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"THE IMAGE OF AMERICA IN THE EYES OF THE EASTERN-EUROPEAN JEWISH IMMIGRANT AS REFLECTED IN HIS MEMOIRS, IN THE ENGLISH AND YIDDISH LANGUAGES"

By

Yechiael E. Lander

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters and
Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

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Referee, Professor Jacob Rader Marcus

DIGEST

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the image of America in the eyes of the Eastern-European Jewish immigrant as reflected in his memoirs in the English and Yiddish languages. The materials both published and unpublished, were limited to memoirs of immigrants who came to America between 1880 and 1920. We have relied completely on primary sources. Though an attempt was made to avoid the ghost-written autobiographies it is impossible to vouch for the authenticity or honesty of those selected. An attempt was also made to make the sampling of memoirs as representative as possible of the various economic, social, educational, political and age levels within the immigrant community.

Part one of the thesis entitled "On His Own Behalf" consists of synopses of the memoirs of some forty-three individuals. An effort was exerted to let the immigrant describe his image of America in his own words via quotations from his writings. We have tried to limit our interjections or interpolations to that which was felt necessary for the continuity of the story line or to underline a particular comment or observation. It was hoped that by utilizing this technique the reader might sample the true flavor and meaning of the immigrant's impressions.

The second part of the thesis entitled "To Each His Own-Image" is an attempt by the author to distill the contents of tens of thousands of pages of material into an intelligible whole, delineating the immigrant's image of America. There is also a brief treatment of some of the factors which influenced the formation of the image.

As to our findings, it must be stated that autobiography proved to be a disappointing and often frustrating source for the purposes of this thesis. The materials tended to be highly subjective and highly personal with little emphasis on the broader issues and with little reflection or self-insight. There was also a great deal of self-glorification and distortion on both a conscious and subconscious level. Much of the material tended to be either highly euphoric or darkly pessimistic.

As to the image itself we found that it was impossible to talk of "A" image. One must rather talk of images. The images were for the most part dynamic in nature altering and changing not only with the experiences and fortunes of the individual but also in response to the changing face of America itself. For the most part the images were positive providing sufficient hope and stability to make the vast majority of the immigrants remain and play an important part in the development of their adopted land. The factors affecting the images were numerous. They varied from such factors as age, education, financial success to such factors as expectation, motivation and psychological health. Above all one is left with a feeling of admiration for the immigrants in their confrontation of America's images and for their attempts to change them.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents, Moishe and Lizze Lander, themselves immigrants from Eastern-Europe. Their lives epitomize the striving of the Eastern-European immigrant to become a part of America. Their success in doing so is testimony to America's promise and to their character. Their example has been a constant source of inspiration to their children and to everyone with whom they have come into contact.

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I should like to acknowledge the encouragement and guidance of Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus in both the selection and development of this thesis. His great knowledge and understanding of American Jewish History, his friendship and constant readiness to help have been of immeasurable aid. We should also like to acknowledge the cooperation of Yivo Institute of Jewish Research and in particular that of its Archivist, Ezekiel Lifschutz, for making available some unpublished Yiddish memoirs.

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INTRODUCTION

The Grand Dame in New York harbor raised her lamp of liberty high and its rays of light penetrated into the furthermost corners of Eastern Europe. Where there had been the gnawing of hunger, the darkness of persecution, the pall of hopelessness, there now appeared sparks of hope. America beckoned and the Jews of Eastern Europe came; two million of them arrived between 1880 and 1920. Most of these came with nothing in their pockets but hope, their currency for purchasing a better future for themselves and their children. Some came joyously with expectations of finding gold in the streets, and others came sadly and reluctantly to the "traife medinah." Some came with anticipations of finding equality and opportunity, but found only prejudice and the dinginess and darkness of over-crowded tenements and oppressive sweatshops. Still they came. They suffered, they struggled, they complained. They cried and they laughed; but they persevered and most remained. They remained to build a satisfying life, if not for themselves, at least for their children. They laid the foundations of today's most prosperous and influential Jewish community. They remained also to make their invaluable contribution to American Society. Who can ever hope to evaluate the contributions of the doctors, philosophers, artists, politicians, workers, scientists, and labor leaders, that emerged from the ranks of the East-European Jews?

It is the purpose of this study to explore the East-European Jew's image of America as reflected in his memoirs in the English and Yiddish languages. We shall try to trace the image as it changes and

evolves from glowing anticipation to bitter disappointment to balanced reality.

We have relied completely on primary sources, published and unpublished memoirs and autobiographies of immigrants who came to America between 1880 and 1920. A great effort was exerted to make our sampling representative of the various social, economic and political currents in the immigrant community. Wherever possible we avoided the ghost-written, doctored and edited memoir whose only purpose is to portray the individual in the best possible tones. On the other hand, it is impossible to vouch for the complete authenticity or integrity of those selected. A certain amount of self-glorification or distortion is inevitable in this genre of literature. Though much of it is contrived and poor some is most honest and literate. Still there is little regard for dates and often for formal structure. There is a great dwelling on items of strictly personal interest. Concerned with his own immediate needs the newcomer took little time to reflect on his experiences or to develop any broad perspective. An attempt has been made to sift out what seemed most relevant to our topic and to the continuity of their stories. All translations from the Yiddish are my own. We have also tried to represent the full spectrum of images from the highly romantic to the darkly pessimistic. Above all an attempt has been made in the synopses of the memoirs, to let the immigrants speak for themselves, in their own words.

A few words on why we should study this period of American life. Is it only a curiosity or a nostalgia that we wish to satisfy? Partly, and that is legitimate. Is it to glory in their many contributions that

we look back? Is it only out of our desire to be acquainted with our history as Americans and Jews that we delve into that important period? To some extent; but there is much more, a more direct and immediate relevance. America is a nation of immigrants, not only in the sense of movement into America from other countries, but internally as well. We are witness today to a great and dynamic internal movement as individuals and groups in our society shift and change in social status, economic position and political outlook. Whatever can be brought to bear to facilitate these changes is of great value. There is much to learn from the dynamics of life of the Eastern-European Jew and from the ways in which he faced the problems and challenges of new situations and new values. There is also much that we can learn from his approach and from his institutions; from his intellectual vitality, his persistence, his inventiveness, and his art. We have learned some but we can certainly learn more from his settlement houses, his self-help organizations, his labor unions, and his business techniques. There is indeed a great deal that the immigrants of today, both from inside and outside, might derive from the experiences of the East-European Jewish immigrant, not the least of which could be new hope. It is in this spirit of learning that we turn to our study.

PART I

"On Our Own Behalf"

Synopses

MEMOIRS IN

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

THE PROMISED LAND

By

Mary Antin

America was indeed The Promised Land for little Mashke Antin. Born in the small town of Polotzk, Russia, her life and that of her family was typical of the low estate of the Jew in the Pale of Settlement. Second-class citizens, restricted in their area of settlement and in the occupations they might follow, hounded by petty officials hungry for bribes, subject to the passions of the peasant mobs incited by their priests, limited in their general education by quotas and barriers, the Jews of Russia eked out a meager existence on the fringe of society, with little light and little hope for change. In times of prosperity life was tolerable and the Jew rejoiced in his portion. In times of depression he was the first to suffer. Mashke's father, victim of bad times, turned his face westwards to America, The Promised Land. Typical of the immigration of that time, her father preceded the family to America. He arrived there in 1894, through the generosity of some Jewish charitable organization in Germany and the grace of God. Three years later, he sent for his family to join him in Boston, where he had tried to establish himself.

After a long and difficult journey across Europe and the Atlantic, Mashke arrived in Boston at age thirteen with her mother, brothers and sister. From the beginning Mashke was full of wonder at this new land and excited over the prospects it offered. While some

might consider her first home as nothing more than a dingy and bleak tenement, for her it was an imposing brick building, "loftier than any dwelling" she had ever lived in.[1] Her first meal provided many pleasant surprises, not the least of which was food from cans and "a queer slippery kind of fruit which he (father) called a banana."[2] What was most exciting was that everything seemed to be free in America. "Light was free; the streets were as bright as a synagogue on a Holy day. Music was free; we had been serenaded to our gaping delight by a brass band of many pieces."[3] Most significant for Mashke, or Mary as she proudly became known in America, was the fact that education was free. As she herself writes, "No applications, no questions asked, no examinations, rulings, exclusions, no machinations, no fees. The doors stood open for every one of us. The smallest child could show us the way."[4] Characteristic of the immigrants of that period, her father tried his hand at a candy store and other ventures, never really succeeding in any of them. Yet Mary was not discouraged, for she thought that "it was miracle enough that I Mashke, the granddaughter of Raphael the Russian, born to a humble destiny should be at home in an American metropolis, be free to fashion my own life and should dream my dreams in English phrases. It required no fife and drum corps...to set me tingling with patriotism. Even... the letter carrier and fire engine I regarded with respect."[5]

Her father proudly entered her in public school, a mission he would not have delegated to the President of the United States. He also applied immediately for citizenship, for though he came to America seeking bread for his family, America above all "meant freedom to

speak his thoughts, to throw off the shackles of superstition and to test his own fate unhindered by political or religious tyranny."

Mary blossomed in the free atmosphere of America. Nurtured and cultivated by the loving hands of her American teachers,[6] she began to feel a special pride at being able to call America "my country." Whenever she would rise to sing the American anthem, "I shouted the words with all my might...Polotzk was not my country, it was Goluth."[7] As a child she wrote a prize-winning poem about George Washington who became her great personal hero. It read in part, "Then we weary Hebrew children at last found rest, in a land where reigned freedom and like a nest to homeless birds your land proved to us."[8]

Mary was also impressed with American justice. In court one day she was pleased to note that "nobody cringed, nobody was bullied, nobody lied who didn't want to. We were all free and treated equally."[9]

However, for many, America meant the break-up of the family. The new freedom of the children and their relative ease of adjustment reversed the roles in the family. The children became the channels of communication with the outside world and the new authority figures. There were clashes which often led "to the disintegration of home life."[10]

Though she was able to take advantage of many opportunities offered a woman in America, her sister, who was just a few years older, had to work and help support the family. She was not able to partake of "a long girlhood, a free choice in marriage and a brimful womanhood which are the precious rights of an American woman."

Accepting quite literally America's promise of equality, she boldly wrote to her state senator and was soon welcomed into his circle of friends. New and undreamed-of opportunities opened for the little girl from Plotzk. Christians and Jews befriended her so that she was able to complete high school and go on to Barnard College in New York. Concluding her memoirs, which were written in 1912 at the age of twenty-eight, she remembered and endorsed the words of Mr. Rosenblum, her neighborhood grocer who once said to his daughter, "In America everybody can get to be something if only he wants to... in America everything is possible."[11]

Mary Antin's memoirs are rather typical of a certain genre of immigrant literature. Living a rather sheltered life, enjoying the security of a good home, able to go to school and be supported, everything was indeed "strawberries and sour cream." Her memoirs tend to be disturbingly uncritical.

THE TRANSPLANTED PEOPLE

By

Etta Byer

The story of Etta Byer begins as so many of the memoirs of Eastern-European Jews in a little hamlet in Russia, in this instance, the village of Lida. Born in 1884 into a poor family, she received only a sparse education in Hebrew. At six she went to work in the little store run by her grandmother Gitl and her mother. Her father spent his time in study and conducting the affairs of the Chassidic congregation. At twelve years of age she went to work in a local cigarette factory. However at thirteen she became implicated in a strike at the factory and under the threat of arrest by Czarist police and pressure from her family, she fled to London, alone.[12] She lived in London till her eighteenth birthday, earning her living as a cigarette maker.

Some relatives from Lida, who had migrated to America and settled in Chicago, encouraged young Etta to leave London and join them. Upon arriving in Chicago, poor little Etta, who was to face a series of heartbreaks, was given a cool greeting by her brother. Afraid that he might have to support her, he says, "Remember you did not come to me. You came to America."[13]

The young lady from Lida proceeded to find a job in a cigar factory and became the supporter of her brother and several worthless cousins who preyed on her good nature.[14] She soon became involved in an unhappy marriage. Moving to New York, she was followed there by her

shiftless and ill husband. She became a machine operator in a sweat shop where she excelled at her work. Tragically, she developed consumption. Etta returned to Lida for a rest and was nursed back to health by her family.

In 1910 Etta returned to New York and a reunion with her husband. After saving money from a job in a cigar factory, she and her husband bought a cigar store in Harlem. Unfortunately, the original owner opened a shop across the street and forced them out.

Shortly thereafter her ill husband returned to Chicago and she followed him there with her children. After a number of false starts she and her husband established themselves in a little store and for the first time they had a little mazal.[15] With a change of luck and some stability Etta and her husband began to feel at home in America. They soon became citizens and Etta's cup ran over. "It was a wonderful feeling to belong to the United States of America," she writes proudly.[16]

During World War I Etta and her husband began to prosper. In partnership with Etta's brother Meyer, they opened a number of newsstands and speculated successfully on the real estate market. Like other prospering immigrants, she and her husband began to support relatives in the old country and sponsored others who wished to come to the land of plenty. Shortly thereafter her husband died and she was subsequently cheated out of much of her rightful property by her relatives.

After meeting an artist named Sam Beyer her luck changed and they had a happy life together. They raised several sons from her

first marriage and one from their own. In time her sons went to universities and rose to high positions in their respective fields.

During World War II Etta became restless and took a job as a sewing machine operator in a factory.[17] She was still an operator in the factory at the time she wrote her memoirs in 1955.

The balance of her memoirs are a collection of impressions of events and people she had somehow come into contact with. She writes of Emma Goldman, the Communist barred from reentry into the United States;[18] of Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist and labor leader;[19] of Lucy Parsons, widow of one of the innocent men executed for the Chicago Haymarket riots;[20] and of Rosa Raisa, the Jewish opera star.[21]

Etta's story would not be complete without sharing some of her impressions of her adopted land. On a visit to her brother Chaim, whom she had not seen for many years she writes; "My heart rejoiced at his good fortune. We had been little people in Lida, lower than grass. Now we were transplanted, branching out, growing as normal Americans...it was a glorious feeling to 'belong' here, and in my mind I kissed the soil of the United States."[22] In concluding her memoirs, this noble little woman who returned to public school at age sixty-eight to obtain the education she had once been deprived of, writes in wonder and gratitude; "Everyone in the United States can travel all over the country without being asked for a passport. We are not afraid of the police...election day is like a holiday...when we become dissatisfied with officials we change them at the following election...we say what we want...every individual is entitled to justice.

Our Constitution is a holy document written by some of the wisest men who ever lived...here we are able to live and prosper...Americans are lavish and generous in their giving...I love Chicago even the smoke belching from the chimneys of its factories...but above all I love our freedom...deep is my love for our country America. I shall never understand how anybody can live here without cherishing it. It must be a lack of common sense or lack of education."[23] So ends the story of Yocheved Beyer, the transplanted Jew from Lida, who became a proud daughter of her adopted land.

MEMOIRS OF DAVID BLAUSTEIN

Arranged by

Miriam Blaustein

These memoirs of one of the American Jewish community's early and outstanding civil servants were arranged by his wife Miriam shortly after his untimely death at age 42 in 1912.

David Blaustein came of humble and poor people. He was born in the little village of Lida, Russia in 1866. He received a traditional education and was exposed to the Haskalah movement. At an early age his appetite for a secular education was whetted. Knowing that Lida held little hope for fulfilling his goal, he stole across the borders into Prussia. He supported himself with odd jobs; among them, tutoring the children of affluent families while attending a school of higher studies.

