eat.
"Are you asking for Speck?" I was asked by the same "Long Prussian" (in Königsberg a slim German was called "Langer Preuße", Long Prussian).
"Speck?" I asked him, "What's that?"
I really didn't know the meaning of the word. I hadn't even come across the word "Speck" in my German classes.
"Pork," was his answer.
I gratefully declined the meal.
"Ah, a Jew!" he grumbled, "a Jew!"

Since I was so hungry, and the "noble" Germans wouldn't let me out on the street to buy something to eat, I was getting desperate. But just then Mrs. Sidelski arrived with a cooked lunch. She actually kept me alive. This Lithuanian-Jewish Mrs. Sidelski, middle-aged with dark brown eyes, limping on one leg, childless, was like a caring mother to all the poor people who came to the famous hospitals and clinics of Königsberg for rehabilitation,

or were waiting for relatives to contact them from America. If they paid for her board and lodging, that was all right with her; if they didn't, that was all right too. She never admonished or pressured anyone, she was a rare good person!

Finally, a gendarme, also wearing a metal cap with a pointed tip, led me to the train, put me in a wagon, and warned me, just like his colleagues from the police station before, not to return to "his" city - that is, not **without money** and a governor's passport. And so I was deported (in German "ausgewiesen") from the city of Königsberg, which at that time was known throughout the world as a medical center, with its famous hospitals and professors. It was also the hometown of the world-famous philosopher Emanuel Kant and other great personalities.

Before the train left for the Russian border, I looked again - for the last time - at the large group of very tall, gray, narrow, square, windowless buildings. These were the " Speicher", warehouses where grain and flax from Russia were stored before being shipped to England and other countries.

Königsberg, „Promenade am Münzplatz“, unknown author, gemeinfrei, source: Schlossteichpromenade (Königsberg) - Königsberger Schlossteich – Wikipedia

Königsberg, Speicherviertel, unknown author, gemeinfrei, source Speicherviertel Königsberg - Hundegatt – Wikipedia

In Prostken and Grayeve [Grajewo] [1]

And here I was, in the small German town of Prostken, right on the Russian border. On the other side is the Russian border town of Grajewo. An agent, a "kontrabanshtshik" [smuggler], picked me up and took me across the border. Together with four other immigrants, we walked for hours in pitch darkness until we came to a small river with knee-deep cold water, which we had to cross until we reached the small shtetl of Shtshutshin [Shchuchyn], Łomża gubernye [governorate].

77

And from there we were taken to Grajewo, the place from which people usually traveled to Germany and back (with governor's passports), and where freight trains from Germany arrived and goods were transported from Russia to Germany. The big station was noisy. The inhabitants of the two border towns traveled back and forth with "pul-pasikes", i.e. half passports. (In those years, the two governments made an agreement that those who lived near the border could enter Germany or Russia with these "pul-pasikes" and stay there for 30 days).
At the buffet, you could see a Prussian gendarme and a Russian gendarme toasting each other. The former, with his nickel helmet with a pointed tip, said to his Russian colleague: "Na zazadravye!" (instead of "nazdorovye" [Cheers!]), and the second replied: "Prust!" [instead of "Prost"]. (It was well known in both towns that the gendarmes earned quite a few extra roubles and marks from the constant smuggling of goods and people in the area.

[1] In his book „As It Happened Yesterday“, Yosl Cohen also describes in detail how, with the help of an agent, he crossed the border, mentioning Grajewo and the small town of Prostken. The chapters starting on page 286 with a few photos of the border crossing can be seen here .

Train station in Grajewo, author: Mario C, CC BY-SA 4.0, no changes made, Dworzec Kolejowy w Grajewie - Grajewo train station - Wikidata

Back Home- The Same Problem

When I returned home, I had a good rest from my "experiences" with the German police and the smugglers who had led me along dangerous paths and robbed me...

I also awoke from my sweet dreams of becoming a "German" or at least spending a few years there and returning to Bialystok as a "civilized" person. After all, I had liked Königsberg from the very beginning; I had walked through the rich, clean streets of the city, had seen how the streets were cleaned with a huge round hard brush driven by an electric motor. I had also seen carriage drivers

78

in top hats reading newspapers or magazines while sitting on the coach-box- something I would never have thought possible in old Russia- and I had seen people behaving nicely toward each other. A few weeks after my arrival, however, I had also seen, behind the beautiful boulevards, some dirty streets with sinister buildings, yes, also a large number of "bufkes" (crooks, ruffians, and other sinister persons).

And What's Next?

Unfortunately, after I had rested from my "vacation", the same problem remained: where would I get a job? My father's business was going downhill and there was nothing he could

do for me. I had to find a job! I searched, inquired, asked friends and acquaintances if they knew of any job openings.

But there was nothing. The chances of getting a job as an accountant in Bialystok were very slim. The few ten large manufacturers of cloth and "shody" employed older people as accountants who had worked for them for years. Small manufacturers did not need "scribes"; they did their own bookkeeping. However, they could not find anyone to fill the position of merchant's clerk. This job required climbing a ladder, taking heavy "keyklakh" (rolls of cloth) down from the high shelves and carrying them up again. This kind of work was not for the strength I had.

But what was I to do now? How much longer should I go around alone? מה יהיה התכלית? (What would be the result)? The friends advised me to go to Łódź , the second largest textile center in the world (Manchester, England;

79

Łódź , Poland; Fall River, America).

My friends were convinced that I would make a difference in Łódź , a city six times the size of Bialystok. My [acquired] knowledge of Russian, German, Polish and accounting should not be lost. I accepted very practical advice and my father agreed.

In this second-largest city in Poland, with its streets full of tall buildings and huge textile factories with tall, round chimneys, I had more luck than in my hometown. I even got jobs, but these "jobs", as they say, only lasted from "Esther Fast to Purim" [1] .
I never stayed long in those jobs.

The first job I got was with a Polish Hasidic Jew named Abraham-Mendl Morgenshtern. He owned a spinning mill and was a tall Jew with a long, dark brown beard. He wore a full hat with a large brim and a long, clean kaftan, which gave the impression of a "stout person". He spoke and wrote perfect German and Polish (but not a word of Russian).

Before hiring me, he instructed me to write my own application by hand in German. As soon as I finished the first sentence, "Da ich gehört habe, dass Sie gerade einen Buchhalter brauchen" [2] , he interrupted me and said, "Enough!". He understood that I knew enough German to keep his books.

Although he was a capable man, he was constantly worried and anxious. He ran around looking for work and money for his spinning mill to run his business, but often found nothing.
His customers were in no hurry to pay him, or they simply couldn't pay him on time for his work.
He was always short of money.

80

Once it happened that he didn't have enough money for the "plate" (the wages to be paid to the workers). He was terribly nervous. Fortunately, a neighbor from the same factory building came with a gmiles-khesed [interest-free loan]. He saved the day. This was on

Friday evening, and my "balebos" [employer], a Gerer Chasid, was able to go home and joyfully welcome the Sabbath in his silk belted kaftan.

When I came to work for him three months later, however, the confused Mr. Morgenstern had brought his nephew, who needed a job, to the office - and he let me go.

[1] Ironic saying, as Purim immediately follows the Fast of Esther.

[2] Since I heard that you are in need of an accountant now…

Łódź, Piotrkowska Street, 1900, public domain, source File:Piotrkowska Lodz 1900.jpg - Wikimedia Commons

Bookkeeping and Teaching Girls Hebrew

My second job [or rather, job offer] was with a box maker who had a small factory on Alexandrinski Street (which was called "Mordekhay Gabay's Street"). Since the business didn't need an accountant, my new "balebos", a Chasidic Jew in his forties, of medium height, with a close-cropped black beard, offered me to teach his daughters Hebrew, to teach them to say the blessings, the "Krishme" [Sh'ma Israel prayer] and other religious "things". I refused the offer. It was beneath me to become a "dardaki-melamed" [1] with a bony pointer.

If my parents at home would have heard that I had become a "rabbi"[2] , sadness would have moved into their house, and my friends in both cities would have simply mocked me and actually looked at me like a "melamed" ...
In short, I had to find another job.

[1] a teacher who taught young children their first lessons

[2] Yiddish „rebe“, the “rabbi” in the sense of a teacher at the Jewish elementary school

A Balebos with a "Reputation"

My third employer was a small manufacturer who owned ten steam looms. He was

tall, in his mid-fifties, with a short brown beard and... dressed half Hasidic: A short suit coat and a black cloth hat with a short brim. He spoke German and Yiddish. But he only spoke German to me. (It was obvious that he wanted to show me, the "Litvak [1] , that he was not a simple "Itshe Meyer"[2]). Warsaw, Łódź and other cities in Poland were full of "Itshe Meyers" in those years.
The reason for this was that a few years earlier a famous Hasidic rabbi named Itshe Meyer had died, and so all Hasidic boys born that year were named after the deceased "Good Jew"...
Many of the Hasidim were simply ashamed of their double name. This name was ridiculed in the same way that the name "Melamed" was ridiculed in Lithuania.
Instead of saying, "Don't be a Melamed!", people in Polish towns would say, "Don't be an Itshe Meyer!"

Even my first "balebos" [employer], Abraham Mendl Morgenshtern, was ashamed of the name Itshe Meyer. When he once sent me to visit one of his clients, an A. Em. Gutman, he wouldn't tell me his full name at first. But when I persistently asked for his friend's real name, he answered with a smile: "Itshe Meyer".

[1] Litvak: Lithuanian Jew, the term "Litvaks" is also often equated with the "Misnagdim", the opponents of the Hasidic movement.

[2] The author spells the name differently, so that the transcription can also be either Meyer, Mayer or Ma‘ir. In fact, there was a Hasidic rabbi of the Gerer dynasty, Itshe Meyer Rothenburg (1799-1866), see YIVO | Ger Hasidic Dynasty (yivoencyclopedia.org)

My Third Balebos

On the first day, my new "balebos" had not yet shown me the books. He just told me to go around the factory and learn about the raw materials that come into the factory and how the goods are made.
When I came home in the evening and told the other lodgers of the boarding house that fortunately

82

I already had got another job with this man (unfortunately I have since forgotten his name), they laughed at me and warned me not to work for him under any circumstances, because if I worked for him, I would lose my good reputation forever and would never get a decent job again.

"Why?" I asked. And the answer was that my new employer was a former "Yankl Shapshovitsh" (the owner of a brothel - Sholem Asch's hero in his "God of Vengeance"). I didn't go to him again - and didn't even ask for anything for the one day's work.

A New Boss - On the Brink of Bankruptcy

My fourth and last job in Łódź was with the factory owner Zelig Shakhnerovitsh, on Petrikover Street. The workplace was just as I wanted it to be: large and long, with shelves full of goods. A man [in the position of] merchant's clerk and chief accountant, whose name, as far as I remember, was Abramski, turned out to be a pleasant young man who showed me my work areas and the books I was to use for my work.
The office was in the warehouse. When I went in, I saw different people: Buyers, brokers, "Lieferanten" (called "loynketnikes" in Bialystok and "contractors" in America) [1], and others.

After a week, one afternoon [Mr.] Shakhnerovitsh, a slim, blond Jew with glasses, came in with another gentleman, whom he introduced to me as Mr. Katz, the new partner.
And only a few days later, when no one was at the office, Mr. Katz came to see me. (He was a Jew from Minsk, while Shakhnerovitsh was a Litvak from Grodno).
Mr. Katz instructed me to write in the ledger that

83

certain quantities [measured in "yards"] of [cloth] goods were sold at such and such a price, which amounted to exactly three thousand rubles. At first I was reluctant to obey such an order, explaining that this was no way to keep accounts. First of all, I told him, before a transaction is entered in the ledger, the entry of a "zakaz" (order) must be visible, then it is written in the sales book, and from there it is transferred to the ledger.
But Mr. Katz became angry: "Write, write! If you are ordered to write, you must write and not ask questions!"
So I had to write. I had no other choice.

About two weeks later, the entire business moved to another building on the same Pyetrikover Street. The new "local" [premises] was bigger, nicer, more spacious and brighter than the first place. But you didn't see as many people coming and going as before. The "shutef" [partner], Mr. Katz, had disappeared, and Abramski didn't appear in the store for days.
It was a sad atmosphere...

Shakhnerovitsh came and went, never staying long. One evening, when there was no one in the office, he came to me with the "good news" that he no longer needed me.
Business was going badly [2] and I should look for another job.

A few days later it became known in town that Shakhnerovitsh's firm was "pleyte“, that is, "bankrupt" (in Bialystok it was called "ongezetst"). Now I understood why I had been hired, namely to make "false entries" in the ledger. If the creditors had sued him in court, it would have been considered a criminal act. Apparently Abramski had refused to do [such entries].
He knew that he, like the boss,

would have been held responsible for such a criminal act. But I didn't know about such a law, so I was just dragged into it...
However, Shakhnerovitsh's bankruptcy did not go to court. He had previously "gesetlt" with his creditors (translated from the business language of Bialystok and Łódź , this means that arrangements were made).

[1] Also small textile entrepeneurs were called that way

[2] literally "loy-aleykhem"= may you be spared from it

Back Home Again

In short, I was once again a candidate for a new job. But I couldn't find anything! I searched and searched, asked, begged friends and acquaintances to do something for me, but - in vain! Nothing was available.
Week after week, month after month went by, and there was still no job in sight. I borrowed money from everyone I knew and was up to my ears in deposits: I had rent and restaurant debt, plus grocery store debt, so I had nothing left to "put in my mouth," but still no prospect of income. So I had to go home, where at least I had a place to sleep and something to eat.

Bitter Memories

When I left the great textile city, which at that time had a Jewish population of about 150,000, I took with me a number of bitter memories: I saw how the police broke up a workers' demonstration on a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1903; how a rough, red-necked policeman grabbed a young Jewish demonstrator and, on the way to the police station, cruelly and brutally beat him on the head with a whip filled with lead bullets.

I also saw another policeman with murderous eyes confiscate a coachman's whip. The coachman, a non-Jewish Pole (there were no Jewish "cabdrivers" in Łódź and Warsaw), cried bitterly because he could no longer drive without his whip. I went to the murderous,

unscrupulous policeman and asked him why he had taken the whip from the poor driver. I asked him to give him back his whip, "he has to earn his living, have mercy on him".

"Nye tvoyo dyelo!" he replied angrily, "stupay!"
(This is none of your business, go away!).

(It was said in the city that the tsarist government had deliberately sent "real" Russians, former criminals, as policemen into Polish cities, i.e. people without a conscience and without any compassion, in order to have them suppress and terrorize the workers' movement and the Polish hoi polloi as a whole).

I had the "rare opportunity" to see how Jewish weavers "live" in Balut, the poor district of rich Łódź , an area about which numerous authors have written, such as Yitskhok-Elkhonen Rontsh, Rafael Pozner, Gina Medes, Y.B. Beylin and others.

The contractor I had seen had his little "factory" and "apartment" in a small square room on the third floor of a long, dark gray wooden building in a very narrow alley. It was late in the evening when I entered the "factory" in the square room. There were three wooden looms, one for the balebos [the owner], and two for the apprentices. Opposite the first loom was the stove where dinner was cooking.

Next to the stove stood a small cradle with a

blond baby, and the contractor told me that the apprentices slept under the looms, on coarse pieces of cloth and sacks.

I didn't see the balebos' "apartment", and I didn't ask about it. The strong smell of the kerosene lamps simply took my breath away, and I had to leave the small "factory" - with its terrible air like hell - as quickly as possible.

"It's a good thing you came", said the balebos to me, a Jew in his forties with a broad reddish-blond beard, "the accountants should know how we weavers live!"

As I walked outside, I wondered how children could grow up physically and mentally healthy under the conditions I found with the weaver in Balut. And the people of the town knew that poor parents threw their children, who did not grow up well, into the street.
In those years, 1902, 1903, and 1904, there was already an active Jewish women's association in Łódź , which took care of collecting the unfortunate children who had been thrown out and giving them to private families to raise.
A committee of the aforementioned women's organization used to visit "their" children every week and bring them gifts.

I once witnessed a touching scene when a volunteer social worker met a mute six-year-old boy. As soon as the mute boy saw the volunteer, an intelligent, graceful girl in her twenties, he fell on her neck, kissed her and cried bitter tears. He saw this kind-hearted girl as his only hope, as he did not know his father or mother, and the family he lived with was not really friendly to him.

An Episode With Mixed-Up and Moldy Tefillin

During the almost two years I spent in Łódź , I had little fun - due to the facts the reader already knows from the previous chapters.

Only once did I actually have some fun with a couple of well-known young guys. And that was the "incident" with the mixed up, moldy tefillin [phylacteries].

The "mayse fun der geshikhte" ["the (hi)story of the story"], as Sholem Aleichem says, is as follows:
In Mrs. Epshteyn's lodging house on Vidzever Street there were five lodgers-four Litvaks, from Brisk, Kobrin, Pinks, and Bialystok (me)-and a short-clothed pious fellow from a provincial town in Poland.

Before we left for Łódź , either to look for work or to return from vacation, our mothers strictly instructed us that - for God's sake - we must not forget to pray and put on our tefillin.
When we Litvaks left home, as if by magic, we didn't feel like praying - not on weekdays, not on Shabbat, not on holidays... And because we didn't pray and didn't put on tefillin, our prayer straps and the prayer capsules for the hand ("shelyad") and for the forehead ("shelrosh") became covered with a thick, ugly layer of mold...

When the day before the holiday came and we had to go home for the vacation, we Litvaks were all very busy in our quarters wiping off the mildew with wet, hot cloths so that our mothers would not see the mildew.

Because if they had discovered the green mold, they would have known that we hadn't "used" the teffillin... And there would have been a scandal, which the boys naturally wanted to avoid.
However, the Polish boy did not need to clean his teffillin. He was devout and prayed every day. Once, early one

holiday morning, when we were busy cleaning, one of the litvaks from Kobrin (his name was Lukin) suddenly became too lazy to continue cleaning his religious utensils. At the same time, he wanted to take them home clean. Then he thought of a solution: When the pious Pole left the house to go shopping, he, Lukin, a strong young man with bright black eyes, went to the table where the Pole's little bag of tefillin lay. He took out the clean ones and put in his moldy ones, and the owner of the clean ones knew nothing about it...

When the latter came home for the holiday and his mother saw the "green" leather straps, she cried out loud because her youngest son had become an "apikor", a heretic...
Her little son (his middle name was Merilender) was blond with dreamy blue eyes. He swore wildly that he had prayed. But his good, pious mother didn't believe him, and so unfortunately he also had to wipe the mold off Lukin's tefillin... It was obvious that he didn't want to use his father's or older brother's tefillin...