After several years, a law was passed in Prussia expelling foreign-born Jews. David fled to America.[24] He expressed his gratitude in a poem called "To my Country." It read in part;

> "...O, my new country,
> Thou art the holy ground
> for time-foiled hopes of
> nations blessed free.
> ...So thou must greater be,
> till freedom shine and simple truth abound
> and every nation find a heart in thee."[25]

Arriving in America in 1886, he helped establish a modern Hebrew and German school in Boston, one of the first of its kind in this country.[26] After receiving a B.A. from Harvard in 1893, he accepted

the pulpit of a Reform congregation in Providence, Rhode Island.[27] He left that pulpit in 1898 to become superintendent of the famed Educational Alliance in New York City. It was at the Alliance, an institution that provided a multitude of educational, vocational, social and legal services to new immigrants, that his reputation as an early Jewish social worker grew.[28] Leaving the Educational Alliance in 1907 after a disagreement with the Board, he tried his hand at a number of positions such as bank manager and director of the Chicago Hebrew Institute. In 1910 he returned to New York to become a lecturer at the New York School of Philanthropy.

He devoted the latter part of his life to educating a generation of social workers. He generously shared his knowledge and insights on the acculturation of the European immigrant. Applying the lessons of his own life, he continually stressed education as "the way into America for the immigrant."[30] The immigrant, he taught, must not only be educated in the language, but as well in the responsibilities of citizenship, in the values of community life, in the importance of physical health and to the vast opportunities which awaited him in America.

BORN A JEW

By

Boris D. Bogen

Boris Bogen's background was not typical of the mass of East-European Jewish immigrants. His father was a well-to-do contractor doing government construction work and was therefore permitted to live in Moscow where Boris was born.[31] His early Jewish education was typical but brief. Since Jewish schools were outlawed in cities outside the Pale of Settlement, the cheder which he attended was located in Moscow's vice district, so as to camouflage it from the police.[32] His father, harboring great hopes for his son, enrolled him in a Russian gymnasium or secondary school. Young Boris joined a group of young intellectuals and dreamt of a future Russian society in which the Jew would have equality. His dreams were quickly shattered by the intolerance he found among all Russians, whether they were in the Socialist group he joined, his school or among his acquaintances. The Jew was a pariah. The excesses following the assassination of Czar Alexander II brought this home to him with unerring impact. "Our little circle was tired of the insoluble Jewish problem," he wrote, "escape was the only way out it seemed."[33] He and his friends began to seek a solution for the Jewish problem via immigration. Their eyes turned westwards. They wrote to all parts of the world seeking help. After contact with an American Jew who they thought of as a man of great importance, America loomed large as the answer to their problems. "We dreamed of Jews as they would be in the new world, where there was

freedom for all, where the schools opened wide their doors to all who would enter and where life was secure and hopeful and worthwile."[34] Many of his friends scoffed at him; "Who goes to America?...criminals, fugitives from justice, people who evade military service."[35]

His wife and he decided to go. They travelled across Europe to Hamburg and thence on to America. They were met by their wife's uncle and taken to the East side. To Bogen, his first view of the new world reminded him of the dark images of Moscow's ghetto and he was deeply dismayed. "The poverty, discomfort and the squalor of the ghetto settled on us like a dark cloud."[36] A city Jew whose native tongue was Russian, Bogen described his feeling of linguistic and cultural isolation from the mass of Eastern-European Jews. Determined to become a part of America, he shaved his beard and began to learn English. Still, much as he tried, it only seemed that he had exchanged the hated Russian epithet "Jid" for the American "greener," which subjected him to a mixture of jokes and pity.[37]

Bogen in quick succession became a partner in a Russian language paper, only to be cheated of his savings, a furniture finisher, a painter and a mill hand. Along the way he discovered the secret of American success - bluff. A relative tells him, "When you go for a job... you say you are experienced in this line. That is bluff. In America one gets along like that."[38] Despite bluff he failed at all of his attempts to find a place for himself. Despite the urgings of some friends to return to Russia, "I could not give up my dream of a free life in America. I could not bear the thought of taking up...the

cramped, furtive existence of the Jew in Russia."[39]

One day, disheartened Boris received an appointment as a correspondent of a Russian newspaper, on the basis of some articles he had written. He was to receive a regular retainer.[40] He used his unexpected new fortune as a stepping-stone to greater things. Freed of the worry for shelter and food, he spent weeks learning the English language. Finally he passed the necessary exams to become an English teacher in an evening school for immigrants. He later enrolled in the School of Pedagogy of New York University. After graduation he obtained a job at the Hebrew Institute. There he was appalled by the attitude of the wealthy German-Jewish benefactors of the Institute "who thought of them (immigrants) as a mass to be thrown into a melting pot and made over into Americans...they...thought that the way to assimilate immigrants was to strip them of their inheritance of language and custom and bedeck them in a ready made suit of Americanism. Yiddish must be stricken from the tongues of Jewish immigrants!..."[41] He was equally appalled at the open warfare between the various Jewish groups. He describes how the anarchists opened a restaurant on Yom Kippur just to taunt the Orthodox.[42] Despite the miserable life in the ghetto, Bogen felt the Jews were better off than the non-Jews. "Jewish life at least had the comfort of Jewish tradition."[43]

Bogen graduated from New York University and took a job with the Baron de Hirsch Technical School. There he became acquainted with Dr. Sabsovich, a Jewish chemist who was the spirit behind the Baron de Hirsch Agricultural Settlement of some two thousand Jews in Woodbine,

New Jersey. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed principal of the Agricultural School at Woodbine. With him we are witness to the creation of the first all-Jewish political unit in America. Woodbine became the Borough of Woodbine.[44] Despite the efforts and hopes of the benefactors, the young people of Woodbine did not return to the land but sought plusher, more prestigous jobs in the cities.[45] Disillusioned by his failure at Woodbine, Bogen obtained a job with the United Jewish Charities of Cincinnati[46] where he did some exceptional pioneering in the field of Jewish Social Service.

The balance of this most interesting memoir is devoted to a recounting of his many missions on behalf of the Joint Distribution Committee in Holland, Poland, and Russia during and after World War I. Boris Bogen, Russian-Jew, American social worker returned to Europe to help fulfill the needs of his suffering brethren. His account of that period of great upheaval is a fascinating but frightening one. Born a Russian Jew, he used the opportunities of America to serve his people.

A LOST PARADISE

By

Samuel Chotzinoff

For Samuel Chotzinoff, his lost paradise is not Vitebsk his birthplace, nor is it the image of America which he brought with him to this country. It is rather the days of his childhood which he recounts with great skill and abundant good humor in these interesting memoirs.

Samuel Chotzinoff recalls his childhood years in Vitebsk with great affection. He was born into impoverished gentility "one year after the pogrom in Suwalki"[47] or 1889. One might note parenthetically that this system of keeping dates by associating them with an event was common amonst East Europeans, and plagues one working with these materials. His childhood was a poor but happy one. One of the many children of Mayshe Baer Chatianov the town melamed and shochet, he held a position of power and privilege in cheder and was quick to use it.[48] As some of his children approached the age of the burdensome and feared military service, Mayshe Baer began to seek a solution.[49] To allow a son to enter the army was as great a tragedy in the eyes of Jewish parents, as conversion. Under the urgings of a second cousin who had established himself in Passaic, New Jersey, the family made preparations to leave. Swindled by a travel agent, they ended their journey in London instead of America.[50] There, through the stubborn tenacity of his mother and the help of a landsman, they did very well. Finally,

prompted by the father's failing health, they left for America, landing in Newark in 1894.[51] Their first contact with America was through the time-honored slogan, "Time is Money," used so profusely by Mr. Gold, their relative. Gold urged Mayshe Baer to shorten his name from Chatianov to Chot, as he had from Goldstein to Gold, for "Time is Money." His father resisted. Outliving their hospitality at the Golds, the family moved to New York. There young Samuel came into contact with Christians for the first time. His first teacher in public school was Miss Murphy. He was afraid of her for she was a "Chreestch" or Christian. In awe of that strange new being which the new world had made it possible for him to come into contact with, he nevertheless learned in time that she was indeed human.

In that immigrant society with its shifting moral standards, the young people spoke openly about sexual matters and displayed tremendous interest in the freedom of ideas and behaviour. Despite that, "the actual behaviour of the young people was strictly, though unconsciously in the tradition of their elders."[53] Chotzinoff writes with great excitement about his introduction into gang warfare,[54] the Yiddish theatre,[55] his first must lessons,[56] and his first contact with socialist open-air meetings on Rutger's Square. Innocent and impressionable, he "heard with horror bosses were drinking the blood of workmen and women."[57] When the speakers cried out for support of the bakers' strike, young Sammy rushed home and refused to eat non-union bread, much to the chagrin of his frugal and conservative father.[58]

A most exciting experience for young Chotzinoff was his first

contact with Horatio Alger stories, which he bought secondhand for eight cents. A new world unfolded before him, as did the limitless possibilities of America. A young, poor, Jewish immigrant boy began to dream the dream of all poor immigrants; wealth, success and prestige. As he said; "I now became aware of America, where before I had been aware only of a few square miles of New York's East Side...it was a country of limitless opportunity for the moral, the virtuous and the industrious... The poorest, the obscurest boy could aspire to the richest most beautiful girls... He had endowed his hero with all my characteristics. I, too, hated bullies and was quick to right injustice... How often had I given my penny allowance for candy to a tattered mishappen beggar... What a country America was for a boy to grow up in. I do not recall worrying about the absence of Jews in the America of Horatio Alger. Certainly so democratic a country could be counted on to cherish and embrace people of all faiths."[59] Later when his father looked for a job in Waterbury, Connecticut, he experienced his first American anti-semitism and the insecurity of being outside the shelter of the Jewish Ghetto. "Who could tell what they thought of me, of all Jews? I looked back with longing to my former unclouded life on East Broadway and Rutger's Place. There Jews with beards walked not only with impunity but with pride in their ancestry and beliefs."[60] When Chotzinoff dreamed of attending a military academy and aspired as every American boy supposedly did to the Presidency, those hopes were shattered by his friend Chubb "who told me, with ill-concealed satisfaction, that no foreign-born male was eligible for that supreme office."[61]

In the greatest part of this book the author concerns himself with family affairs, the many business ventures of the Chotzinoffs, his passion for music, his school days, the various teachers who helped him on his road to success as a musician and critic. He concludes with his debut as a pianist at the Educational Alliance in New York. Shmuel Chotzinoff, son of a poor immigrant melamed from Vitebsk, with no money, no status, no special privileges, but with talent and determination, realized the American dream of success, as had many of his compatriots. This is the lesson of his story.

A DREAMER'S JOURNEY

By

Morris Raphael Cohen

There could be no more appropriate name for the autobiography of this dreamer par excellence. Morris Raphael Cohen, the lad from Minsk, dreamed of a bright future in America and helped kindle the dreams of thousands of young boys very much like himself who escaped from the physical and spiritual ghettos of Eastern Europe.

His childhood was fairly typical of the young boys of Minsk. His father fled to America in 1883 to escape the persecutions of the Russians and to try to find a new path of hope for his family. Unable to find a place, his father returned home defeated. He was forced to leave again shortly thereafter, spurred on by deteriorating economic and political conditions.[62] In time the "shifscarten" (bookings) arrived. Morris and his mother set out on a long and arduous trek. His first impressions are of America and of the wonderful foods that filled his hungry child's belly.[63] Imagine "bananas and fresh rolls." It was like paradise.

After the initial excitement of arrival and reunion he paused to reconsider. "What I first saw of America did not come up to the high expectations which popular accounts of its unlimited wealth and radical differences from the old world had led me to entertain. Almost all the people I met...spoke yiddish; and though their dress had a different tone...it did not seem much richer in quality...Grand Street...did not seem so much grander than the great mercantile streets of Minsk...

The most marked outer difference was the uniformity of the many storied houses."[64] The differences also became apparent in the divisions within the Jewish community. Wealthy and poor lived separately, German and Russian Jews barely mixed, Galicianer and Litvak hardly spoke, and it "took some time before the separate communities began to have sufficient intercourse to influence each other."[65] Another great and marked difference for young Morris was the emphasis in America on recreation and sports, which the older Jews opposed strenuously as harping back to Hellenism. The pace of life in America he found much more intense and hurried. Visiting the shop in which his father worked, he "was impressed with the tremendous drive which infiltrated and animated the whole establishment - it was nothing like the leisurely air of the tailor shop in Minsk...where men even sang occasionally."[66]

He soon became aware of the "harsh injustices in the distribution of wealth under capitalism."[67] Manufacturers made enormous profits while workers exhausted themselves physically and mentally for a pittance. While the conveniences of gas for lighting and cooking were welcome, something more in the pot would have been even more welcome.[68] Through the pages of The Arbeiter Zeitung, a socialist newspaper, and the struggles of his father, he became very much aware of the inequities of America; "I began to see the reality of class oppression."[69] Also apparent to him as a lad was the increasing drift from orthodoxy, as family and community ties loosened, and as the prepossessing concern of all became the earning of a livelihood.[70]

For the longest time Morris was lost. Ignorance of English set

him apart. His studious interests and physical ineptitude seemed to cut him off from his peers. Also the experiences of his father, who became a glazier, and was continuously harried by street urchins who pursued him calling him "sheeny" depressed young Morris. When his public school teacher called a boy "sheeny," he became deeply distressed and discouraged about America.[71] Nevertheless, he soon learned to play baseball and became a New York Giant fan. As if transformed he suddenly felt "a part of America."[72]

Cohen excelled in his studies and went on to City College. There he felt at home. He found there the same zest for learning that characterized his home. He was encouraged by the freedom of expression that he found at school.[73] "The life on the East Side...was characterized by a feverish intensity in intellectual life and a peculiar restlessness and eagerness to help usher in a better social order."[74] Though the new world shattered old patterns, the passion for study continued amongst the Jews and "parents continued to grind there own lives to the bone in order to make it possible for their children to achieve some intellectual distinction or skill...a new world substitute for the Talmudic learning... in the old environment."[75]

Morris describes how and why young intellectuals were drawn to the movements of social reform, particularly socialism. It was "not a seeking for better food or drink or clothing or even homes for ourselves and our less fortunate fellows. It was a protest against the economic conditions which denied to so many of us...access to riches of the spirit...those who toiled twelve hours a day...from childhood to old age were deprived of all the things that made human life worth

living."[76] At that point it seemed that the greatest challenge for young intellectuals was the democratization of the things of the spirit,[77] the achievement of progressive economic legislation[78] and the humanization of the judicial process.[79] America at that point posed a threat to Cohen's religious beliefs in the sense that there was a blatant disregard for the needs of the individual.[80]

For Cohen, as for other young intellectuals, the Yiddish press was an avenue into the non-Jewish world which the Jew regarded with some well-founded fear and suspicion.[81] It was also a force in helping to develop a cosmopolitan world view. He considered the Yiddish press as a positive and legitimate agent in a pluralistic society.[82] Becoming an American for Cohen was not assimilating, but rather bringing to bear the tradition and love of Jewish learning to the expansion and liberalization of American Society.[83] In fact, he ties Jewish survival to the survival of liberalism.

In his memoirs, Morris Cohen, beloved Professor of Philosophy at City College of New York, traces his career and shares his thoughts on education,[84] philosophy,[85] fanaticism[86] and the law.[87] Cohen's memoris provide exciting reading and excellent insights into American-Jewish life as one accompanies him on "A Dreamer's Journey."

THE MIRROR OF LIFE

By

Fannie Edelman

This is the tale of a simple Jewish housewife who came to America from the village of Tarnorvda in Galicia, located near the Russian frontier.[88] Though life was a struggle, most people were satisfied. As Fannie says, "when a worm lies in horseradish it imagines there is no sweeter existence."[89] As was typical, it was her mother who supported the family by running a little shop.

As a child Fannie had heard people speak of America. When things became difficult for her, she would dream "of coming to the free world called America...where I would fall in love and marry, without being forced to live with a man my father had selected."[90]

When her sister and brother-in-law went to America, she nagged her father into sending her.[91] In America she lived with her sister and worked in a shirt factory. Since she did not know her way about, her brother-in-law warned her to wait for him to show her, "because in the United States many young girls are misled."[92] She was subjected to ridicule as a "Galicianer," and was perplexed about America. She wondered what kind of country America was where "Galicianer" are laughed at. Yet when her sister cheated her out of her hard-earned savings, Fannie took American justice at its face value, and called in a policeman to retrieve them.[93]

Fannie then moved in with another family. However, the family's two daughters who were her own age made life miserable for her. They

insisted on calling her "greenhorn," the favorite appellative for a new immigrant. The lonely little immigrant girl consoled herself with fantasies of "America the land of gold."[94]

Later Fannie married a good man and they were blessed with three children, two of whom fulfilled every Jewish momma's dream to become doctors"...and what doctors!" Esther, her daughter, became a social worker, much to momma's delight.

With her children grown, Fannie decided to try to help others. She played an active role as a volunteer worker for the Jewish Arbitration Courts. One day on her way to work, she heard a Communist berating the United States. She became incensed. "I was angry. I was angry... because he was attacking my beloved United States of America." She does not hesitate to tell him: "you are all wrong in attacking Democracy and the freedom-loving United States of America."[97]

Much of Fannie's memoirs are concerned with those things most important to her life, such as her own activities with the Jewish Arbitration Court and her family. With relish she relates her many experiences trying to help broken families, drunkards, quarreling neighbors, jilted suitors, and forgotten parents.

Whenever Fannie applied herself to activities on behalf of the less fortunate she had in mind her own gratitude for "the good fortune that brought her to America: truly the 'Golden Land' of opportunity! It is here that I met an industrious hard-working man who became my beloved husband; and who is the devoted father of my children all of whom have become successful. As for myself, I have been able to realize

an ambition far beyond my wildest dreams...that of being a writer. For these great blessings, I will be ever grateful to the beloved United States of America."[98] Like many immigrants, Fannie was grateful for the simple opportunity of a new life and grateful for whatever good fortune it offered.

AN AMERICAN TESTAMENT

By

Joseph Freeman

Joseph Freeman's story is representative of a whole genre of immigrant autobiography and experience. Though coming with the same hopes and dreams as other compatriots from Eastern Europe, their reaction was one of disillusionment. The inequities in American life became their focus and they devoted their lives to combating these inequities and what they felt was their source - the Capitalist System. Yet with Joseph Freeman it is a critique born not of dogma or bitterness, but of disappointment.

Now to return to Joseph Freeman's story. His childhood was similar to that of thousands of other Jewish children in Eastern Europe. Born in 1897 into the family of an itinerant shoe merchant in the Province of Poltava[99] in the Ukraine, he experienced the same highs and lows as other children. There were the happy memories of vacation and Sabbath and the fearful moments born of hunger and oppression. As other Jewish children, Joseph was disturbed by the paradox, that the very same priests who trusted and traded with Jews at one moment would incite the peasant masses to pogrom at the very next.[100] Typical too was his mother's response, who in answer to the question, "mother why do they (non-Jews) hate us?" She says to Joseph, "I don't know why my son. So goes the world." Young Joseph, or so he relates, had the presence of mind to answer her, "what a terrible world."[101]

During the upheavals in Russia at the time of the Russo-Japanase War in 1904, Joseph's father questioned his position. "Should I get killed for the Czar...while I am fighting they may stage a pogrom and butcher my wife and children."[102] Or should I leave the prison of Russia for the liberty of America where "men are free and opportunities endless."[103] The elder Freeman went off. Young Joseph could think of only one thing: "to see my father, to enter the golden realm."[104]

Coming to America in 1904, at age seven was for Joseph and others a traumatic experience. As he ways, "it was a shock to be lifted out of one world to which I had painfully accustomed myself and dropped on the threshold of another. Habits of speech, feeling and thought had formed which must be altered. Bonds which must be loosened."[105] The insane noise of the Brooklyn streets unsettled him.[106] The strangeness of the language frightened him; "it was awful to hear somebody around you making sounds you could not understand."[107] His father too had changed. Not only was he clean-shaven, but the orthodox Jew from Poltava now preached to his children that "in America business was more important than piety."[108] He seldom saw his father, who left very early and returned home after he was asleep. Joseph wanted to do what the other children on his block did - to roller-skate and play baseball. Still his parents refused. Despite the help of his Hebrew teacher who lectured the parents that "in America a boy most develop his body as well as his mind,"[109] they considered baseball a game for bums. After all, who played baseball if not the sons of the lowest types; truck drivers, plumbers and carpenters. Young Joseph missed the sense of community he had felt in the old country and "all this increased the fear in my heart.

Fear of the turbulent machines in America, of God who might not like the new things I was doing, of father and his severe judgements, of the gangs around the corner, of blue eyes (his teacher) who rapped my fingers with her ruler...of the poverty which robbed us of milk and fruit and air and sunlight and made us frequently ill..."[110]

In time Joseph met at least some of the challenges posed by his new homeland, and he too dreamt of "rising to the highest rungs of the American ladder whose top was lost in the clouds."[111] He was however not blinded to the problems of American society. His young, sensitive and fertile mind was captured by the teachings of the Socialist Party; that "American capitalism was corrupt from top to bottom" and that "capitalism had to be exterminated if humanity was to progress."[112] The filth, poverty, illness, and prejudice seemed to confirm these teachings for him. Despite his negative feelings he could not help but be captured by the personality of Teddy Roosevelt, with his espousal of Social Justice.[113]

He was also troubled by what he found in the Jewish community. The "myth of Jewish unity and the reality of a class struggle were brought home to him when he witnessed Jewish bosses hiring Italian gangsters to beat up the Jewish workers."[114] When his French teacher in public school questioned his ambition to go to college since "American colleges are for Americans. You're not even an European; you're an oriental - a Jew," Joseph's judgement that America was teeming with prejudices was confirmed.[115] As he says: "when I left Russia for America I thought I was leaving the land of tyranny, of frustration and decay for a land of freedom, opportunity and progress. The America I first

saw was a stinking tenement."[116] Freeman was deeply shocked by the shooting down on defenceless workers in Colorado; his views of American capitalism seemed verified.[117]

His father experienced a good deal of success in the realm of real estate, and new opportunities opened up for him as well. He went to college only to be shocked by what he found. The student body at Columbia University was composed of many different groups, yet there was little crossing of social or economic lines. He and his socialist friends were appalled at what was taught. They were told that "America...was the land of unbound possibilities - talent, perseverance, hard work, intelligence would get you anywhere...if you failed it was your own fault. The test of success was money."[118] He and his socialist friends "who despised that 'success' made a cult of failure."[119] Nevertheless, Freeman admitted that their hatred of Capitalist America "far exceeded our understanding of it."[120]

With the entrance of the United States into World War I, with the abuses committed under the cover of the Espionage Act wherein all dissension was silenced and differences suppressed as disloyalty, Freeman became even more committed to his socialist views. America for him during the final year of the war was "barbaric."[121] The dominant ideal of America seemed to have been "the awe for money."[122] He joined the Communist Party, became editor of one of their publications, The Liberator, and rose in its ranks.

For his father, who had risen to financial heights in the post-war years, the American dream had come true. Arriving as penniless immigrants, he and his friends had accumulated substantial wealth.[123]

Joseph could not bring himself to partake of or rejoice in his father's good fortune. On an infrequent visit to him, he warned his father that "Wall Street will confiscate your property. The middle-classes will be robbed with the working classes."[124] The memoirs conclude with an account of Joseph Freeman's activities in the Communist Party in the 1930's. Another American testament comes to an end.

HOW FROM A MONKEY I BECAME A MAN

By

Sam Goldfarb

This story is a success story. The success it recounts is not only of a poor little Jewish boy from Volhynia became a millionaire, though that would be a story in itself. More significantly, it recounts the story of how a physical being pandering only to its own selfish needs, moved by ambition, greed and envy transforms itself into a spiritual being dedicated to the service of others; "how from a monkey" he "became a man."

Sammy Goldfarb, born in Linkowitz, Vohlynia, Russia into a family of modest means, was brought to America in 1905 at age three. He and his family rejoined their father, who eked out a bare living as a Hebrew teacher in St. Louis. Despite the poverty in the Jewish ghetto of St. Louis, Sammy recalls that it was "like a little bit of heaven compared to what we left behind in Linkowitz."[125]

Though getting along well with their Italian neighbors with whom "they shared weddings, births and funerals,"[126] Sammy was soon subjected to a dose of anti-semitism. In kindergarten he was called "sheeny," and on the way home from school he was attacked by some Catholic youngsters as a "Christ-killer."[127] Constant harassment by Catholic youngsters troubled him. "The prosperity and freedom was offset by constant anxiety, strain and utter terror."[128]

When Sam was just ten, his father passed away. The family was broken up; he went to live with a sister in Galesburg, Illinois.[129]

Sam enjoyed small-town life despite the occasional anti-semitic experiences. An ambitious youngster, he worked in a shoe repair shop while attending school.[130] A real go-getter, he compensated for his smallness in size with his bigness in mouth. By his graduation from high school, he became the first in his family to do so and thereby helped to fulfill "the hope and dreams they (his family) brought with them from Russia."[131]

At sixteen Sammy went into business for himself. Capitalizing on the returning doughboys, he sold them souvenirs and insignia of their army days. In one year, 1919, he made a profit of three thousand dollars.[132] A small fortune for him and for those times.

After a succession of jobs as manager of a general store, as a traveling salesman, and as a bookkeeper, he enrolled in Washington University in St. Louis. While going to school, he supported himself by selling the students clothes at discount rates.[133] After his third year, however, he left the university to try his hand at business yet another time. Again he became restless and enrolled in Law School at the University of Chicago. There he met brilliant Nathan Leopold who later achieved great notoriety for his involvement in the Bobby Franks thrill murder.[134]

Yet another time Sam left school; this time to enter the dress business in partnership with his brother. In that business he was to remain and prosper for the rest of his life. Ambitious and able, at least as he describes himself, he moved from job to job until he finally established a business of his own.[135] He capitalized on the American housewife's need for cheap, attractive clothing. As he acquired

a family and as he progressed up the ladder of success, Sam began to reexamine himself and his life. He found a disturbing image - "a monkey" as he says. Determined to become a man, he engaged in a planned program of self-improvement vis-a-vis lectures, reading and a Dale Carnegie Course.[136] As he remolded the image of Sam Goldfarb, he also rebuilt the image of his business. He adopted the slogan "do business on Monday in the spirit of Sunday."[137]

With prosperity came position in the community and a deeper involvement in Jewish life as well. He was profoundly shocked by the Nazi mistreatment of Jews. He was equally shocked by the American reaction. As he writes, "the sad truth was that millions of Americans were so morally bankrupt that they enjoyed seeing that picture (of old rabbis scrubbing the streets of Vienna)."[138]

Much of the book paints Sam Goldfarb as God's gift to humanity. He paints himself as the ideal businessman,[139] the ideal father,[140] the moralist,[141] the critic of modern music, art and dance,[142] and the ideal citizen.[143] Despite this, one cannot help but admire his involvement in the Civil Liberties Union and the League for Industrial Democracy,[144] in the campaigns of Franklin Roosevelt[145] and in the United Jewish Appeal, where he became a pace-setter for other contributors.[146] One cannot help but applaud his attempts to help gain parole for Nathan Leopold[147] or to fight the exploitation of racial prejudice in the Roosevelt-Dewey presidential campaign.[148] One cannot help but feel proud of little Sammy Goldfarb who was invited to the White House and writes back in gratitude that he feels "humble because a liberal America makes possible the invitation of the President of the United

States even to foreign-born citizens whom you recognize on the same level as those descended from the Mayflower."[149] Though he reaffirmed his belief in America and in the possibilities of Jewish life in America,[150] he could not help but feel depressed by "those who shout America first and wave our flag the most...creatures of emotion rather than reason"[151] and who if a Hitler ever seized power in America "would turn into destructive animals."[152]

The odyssey of Sam Goldfarb comes to an end with a flowery paean of praise to America. In essence it says: "I have faith in America not of anything material...(but)...because of the religious democratic ideal which alone has made her great and the hope of mankind."[153] He certainly expressed the sentiments, albeit too sugary and even too romantic, of a good many Eastern Europeans who found their places in this Country.

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

By

Benjamin L. Gordon

Benjamin L. Gordon, product of a typical Lithuanian Jewish home, arrived in America with high hopes yet with many reservations. "Of course I was happy to go to America, but to one who has no funds, no trade and no relations one of the freedoms of the new world could be freedom to starve."[154] Moving in with a landsman, he was advised that "the changing of names was the first step to Americanization."[155] That he resisted.

Gordon tried his hand at a variety of jobs from peddling to teaching Hebrew.[156] Realizing the crucial importance of knowing English, he began to teach himself the language by reading the Yiddish and English shop signs that dotted the East side of New York.[157] Slowly he accommodated himself to life in the new land.

Gordon moved to Philadelphia to take a job as a teacher, and while there developed the ambition to become a doctor. He finally managed to pass the necessary exams and to save the necessary funds to enroll. He recounts how he tried to get help from Rabbi Krauskopf who rebuffed him with the remark that "there are too many (Jewish) doctors."[158] Later Gordon had the opportunity to retort and asked the distinguished Rabbi if perhaps there were "too many Rabbis."

Benjamin Gordon relates many of his experiences as a young medical student, including his run-in with an anti-semitic professor who was later forced to apologize.[159] He also tells with some amusement and relief stories of how Jewish mothers in those days, hired

young unsuspecting medical students as tutors for their daughters in the hope of also acquiring husbands for them.[160] Gordon goes on to relate his experiences as a medical student and as a fledgling doctor establishing a new practice. The primitive state of medical knowledge and practice become obvious. There is a tendency here as in other memoirs to fall into the trap of self-glorification, and Benjamin Gordon falls as well. There are times when the hoof beats of his white charger become deafening.

There are moments when the young doctor, involved in the vital trivia of life like making a living and finding a place for himself in society, becomes disheartened with America.[162] There are however, other moments when things went well, he was reassured and waxed eloquent. He had a run-in with an anti-semite but received such support from bystanders that he became deeply convinced that "America was not a suitable place for anti-semitism."

With increasing success his image of America also changed. He began to feel that "notwithstanding the trials, conflicts and tribulations I had suffered since coming to this blessed land, it cannot be denied that America had offered and was continuing to offer me opportunities which could not be equaled in any land...a haven to any stranger of ambition and integrity to toil, to study and to succeed... the utilization of such opportunity was up to the individual."[163] Above all he was grateful that the "golden land" was a place "where equality was a fact not a dream, and where man could aspire to better things in life regardless of their race, creed, color or of the land of their birth." The young doctor, having found a place for himself, had an

image quite different than that of the young worker who sweated twelve hours a day in the sweatshop and saw no opportunity nor any exit.