When the "Poylish ingl", as we often called him, returned to his quarter from his vacation, he began to shout in German, in Yiddish, and with a Polish accent, cursing loudly all the

Litvakers. He had suffered such an insult because of them and the exchange of his clean tefillin for dirty ones, and he demanded that his tefillin be returned to him.

Three of us showed him our tefillin, but Lukin said that he "forgot" to take his tefillin and left them at home...

When the robbed, pious Merilender stopped screaming, he himself began to laugh heartily at the trick that the Kobriner, Lukin, had played on him. And believe me, dear readers, it was really something to laugh about...

89

Two Jobs - on "Hinerne Fislekh“ ["Chicken Legs"]

When I returned to Bialystok in the summer of 1904, I was immediately busy looking for a job.

A few months after my arrival, I actually got two jobs. But while the four jobs in Łódź - as I noted earlier - lasted from "Esther Fast to Purim", my Bialystoker jobs were indeed, as the expression goes, "oyf hinerne fislekh" [on shaky ground] from the very beginning.
Both were already doomed...

My first job as a bookkeeper was with a leather commissioner who bought unfinished leather and took it to the "valker" [1] to prepare it for the cobbler. He sent the finished pieces of leather to his customers in Berditshev (or as Sholem Aleichem pronounced it, "Barditshev" - his hometown).
A few weeks later, however, his customers from Berditshev, who usually paid as soon as they received the goods, were a few times late in sending money orders, and he was left penniless. He had nothing left to "dreyen" [2] , as merchants call it.

The "valker" couldn't help him because he had no liquid reserves of money either, so [my employer] had to pawn his goods with a usurer. And my Berditshver "balebos", a sturdy Jew with a short black beard, would have had to go to the usurer and pay him interest and warehouse rent to get the pledged goods back.
In short, it didn't take long - and his business was over.

[1] "valker"= in German "Walker"= a person who softens and shapes the leather in a special working process.

[2] dreyen= literally turn [around]. He no longer had the means to turn the tide once again.

The Cloth and Tailoring Company

My second "job" was at a great tailoring and cloth company on the rich residential and commercial street

90

"Vashlikover Gas". The owners of the company were two Jews. One, a "zakroyshtshik" (cutter), was a very tall Jew with a short, thick dark brown beard and glasses. The second, a tailor, was a blond young man. In front of the store was the cloth warehouse, and behind the store was the tailor's workshop. The two partners worked "zakazne" (in English, "made to order") for the upper "cream of the crop" of Bialystok - the high and mighty, the professionals, high bank officials and military officers who needed civilian (city) clothing.

Everything was noble and fine: a beautiful store. The high intelligentsia came in: Teachers from secondary and commercial schools, bankers, doctors, lawyers and even judges. They all had interesting conversations. But along with the intelligentsia, there were also claimants and plaintiffs: One came to ask for wood and coal, another for the cost of tailoring, a third for cloth, and the owner of the house for rent. [In addition], there were tailors who had accepted commissions.

There was even a Jew who demanded money for cigarettes (in those years many Jews made a secret living by making cigarettes and selling them in large covered boxes to certain customers, deceiving the government).
And if the Jewish cigarette seller didn't get anything, he would cry his heart out...
Once, on a Friday morning, a tailor came in crying that he needed money for his wife to celebrate Shabbat.

But the most interesting demander was the "kazyoner" [government appointed] rabbi, Dr. Mohilever (a grandson of the late Bialystoker rabbi, Reb Shmuel Mohilever, who was one of the first Zionists [1]).

The "balebatim" knew that the rabbi had delivered a suit and a coat

91

with instructions to have them mended and pressed. The [finished work] was given to a worker who was to take it back to the high and distinguished customer. However, the worker from the tailor's shop who was supposed to bring the "work" to the rabbi was a drunkard. He pawned the clothes and wasted the money on alcohol.
Dr. Mohilever demanded the clothes back or financial compensation and explicitly told the tailors that he would take his claim to court...

More creditors came, and the whole store looked as it did in Sholem Aleichem's "Shimele Soroker" [2]. The door could no longer be closed because of the many claimants. But there was no money to satisfy the creditors. The rich customers of the intelligentsia, who used to dress up in beautiful, elegant clothes, had forgotten that they also had to pay the tailor. I sent out letters in German, Russian and Yiddish, asking the "noble" customers to pay their debts to the tailor. But very few replied, and those who did sent only a tenth of what they owed.
My poor "balebatim" were truly suffocating for lack of the funds they would have needed to turn the tide.

[1] The author has marked his note with "L.H." for Leyl Hindes.
Concerning Shmuel Mohilver, see Zionist Rabbi - מוזאון הרב מוהליבר (museum-mohaliver.org.il)

[2] Shimele Soroker: the main character in Sholem Aleichem's comedic theater play „Dos Groyse Gevins“ [The Big Winner/ the Big Lottery]. See Sholem Aleichem's "200,000," at the Novotshi Theatre, Warsaw (museumoffamilyhistory.com)

The Store is Robbed - The Partners Insult and Beat Each Other and - the Business is Over

When I walked in one morning, I saw a strange sight: the store was full of people - known and unknown - and the shelves where expensive goods were usually displayed were empty! People were shouting and making noise. The two partners were accusing each other of stealing the goods.
The tailor's sister-in-law, a young brunette of thirty, raised a cry:

92

"My dowry, my dowry!" she cried, not knowing, or pretending not to know, that her own brother-in-law had done the "job"...
And one of the tailor's uncles, a tall Jew with a blond beard and glasses, shouted:
"What have you done to my poor niece?" But he immediately received a fiery slap in the face from the brunette young woman for shouting.

They scolded and shouted at each other all day, and only parted in the late afternoon. But the tailor remained in the empty store and workshop. He buried his face in his hands and wept bitterly...

The sad end of my two employers in Bialystok and Łódź was just one example of the helpless situation in which thousands of small businesses in the old homeland found themselves.
They lost their existence for lack of small loans. Many of these "melkosobstvenikes," as the small businessmen were called, did not survive their troubles. They often suffered from illnesses such as nervousness and cancer, from which many died.
Others committed suicide.

During my time, three small factory owners ended their lives: Leybl Ash, Yankel Katz and Yakov Halpern, a prominent Jew from the aristocratic New Town Street.
The first two threw themselves under a moving train, and the third hanged himself.

It was said of him in the city that although he owned a large stone house, he found himself in the tragic situation of not being able to give his wife any money for the household, and had to take his two sons

93

out of the [elite secondary school] "realne utshilishtshe".

(I met the two boys I knew from Yofe's school in New York in early 1905. They knew neither Yiddish nor English and became paperboys. They worked for a newspaper agency and delivered papers to private homes. Their knowledge of Latin, Greek, French, and mathematics, acquired in the "realne" from which only five percent of Jews were accepted, was ultimately of no use to the learned and aristocratically educated boys).

A "Free" Person Again

Of course, with the demise of the cloth and tailoring company, I lost my job and had to look for another one. But I searched all day long, for weeks and months, without having a job. All my "work" consisted of walking with a stick in the streets of Pyaskes.

In the nineties and early twentieth century, it was fashionable for young men in my town to walk with a stick, and for women to walk with an umbrella. Not only 'balebatishe' boys, but also [young] workers such as weavers, tanners and tailors carried sticks.

Once I forgot to take my stick. My father shouted at me, "Only a pickpocket goes without a stick. (Because, as we know, for a pickpocket a cane would be a disturbing factor in his "operations in other people's pockets". After all, it was a "job" that required two empty hands...).

I felt very unhappy walking around idly with nothing to do. I couldn't find a place or peace for myself. I couldn't read either because I couldn't concentrate. Even if I took the courage

to pick up a book, someone from our house would immediately come to me with a reproach: "Why are you resting on your privilege? You'd better get a job, try to earn some money!"

I managed to read at least half a dozen books, but only in Russian. No Yiddish books were allowed in our home. My father didn't want me to read books in Yiddish, or "jargon," as he called it. "That's the language of the maids," he used to say (although he spoke Yiddish himself and wrote letters in Yiddish when he was away from home).

As for Yiddish, I remember that in those years there was great respect for those who didn't speak or know our mother tongue.
A young Jewish man who spoke only Russian considered himself a "yakhsn", a distinguished man with privileges. And those who had a close relationship with a young man or girl who spoke Russian considered themselves to be "yakhsn number 2" [1] . We often heard naive young people boasting that they had just made the acquaintance of a Russian man or woman.

Once our neighbor's son came to our house and told my sister that the day before he had made the acquaintance of a young Jewish girl who didn't know a word of Yiddish. When my sister pointed out to him that this could not be true, since a Jewish daughter brought up in a Jewish home must understand and speak Yiddish, the enthusiastic "Russian" swore that he was telling the truth.

"I will fall ill," he cried, "if she can speak a word of Yiddish!"

[1] Literal translation. Just being in a relationship with a "yakhsn" promised social advancement, and some people felt privileged to be around such a person.

What Can Be Done?

I had to turn to my real problem: what should I do, or as the famous Russian writer [Nikolay] Chernyshevsky said:

95

"Tshto dyelat?" [What is there to do?], or as the "Tano" [1] says:
"ה יהיה התכלית?" [What is the purpose?]
Really, how long was I supposed to walk around idly without a penny in my pocket, begging my mother for a "pyatak" (five kopecks) for a pack of cigarettes? (Unlike today, I smoked then). Was there really no prospect of a job? What should I do?