MY FIRST EIGHTY YEARS

By

Bernard Horwich

Bernard Horwich's odyssey is an unusual one in the sense that he was not only the product of the Eastern-European "shtetl" where he was born. Certainly as significant for his life and attitudes the fact that he was also a product of German-Jewish society in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Born in the little hamlet of Poneimon in Lithuania[164] into a family of moderate means, young Bernard received a good Jewish education.[165] Though his parents had a scholarly career in mind for him, he was determined to go to Prussia to make his fortune. After a period of study in Wilno,[166] he persuaded his family to let him go to Koenigsberg. After a number of false starts, Bernard went into the grain business and did rather well.[167] At that point the Prussian Government passed an order expelling all foreign-born Jews who were not certified businessmen.[168] Young men between eighteen and thirty-five were given the alternative of serving in the army, thereby qualifying for citizenship. Horwich, then eighteen years old, began to look to America. He was frank about his motives. He admitted that the attraction of America was the more comfortable life that it offered, and not the prospects of liberty, equality and democracy.[169] He made his decision and left.

At eighteen, clad in a new suit, and an abundance of self-

confidence, Bernard Horwich arrived in New York.[170] Shortly after he was introduced to the realities of the land of opportunity. He found his cousin living in filth and poverty. He was also subjected to "the humiliating appellation of greenhorn."[171] Greenhorn meant a new arrival, an untouchable, unlearned in the ways of the new world. This, regardless of how primitive or distorted those ways were in the hands of the "oldtimer" who had been in the country only a few months himself. Horwich was also lonely, and longed for the happy times of Koenigsberg. The redeeming quality of America was an "atmosphere of freedom and liberty that prevailed as well as the generosity of the people with money."[172] He recounts how a complete stranger, recognizing how lonely he was, took him into a saloon for lunch.

After trying his hand at peddling and other occupations, he left for Chicago, where opportunities were said to have been better. Chicago he calls "second America," the second stop of immigrants after they tried New York.[173] It was in second America that Bernard found his place. He begain again as a peddler, the common first occupation of many Jewish immigrants. Though subjected to harassment as a peddler, as a Jew and as a "greenhorn,"[174] he was successful and was soon in business for himself, supplying other peddlers.

As his business enterprises grew, he became involved in communal life and in politics. One day when a politican called on him and his fellow-Jews for support, he confronted the politician with his own platitudes: "this man advises us that we should thank God every day...for the freedom and liberty that we are enjoying in this great and blessed country. That might apply to those who are really enjoying

the blessings of freedom and equality but do we Jews here on the West side - do you peddlers - enjoy that liberty?"[175] Horwich knew no "chochmos." If America promised equality the peddlers deserved it as well. With a committee he approached the Mayor to stop the harassment of Jewish peddlers and they received action.

In another instance when the Mayor of the city addressed the members of the synagogue "in a most polite manner" one cynical person remarked; "Alas how unfortunate our situation and how pitiful is our self-respect that because an officiall addresses us in kind words we are so overwhelmed that we fall on our knees and kiss his feet."[176]

Always concerned about the image he was projecting to non-Jews, a lesson he seems to have learned from his German experience, Horwich was thrilled when his fraternal lodge participated in a Columbus Day parade and were singled out for mention. He was overjoyed that the South-side Jews (German-Jewish community) and the people of Chicago generally would see that there were "higher-type Jews on the West side," and that they were not all of the "crude, ignorant peddler type."[177] Horwich was also introduced to some of the new social mores of America. He learned to his surprise that marriages were not arranged in this country, and that the girl is the most important party in matches. With awe he outlines the correct procedures for wooing and winning a mate in America, from dating to proposal.[178]

In time Horwich's five brothers joined him in Chicago and they all prospered. A good part of his memoirs are filled with glowing descriptions of himself and his brothers.[179] They were superior people

ever exhibiting good judgment in business, politics and social affairs. This desire to present the nearly perfect image of oneself is an almost inherent flaw in this type of literature.

An ardent member of fraternal and service organizations, Horwich spells out the important role he played in the establishment and functioning of such organizations as the Knights of Zion, the United Hebrew Charities of Chicago and the Jewish Home for the Aged. A dedicated Zionist, he attended almost all of the Zionist Congresses and his memoirs are dotted with reports of such famous personages as Louis Lipsky, Dr. Chaim Weitzman and Nahum Sokolow.

Rising to substantial heights in the Chicago business community, he was particularly proud of his and the record of Jewish banks during the great depressions of the twenties and thirties. With some understandable pride, he points to the fact that Jewish bankers took particular care in protecting the money of their depositors, often at the sacrifice of their own personal fortunes and wellbeing. 180

A number of incidents from Bernard Horwich's life are worth retelling since they expose the man and his attitudes to America. In 1908 a young Russian Jew was shot by the Chicago Chief of Police. Though cleared by a jury, the general consensus was that the chief was guilty of killing an innocent lad. Horwich's brother Aaron, visiting from Europe, was amazed that there was even a second thought given to the lad's death, and that Jews in the community felt free to protest. With some incredulity he remarked that: "In Russia the Chief of Police would have been decorated for his bravery and no one would dare to say a word

about it. Here the press had headlines as if it were a national problem...America is a free Country."[181] Later, following World War I, the author was chosen to participate in a relief mission to the Jews of Germany. His passport, however, was held up. In investigating the problem, he found that he was considered disloyal, along with Dr. Emil G. Hirsch,[182] the prominent Reform Rabbi in Chicago. The charge of disloyalty was based on his having protested the delivery of war propoganda speeches from the pulpit of his synagogue as highly inappropriate, "a synagogue," he had said,"...is not a place for advocating the killing and maiming of human beings and preaching inhumanity."[183] He defended himself successfully by calling on his rights as an American citizen "entitled to my own opinions so long as it did not interfere with the laws of the country."[184] On the same occasion when he opposed the war speeches, he also attacked another part of a politician's speech which implied that the Jews might suffer pogroms in America if they did not support the war.[185] The author argued that the Jews in America were "free citizens...entitled to every privilege and protection enjoyed by all other citizens."[186] On another occasion he refuted the charges of dual loyalty levelled against American Jews. He used the Brandeis approach that to be a good Jew is synonymous with being a good American.[187]

Yet this same Bernard Horwich, seemingly at home in America, spends a considerable portion of his memoirs attacking the Jewish community's boycott of Germany during the 1930's. His arguments are that the pressure by American Jews was unfair to the bulk of Germans who were fine people, that the clamor was pushing Hitler to more extreme measures and that it was antagonizing non-Jewish elements in the American community

who might otherwise be sympathetic.[188] This same Jew who seemed so much a part of America displayed a frightening lack of confidence and security when he asserted that: "In the history of the last two thousand years the Jew has never fought back. His only defence has been prayers and resignation. In that role...the Jew has aroused compassion...and even...a certain respect."[189] Though still very much the Galuth Jew, Bernard Horwich's memoirs give us many valuable insights into the adjustment of the Jew to his new environment.

THE DAYS OF OUR YEARS

By

Israel Kasovich

Teacher, poet, bookkeeper, peddler, mine manager, farmer, editor: these were the varied occupations of Israel Kasovich. Certainly one of the most fascinating autobiographies written by an Eastern-European Jew, it is at once the story of an individual and of a generation. As the translator Maximilian Hurwitz wrote in his introduction: "It chronicles the events of the last seventy years, one of the most eventful periods in the long and crowded annals of the Jew - a period that witnessed the World War, the Russian Revolution...the growth of American Jewry...The renaissance of Jewish Art and Letters, the gradual restoration of Palestine by Jewish brain and brawn..."[190]

Born in a tiny town in Lithuania in 1859, Kasovich's family life was no different than that of an entire generation of Eastern-European Jews. The early part of his memoirs trace his life as a child, Yeshiva bochur, and businessman, and give us valuable insights into Russian and Jewish life in the latter half of the nineteenth century. We are made witness to the birth of the Chibat Zion Movement, to the Haskala and the blossoming of modern Hebrew literature. Leaving business, Israel began to study law. However, when the pogroms broke out in Russia, in 1881 and were followed later by the oppressive May Laws, he began to think in terms of migrating to America. Stories came back to Russia "that in America gold lay in the streets, but I was very little interested in that; I was not going to America in quest of riches; all I wanted was to enjoy her freedom and human equality. Just think

of it! A land without hereditary rulers, where the people elected their president just as we elected the president of the congregation, and where, moreover, there was no state religion as with us in Russia, but all creeds were on the same footing, and all men were equal before the law."[191] He was attracted by the Am Olam group, then forming, whose purpose was to establish a large agricultural colony in America. Selling all his belongings, he, his wife, his children and relatives whom he had convinced to join them began the triumphant trek to America with high expectations.

Their reception in New York was hardly hospitable. Joyously debarking from the boat at Castle Gardens, the immigrant reception center, they proudly raised their Am Olam flag only to have an officer demand that they lower it. In response to their shocked queries whether America was not a free country, the officer tore down the flag and threw it into the sea.[192] Their hopes seemed to go with it. There was no one to welcome the group. They were left stranded, bewildered and alone. When the Jewish Aid Societies arrived, they informed them that they could be of little help to the group and that they would have to fend for themselves. For several days they slept on the cold pavement in the Reception Center until they finally learned that "our becoming farmers was now entirely out of the question...we divided up the money still remaining in our treasury...our Am Olam group was now disbanded and scattered."[193]

Disheartened remnants of the group tried to make a go of it. Kasovich's young brothers-in-law, found work in a tobacco factory. They worked long hard hours for little pay. He described the wailing in the

house when they first went off to work on the Sabbath.[194] Kasovich himself could not find a job, and in desperation turned to peddling, the first job of so many of his fellow immigrants. He vividly describes the shame he felt and the difficulties he experienced. He was set upon by street urchins,[195] spat upon by some customers and cursed by others.[196] He was deeply discouraged. In bitter tones he described his plight: "We had uprooted our home to travel to a distant land... to lead a quiet, honest life as tillers of the soil, as Jews and as free citizens and instead of this we had to live amid noise and dirt and eke out a livelihood by engaging in a contemptible business that smacked of begging, or else by hiring ourselves out as wage slaves... the class struggle was more bitter here than in Russia...we were stoned in the streets...where then was the freedom and the equality?"[197] After three months the family decided to return to Russia. Their boat was filled with returning immigrants "full of resentment, that kept on cursing America and Columbus."[198]

In Russia Kasovich reestablished himself. In succession he became a teacher, a paint dealer, a grain dealer and finally a mine manager in Krivoy Rog, in southern Russia. He prospered and became deeply involved in the Haskala and Zionist Movements. He writes with great satisfaction of his life and that of his wife and six children. We are given some wonderful insights into the Russian - Jewish life of that period. Through Kasovich's communal activities, we are introduced to some of the leading Jewish figures of the era: Hirsch Masliansky, the great maggid,[199] to Sholom Aleichem[200] the great humorist, to Ahad

Ha'am,[201] the outstanding maskil and to many others. His memoirs are a wonderful chronicle of life in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century.

Then it happened. The Kishinev massacre took place in 1903. There was no protection for the Jews. In fact, the government encouraged the pogroms.[202] He decided to leave. The alternatives were America or Palestine. After consulting with two of his friends, Rabbi Schmarya Levin and Menachem Ussischkin, he decided it was more practical to return to the United States. This time he felt better prepared. He had some money; he had friends and relatives in America who would welcome and help him.[203] He also felt that for the sake of his children America offered better opportunities.

At age forty-five, with a wife and six children Kasovich bravely returned to America in 1904. Though welcomed by his brother and friends, he was still dismayed by what he found on the East side. "The crush and stench were enough to suffocate one; dirty children were playing in the street, perspiring Jews were pushing carts and uttering wild shrieks."[204] His brother's home turned out to be a "dark hole" behind a store. Everywhere he went he found only "cramped quarters and people spent with toil."[205] He explored various business enterprises, none of which interested him. Idleness hung heavy on his hands. He longed for his life in Russia. "Here one could not find that intimate friendship and devotion, that sincerity in public life one could find in the old country...if I attended a Zionist meeting, I felt as though I were watching the antics of clowns...if I went to a synagogue

I saw nothing but business there...here everything was alien to me and it seemed as if it would always remain so."[206]

In 1905 he returned to Russia and to his old job. He was soon dissatisfied and feared bringing his family back into such unsettled conditions. In August of 1905 he returned to America, the "Rivers of Jewish Blood" having "cured me of my homesickness for that country (Russia)."[207] Kasovich then became a tutor and teacher. Next he resolved to try his hand at farming and bought a farmstead in Ellington, Connecticut.[208] Though the life was hard, he was jubilant. For the first time he began to feel that "we were living in a free country among our own green fields and woods."[209] He described with particular joy the celebration of some of the Jewish agricultural holidays on his own farm. Succoth was celebrated "with merry hearts. We harvest the fruits of our own labor...in an atmosphere that is pure and free."[210] The farm work became too difficult for him and with reluctance he returned to New York. He could not adjust to the city, to its smells and noise and pace. He finally decided that he might fulfill a useful role by writing a handbook in Yiddish for Jewish farmers. For an entire year he immersed himself in agricultural studies, while at the same time polishing his English. He published a manual in Yiddish and in English and was hired as the associate editor of the Jewish Farmer, where he remained for sixteen years.[211] During that time he wrote on many agricultural subjects, as well as contributing literary pieces to such journals as Hamelitz and the Judische Folksblatt.[212] He also wrote a number of memoirs and novels.

His beloved wife Fayge died in 1914. Lonely and at a loss, he was enticed into a second marriage by a shrew whom he later deserted and divorced.[213] He resigned his position at the Jewish Farmer and spent the balance of his life writing and contemplating the world. He closes his memoirs with random thoughts on life, religion and literature having "attained my goal...to live as my conscience dictated to me, as my religion taught me, as my God required of me."[214] Thus came to an end one of the most interesting tales of an adopted son of America.

MEMOIRS OF A NEW AMERICAN

By

Nathan Kushin

Nathan Kushin was one of the several hundred thousand refugees that fled to America just after the Kishinev Pogroms in 1903. Facing the upcoming Russo-Japanese War and military service, "it was decided that I should go to America - that golden land . . .America, a magic word to the Jews of Russia."[215]

Nathan describes his feelings upon arrival in Philadelphia after the typically difficult journey across the Atlantic - steerage class: "We came, thousands of us, in the prime of life, to the promised land which had expended not one penny for our food or education and which was ready to use our manhood and strength to build houses, mine its coal, pave its streets...in return we asked but a haven from persecution, an opportunity to work and to produce and a chance to live."[216] He slept in peace for the first time in years; to sleep without fear was what America initially meant to him.

He tried his hand at various jobs. He who had been a budding businessman in the Ukraine found himself in a variety of short-lived positions. In turn he was an assistant to a paperhanger, a painter and of course, a peddler. Like many of the young men forced to peddle notions, he "sat down...and began weeping bitterly and longed for my despised country where at least I was not a beggar."[217] He finally got a job as a cigar maker,[218] the aristocrat of the working class.