I thought about learning a trade - weaving, tanning or tailoring. When I mentioned this to my father, he reacted very angrily. "Staytsh!" [what'a all this about], he shouted, "so the son of Yoshe Hindes is to become a "veberik" [2] or a "shneyderik"[2] ?!"
(This is what factory owners called skilled workers).

Although my father's business was going downhill, as I mentioned earlier, he was left with an empty pride. And it was the same with all the other factory owners, who often ran around to borrow a "dreyerl" [3] for Shabbat, a "finferl" [3] for Purim, or a "25ker" [3] for Passover.
Both large and small cloth and "shody" manufacturers considered themselves the "top of the pestle" and looked down on anyone who did not belong to the "branch" of manufacturers - even the rich forest and grain merchants and the "professionals", such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and all educated people in general.

[1] „Tano“ [תנא]= "repeaters“, Mishnaic Authority

[2] somewhat derogatory for "weaver" and "tailor"

[3] Coins of low value. Some of the terms go back to an old currency system

America - the Only Solution

Assuming that I wouldn't get a job or learn a trade, the question arose as to what I should do. The situation at home was very tense. A Russian proverb says: "Ot pradnosti roditsa mnogo gorya i stira" [From idleness comes much sorrow and shame]. And I actually experienced this. As I walked down the street, I thought that every neighbor I knew pointed a finger at me

96

and growled "A balebatical idler", a loafer with "stones in his sleeves" (the latter expression was used to describe anyone who couldn't get a job or other employment).

On top of that, the matchmakers made my life a misery.
As soon as these matchmakers became aware of a young man who had been released (from conscription), a parade of them marched to the young man's house.
What did they, these "lekishevate" [ignorant] Jews, want from me?
How could I think of something like a match when I didn't even earn a kopeck?
But they just came.

Finally, whether they achieved anything or not, they were entertained as guests - with a glass of tea and a snack.
They were simply unbearable.

One day a middle-aged Jew with a broad, gray beard came to our house to arrange a marriage for me with the daughter of a "melamed" [1] . My father didn't like this matchmaking at all.
"You want me to have a melamed as the father of my daughter-in-law?" he snapped and became angry.
The matchmaker tried to defend himself.
"He teaches bridegrooms," he tried to calm my enraged father.
"But he's still a melamed!" my proud father huffed angrily. He wanted to throw the incompetent man out, but he held back. Instead, he grabbed his winter coat and left the house. Unfortunately, the naive Jew couldn't understand why my father was so angry about a [possible] marriage contract with a melamed...

[1] As previously described by the author, a "melamed", a teacher in the Jewish elementary school, enjoyed little prestige and usually lived in poverty

The Failed Terrorist Act

The situation in Bialystok was very tense. Terrorists resumed their activities. One morning

in October 1904, the anarchist Notke from Vashlikover Street, a cross-eyed but strong blond lad of twenty, together with his comrade, threw a bomb into the police station. The bomb exploded in the wrong direction and both comrades were killed.

The police went wild with rage against the Jewish proletarians and intelligent people. In the middle of the night they raided hundreds of houses and arrested innocent young people. Agents of the "Okhranke" [secret police] and policemen stood on the corners of the main streets, chasing anyone they suspected of taking part in the terrorist actions.

In short, life became unbearable. Every young man and woman had one foot in jail. And for me, there was only one way out: America. And as soon as possible.

Like all mothers, my mother regretted that I was leaving home forever. But in the end she was happy that I would leave the city and Russia, because she was afraid that I would end up in the hands of the police, like her cousin's son, Yankl Fisher, the son of Kive the broker. Yankl was innocently arrested and his father had a heart attack from all the grief and died a few days later.

The only one in my family who was unhappy and against my decision to leave was my father. He had the desire and ambition to make me a "fifteen-hundred-ruble young man," that is, a young man who would receive a fifteen-hundred-ruble dowry.
But, as the saying goes, "necessity breaks iron."

My only choice, to free myself from my unbearable situation and go to America, thwarted my father's proud ambitions...and I did go.

98

The Farewell

On a cool spring evening in 1905, a week or two after Passover, I was already standing far from the city center next to the "polyester train“ [1], surrounded by my family, relatives and neighbors, who asked me to send greetings to their relatives, to ask them on their behalf to send them support, or if possible, to take them over to the new country.

And as we stood there, talking with great anxiety about my future in America, suddenly Alter, the "agent", a slender Jew in his late thirties with a close-cropped blond beard, joined us and said in an almost commanding tone:
"It's about time!"
And as is the way, we immediately started kissing, crying, kissing again and crying again...
"Don't forget us!" my mother begged, wiping away her tears.

Five minutes later, I was already sitting in a long wagon with three other passengers going in the same direction as me - to America.

The sun was setting as the "haul" with its four passengers began its long, sad journey. For the next three miles to the closest village, through fields and forests, the setting sun accompanied us - as a huge, red "ball of fire". At times the red ball would hide behind the floating dark clouds, only to appear and disappear again until it finally disappeared completely. And the "train" with the four frightened emigrants drove off into the silent, dark night...

We didn't talk. The agents strictly forbade us to speak so as not to attract the attention of the police. The other three had to be very careful because they were

99

refugees from the Russo-Japanese War, which was still going on, although it was already in its final stages. It was impossible to sleep through the night. The wagon was shaking. Sometimes I would fall asleep, then wake up, and it would go on like that all night. And as I

fell asleep and woke up again, the images I had seen on the Pyaskes in my earliest childhood years unfolded before my eyes.
I saw in front of me the mile-long green field across from our house (even before the "Argentinean roads" were built). The field extended into the forest - the forest where we schoolboys played, danced, jumped, picked stone fruits and sang various folk songs in the summer months after Shabbat dinner. There, our friend Shimen, a ten-year-old boy with a full face and freckles, sang in his hoarse voice, half Yiddish and half Hebrew:

"I was walking in the forest, walking;
I heard, heard the voice of a bird,
Singing ro-ro
And I am not responsible and I am not bad".

Another black-eyed boy there sang a touching love song he had heard at the maid's house: "When I remember you, my sweet lover, I sit and mourn and weep" ....

In the same forest I also "saw" the "Green Alley" where thousands of young Jewish boys and girls from the Pyaskes and Khanaykes went for a walk or sat around a burning campfire in the evening and sang those pleasant, heartfelt Jewish and Russian folk songs, but also proletarian songs, like:

"Sleep my child, keep sleeping
I will sing you a song,
When you get older,
You will know the difference.“ [2]

And another lullaby by H.D. Nomberg:
"There are black clouds running and chasing,
And a wind is blowing;
Your father sends you greetings from Siberia, my child." [3]

And also the well-known Bundist song:
"Long live in Russia, Lithuania and Poland
the Jewish Workers' League!" (and so on).

And I had the feeling that I was hearing the Yiddish folk song again:

"Flicker, fire, flicker,
Crackle merrily for us" [4] .

Likewise, the Russian folk songs [sounded in my inner ear]; and I also felt as if I were hearing the Zionist songs, sung with great enthusiasm, like the "Hatikva" - and also the Yiddish peasant song ["The Song of Bread"]:

"Almighty God, we sing hymns,
You alone are our help.
Gather the sheaves, brothers,
Until the sun goes down;

Gather the sheaves, brothers,
Until the sun goes down!" [5]

And so the long, sad, monotonous journey to the border towns dragged on. The night was completely dark. There was not a single star in the sky.

101

In some places the sky looked cloudy - a sign of rain... It was impossible to sleep, but to stay awake, the darkness made it impossible to see the fields and forests or the rivers we passed. Unable to fall asleep, I stayed awake with my eyes closed...

And again I saw the images from the distant past. There I see and hear a group sitting around a campfire singing the gypsy song:
"Moy kostyor v tumanye svyetit, iskry gasnut na lyetu". [6]

And again I "see" the forest with the fenced park, with "Tsertl's Buffet", with the open "scene" where we were shown the first "moving pictures" in 1902 or 1903,
(then called "b-i-o-s-k-o-p"), and where we also had a colored couple perform for the first time. Pregnant women didn't want to look at the black people because they were afraid that, God forbid, they would give birth to black children.

In the same park I also "saw" the huge gray wooden stage where I heard such interesting operas as "Faust", "La Traviata", "Les Huguenots", the Polish opera "Galka", the German opera "Der Vogelhändler", the Jewish historical drama "Uriel Akosta", Gogol's "The Government Inspector" and other interesting performances.

In the second theater I saw a strange ballet: cooks danced with [female] cooks, soldiers with maids, colonels with their wives, middle-aged aristocrats with their aristocratic wives, merchants with their wives, professors with teachers, and actors with actresses. Everyone was dressed in appropriate costumes and expressed their individual facial expressions. What more do you want? Anyway, there was something to see!...

[1] literally, "polyester ban [train]"= We later learn that it was not a train, but a ride in a horse-drawn carriage. The word "polyester" could perhaps stand for "Polish-Eastern".