He writes of some of his initial impressions. The sanctity of

rent astounded him. "In a few weeks in America," he says, I learned rent was sacred...it comes ahead of food, clothes, amusements or anything else."[219] Seeing the sign Mr. Ice Cream on so many stores, Kushin assumed that Mr. Ice Cream was a multi-millionaire.[220]

Determined to find his place, he studied English by visiting the various churches on Sundays with his trusty English dictionary in hand.[221] Approached about joining a lodge, he was amused by their rituals, but aware that this was "a make believe world for those hard workers who had to perform the work of the world for six days every week."[222] He writes of his astonishment at the native Americans "who were worshipped by the newcomer yet considered him (the immigrant) lawful prey."[223] The slogan seemed to be "every man for himself." His impression of life in America was that it was "an eternal scramble for the dollar and the survival of the fittest."[224] Because of this atmosphere, many young idealists and intellectuals were attracted to the Socialist movement, which offered some respite. The older immigrants faced the prospects of losing hold of their young children.[225] Workers in America had little security; they were fired without care or compassion. To Nathan such firing "was the cruelest custom I had ever encountered".[226] He also saw poor immigrants pressured to take out insurance policies they could afford. He recounts with some bitterness the desire of immigrants to get into a trolley accident. It was a sure way to acquire some easy money.[227]

As he adjusted, found a steady job, learned the language, and made friends, he began to "feel that I really belonged here. I saw

unlimited opportunities...I began planning for a business of my own."[228] He turned to the real estate business. In those days there was nothing more prestigious for a man, or so it seemed, than owning his own home. For the Jewish immigrant this was even more significant. In Russia the Jew could not hold title to property, "but here in this free land one could purchase real estate and record a deed in his own name in the public archives."[229] The popular view was that nothing could make an American so good a patriot or citizen than owning his own home.[230]

Kushin prospered in the real estate business and other enterprises. Later returning from a trip to Europe, he had none of the fear of the young immigrant, but approached "America with love and gratitude."[231] He had little regard for many of America's captains of finance who prospered in peacetime, but who in trouble turned their backs on their fellow man and their country and "ran for cover." He describes the dismal picture of America during the Depression. He accuses the leaders of the country of reneging on their responsibilities by not helping the national recovery. He describes the enormous waste of human talent during the depression "as thousands of trained artisans were selling apples on street corners."[232] In time, under Roosevelt the country recovered, as did Nathan Kushin and his business.

In the final pages of his memoirs he waxes eloquent about the contribution and loyalty of the immigrant to America. The naturalized American he argues, appreciates the opportunities of America, the right to property, education, liberty better than the native American since "he can draw a contrast between the country of his birth and that of

his adoption."[233] The immigrant, in coming to America, enriches himself and his new homeland.[234] He contends that there are no super one hundred percent Americans and there are no hyphenated Americans. The great bulk of native Americans he finds broadminded and tolerant. He concludes his psalm of praise to America and its immigrant sons with these words: "If I had the ability to describe the reverence and joy felt each time I reached the shores of America from abroad, I am sure self-appointed patriots would not doubt the sincere love we immigrants have for our country." Thus another new American expresses his unbounded gratitude for the opportunities offered and realized.

IN THE GRIP OF CROSS-CURRENTS

By

Ephraim E. Lisitzky

"The obstetrician had no choice - mine had to be a live birth."[235] The opening sentence of this most sensitive autobiography characterizes its wistfully eloquent sadness. It symbolizes the melancholic nature of both his literary and life style.

Born in Minsk, Lisitzky's life almost from its very beginning was marked by tragedy. Following the death of her newborn baby, his mother went mad. Ephraim was then but a young child. A short while later she was discovered dead in bed by young Ephraim, who had gone to her for comfort. His father, a frustrated Yeshiva bochur, made a poor living as a water-carrier. When Ephraim was only seven his father secretly left for America without informing his son. For young Ephraim, who had become closely attached to his father following his mother's death, it was a shattering experience. He sought consolation in his studies and in nature.[236]

He was handed from family to family. Finally receiving some love from his Uncle Reuben, he faced disappointment again when his uncle decided to go off to America, "a country where there wasn't even a kosher doorknob."[237] Suddenly at sixteen he received ship tickets from his father who had found a place for himself in Boston. Fearful of what the future might hold, yet longing to see his father, he departed.

Arriving in Boston he again faced a disappointment; his father was not there to meet him. When they finally do meet, the loving reunion he had anticipated did not come about.

Lisitzky writes of his early impressions of Boston. He recounts vividly the clashes between the various elements in the Jewish community, and the clashes within each segment.[238] The Orthodox, though most important, were divided amongst themselves and weakened by the realities of life in America. The immigrant's first loyalty was to making a living, though this often necessitated the desecration of the Sabbath and other holidays. At home in Europe there was a new spirit on the Sabbath; "but in Boston very few Jews observed the Sabbath. In the Jewish quarter through which she had just passed they trampled with weekday shoes the train of her bridal gown and interrupted with shrill weekday outcries the music of her angelic escorts...."[239] Young Ephraim tried to make friends but they had no time for him, they were engaged in the task most important to Americans, "improving oneself."[240]

Conscious of the burden he was to his father, who eked out a living as a "rag and bottle man"[241] during the day and as a bar mitzvah teacher at night, he decided to go to work. He began to seek a vocation. Everyone encouraged him to become a peddler, as it required little investment, no training and provided a good way to learn the habits of the country. Timid young Ephraim went from door to door peddling his wares. To impress his customers he quoted suitable passages from the Bible. While selling soap for example, he quoted from Isaiah, "and I will cleanse as with soap...." Before he was able to finish, doors were

slammed in his face and he felt he was a complete failure.[242]

Ephraim decided to return to the old country, but kept postponing any action. He was slowly being won over by America and charmed by old Boston. He was particularly fascinated with Abraham Lincoln, whose "Jewish name Abraham, his bearded face with its Jewish expression of sorrow, made him look like a Jewish prophet of old whom providence raised up for Americans to free them from the shame of slavery."[243] At a Memorial Day celebration he saw a statue of a maiden holding a flag "symbolizing young America bearing the banner of liberty to the races and nations that have found haven in her shadow."[244] He was impressed by the soldiers who inspired joy and confidence and not fear as did the military in Russia. As he strolled through the park, he was touched by the other strollers "with their bright holiday faces and secure expressions."[245] It reminded him of the Psalm, "happy is the people that is in such a case." The decision to remain was made.

Ephraim decided to study for the rabbinate, though he was disgusted with American Rabbis who had converted Judaism into a "Kashrut cult."[246] he enrolled in the Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva in New York because it afforded full financial support to its students. He quickly realized that if he was to serve the American public, he must speak the language of the country. After being disappointed by the English classes for immigrants, he decided to teach himself the language by using a translation of the King James version of the Bible. He amazed his roommate with such classic expressions as: "My anger is kindled against the Lord of the house for hastening to extinguish the small luminary."[247] In time

he realized that the rabbinate was not for him and he returned sadly to Boston.

He listened to his father daydream about wealth and success in America over his Sabbath-morning cup of chicory. For his father, in America "everything is possible, great wealth would miraculously come his way as it had to many fellow immigrants."[248] Ephraim decided to seek his fortunes as a shochet, to the delight of his father. He hoped to save enough money to go to university - his ultimate ambition. Lisitzky approached a rich relative who grudgingly gave him some help with the warning not to come back for more, and the advice that "in America it's every man for himself."[249] Despite his abhorrence of blood, he received his certificate.

He obtained a job in Auburn, New York as a teacher and shochet. There he was befriended by a maskil, Hurwitz, who guided and counselled him. He was also influenced by the Socialist movement, because "in the new country I saw injustice again as part of the world order."[250] He describes the miserable state of his Uncle Chone, who had been a respected merchant in the old country, but in America he "ended up as a presser in a clothing shop." Uncle Chone worked under terrible conditions "all day and half the night" for a mere pittance. He finally died of consumption with "the damn shop" as his final words.[251]

Lisitzky ably fulfilled his duties as shochet, teacher and cantor in Auburn. He fell in love with the daughter of one of his benefactors but the affair ended unhappily when he broke off the relationship. He could not bring himself to make her the wife of a lowly shochet. In time, through the machinations of a newcomer to the community, he lost

his position.

Ephraim returned home to his father's house in Boston. There he was deeply influenced by an old maskil, Menachem Dolitsky, who encouraged him in his writing of poetry and his interest in Hebrew Literature.[252] He tried to learn cigar-making, but he failed miserably. He realized that poetry and "the world of the spirit is my home."[253]

His health threatened by tuberculosis, he then accepted a job as a teacher and shochet to serve the only Jewish family in Amhic Harbor in Northern Canada. Dreaming of recovery and of becoming a farmer someday,[254] he served the family of Yudel Brown, a landsman. Life there was a complete joy to him. He recovered his health, wrote poetry and fell in love. He was befriended by a Scotch blacksmith, "Tom." He describes the beautiful friendship that blossomed between them - the rugged outdoorsman and the sensitive poet. With fascination he described his discovery of a Jew-baiting Jew in a remote area of Canada. Though living as a Christian, and raising his children as Christians, he longed for a "Jewish burial."[255] One day Lisitzky was called upon to deliver a lecture on "The Jews and Their Religion" before an audience of homesteaders, lumberjacks and trappers. After a plea for understanding, for tolerance and brotherhood, he concluded with a touching tribute to America. He said: "I came here from Russia where my people are repressed and deprived of basic human rights. I have been in this free country for six years, yet I am still impressed by the freedom of America. Every hour of the day I bless it and I bless those who gave it to me. Here I stand, a lone Jew before an audience of non-Jews, gentiles, and I can speak to you as a friend. I can say whatever

I want, and you all listen to me with patience...I never would have been able to do that where I came from...here I can walk down the street in a non-Jewish village...meet someone who is not Jewish...we say hello...and I am not afraid of him."[256]

Fearful of the consequences of his love for a non-Jewish school teacher, Lisitzky returned to Boston. He found his father dying. He went back to college and received a degree in Pharmacy.[257] Again he became unhappy and tried to end his own life. When he failed, he decided to devote his life to teaching Hebrew. Recognizing the promise in American Jewish life and the need for devoted and able teachers, he undertook "this pioneering task and...its inescapable burdens."[258]

Drawing inspiration from the struggle of the Jewish people "to preserve something of its own character in the midst of this new existence,"[259] Lisitzky made his contribution to Hebrew teaching and poetry. After much heartache and disappointment, his spiritual journey ended.[260] At last, "I had come to feel at home in America."

THE MAKING OF AN OILMAN

By

Isador Molk

Little did Itzale Molkho, descendant of the famous sixteenth century Portugese Jewish mystic, Solomon Molkho,[261] dream as a child in Ponievez, Lithuania that he would someday go to America, and there become a millionaire oilman. Early acclaimed as a child genius, "illui," in the study of Talmud, he was sent at nine to the famed Slobodka Yeshiva.[262] There he studied with young men in their twenties. His studies brought him renown and happiness. Yet disturbed by the constant intimidation of the Jews by Russian policemen, he longed "to feel I'm walking on my own ground."[263] Itzale arranged to go to America with a neighbor who was emigrating. He was elated that he "left the land of tyranny in May 1907 at thirteen." He dreamed that someday "I might be somebody, if only I had freedom."[264]

Arriving in America he was angered by a Jewish immigrant society worker who treated him roughly and put a tag on his jacket. He tore off the tag and headed out into the new world on his own. As he describes it: "I walked like a man out of prison. I saw a lot of people hurrying, I saw a policeman smiling. I felt I was among friends."[265] Walking down the streets of the East-side, Molk stumbled into a convention of Orthodox Rabbi. He astounded them with his learning and was immediately given a job in a Yeshiva.[266] An ambitious young man, he studied secular subjects on his own and passed the New York State Regents Exams.[267] At seventeen he obtained his S'micha and became the first graduate of the Itschak Elchanan Yeshiva.[268]

Determined to become a doctor, he studied at the Long Island Medical School, while teaching at a nearby Talmud Torah. Itzale,

become Isadore, ran out of money and decided to study forestry at Ohio State University in Columbus.[269] Again he ran out of funds. This time he returned to New York to take a teaching job. Still determined to go to college, he found a position with a Reform Hebrew school in Utica, New York,[270] which permitted him to resume his studies at nearby Hamilton College. He describes the thrill he felt when Oscar Straus, United States Ambassador to Turkey was honored by the school: "What a change from my recent background. In Russia the term Jew was used in a derogatory sense. Here it is exalted."[271] If Oscar Straus could rise so high, why not me? For Molk, America held unlimited possibilities, and he was determined to share in them. Molk got into a fight with the Chairman of the Reform Hebrew School Board, and was forced to resign. He moved to Middletown, Connecticut to take a job as a Hebrew teacher; while there he enrolled at Wesleyan University. Again he became involved in a community scandal and decided to move on.[272]

After an unsuccessful attempt to register at the University of Missouri in Columbia, ever - resourceful Molk found his place at last at Valpraiso University in Indiana.[273] It was there that he became fascinated with the study of geology. He devoted every spare minute to his new interest. After all of his trials and travels, and after studying at half a dozen universities, he finally received his degree with great satisfaction. He wrote to his aging mother in Lithuania: "I've worked and studied to adjust myself to a new land, in a new environment. I feel that I have accomplished a lot. I feel that I am

somebody. And I am ready to do something. I am going to do it and do it in a big way."[274]

True to his pledge, Isadore set out to "do it in a big way." He rememberd a Jewish oilman he had met during his few days stay in Columbia, Missouri, and wrote to him. In a short while he received an invitation from the oilman, a Mr. Windel, to come and live with his family and learn the business. In return he promised to tutor his children.[275] When his supposed benefactor did not fulfill his promise, Isadore looked for greener pastures. Through a contact, he inveigled an invitation from another oilman in El Dorado, Kansas; this time one of the conditions was that he serve as a shochet. Undaunted, Isadore arranged to get a "Kabola," a permit to slaughter from a Rabbi in Pittsburgh. He does not hesitate to mention how awed his fellow shochtim were of a "gaon like me."[276] Finally he returned to El Dorado to learn the oil business.

In time Isadore Molk, boy - genius grown into an adult - opportunist started his own business, and began his climb up the ladder of success. From time to time he meditated about his success, of course not long enough to miss any opportunities. Grateful for America's opportunities he realized full well that, "this could never have happened in Russia. All avenues of opportunity would have been closed to a Jew. There was no chance to get ahead on your own merits."[277] Molk's business grew. He branched out from surplus oil field supplies to the drilling of oil itself. On the way, he took a short side trip to New York, where in a matter of a few days he acquired a wife.[277]

Among his many accomplishments he treasured one experience in particular, which for him epitomized the spirit of America. In the midst of the Depression, he wrote to President Roosevelt on behalf of the Kansas oilmen. He appealed for the establishment of an oil code. When he received a reply from a Presidential assistant, he marveled: "We are living in a wonderful country. Would I have had the nerve to write or to send a telegram even to a minor official in Russia. Here I wrote to the President of the United States...and he answered me...."[279] Later he adds: "In czarist Russia even genius was stifled among the poor. Here in America everyone is free to develop his abilities...the roustabout on the leaae, the roughneck at the rotary, the driller, the tool-dresser in the derrick house...leaves his imprint."[280]

Itzale Molkho, scion of mystics and scholars, boy-genius, Rabbi, teacher, shochet, junk dealer, and oilman left his imprint as well. Though his memoirs smack a little too much of his oil and ego, his accomplishments are nevertheless evidence of America's promise fulfilled.

STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

By

Abe L. Plotkin

If ever there was a grandmother Moses of Jewish autobiography, it is Abe Plotkin who recounts his life in truly primitive terms. Without embellishment he recalls the struggles of his lifetime.

A simple man, he was born in the hamlet of Kasekeve near Minsk in 1889. As in many of the Eastern-European Jewish families, it was Abe's mother who supported the family as well as running the household.[281] His father was the typical "luftmensch" who tried his hand at a number of enterprises with little success.

After years of struggle, his father decided to emigrate to America, "because we had heard such glowing reports that anyone there gets a good job and makes money and that especially if one sends the money back home it amounts to twice as much."[282] In time Abe's mother became impatient and decided to go to America to see for herself what was happening.