[2] Shlof Mine Kind, Shlof Keseyder (youtube.com)

[3] S´loyfn, S'yogn Shvartse Volkns - YouTube

[4] „Flaker, Fayer, flaker, knak undz freylakh tsu", from „Shulamis" by Avrom Goldfaden

[5] Dos Lid Fun Broyt von lorinsklam (soundcloud.com)

[6] My fire shines in the fog, the sparks go out on the fly, see Анна Литвиненко Мой костёр в тумане светит Old Russian Gypsy Romance (youtube.com)

The "Pyaskover" Jewish Theater

Well, in my dream I also saw the Jewish "theater" on the Pyaskes. You ask, how could there be a Jewish theater on the Pyaskes? After all, the Pyaskes were in the farthest corner of the city?
The answer is: On the Khanaykes and in the narrow working-class streets between the Khanaykes and the Pyaskes lived a few dozen boys and girls who felt called to be actors. They rented the "Amdurer's" hall (a hall for weddings of the poor) and gave performances (without the knowledge of the police) during the "Khalemoyd" days of both long festivals [1] .
They played matinees.
We, the cheder boys, asked our mothers for the "Zehnerle" (five kopecks, ten pennies) for a ticket. But I only saw the two comedies by Goldfaden: "Kabtsnzon and Hungerman" and "Shmendrik".

I don't remember the first play at all. At least I remember the "love song" from the second one:

"No, David, no, David,
You don't love me anymore!
No, David, no, David, you don't love me anymore.
You've been away for so long
And you didn't write me a letter.
Today I ask you, answer me,
Do you call this 'love'?
No, David, no, David,
You no longer love me:
No, David, no, David, you no longer love me!"

The show started an hour later, and we boys were afraid that the theater group had just cheated us out of our "tens" and wouldn't play at all.
But suddenly,

103

from behind the curtain, a solidly built Jew, a fat man in his early forties with a brown goatee, came out and, holding a handful of copper coins in his fist, began to complain that not enough money had been collected.
There wouldn't even be enough for a barrel of beer. "A barrel of beer!" he complained, almost in tears.
We children couldn't help him, because we didn't have more than five kopecks. But some older visitors threw him a few "meysem" [2] (that's what we called a coin worth ten kopecks).
And he, the steward, disappeared backstage and the play began.

[1] the middle of the Passover and Sukkot holidays

[2] מתים=meysem, dead persons

The Telephone, the "Vodoprovod" [Water Pipe] and "The Konke"

I opened my eyes and looked up at the cloudy sky. It looked like we were about to have a "wet" trip...

But the few stars shining here and there reassured me that we wouldn't get any rain on our way to the border town.

My fellow travelers were able to sleep quite comfortably, but not only did they sleep well, they also snored quite well...
I couldn't sleep. Sometimes I kept my eyes open, then I closed them again, but I couldn't fall asleep...

And once again I remembered pictures and conversations I had heard in the distant past, when the telephone was introduced in Bialystok. And I heard the coachmen complaining that the telephone was taking away part of their income. When the "vodoprovod" (public water supply through pipes) was introduced in the city, the water carriers complained that the "vodokatshke" (water pump) would turn them into beggars; and when the horse-drawn "konke" (tram) was introduced, the coachmen again complained that the new means of transportation would bankrupt them...
And I [still] hear

the non-Jewish conductors complaining on Shabbat [about Jews "staying away"]: "Nima zhidkov, nima ditkov" (a "ditke" was a coin worth three kopecks) and the song of a jester, which he gave to the "konke":

"Our men give 'Zehner',
Our Jews give 'ditkes',
Have you ever heard of this-
That the 'konke' rides on horses?"

(The "konke" was divided into two "classes": At the front were long, hard benches, along both sides. At the back were soft seats. The common people rode sitting on the benches, which cost three kopecks or one "ditke". The richer people rode at the back, on the soft seats, and paid a tenner, five kopecks).

Nicholas‘ „Monopolke“

And our "emigration wagon" slowly made its way through the main village streets, passing the towns of Knishin [Knyszyn], Gonyendz [Goniądz] (Grodno Governorate) and the small towns of Yedvabne [Jedwabne], Stavisk [Stawiski] (Łomża Governorate), and I still couldn't fall asleep.

Pictures of days not so long ago come back to me:
I am on a warm evening in August 1897, when the tsarist government introduced the "monopolke", the monopoly on liquor. And I see before me the four "Pyaskover"

innkeepers: Velvel, Yisroel, the "Byeler" (Hershl Bialystotski) and Dovid Furye. At that time they were walking around with melancholy in their hearts because they had lost their income. People felt bitter pity for Velvel, because he had nothing, not even a dowry for his daughters... (the other three had their own houses, which brought them some income).

The two Pyaskover Jewish drunkards,

105

whom we called "Branfalakh" [1] , also mourned. Khayim-Zelig, the weaver, who was known as the Pyaskover joker, gave them the lament he used to sing himself:

"My life, my life,
If there is no more bronfn [1] here,
I'll give my life for it,
If someone will let me lick [the bronfn]".

[1] derived from "bronfn"= liquor, schnapps; here maybe "vodka".

"Nicholas the Last's" Visit to Bialystok

And before my sleepy eyes appears the parade that the town organized for Nicholas' visit on Shabbat evening in August, a week or two after the taverns had closed.

I "participated" in the parade. At that time I was a student at Yofe's School and was part of the group of "pyevtshi" (singers).
We had to line up at the corner of Vashlikover and New Town Streets, and as soon as his carriage approached us, we "broke" into the most patriotic Russian song under the direction of our singing teacher, Yakov Berman:

"Slavya, slavya, nash ruski tsar,
Khospodos danny,
Nas tsar gosudar, da y budyet
Bezsmertyen tvoy tsarski rod".
[Glory, glory, our Russian Tsar, our God-given Tsar,
our Tsar Sovereign, and your royal family will be immortal].

We already know how the prophecy of the "poet" who wrote this "Slavisya" was fulfilled. Nicholas and his family, the Romanovs, not only turned out not to be immortal, but they died, were buried and forgotten, just like the aristocrat's big dog [1] ...

106

It is worth noting that the Jewish workers, especially the tailors, adopted the melody of the "Slavisya" for their song:

"The man with the needle,
The man with the shears,

The man who works hard
For his life [all the years]."

[1] see Nicholas II's canine companions | Nicholas II (tsarnicholas.org)

A Pig Among Nicholas' Horses

Nicholas the Second - and the Last - spent five days in Bialystok and its surroundings. He visited the maneuvers of the Vilnius military district there. As already mentioned, he entered the city quietly and without incident on the evening of Shabbat. However, when he entered the city for the second time three days later, things did not go according to the wishes of the governor and the police.

As he and his entourage entered Tiktin Street from Nowolipie, a pig "the size of Rome" came running downhill from a very narrow alley (almost a niche) into Khaye Odem Street. It pushed its way through the crowd, immediately ran under the governor's carriage, then under H **i s** [Majesty's] carriage and got lost under the legs of the two horses.

The police chief Malyevitsh and the policemen went wild with excitement. Dozens of policemen standing on the street tried to catch the animal. But the big "doverakher" [pig] did not surrender so easily. He made a noise, a really pig-like noise, and the whole parade of Nikolai's followers had to stop for a few minutes.

Finally, the police managed to chase the "uninvited guest" to the market opposite the town clock.

107

Naturally, this incident caused laughter among the common people - and gnashing of teeth among the high and mighty. But everyone wondered:
How did the pig get there?
Khaye Odem Street, Yeshive Street and the surrounding alleys were densely populated by Jews. No gentiles lived there, and you couldn't find any non-Jews there either - no way! So where did the pig come from?
It was rumored in the still that the purpose of pushing the pig onto the parade was to confuse the police in order to carry out an even bigger "jab"... But nothing more happened.

The incident with the pig among Nicholas' horses was later called "dyelo kabana" [the boar's case] by the Russian-speaking intelligentsia of Bialystok.

In Kolne [Kolno]

Very late after midnight I managed to fall asleep. It was a beautiful sleep - without bad dreams and without bitter memories. But the long-awaited sleep didn't last long. My neighbor in the car nudged me and whispered in my ear:
"We're almost in Kolno!"
He saw the steeples of the churches. Fifteen minutes later, the car pulled up to a one-story white wooden house far from the center of town.

Physically and mentally exhausted from the long journey and the memories of my youth, I crawled with great effort from the "agole" [horse-drawn carriage] into the "light-filled world".
The sun was already shining in the sky, but not in its full splendor. A dark cloud had moved in front of it, and it looked a little angry...
The scenery around the white house - the flat fields, the sparse

forest and the little rivers - did not get the expected rays of sunshine, so it looked more like October than May.
In the "parlor" of the "white house" we were greeted by two young, blue-eyed boys of 19 or 20 (they looked like brothers), dressed in brown cheviot suits and brown caps. These were the "transfer leaders", or agents. The most appropriate name for them, however, was "kontrabantshtshikes".

After we ate a snack, one of the brothers told us that we would soon be going to the border and that we should be ready. He also asked us to say a prayer to God, and the four of us looked at each other and wondered what God had to do with crossing the border.
"Yes, yes!" the other one got angry when he saw us hesitating, "we have to ask God to help us"...
"How should we ask God," one of us asked jokingly, "in Hebrew or in Yiddish?"
"God understands both languages", the "kontrabanshtshuk" replied seriously, and with the cooperation of the questioner, we composed this prayer in Yiddish:
"Riboyne-Shel-Oylem [Lord of the World]! Almighty, dear, merciful God! Hear our plea. Help us to cross the border safely and protect us from falling into goyish hands. Omeyn [Amen]!"
The agent also responded with "Amen!"...

The Last Trip

When we came out of the "parlor," a long, narrow cart was waiting for us, lined with some straw.
We quickly

crawled inside and stretched out. A minute later a bundle of straw was thrown on top of us, three long planks were placed on top of the straw, and the two brothers and two other people sat down on the planks.
Everything was done so quickly and mechanically that we had no time to enjoy the warm sun that was now shining in all its splendor and casting its rays in all directions.
And the green fields around us looked much more beautiful and alive than before...