Abe's first recollection of America was the beautiful strange fruit they were introduced to - oranges.[283] Life was a struggle. His father worked as a tailor and because he was slow, he barely made a living. They discovered that money was "by no means...as plentiful as we had been led to believe."[284] Abe worked in a factory ten to twelve hours a day, running errands and doing odd jobs.

After a while the family decided to try its hand at farming. They bought a farm in the Catskills, believing that it would be no harder than tending the few square yards of ground they had back in

Kasekeve. Farm life was hard. However, between a few summer guests and his father's winter job in New York, they managed to sustain themselves. In time it became necessary for Abe also to take a job in the city. For awhile he drove a truck. After drifting from job to job, Abe decided to take advantage of an offer by the Canadian Immigration Department; it offered free homesteads of one hundred acres in Western Canada for a minimum number of improvements. On October 8, 1910 he left for Winnipeg, Manitoba.

For awhile Abe worked for a number of farmers to gain some experience in farming.[285] When he felt he was prepared, he began to search for a suitable piece of land. He describes the rural life in Western Canada as hard, but satisfying. He finally located a piece of land in Northern Saskatchewan. After awhile his father joined him, and they both developed homesteads side by side.[286]

The balance of Plotkin's memoirs describe in some detail his successful farming in Western Canada,[287] his role in forming a farmer's wheat marketing pool,[288] his unsuccessful marriage,[289] and his later retirement.

His role in helping to create an organization for the marketing of wheat which would be fair to the farmers reveals how completely a part of Canada this Eastern-European immigrant had come to feel and how seriously he took its democratic promise. He did not hesitate to speak out against vested financial interests and the governments of his province and country.[290] In the midst of a depression when a variety of social and political dogmas were being offered as solutions, he wrote to the local paper supporting the policies of the C.C.F, a Social Democratic

Party: "We propose to guard and exercise our precious gift of Democracy for which our forefathers paid so dearly."[291]

Later Abe rented his farm and moved to Winnipeg and then to Los Angeles. There too he involved himself in the politics of the State and in many of its social causes.

Abe Plotkin concludes his memoirs with some general remarks on religion, politics and economics. He expresses fear over the lack of planning in the United States economy and concern over "the drive for money in our present generation...everybody wants to get rich quick and become a big shot, like the officials of big industries who receive hundres of thousands of dollars for their yearly services...."[292] He attacks the stock exchange as "an irresponsible gambling joint,"[293] and as "the opium and poison which is undermining our Democracy and Economic System."[294] He attacks both industry and labor in the United States for disregarding the "welfare of our country" and the "elected governments" for "standing by and watching the sport as though it were of no concern to them."[295] He viewed the United States as having "already adopted the majority of Marx's Manifesto,"[296] and calls for even further steps to pass legislation on behalf of the people.

Plotkin, East-European Jewish immigrant, a man of little formal education, a simple farmer for most of his life, demonstrates an amazing amount of social and economic savoire-faire as he concludes his memoirs with an impassioned appeal to his adopted country for greater political and economic justice and for peace. Like so many immigrants, he not only was content to drink from its economic and cultural springs, but enriched them as well.

THE PACK PEDDLER

By

W. Lee Provol

Though Lee Provol was born in Sweden, he was the product of Eastern-European parents who had settled there temporarily. In 1881, when Lee was four year of age, his father sailed to America to seek his fortune. Lee, his mother and sister returned to Poland only to rejoin the senior Provol or Provolsky, in Syracuse, New York in 1883. In Syracuse Provolsky supported his family as a pack peddler and as an occasional cantor.

Lee's first experience in America was an unhappy one. Just off the boat, their baggage was stolen by a would-be helper. He soon learned they had been victimized by one of a goodly number of immigrant con-men who preyed upon their unsuspecting countrymen.[297] Despite that incident, he felt that "America was that magic land of opportunity. To foreigners from alien lands, like us, it meant the dawn of a new day."[298]

Little Lee was soon confronted with the realities of immigrant life in the United States with its poverty, its exploitation and its harships. He was amazed to see people in the sweatshops "living, sleeping and eating in the same room."[299]

He describes his early jobs as an acrobat[300] and his experiences as part of a "bone trust" - a group of youngsters who earned money by collecting bones, rags, bottles, and scrap iron, and who held a monopoly over such activities in their neighborhood.[301] When older immigrants forced the youngsters out of business, they turned to peddling newspapers.[302]

With considerable skill Provol describes the pack peddlers of America as "the farmer's department store."[303] These were the early travelling salesmen who carried their wares on their backs, bringing not only material goods, but cultural and spiritual goods as well to outlying districts. They often opened up new areas for trade and commerce. Provol points with some legitimate pride to the great merchandising minds of America that rose from the ranks of the pack peddlers: people like Julius Rosenwald, Isaac Gimbel, Nathan Straus and David May. "All that proves," writes Provol in his memoirs, is that, "America was in word and truth, a land of opportunity for a man of ability, vision and ambition." He also describes his partnership with Sammy Schubert, later to become one of the founders of the great Schubert Theater Enterprises.

At one point Lee describes his astonishment over the techniques employed in the election campaigns. He was amazed at the ease with which politicians were able to buy the votes of the new immigrants,[304] or to raise the spectre of the Catholic church and its danger.[305]

Provol traced his own climb to success from peddling Swedish safety matches,[306] selling Catholic religious emblems, peddling by pack, to his great success as a retail furrier with branches in Salt Lake City and San Francisco.

MY FOUR HOMES

By

Pincus Puchkoff

Pincus Puchkoff's first home was his birthplace - the little town of Tolni near Kiev, in the Russian Ukraine.[307] It was there that he spent the first thirty-six years of his life; those years were happy ones for him. He traces his development from cheder yingl (young boy) to Yeshiva bochur to principal of the Tolni Talmud Torah - from chassid, to Zionist, to maskil. In 1905, following Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, a new series of pogroms broke out. What had seemed to be a new era of peace for the Jew turned into "a sea of Jewish blood." "All through the Jewish pale in Russia nightly ransacks and imprisonment by police multiplied... bands of ruffians, 'the black hundreds' under the slogan...kill the Jews and save Russia, did their job perfectly."[308] Expressing a general suspicion of the non-Jew in an aside, Puchkoff attacks Ernest Bevin and Clement Atlee as well as 'those' in Washington who did nothing beyond making "pious promises and uttering unctuous words...for the hapless remnants of the Jews "[309] during the Hitler period.

Having lost faith that Russia would ever offer the Jews democracy and freedom, he writes: "I did not want to live in that land of slaughter. I did not intend to give my life and the lives of my dear wife and children for the liberation of the Russian muzhiks, descendants of the Chmelnitzky Dynasty..."[310]

On January 10, 1906 Puchkoff, with his wife and four children, left for America which "though galuth...for the time being was a land

freedom, a land of liberty."[311]

They arrived in New York on January 27, 1906. He describes his great excitement at seeing the Statue of Liberty. The Statue seemed to bid welcome, and "I felt that welcome with my heart and soul...in those dark, obscure years of no radios, no airplanes, no automobiles, every oppressed, every afflicted emigrant found open doors all over the world, particularly in the United States of America."[312]

Pincus' enthusiasm for America was unbounded. Though debarking on Saturday evening, "on Monday morning I was in City Hall to take out my first citizenship papers."[313]

In Newark, New Jersey Puchkoff obtained a job as a bookkeeper in a grocery business. He describes his anger at fellow immigrants who "neglected their naturalization,"[314] despite the fact that they never had citizenship or equal rights in Russia. The differences between life in Russia and America were immediately obvious to him. It was "the difference between day and night, and light from darkness in every respect, politically, economically and in the general standard of living...for me every day has been an 'I am an American' day."[315] In one of his frequent asides, however, he does not hesitate to criticize America for not meeting its responsibilities to its fellow men. He expresses his "deepest sorrow" at Uncle Sam's "isolationism" or "caininism" during the Hitler period.[316] He makes a plea for Uncle Sam's intervention to "help open the doors of Eretz Israel." "I fervently hope," he writes, "that our good Uncle, generous to all nations at all times, will prove our (the Jews) redeemer this time..."[317] Continuing the aside, he attacks those Jews and non-Jews who would accuse Zionists of being

disloyal to America. "The truth is that Jews in America where they enjoy equal rights, freedom and liberty, are the better Americans because of their love of Zion..."[318]

Puchkoff then returns to his story. After living in Newark for three months, he decided to move to New York "to the cauldron of homely Jews, to landsleit, to Jewish theaters, to Jewish newspapers...,"[319] to his second home.

His first six months he describes as a taste of "the seven pyres of hell."[320] The struggle to support his family was a very difficult one. He barely made enough for "water on grits." For awhile he served as a bookkeeper. He then tried his hand at selling Singer sewing machines. Puchkoff got an idea to import cherries for wine from the old country. He felt he could make some easy money. He worked out a plan to corner the cherry market, only to find when the cherries arrived, that they were smoked and unsuitable for American consumption. He learned the important lesson the hard way that "America a land of liberty and free enterprise does not like such quixotic business. In America one can grow from a street peddler to a banker without let or hindrance, but one must work and work hard."[321]

After a number of such ill-fated attempts, Puchkoff entered the paper supply business which eventually was successful and provided him and his children with a good livelihood.[322]

After awhile Puchkoff became active in Hebrew cultural circles and in the Zionist movement.[323] He describes with great satisfaction the achievements of his sons, one of whom became a dentist. The others entered his business as partners. He also recounts with some pride his

first attempts as a writer in Yiddish and Hebrew,[324] and his trip to Eretz Israel, his third home.

The final portion of the book is devoted to his experiences in his fourth home, Miami, Florida, where he settled following his retirement from business.[325] In Miami the former teacher, former businessman, Pincus Puchkoff made his home which he named "Tel Aviv" the center for a cultural group for elderly people. With great pride he describes his role in the activities of the "Arichat Yamim" (length of days) group.[326] With this, the tale of Pincus Puchkoff and his four homes comes to an end.

AN AMERICAN IN THE MAKING

By

Marcus Ravage

Certainly one of the most honest, thoughtful and analytical autobiographies to appear from the pen of an Eastern-European Jewish immigrant is this memoir by Roumanian-born Marcus Ravage, who came to America at the dawn of the twentieth century.

In his introduction Ravage calls for compassion from his readers towards the new immigrant who has uprooted himself to come to a strange land to begin life anew. He is not the comic figure he appears to be but a tragic one with "the agony and the heartache, the endless disappointments, the yearnings and the despair - all of which must be ours before we can make a home for our battered spirits in this land of yours."[327] Because of these experiences it is the immigrant who can really teach the native American the "high privileges" and "the lofty messages which America wafts across the seas to all the oppressed of mankind."[308] He calls for understanding of the alien who but yesterday was a familiar citizen in his little village, tied to its background and surrounded by friends and family. Today this same person is adrift in a foreign world, mute and helpless, tragically ridiculous, "a human creature cut adrift from its moorings, the most pitiable sight to be met on earth."[329]

In describing his own motives for coming to America, he was frank to admit that while he could say that he came to America for the great opportunities, adventures and riches that it offered, while he could nobly claim it was to deliver his family from oppression, he

actually came because it was popular and fashionable for the people of Vaslui, Roumania to emigrate there.[330]

Ravage relates the fascinating story of his cousin Couza who returned from America to visit his family in little Vaslui in 1899. During his stay in America Couza's glowing letters were read to the entire community. Where previously they had thought of America as a refuge where no one went willingly, Couza's visit convinced all the townspeople that America was indeed the land of golden opportunity.[331] Couza's visit was as if "a star had risen in heaven to lead us out of the wilderness."[332]

Lines formed outside the home where "the American" was staying. Fathers vied with each other for a place in line so as to entreat the great visitor to help their child go to America. They imagined Couza, with his prosperous appearance to be at least an ambassador. The stories he told of the possibilities of becoming rich and of being able to vote and hold office seemed miraculous to the small shtetl Jews.[333] They heard stories of even young girls making a living, and of their being considered an asset;[334] stories about free education for Jew and gentile alike, available at night as well as by day.[335] In America they heard "a man was a man in spite of his religion." If Couza could become an ambassador in America, the average Vasluinik could at least become a police commissioner.[337] They were enthralled by his stories of a President who could be removed by the people, of papers that dare poke fun at rulers, of trains that run over rooftops, of food sold in sealed packages, and shoemakers who go to shule on the

Sabbath with stovepipe hats, like millionaires.[338]

An American fever spread through Vaslui. People began to leave in droves. A rumor spread that there was no feather bedding available in the United States. Suddenly it became the most precious commodity.[339] Organizations developed to march to America; never for a moment did anyone pay attention to its physical impracticality.[340] A whole genre of literature developed with newspapers, songs, poems, and stories about America the land of hope, "the new Jerusalem."[341]

With such high expectations, whatever the Vasluiniks, Ravage amongst them, would find in America, it was bound to be disappointing. He was disappointed. He was disappointed by the way in which the native Americans regarded the immigrant. They completely discounted his dignity and worth as an individual, the value of his traditions and culture and considered him nothing more than "a blank sheet to be written upon."[342] Debarking from the boat at Ellis Island, he was pushed, questioned and labelled. His relative Couza, on whom he had depended and whom he had regarded with great admiration, turned out to be neither the great ambassador or the great benefactor. Ravage was depressed by the horrible slums. There was poverty in the old country, but there was also self-respect. Here on the East-side, he saw the elite of Vaslui society degraded. He could not believe his eyes when he saw old Jonah Gershon, the Chairman of the Hospital Committee in Vaslui, selling lollipops on a street corner.[343] The lack of self-respect was evident to Marcus by the ease with which people exchanged such revered names as Mordechai, Abraham, Israel, Moshe for Mike, Abie,

Izzy and Morris. How dreadful! As he himself describes it: "Good manners and good conduct, reverence and religion, had all gone by the board, and the reason was that these things were not American. A grossness of behaviour, a loudness of speech, a certain repellent 'American' smartness in discourse were thought necessary if one was not to be considered a boor or a greenhorn. The ancient racial respect for elders was gone."[344] He was deeply distressed by how America had affected Jewish life. The old folks shed the old world ways of the earlocks and peruque.[345] The young children in America dominated the family.[346] The houses of ill-repute and criminality were evidence of the breakdown in morals fostered by America.[347] The old world seemed like paradise as Ravage remembered "the blessed life we had left behind."[348] In the old home people "were not unattached drifting nobodies as everyone was here."[349] He was disturbed by the divisions within the Jewish community and by the need to resort to peddling to make a living. He could not at first accept what his cousin told him: that "In the land of Columbus one did what one could and there was no disgrace in doing anything. A shoemaker is as good as a doctor as long as he worked and made money and paid for everything."[350]

Still America had its compensations, it provided an abundance of food - imagine meat twice a day;[351] the possibilities of becoming a "citisnik";[352] the fine clothes that everybody wore so that "you could not tell a bank president from his office boy."[353]

Despite his disappointment, Ravage could not bring himself to return to Roumania. He became a peddler, selling chocolates on the

street corners. When he did not make any sales, a fellow peddler gave him a lesson in American economics. "Charge more," says his colleague, "your American likes to be charged a stiff price - otherwise he thinks you are selling him trash. Don't be timid, this is a land where modesty starves."[354] He raised his prices and sold out. "I was a successful business man. I began to hold my head high."[355] He was envious of the school boys, passing in the streets who could dream of becoming doctors, lawyers or businessmen. Marcus concluded that it was time for him to learn the language. He taught himself English by comparing the Hebrew and English Bibles.[356]

As he began to earn a living, America's image tended to brighten somewhat. He was puzzled by the American's trustfulness; he was amazed to see housewives leave money in unattended milk bottles for the milkman. To him, "this undiscriminating confidence in God and Man was a distinctly American peculiarity."[357] Ravage fluctuated between periods of elation and depression. On the one hand he was aware of the equality which America promised, while on the other he was unhappy over the need to practice deceit and dishonesty to advance.[358] While he was embarrassed by his early jobs, he began to see that perhaps "peddling and hawking and the sewing machine were just so many rungs in the ladder. A dingy apartment in the tenements was merely a stage in the march to a home in Brownsville or a shop in the Bronx. The earth was young and fresh from the hand of the Maker and as yet undivided among His children. That was another distinctive superiority of America over Roumania."[359] Yet, he recognized that there was also the "sweatshop hand," who "con-

tracted consumption or socialism and never rose to anything better."[360]

In time, Marcus found his way into the sweatshop, though his friends looked down on one who worked with his hands. Although the sweatshop conditions were difficult, though the wages were low, and slack seasons were plentiful, for Ravage it was his first "university."[361] With pleasure he recounts the camaraderie of the sweatshop, the mutual concern of the workers for one another and the lively political discussions. Through the sweatshop, he learned of lectures, theater, and books. A whole new world opened up for him, thanks to "this intelligentsia of the slums."[362] In the sweatshop society, "the man not the costume was the thing."[363] Evening school also exposed him to new vistas. Ravage began to dream of attending university.