We rode for half an hour or a little longer in the long, shaking carriage. It shook our shoulders and arms, and the boards with the "kontrabanshtshikes" squeezed our chests (even in the past, people used to hitchhike, so what are you asking?!) [1], until we entered a German village.

I crawled out of the wagon, exhausted from this "pleasure trip", and would have loved to grab one of the "transfer leaders" and give him a good spanking, but - well, you wouldn't want to do that! ....
Our "carriage" had stopped right across the street from a grocery store and tea house. There we met another twenty emigrants who had been smuggled over during the night.

Among these twenty people were many women and children.

[1] literal: (s'iz shoyn eynmol geven a yazde, vos fregt ir?). The term "yazde" (trip, wagon) can also mean "hitchhiking" in a certain context, but I'm not entirely sure. In any case, this is a humorous insertion.

A Clash With a "Yahudi" [1]

The owner of the store and the "tshaynye" [tea room], a fat German Jew with a brown, round beard, looked at the tortured border crossers and did not stop snarling:
"Russian pigs".
I took sides with those involved and explained to him in his language that these

Russian Jews, these men and women, were very orderly, hard-working and intelligent people. And even though these people had not studied in high school, they should not be called "pigs".
"But they are pigs!" he shouted.
My patience broke and I told him in simple German:
"Derjenige, der ernsthafte, arbeitsame Menschen als Schweine bezeichnet, ist selbst ein Schwein". [He who calls serious, hard-working people pigs is himself a pig].

Understandably, he didn't like my statement at all, and I got a slap in the face!
When the other "runaways" heard the slap, they immediately came over and wanted to get even with the cheeky guy. But I held them back and explained to them that in our situation we couldn't afford to make trouble because it could seriously hinder our journey.

And just as I was speaking to the people gathered around me, his wife, a slender brunette, appeared with tears in her eyes and asked me to excuse her husband because he suffered from "getting upset easily".

I told my friends that the "yahudi" had embarrassed himself distressingly.

[1] contemptuous term for a Western European assimilated Jew

An Encounter With a Nazi Doctor in 1905

Around three o'clock in the afternoon, we were already on the train that took us to Prostken. After spending the night in Prostken, we traveled to Berlin; we rested in Berlin and went on to Karlsruhe. It was as it says in Khumesh [Pentateuch]:
"ויסעו ויחנו ויחנו ויסעו" [And they traveled and camped and camped and traveled] until we arrived in Hamburg, the world-famous port city.
There was also the huge emigrant camp, a semicircular, large building for a few thousand emigrants.
Since there was no room in the large hall of the camp,

111

we, the twenty passengers, were taken to an empty ship, where we spent two full days until the large ship "Armenia", which was to take us on our last journey to America, was ready for our long voyage.

As I was standing next to the stairs leading to the captain's cabin, a medium-sized man of around fifty with a brown moustache came up to me and engaged me in conversation. He introduced himself as the ship's doctor.
"Sprechen Sie Englisch?" [Do you speak English], he asked me (he knew I was familiar with the German language because he saw me standing there with the German magazine "Die Hamburger Nachrichten" [Hamburg News] in my hand.
"Unfortunately not," I replied.
"Don't worry, don't worry," he comforted me, "German will be spoken all over the world!"

At first I didn't understand what he meant by his prophecy. I reminded him that French was recognized as the international language of diplomacy, English as the language of commerce, and German as the language of science. And I would not agree that German should take the place of the first two.

The "studied" doctor was not satisfied with my opinion and insisted on his prediction.
"Passen Sie auf, passen Sie auf" [Look out, look out], he cried angrily, gesturing with his hand, "German is about to invade the whole world!"
Saying "Mahlzeit" [Enjoy your meal], he disappeared.

In later years, during the First and Second World Wars, I found out that the Hamburg doctor had been infected by the murderous slogan:
"Deutschland über alles",

112

(meaning that Germany will rule the whole world). This ridiculous, wildly insane slogan poisoned the minds of the German masses, making them believe that the Germans were the most "civilized" people in the world, and therefore should be allowed to rule over the

"uncivilized". And that the Germanic tribes should be the "master race" and the others their "slaves", chopping wood and fetching water for them.
What the Tsar tried to achieve during his lifetime in the World War I, Hitler tried to achieve in World War II, and six million Jews and four million others lost their lives in the gas ovens of Treblinka, Auschwitz, Dachau and other extermination camps.

But while these lines are being written, it is already foreseeable that the murderous cry of "Germany above all" will be transformed into "Germany below all". By this we mean Adenauer's Germany. [1]

[1] This obviously refers to the period under the four Allied occupying powers.

On the "Armenia"

On a cool, sunny morning, we finally boarded the ship "Armenia" for our last trip to America [a]. The ship was not divided into first and second class, it was only for third class passengers, which consisted almost exclusively of poor emigrants. (It was said that the "Armenia" was originally an "ox ship". It was only because the "Hamburg-Amerikanische Schifffahrtsgesellschaft" had no passenger ships that our "Armenia" was dismantled and converted to carry people).

After I had settled down in my "betl" [bunk], in the depths of the second deck, I was again possessed by strange thoughts, thoughts of the past. Now I realized that I had actually left forever my hometown of Bialystok, the birthplace of Doctor Zamenhof

(the author of Esperanto), Maxim Litvinov (Meir Walach) [1] , Professor Zabludovski [2], and Avrom Gotlober [3], where Aaron Liebermann [4], Rosa Raisa, and Reitske Burshtein [Raitza Burchstein] [5] lived. Bialystok with its beautiful streets - Nowolipie and Vashlikover Street, New Town and German Street, with the beautiful "Gorodsko Sad" [City Garden] and even with its "slums" - with the side streets of Pyaskes and Khanaykes. Here every "Rosh-khoydesh"[6] was filled with the "khalyastres", the "gang" of limping, half-blind, mute, or deaf beggars in their "splendid costumes. They went in groups of ten, twenty or thirty, in "closed ranks", and lived "communistically", i.e. they shared the kopeks collected from the few donors equally.

These "khalyastres" presented a terribly depressing picture and left a sad impression on all who met them in their hunt for "Rosh-khoydesh money".

I also remembered those of my childhood friends who were already buried in "Bagnovka", the Jewish cemetery: Velvel Tabatshinski, a warm, dear friend; Shmuelke Furye, the "Hebrew" who had already written in Ha-Meliz [7] ; Yakov-Yosef, the Talmud genius, from the Radin Yeshiva - and my cousin, Leybl Spektor.
Their deaths caused me much pain for a long time.

When I went out on deck again and walked back and forth, I noticed that more than half of the passengers were Hungarian peasants and "polyakn" [non-Jewish Poles] from the Łomża Governorate. As I found out later, the big and rich American coal magnates and steel companies in Ohio and Pennsylvania needed "hands" [laborers] at that time.
These coal and steel "barons" had sent their agents to Hungarian villages and

114

used "moving pictures" to show how the immigrants could live happily in the villages of America. The textile "barons" of the New England states - Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Vermont - did the same. They fraudulently lured Polish girls and boys from the villages of Łomża County to work in their cotton mills, for low wages, of course.

There were also a number of Ukrainians, White Russians, some Germans and a large number of Jews from Russia and Galicia on the ship. Many of them were refugees from the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

As I leaned against the railing of the ship, looking out at the blue sea, a tall Jew with a round, black and gray beard stood next to me. We began to talk. He told me his entire biography: How he came from Slutsk, in the Minsk gubernye (a fellow countryman of my father's), and that he had been to America once, was going back there now, and knew the "Golden Land" well.

"Well," I say to him, "we'll soon be in America at last, after we've crossed the border and been to Prostken and Hamburg. Now we're already on the last leg of our journey".
"Ey," he answers me with a sad smile and quotes the "goyish" proverb: "Nye kazhi hots poka nye pereskots. Don't tell me what's going on until it's over. We're not in America yet!"
"Why?" I ask curiously.

"We still have to pass 'Cerberus'," he says, "and this 'Cerberus' is the "Kesl-Gardn" [8].
(According to prehistoric Greek mythology, 'Cerberus' was a large dog with three heads that would not let the bad guys out of hell and kept watch next to the Garden of Eden to prevent sinners from entering).

In this

115

"Kesl-Gardn", my fellow passenger explains to me, "sits a 'tshinovnik', an American immigration official who questions every arriving immigrant and decides whether to let them in or not. He usually finds all kinds of arguments not to let them through. Sometimes he doesn't like the immigrant's physical appearance. And sometimes he doesn't like the kind of job the person did in his old country. For example: cheder teachers, matchmakers, brokers and similar 'shady' businesses, such a person would not be able to make a living in America, but would eventually become a burden on the welfare system, so he sends the desperate emigrant back".

The rather sinister information from the Slutsker, that we still have to go through a final "hell" and that none of the emigrants can be sure that they will really be allowed to enter, literally killed me...
I was afraid of the "maybe" - maybe the "tshinovnik" wouldn't like me or my profession and would send me back? That would have been a real tragedy for me - a tragedy that I might not have survived.
For, as you already know, dear reader, America was my last resort...

My father's compatriot had advised me that when I arrived in "Kesl-Gardn" and the "tshinovnik" asked me what I did for a living back home, I should never answer that I was an accountant.
"Why not?" [I asked].

He replied: "America is not looking for accountants among the immigrants, but only people who can work fast and hard - so fast, in fact, until 'the breath of life is chased out of you.' Or they want people who can do heavy work, like hauling and pulling loads on ships and freight cars.
"So what should I tell him?"
"Tell him you are a tailor".

"Why a tailor?"
"Well, if you tell him you're a carpenter or a locksmith or a tanner, he won't believe you because you don't look like a hard-working man. He'll look at your hands!"...

The advice of the "American" (he was called "American" on the ship because, as you know, he had been to America before) was very good and logical advice, but I was always afraid of the "maybe"...

Maybe, I was afraid, he would interrogate me and give me a thread to pull into the eye of the needle and... maybe I wouldn't survive this "test"?
Don't even ask what would happen then!

[a] Interesting article about emigration from Hamburg to America, unfortunately only in German: Von Hamburg nach Amerika: 1913 so viele Auswanderer wie nie | NDR.de - Geschichte - Chronologie

[1] see Maxim Litvinov - Wikipedia

[2] see The unknown Zabludovsky: his early years – History of Medicine (historymedjournal.com)

[3] see Avrom Ber Gotlober - Wikipedia

[4] see Aaron Liebermann - Wikipedia

[5] see Rosa Raisa - Wikipedia

[6] Rosh Chodesh, the „head“ of a month, the monthly celebration of the New Moon, a semi-holiday. It is considered a "mitzvah" to give more donations than usual to the poor on Rosh Chodesh

[7] המליץ= the first Hebrew newspaper in the Russian Empirer

[8] The Yiddish pronunciation of "Castle-Garden", which became a kind of synonym for the emigrants' arrival and registration center even after its closure.

On the Other Side

When the weather was fine, the atmosphere on the deck of the ship was very cheerful. People sang, danced and told very amusing anecdotes. Polyakn [Christian Poles] danced and sang the Polish patriotic song "Yetshe Polska ne sginela i ni mushy sginutsh"[1] - a song that was strictly forbidden in Tsarist Russia.
A Ukrainian "shikse" [gentile woman] sang the well-known love song from [the opera] Natalka Poltavka, "Veyut Vyetri"[2] and then danced a "kozatske" [3] .
Bundists sang the "Shvue", "Long live the Jewish Labor Bund of Russia, Lithuania, Poland" [4] .

You'd also hear the Yiddish folk song "Oyfn Pripyetshok" [Oyfn Pripetshik, On the Hearth], "Unter die grine boymele shpiln zikh Moyshe'lekh, Shloyme'lekh" [Under the green trees play Moyshelekh, Shloymelekh], and "Hotsmakh iz a blinder" [5]. On rainy days, when we sat in the cabins, Jewish girls and boys sang the "Elegy on the Death of the Scribe Levanda"[6] , written in Yiddish and Russian, which begins with the words: "Our tears have not yet dried because we miss Gordon and Smolenski, when suddenly we have to hear the news that Levanda is no longer in this world;

God, hold your hand over us, do not punish us constantly, let us rest a little; what can become of us if we often have to swallow the bitter drop of wine?".

We heard funny songs from a group of German immigrants:
"Dreimal Drei ist Neun, wir waren betrunken wie die Schweine" [Three times three is nine, we were drunk as pigs] and "Komm trink Bier, liebe liebe Liese" [Come drink beer, dear dear Liese][7] .
And a love song:
"Dear, dear Liese, do you love me? On the green meadow I asked her," and with the melody from "Rigoletto" they sang, "If you don't want to marry me, if you don't want to love me, then the devil take you and leave me in peace!"

We heard the sounds of "Vikhri vyazhdyebnya veyut nad nami" [8] , "Trudno, bratsi, nam zhivyotsya na rusi svyatoy" [9] , "Iz za idal svyatavo"[10] , and also the two famous Yiddish revolutionary songs: "We are hated and driven" [11] , "Dreaming Boatmen" [12] , and others I cannot remember...
I also heard several anecdotes:

A young man, a former, knowledgeable "kloyznik" [a devoted synagogue worshipper], asked an older Jew what the "mekhaber", i.e., the author of the "Rosh Khoydesh" blessing [13] , meant by the prayer "חיים שימלא משאלות לבנו" (Dear God, fulfill the desires of our hearts) - and he added to his question:
"What do you mean, if we have already asked for health and livelihood, what other wishes should we pray for? "
The other replied: "Perhaps he [the mekhaber] meant to ask for children".
The first one said: "Well, but he had already asked for health, and childlessness has something to do with health."
The other asked: "Perhaps he had a grown-up daughter and couldn't find a suitable husband for her?"

The first said, "But he had already asked for a livelihood, and if you have enough income, you can get a bridegroom".

118

The other:
"Now tell me, don't make me impatient. What then is the meaning of משאלות לבנו ? "

[The answer was]: " משאלות לבנו means that **the other person should not have it**"...

The other smiled and made wry faces…

A veteran Belarusian soldier recounts:
"An officer ordered his servant to cook a chicken for lunch. A few minutes later, the servant returned and told his "blagoradye" [nobility] that he couldn't cook the chicken.
"Why not?" the officer asked angrily.
"Because the general's rooster is courting the chicken!

An erudite, Russian-speaking Jewish lad tells an anecdote about a tsarist general.
"A general came into a restaurant with his big dog "Mopsi". Two students were sitting at another table across from him. The general said to his dog: "Study, Mopsi, study, so that you become a professor!" One of the students replied:
"Don't study, Mopsi, don't study to become a general"....

Also, I heard the singing of two young Belarusian peasants who were holding an empty bottle and an empty glass in their hands: „Grafintshik, golubtshik, krasavtshik, ti moy, lyublyu tyebya vidyet‘s tryokh probnoy vodoy“ [14] and „Kilishek to moy bratshishek“ [15].

[1] „Jeszcze Polska nie umarła, Kiedy my żyjemy“, „Poland has not yet perished so long as we still live“, see Polish National Anthem - "Jeszcze Polska Nie Zginęła" (PL/EN) (youtube.com)

[2] "Winds blow", see Віють вітри Natalka poltavka Ukrainian opera 1935 (youtube.com)

[3] popular Jewish dance of Cossack origin

[4] The quoted sentence is not in the "Shvue" of the anthem of the Bund, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDlip_ciLek , but in the Yiddish workers' song "Salted Sea of Human Tears", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4W0LUnohVw

[5] see Browse by Title: "Hotsmakh iz a blinder" · YIVO Online Exhibitions

[6] see Lev Levanda - Wikipedia

[7] These are German folk songs whose lyrics were made fun of.

[8] [Hostile whirlwinds blow over us], see Варшавянка - Вихри враждебные веют над нами (youtube.com)

[9] It’s hard for uns, brothers, to libe in Holy Russia

[10] From__ distance holy [not sure with the meaning]

[11] see Im Kamf (youtube.com)

[12] Possibly he means "Ey, uchnem!“, see Ey, uchnem! - Der Michel - Lied der Wolgaschlepper - Эй, ухнем! (youtube.com)

[13] The prayer on the Shabbat before the beginning of the new month [Rosh Chodesh], asking for a happy month, see Blessing of the month - Wikipedia
To make the following very short sentences easier to understand, or to get the point, I have translated a bit freely.

[14] a parody of this poem Песня. Графинчик. 1904 года (Александр Васев) / Стихи.ру (stihi.ru) My dear decanter, my handsome one, I love to see you, with "three test water" [wodka]

[15] Kilishek [a glass for drinking vodka] is my brother

Cheerful, Lively on the Ship - but also Wistful...

A middle-aged German asked a young German girl why she was leaving her country and going to America. Her answer was:
"I was homeless in my homeland" ....

A farmer from the Vilna Governorate tells his fellow countryman why he is going to America:
"My 'gaspodoarke' [homestead]", he said, "did not bring enough income to live on". As a result, he was

constantly arguing with his wife, which reminded him of the peasant proverb:
"Yak vsarayu nye molotytsa, to vdomu klutytsa"[1] .

[1] When there is no grain being threshed in the barn, there is quarreling at home.

How a Jewish Soldier Blessed his Colonel

A veteran Jewish soldier made a group of people laugh when he told how he responded to his colonel's greeting, "zdorovno rebyata!" [Hey, guys!]. He told how all the soldiers shouted, "zdravya zhelayem vashe visokororye" [I wish you good health].
[My thoughts were, "What, should I wish him good health? - The plague!"
"One of the listeners asked curiously, "And what did you say to him?"
He answered: "When the soldiers replied, 'Zdrvya zhelayem vasher viso***korordy***e,' I shouted, 'Shall you catch the ***kholyere*** [cholera] immediately'!" [1]

The cheerful atmosphere on the deck of the ship, the singing, the dancing, the anecdotes, unfortunately had no effect on me. That "maybe" was eating away at me like a worm. But I

wasn't the only one trembling inside. Especially the girls who had left to try their luck in America were scared.
Maybe, God forbid, they wouldn't get in, then they wouldn't know where to go. They could not stay with their poor father, they complained, and there was no way for them to earn money in the small shtetl.
And a girl without a dowry couldn't find a decent husband.
But also the war refugees and the political "criminals" who had escaped from the tsarist prisons and from Siberia were afraid. Then there were those who, unfortunately, did not have the ten dollars that every immigrant needed to survive the first few weeks before finding a job (in fact, I had exactly ten dollars left).

120

The last two days were sad for all fellow-passengers; you didn't know what to expect in the new country - assuming you were allowed in at all - and how you would get along. I consoled myself with the thought that I could **study** in America. I would sit down in a library for an hour or two and study anything I could lay my hands on: a newspaper, a magazine, or a book, and no one would punish me for it, and no one would bother me, as had unfortunately been the case at home.