Marcus went to school while working part time. He was successful and passed the Regents exams. Seeking a college that had minimal tuition fees, he wrote to and was accepted by the University of Missouri.[364] He was lonely there and almost returned to New York. Though life was difficult, he found the campus a place of no class distinction, so that "however America might have broken faith with me in other ways, her promise of democratic equality she had scrupulously fulfilled."[365] The college world was strange for the young Roumanian Jew. Its baseball, football, and slang were at first unintelligible to him. Yet when he met, was befriended and lived with a typical American type, he was overwhelmed and reassured. They exchanged cultural gifts. Harvey taught Marcus how to speak, how to dress, and Marcus in turn introduced Harvey to such delicacies as Russian tea,

Roumanian Pastrama, cheese and ripe olives. Marcus found the people in Missouri open, frank and unassuming. For him it was a marvelous contrast to New York. At vacation time he returned to the East side ghetto, only to find himself out of place in it. He went back to Missouri, which had new become home.

It is at this point that Marcus Ravage's memoirs terminate. We learn that he went on to graduate and become a successful business-man. Truly his was the tale of an American in the making; the blending of the old and the new.

MY LIFE

By

Bella W. Rosenbaum

Bella Weretnikow came to America from the little town of Kominetz Podolsk in Russia.[367] Threatened by the pogroms of 1881, her family fled to the new world. Bella was then a babe in arms. Arriving in the United States with no visible means of support, her parents and other people from their town were shipped to far-off Winnipeg by the local Jewish Immigration Aid Society.

Bella describes the warm welcome they received from the German-Jewish settlers[368] who had settled there some years before. She recounts many happy memories of life in Winnipeg. As a school girl her life was happy and carefree. Her father earned a bare living from peddling. It was her mother who supported the family with her little general store.[369] The other Jews supported themselves as farmers and petty merchants.

In 1893, her parents moved to Seattle to escape Winnipeg's harsh weather. Her sketches of early life in the colorful town of Seattle abound in stories about loggers, sailors and the many transients found in a port city. She entered school in Seattle, later going on to the University of Washington to study law.

Bella's description of the Klondike Gold Rush of 1893 provides a colorful journal of that exciting period in the history of the Northwest. Her parents, who ran a business to outfit the prospectors,

prospered nicely. The Jews not only served as outfitters to the miners, but were often confidants and bankers as well. Graduating as an attorney in 1901, Bella comments that it was not unusual to find women in that frontier area engaged in the professions and business.[370]

In 1905 she was married to Lewis Rosenbaum, an attorney from Nashville, Tennessee. Seattle's fortunes turned, and by 1913 the city was in the midst of a great depression. Bella's husband found a position in New York and they moved.

For Bella moving to Brooklyn was almost like immigrating to another country; it was certainly a different cultural milieu from what she had known in Seattle. Living in Brooklyn, she was exposed to an almost totally Jewish community. Though Yiddish was strange to her at first, she soon learned to converse and began to feel a part of the "shtetl" of Eastern Parkway, a main thoroughfare in Brooklyn.[371]

In time Bella learned of the wonders awaiting her at Klein's Department Store, where one could actually buy ready made silk dresses for "only five dollars."[372] Her first trip in the subway proved to be a frightening experience. That event convinced her "that the person who conceived the plans for it not only obtained his ideas of the subterranean tunnel from the lower regions, but also brought back with him a host of the inhabitants of Hades. The hordes who pushed and shoved you...bore no resemblance whatsoever to civilized human beings."[373]

Bella's memoirs are sprinkled with delightful descriptions of the pushcart row on Pitkin Avenue, scenes in a Jewish butcher shop, and sketches of the Jewish worker.

She writes of the driving ambitions of the Jewish immigrant and

of the special hope they nurtured of a better future for their children. She relates with warmth and admiration of the little old lady who stood in the cold all day and sold her goods from a pushcart so, that her "Herschele" would soon "Thenks Got...graduate dentist."[374] This however did not blind Bella to the dire poverty that these same "colorful" people lived in. She was distressed to think that in America there could be "so many dark windowless rooms - so many persons crowded into so little space - so many families deprived of light and air...".[375] Despite the poverty, these opressed people "could not help but feel a sense of freedom in the 'promised land.' There was hope, if not for them at least for their children. They too had the opportunity of becoming the 'bosses' of tomorrow; even as today's 'bosses' had been the workers of yesterday."[376] She writes with admiration of the Jewish labor leaders, the intellectuals and artists. Bella describes with some wonder the American habit of moving one's residence with every move up the economic and social ladder. The ambition of the poor was to move from a tenement to a flat, to a home. The rich, on the contrary, moved from homes to apartments.[377]

Her memoirs conclude with portraits of some of the products of the ghetto: Jewish theatre, show people, newspapers, composers, comedians, and impressarios. Like so many of the memoirs of the early immigrants, Bella Rosenbaum's reflect a concern with their immediate environment, and needs. Though colorful, interesting and understandable, they lack the broader perspective of life in America and their place in it as citizens. Nevertheless they do reflect the immigrants' reactions to that part of America most relevant to them.

MY CARAVAN OF YEARS

By

Goldie Stone

It is significant that Goldie Stone dedicated her book "to America, stronghold of liberty, guardian of western civilization."[378] To Goldie, the sickly little girl from the tiny town of Ploksh in Lithuania, America was indeed the stronghold of liberty and the land of unbounded opportunity. She had risen from the slums of the East side to the heights of Chicago society.

Goldie was the child of Ephraim Tuvim, estate manager for a petty nobleman. A learned man, he sought to give his children a good Jewish and general education. Though relations with the non-Jews was cordial, they were all aware of an underlying hostility which could easily break out into a pogrom. When Ephraim Tuvim died in his mid-thirties, the family was able to manage with the help of relatives.

There was no thought of emigrating to America. One day Goldie's older brother Maurice, a brilliant student, was refused entry into the University of Warsaw. Maurice pondered: "There must be some place where I can be accepted as a man without questions about religion being spit in my face...why there is of course there is, there is America."[379] Maurice left to seek his fortune in "America, the land where everyone was fabulously rich. The land where all sorts of exciting adventures took place. It was a golden land on the other side of the world."[380]

Goldie missed her brother greatly and fell ill. A wealthy aunt decided to take her to America for a short visit and to improve her

health.[381]

With Emma Lazarus' poem "The Colossus" on her lips, and with hope in her heart, Goldie arrived in the land of opportunity. When they debarked from the boat, their first greeting by street urchins was "greenhorn," a word "that etched itself into our brains with a bitterness and malice, hard to forgive and harder to forget."[382]

When they arrived at the house of Uncle Julius, Goldie was disappointed by the poor cramped quarters. Yet she was impressed with the spirit of the people. Goldie's brother Maurice, though plagued by ill fortune and illness, rejoiced at the opportunities of America. "I am glad I came," he says, "it is truly a land of freedom...the policeman on the corner is no different than you. He is a citizen and you are a citizen...there is always a chance for the poorest person to become a prince. It was not that way in Lithuania or Warsaw...and the libraries, Goldie, thousands and thousands of books and you don't have to pay to read them."[383] Goldie too was impressed by the public libraries. They were symbolic to her of America's equality and opportunity. "I watched them" she writes, "under the green lights - men of every color, of every station in life, some well dressed, some in rags bent over books on history, on art, on music."[384]

Goldie decided to stay with her brother. She realized that if she was ever to feel a part of America, she must learn English. She enrolled in night school. She found masses of people hungry for knowledge, yet being made to read such elementary materials as "does the pretty black cat like white milk? yes the..."[385] When she mastered the language and was able to explore American history and literature,

"I realized with joy that I too, was a thread in the magnificent fabric of a great human experiment."[386] Goldie writes "the constitution of the United States was my bible...I loved the land and its history. I had an overwhelming desire to become a good and useful American."[387] She was particularly impressed with the democracy of the American educational system which offered a free education to all.[388]

With some bitterness Goldie remembered the aloofness of young native Americans who considered the foreigners inferior and crude. She also recalled the rough treatment that newcomers received from those who had arrived but a short time before, and who mocked the new arrival with "greenhorn." Her Uncle Julius, though slaving to keep body and soul together, was loud in his praises: "here in America we can truly live the law and spirit of our people - to earn our bread by the labor of our hands."[389] How different this was from the old country where the laborer was looked down upon and considered an ignoramus. Despite his poverty Julius felt the dignity of his labor.

Her beloved brother Maurice left for home to recuperate from his illness. Goldie decided to forget her loneliness by going to work. She got a job in a sweatshop. She was sickened by her first view of what looked like a scene from Gehenna. She saw "women of all ages, some with gray hair, others looking almost like withered children, with shoulders bent pulling frantically at their needles...all of them plucked at the needle like terrified imprisoned creatures that were attempting to tear the meshes of a net that held them prisoner."[390] The work was too much for her and she collapsed. Goldie vowed to try

and change conditions. This "Egypt in the promised land" had no place in America. Goldie identified with the plight of the poor. When a rich relative, a banker, offered to take her out of the poverty of the East side, she bristled with anger. She defended the right of the immigrant to his different ways and customs. She challenged her cousin: "Who is the model American that he (the immigrant) must try to simulate - the Greek-American, the English-American, the Chinese-American?...Americanism is an idea. That's all it is - the idea that men have a right to be different and must respect the rights of others."[391] Goldie rebelled at those who preached that all Americans had to be alike. She rebelled equally at those immigrants who considered only native Americans as "real Americans".[393] She dedicated herself to helping new immigrants.

Goldie met Julius Stone, product of a wealthy Jewish family. She was amazed when "this blond American giant" proposed. She accepted, they were married and went off to Chicago to establish their home. She began to look around for some way in which she might be active in the community. She attended a meeting of Eastern-European Jews on the establishment of a traditional home for the Aged. She was impressed by the new stature of the East-European who wanted to care for his own instead of depending on "the bounty of the German Jews."[393] She became deeply involved in working for that institution and describes some of the touching scenes in the home. She admired the old people for trying "to adjust their points of view to the American way of life" and for their support of "the Democratic Government of their adopted country, America."[394] Her mother came to visit this country. Nestled in the comfort of her daughter's home, she was impressed with "this

America. It is a wonderful land. It's young; the people are like laughing children. There can be no hatred, no misunderstanding where there is laughter."[395] On another occasion she said: "America is a miracle...a land without 'bosses,' no Cossack with his whip, no Nobles or military aristocracy to force you off the sidewalk...no government spies...a thousand blessings on the head of Columbus."[396]

Goldie became deeply involved in the community life of Chicago Jewry. She writes with admiration about her association with Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, with the great philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald, and with Rosa Raisa, the Jewish opera star. She writes with much pleasure regarding her activities on behalf of the Chicago Hebrew Institute and the Marks Nathan Orphan Home. She exults over her children.

When her husband died, Goldie assumed direction of their business activities. Concluding her book with some random thoughts on America and Jewish life, she was somewhat disheartened as her caravan comes to its end. "Today even the Jew in Democratic America...is looked upon as belonging to a minority group, not included in the dominant majority...yet America has no room for discrimination against any group or people. Our national liberal philosophy...regards freedom as a priceless gift for the benefits of all peoples and all lands."[397]

Despite the prejudice in some circles, the immigrants that came to America "lived together in peace; they have established homes; they have worked in harmony to develop the resources of the Country. Together they established the institutions for the benefit of all alike."[398]

At seventy, Goldie Stone, the little sickly girl from Ploksh, was able to write of America, "her beloved home, I have faith that we

will continue to build bravely a monument of our (founding) fathers'
courage and vision."[397]

A SURGEON'S WORLD

By

Max Thorek

From his earliest days Max Thorek dreamed of being a doctor. He would follow in the footsteps of his parents who were both physicians. Every opportunity seemed open to him. He had wealth, he had security, he had dreams. He felt at home in his town. Then in 1897 anti-Jewish vandalism broke out.[400] People whom he knew "as kindly harmless folk were suddenly transformed to attack with murderous frenzy their neighbors, their fellow townsmen, their friends."[401] One day Max saw a pregnant Jewish woman being beaten by a policeman who shouted, "these bastard Christ-killers! What a joy to watch them die!"[402] As Dr. Thorek writes,"from that moment on it (Hungary) was forever an alien land."[403] Only one thought gave him courage and hope - America. Max decided "not to stay here in this place of hate and violence. I would find that new land where men were free and equal and where horrors like this could never happen."[404]

The family began to lay plans to leave. An American uncle in Chicago promised them help. The excitement grew. "America - the very word was a tonic!"[405]

After a long and difficult journey, the Thoreks arrived in New York. Their drooping spirits were lifted "by the sight of the noblest statue of our planet. Liberty enlightening the world."[406]

Though they were treated roughly at Castle Garden, "which was neither castle, nor garden," they left for Chicago. The nonchalance and friendliness of a policeman gave them courage.[407] Though they felt

isolated because of their ignorance of English, they did feel "a certain sense of security."[408]

Arriving in Chicago, they were surprised that Uncle Bernard was not waiting for them. All their anticipations of warm welcomes, feasting, clothes, and schools were shattered. They learned that their Uncle had just lost his wife. They also discovered that Uncle Bernard was far from wealthy, and struggled long and hard to make a living.

Disappointment followed disappointment as Max's father discovered he could not practice in America, and his mother had to find work as a mid-wife. Their lives were difficult. The paradox struck Max:"Here we were in the land of golden plenty and we were having a hard time to buy enough food to keep us from starving."[409] He writes: "Had thirst for gold been our motive in coming to American soil, I believe none of us could have borne it. But poor as we were...friendless as we were, bewildered as we were, we put behind us the cruel shadow which would darken our homeland. We set our faces to the future."[410]

Chicago was, as Sandburg called it, "half naked, sweating, proud to be hog butcher, tool maker, stacker of wheat, player with railroads and freight handler of the nation." The Thoreks lived on Halsted street, where "cesspools and political corruption were the distinguishing feature of the street...the great slaughter houses poured their stench into the air and their refuse into the streams and streets. The graft-ridden Red Light districts were blatant and shamless...the Jews thronged the ghetto."[411]

Max determined to rise above what he found. He sought and obtained a job playing the violin in a gypsy orchestra. He was as proud

of his union card as of an American passport. Indeed it was to be his passport to a bright future. Though embarrassed at having to work, he was reassured "that working one's way through school was an honored tradition in America."[412] Having mastered the language, Max obtained a full scholarship to medical school by his proficiency on the snare drum. He learned that the school was seeking a drummer and so spent the summer developing that talent. He was so good that he was able to bargain for a scholarship. His education was completed in a matter of years, and he was soon ready to hang out his shingle.