Finally, on a warm Sunday afternoon, May 25, 1905, the huge "Armenia" floated into Ellis Island, known as the "Kesl-Gardn" and also as the "Island of Tears" (because of the many tears shed by those who were not let in).

The immigration officers ordered everyone to take off their hats and get in line. A thin, old doctor with a gray beard came up and scowled at the anxious immigrants.
Together with his three assistants, he examined the heads, trying to find something that shouldn't be there...
But he found nothing, because someone blessed with an unwanted "crown" wouldn't have even tried to travel to America, knowing from the start that they wouldn't be allowed in.

[1] For a better understanding of the abbreviated sentences, I have translated a little freely and marked two words.

The Last Way

And there I am, standing in the long "shure" (line) between people who, like me, are standing with beating hearts, waiting to get to the "Cerberus", the official in whose hands lies the fate of thousands of desperate emigrants. As we already know, this American official had the right to refuse entry to emigrants he did not like and to send them back to the countries

121

from which they had fled - fleeing poverty, unemployment, pogroms or wars, political and religious persecution.
As I stand in line, I can hear the American official in front of me - a gentleman in his late forties, clean-shaven with a brown mustache, sitting on a high chair, documents in hand - arguing with the people in German, Polish, and Russian.

"So, you're a tailor," he says with a smile, after I've answered his question about what I did in the old country.
"Yes, yes, sir, a tailor!"
He wasn't "interrogating" me. Nor did I see that he had a needle and thread in his hand. I was really scared for nothing!

I don't know why he smiled when he questioned me. Could it be that he was happy that "his" America was enriched with another tailor? Or did he know that I was deceiving him and feigning ignorance?

In any case, my "bluff" worked satisfactorily, and so I am already on American soil.
If you, dear readers, want to know how I settled in this new country, you'll have to read my first book:

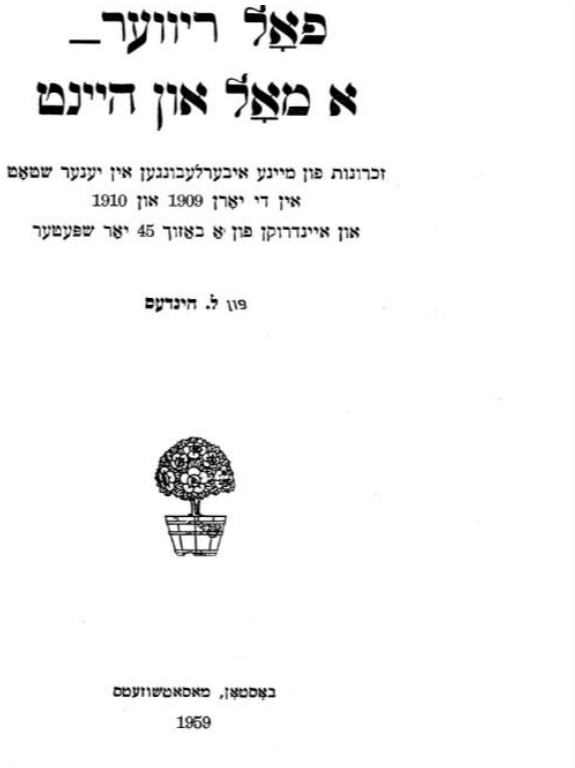
"Fall River - Once and Now".

The Names of the Writers Mentioned in the Book

Sholem-Aleichem	Tolstoy
Sholem Ash	Gorky
Abraham Reizen	Nekrasov
H.D. Nomberg	Gogol
Gina Medem	Tshernishevsky
Y.A. Rontsh	Lenin
Raphael Posner	Goethe
Y.B.Beylin	Schiller
Abraham Mapu	Heine
Y.L.Gordon	Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
Prey [Perets] Smolenskin	Mendelssohn
Levando	Karl Marx
David Edelstadt	

Appendix [not part of the opriginal book]

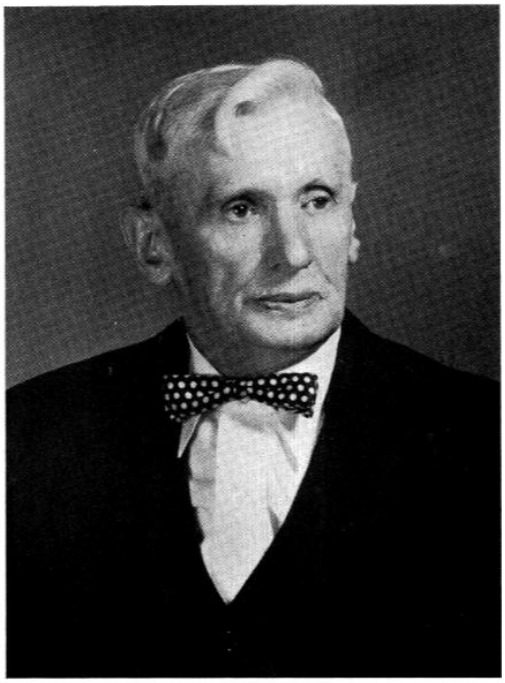
Excerpt from the follow-up book by Leybl Hindes,
"Fall River, Past and Present",
dedicated to the author's son


פאל ריווער_
א מאל און היינט

זכרונות פון מיינע איבערלעבונגען אין יענער שטאָם
אין די יאָרן 1909 און 1910
און איינדרוקן פון א באזוך 45 יאָר שפעטער

פון ל. היינדעם

באסטאן, מאסאטשוועטס
1959



Printed in Boston, Massachusetts
by the
Independent Press, Inc.

Source: Fol River a mol un haynṭ ; zikhroyneṡ fun mayne iberlebenungen in yener shṭoṭ in di yorn 1909 un 1910 un ayndrukn fun a bazukh 45 yor shpeṭer | Yiddish Book Center

XI

[Foreword] By the Editors

The author of this book came to America with the great stream of emigrants from Russia in 1906. Having neither a trade nor a command of the local language, he found it very difficult to adapt to the new circumstances and the new country. The knowledge he brought with him from home, four languages and bookkeeping, did not help him at all. So he had to work in New York for very low wages in the [so-called] "light" industries.
One of the "light" industries of those years was the manufacture of leather goods, such as wallets, ladies' handbags, belts, and other leather items. However, "slek" [unemployment] very often prevailed in these "paket-buks" [purse] factories. If you had worked in one of these small factories for five or six weeks, the factory would close and the laid-off workers would have to look for new jobs.
This search for a new job on "every Monday and Thursday", where often nothing could be found, became tiresome for him and he moved to the "country", to the provinces.

In the small towns in the country, however, the situation was no better than in New York - everywhere it was just slek, slek, slek and slek again.

Instead of looking for a new job in the same small town, he moved to a second and a third, and so for three years, from 1906 to 1909, he wandered through 25 small towns in the states of Massachusetts, Road Island, Maine, and New Hamstedt. He supported himself by working, peddling, waiting tables in restaurants, and doing whatever work came his way until he reached Fall River, where he stayed for just under two years.

During his years of wandering, the writer was influenced by socialist ideas he heard from speakers or read in socialist literature, especially the world-famous work "In Hundert Yor Arum" [1] by the great American writer Edward Bellamy.
But he was even more influenced by the biographies

XII

of the Russian "narodnovoltses" - the sons and daughters of rich and cultured families, who in the 70s and 80s of the 19th century went "vnarod", away to the people, to the poor, oppressed peasants of Russia, to teach them the rules of hygienic life, to teach them to read and write, and to show them the way to fight against their oppressors, the aristocrats and the tsarist clique.

The author of this book followed the example of these heroic "narodniks" during his years of traveling through the cities. He took "green" workers, Jewish and non-Jewish, to doctors; he watched over them all night as they lay sick in their beds; he went with them to look for work in non-Jewish factories where the managers spoke only English. He taught them to write Yiddish so that they could write letters to their relatives in the old country, and he taught them to read English characters so that they could read a sign on a streetcar, over a shop, or over a street and not get lost. And he helped the helpless immigrant youth in any way he could.

He continued this humanitarian work for the benefit of the unfortunate immigrants when he came to Fall River, even when he himself was in great need. During the few years he spent in the city, he had a good insight into the social life of the ordinary Jewish people, which was concentrated in and around the delicacy store, where Jewish newspapers were also sold. Every Sunday morning on summer nights, workers, peddlers, and small shopkeepers would gather near the store to talk about the problems of the world ("politics", as they called it). The author reproduces these overheard conversations in full detail in this book.

The brilliant and praiseworthy work of the cultural committee of the Workers' Circle, which serves the sacred purpose of spreading light and enlightenment among the immigrant and Americanized Jews of the city, occupies an important place in this book. He describes what the city looked like after a devastating fire, and reports on the new industries, the old,

XIII

lost Jewish quarter, and the "new Jewish ghetto" in the mountains. He writes about meetings and conversations with the few remaining friends and close neighbors.

The book also contains the interesting history of the town, beginning in 1657, and the two greatest events in 1892 and 1904 - events that became known all over the world.

We are absolutely certain that this work will be of great interest not only to the Jews of Fall River and the New England states in America, but also to Jewish readers in other countries.

The L. Hindes Book Committee
Max Haid, chairman
Harry Levenson, secretary

[1] Looking Backward: 2000-1897, see Looking Backward - Wikipedia