As a young doctor, Thorek was exposed to life in the raw. Treating the poor in the tenements, he was witness to beatings, to exploitation and to illegitimate births.[413] Little by little Thorek's practice expanded beyond the working class areas. Soon he was ministering to the upper classes and to the great show people of his day.[414] As he moved up the ladder of success, he became aware of the strange restlessness which possessed the immigrant in America. "ith each step up the ladder he felt compelled to demonstrate his success by moving bag and baggage to a "better neighborhood."[415]

Thorek, to whom America had been very good, spends the rest of his memoirs recounting his successes, his struggles and his honors in the surgeon's world. Few are the times when he pauses to reflect on the country which offered him such boundless opportunity which was the soil of his personal and professional growth.

MY LIFE WITH THE MICROBES

By

Selman Waksman

Solomon Waksman was born July 8, 1888 in the small town of Novaia-Priluka, near Kiev, in the Western Ukraine. As a young lad living in a small town, surrounded by fields and forests, he "had ample opportunity to observe the growth of plants, their awakening in spring and their death and disintegration in autumn...I had impressed upon me by my mother the infectious nature of disease and the need for cleanliness and personal hygiene, I became gradually aware of some fundamental principles involved...as I watched my little sister Miriam suffocate from the effects of diptheria and I listened to the small-town doctor tell of some great discovery...of an anti-toxin that could have saved her life. My youthful mind began to wonder."[416] Little did he imagine that he would devote his life to microbes and that in 1943 he would discover the miracle drug, streptomycin, for which he was later awarded the Nobel Prize.

Solomon, or Selman as he became known, was the firstborn child of his mother's later years. As such, he was doted over. He received a thorough Jewish and Russian education in schools and in the hands of private tutors. His was a happy and contented childhood. Greatly influenced by his mother, who had a highly developed social conscience, he and his friends started a free school for poor children when he was only thirteen.[417] In 1907 Selman tried to pass the Gymnasia (high school) examinations, but failed because of an unfair examiner. After several years of further preparation in Odessa, he finally passed in

1909.[418] When his mother died in 1909 he threw himself into his studies. He studied Latin, German, French, Russian literature, mathematics, and science in the hope of qualifying for university. Though at the top of his class, he was rejected because he was a Jew.[419] The rejection marked a turning point in his life. Because of discrimination against the Jews, he felt Russia held no hope for him. He began to look to America. In October of 1910 at age twenty-two, he and a number of friends started on their journey to the new world.[420] On the train to the Port they sang, "we have shaken the shackles off our feet, we are entering upon a new world, a free world, where man is free."[421]

When they landed in Philadelphia, they were amazed at everything they saw. They were "particularly impressed by the large numbers of colored people whom we had never seen before." Despite the fact they were well educated he and his friend Pessi were considered "green cousins." His cousins thought of America only as a place to make a living. They forgot that "we had come here to study and to escape from tyranny and not because we were unable to earn a living in the old country."[422]

Waksman's cousins were nevertheless very good to him. He lived with one, Molki, who owned a farm in Metuchen, New Jersey. His cousins' children taught him English while he helped with the farm chores.[423]

Though he had planned to enter medical school, Dr. Jacob Lipman, Head of the Department of Bacteriology at Rutgers University, advised him to study bacteriology at Rutgers University. He received a full scholarship and commenced his studies in September 1911. As he himself

writes, "the die was cast."[424] It was at Rutgers that Waksman was to remain and make his great discoveries. Though he found the atmosphere at Rutgers conducive to study, he felt out of place. The superior technical knowledge of his classmates, their different interests and their comparative youth made him feel out of place. Nevertheless he persisted, and with the help of his professors, did very well. More important to him, he writes, "I was becoming more and more saturated with the spirit of the new world, a desire to depend on myself."[425] He was graduated as a Phi Beta Kappa. He remained for a time at Rutgers as an Instructor, and then went to California to obtain a doctorate. There, too, he was greatly encouraged by the friendliness and helpfulness of professors and students.

After receiving his doctorate from the University of California, Waksman accepted an appointment at his Alma Mater. There over the years he rose from Instructor to head of the Institute of Microbiology. In less than thirty years he rose from a promising research assistant to a Scientist of world acclaim.

Waksman's feelings about America are best summed up in the dedication of his autobiography. He dedicated the book to his grandchildren,"Nan and Peter native Americans." "Your grandparents" he writes, "came to this country as pioneers to help build a new world. Just as earlier pioneers who came to clear the forest, cultivate the virgin land, fight the undesirable animals and transplant the desirable ones, so your grandparents came to avoid persecution, to find greater freedom and to contribute their share in making this country a better place in which to live. They came from an old race, one that has given the

world its highest code of ethics and morals; they in turn have tried to create more knowledge, to help alleviate human suffering and to make the life of man a happier one. They have labored so that you will find the world perhaps somewhat freer from prejudices, freer from suffering, than they themselves have found it." So they did.

FROM A TO X

By

Max Winkler

Max Winkler wrote his memoirs in response to a question put to him by his grandaughter - a question motivated by an assignment from her public school teacher to interview a foreign-born person of her acquaintance. Written as a sequel to an earlier autobiography, they ramble without form and order.

Max was born in 1888 in the Province of Bukovina, Roumania, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[426] His father was rather well-to-do as a manager of a lumber mill. When Max saw his first pictures of the United States in a popular magazine, he knew instantaneously that America was where he wished to live. For "to live forever among such surroundings (Bukovina) with no chance of advancement or of improving my station in life, didn't appeal to me...I was determined to go to America."[427]

After working his way across Europe, and after "thirty-three days of misery,"[428] he arrived in New York in 1905 at age seventeen. Penniless and alone, he "walked the streets of New York's East side for four weeks, digging discarded bread out of garbage cans."[429]

Eventually Max found a job as a porter in a music publishing firm. From there his rise was a steady one. He finally developed his own business, for as he said, "he knew how to take advantage of an opportunity, of that golden minute."[430]

One of the greatest days of his life was the day he became a citizen. Directed to be at the Court House at 10:00 A.M., he arrived

punctually, only to find that the line of people stretched for blocks. Arriving somewhat earlier the next day, he was also not able to complete his examination. Bright and eager as he was, he arrived at 3:00 A.M. the next morning, only to find some thirty-eight people waiting. He describes the joy, excitement and spontaneous camaraderie that developed among the immigrants eager to become citizens of America. Finally, four weeks later he proudly received his papers as a "certified citizen."[431]

He humorously recounts his attempts as a new citizen to find out the issues in an election, and his unsuccessful encounter with the biased American Press.[432] Quickly feeling a proud part of his adopted homeland, he took up the cudgels for his new country. He describes his anger and astonishment at hearing orators in Union Square condemning "our officials, our institutions, our laws, without being locked up."[433]

A good portion of the book flits back and forth describing the secrets of his success,[434] offering advice to young lovers,[435] recounting his trips around the world and America with his wife, Clara,[436] an audience with Pope Pius XII,[437] and a visit to Israel which impressed him deeply.[438]

The balance of the book is a potpourri of self praise, limp stories and personal incidents. Touching, however, are his feelings about America. So taken was he with his new homeland that he directed that the Star Spangled Banner be played at his funeral to "remind my mourners that it is indeed a sad moment when someone can no longer hear the golden tones of our National Anthem."[439]

RED RIBBON ON A WHITE HORSE

By

Anzia Yezierska

Anzia Yezierska's life story is a poignant portrayal of the struggles of an Eastern-European immigrant in her search for identity. It is at the same time the portrayal of an artist's search for identity.

Anzia was brought to this country at a very early age by her father. While for some, America was an improvement, for her family it was the exchange of one state of poverty for another. Out of her struggles emerged a novel called "Hungry Hearts." Though it barely sold as a book, it was purchased by Sam Goldwyn as the basis for a motion picture. Suddenly Anzia was catapulted from anonymity and gnawing poverty to nation-wide renown and wealth. She tried to share her good news with her father whom she had not seen in over a year. His rebuke was typical of many of his generation who came to America under protest and remained in a world apart, the world of the Orthodox Jew. He called Anzia "an 'Amerikanerin,' a daughter of Babylon." "In America," he said, "money takes the place of God." 440 Standing on the threshold of a new-found fame, she recalled scenes from her childhood, spent in abject poverty in the tenements of the East-side. They were black years she felt and she was glad to be rid of them.

Hollywood was a puzzling and frightening experience for Anzia. Fame, money, secretaries proved to be her nemesis. Removed from the milieu which spawned her literary creations, and commanded to write on demand, her wellspring of creativity dried up. As she watched

"Hungry Hearts" put into production, it brought to mind scenes from her childhood. In fact her autobiography reads like a movie with its constant use of flashbacks. She recalls how she managed to learn English. She would pay Minnie, the janitor's daughter, whatever she was able to save out of her meager sweatshop earnings in order that Minnie teach her whatever she had learned in school.[441] She recalls how she would read her first literary attempts to whatever ears were available: to Sara Solomon, her neighbor in the sweatshop; to Zalman, the fish peddler and to Hayim Shmerl, the plumber.[442] Her new-found fame brought her fan mail from all over the world. Certainly the most touching letter was one from an old Jew who signed himself Boruch Shloimo Mayer. It epitomized the feelings of many older generation immigrants who had not found success in America. It read:

> "long years and good health on you. May you continue to find in America the land flowing with Milk and Honey that God in His wisdom did not see fit to let me find... To my sad sorrow, mine is a story of an immigrant different from yours. I also came from a village in Poland like you. But to me America is a worse Goluth than Poland. The Ukases and pogroms from the czar, all the killings that could not kill us, gave us the strength to live with God. Learning was learning, dearer than gold. Poverty was an ornament on a learned man, like a red ribbon on a white horse. But here in New York, the synagogues are in the hands of Godless lumps of flesh. A butcher, a grocer any money-maker could buy himself into president of a synagogue... Better to die there than to live here, among the money-making fat bellies - worshippers of the golden calf... I pray... to go back to my little village in Poland where all know me for what I am - and will respect me because I am what I am... I beg you for a ship ticket to Poland... your landsman."[443]

She was troubled by the letter. Why was poverty a disgrace in America? Anzia then made up her mind to return to New York, to find Boruch Shloimo and to find herself. She returned to find him dead.

Anzia found her New York as she had left it, a place where "people ragged, brutal, dirty-crowded into subhuman cubby holes - without light - without air."[444] This contrasted with the romanticized view of a Mary Antin, who somehow found beauty in dire poverty. Poverty held no beauty for Anzia.

The final portion of her book deals with Anzia's struggles during the depression period, her work as a secretary, as a writer on a WPA writer's project, and as a lecturer. She writes of an America in which "destitute millions of umemployed roamed the highways, hungry, hopeless."[445] It was an America where "decent hard-working people were tossed into the scrapheap" and in which "a new poor...suffered the terrors of hard times."[446] She writes of the return of hope in the person of Franklin Roosevelt. Under Roosevelt, America became a place where, "people who no longer hoped or believed in anything but the end of the world began to hope and believe again."[447]

In time Anzia too returned to normalcy. The result was a return to self-confidence and to her writing. Again we have an example of a sensitive autobiography which like so many others, is turned inward on the thoughts and emotions of the writer with minor regard for the outside world. Perhaps it must be so, that the country of the struggling immigrant is destined to be composed of a landscape of his own trials and tribulations.

MEMOIRS IN THE YIDDISH LANGUAGE

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

By

Rebecca August

These fragmentary notes on the life of Rebecca August were composed on September 15, 1955 for the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research Archives.

Rebecca August was born in the town of Kraslava, Russia in 1883. Her father, an itinerant tailor, was barely able to support his family.

After years of hardship Rebecca, who was then twelve years old, and her family moved to London to seek a better life.[1] Though she sought work to help support her parents, she was forced to give it up. English Law required that she attend school for several years.[2]

In 1904 Rebecca and her father migrated to America in the hope of improving their lot. Rebecca went to work in a sweatshop where she earned a mere pittance. She recounts how the girls would work as fast as possible since they were paid on a piece-work basis. The foreman however would cut down the pay per piece as their speed increased. When Rebecca protested and tried to organize the girls, she was fired.[3] She had difficulty finding work since the word got around that she was an agitator.[4] Fired from one job after another, she moved to Seattle in 1910. There she was active in the Trade Union Council, working for better conditions and for an eight hour work day. Though she married, Rebecca continued to work in clothing factories until she was sixty-five years of age. Her proudest achievement was her membership in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America.[5] For her America consisted of her struggles, her shop and her union.

PAGES FROM MY LIFE

BY

Abraham Cahan

For almost seventy years one figure in American-Jewish life was to play a unique and monumental role; that figure was Abraham Cahan. He faithfully served his transplanted people as teacher, lecturer, labor organizer, and finally editor for more than half a century of the most widely read and most deeply influential Yiddish newspaper in the world, The Jewish Daily Forward. A resident of the United States for over seventy years, he experienced, influenced and described the birth of the modern American - Jewish community. The five volumes of his memoirs therefore represent much more than a personal history. They are the history of an entire community.

Born in a Lithuanian village near Vilna in 1860, Abraham Cahan was the son of a poor Hebrew teacher. He received a traditional education, but his appetite for Russian literature developed early. He secretly taught himself Russian and attended a Russian public school against his parents' will. As a tutor he earned money to buy secular books, and by discarding his traditional garb, he gained access to the Vilna Public Library. At an early age, while at a teacher's college, he joined the socialist movement. When the police discovered his participation in a revolutionary organization, he was forced to flee. It was to America that he fled in May of 1882.[6]

As his ship approached the port of Philadelphia, Cahan began to give some serious thought as to what lay ahead. He had little

information about the United States except what he had once read in a romantic novel in Russian translation. He conceived "America to be like some dreamland...in my imagination, for some unknown reason, I expected Americans to be tall slender people with yellow pants and high hats."[7] His first contact with Americans, the immigration officials and those from the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society were negative. Though the Hias people were sincerely concerned with the plight of the immigrants, "they could not communicate with us. It was not only language that stood in the way...much more significant was the difference in inner language. The attitudes and life circumstances were completely different."[8]

Upon his arrival in New York, Cahan sought out his old friends from Vilna. In their company he felt more secure. His first impression of the American Jews was that they possessed little Jewish learning and little intellectual life.[9] His first reactions to America were mixed. On the one hand, "I felt a deep interest in the dynamic life of the great American state. Before I had only read about capitalism. Now I could see it and feel it. It surrounded me on all sides."[10] On the other hand, he was puzzled that a socialist paper could be freely distributed in public.[11] As he writes himself, "I felt America's freedom every minute...yet at the very same time I said to myself, 'this is a capitalist prison.'"[12] In this way he was very much like many other young intellectuals who could only view America through their ideologically colored spectacles.

For the first months in New York, he worked in a sweatshop. By his own admission he felt as if he were a slave.[13] Another of the

paradoxes he confronted was the fact that in America one might espouse socialism openly. Those who had been part of the Russian movement which had to operate underground were puzzled. They pondered, "what kind of socialism is this that one need not hide?" The movement lost its vigor.[14] While in Russia it was the young socialist idealists alone who extolled manual labor; in America all seemed to engage in it and it was not looked down upon.

After the factory experience Cahan obtained a job in a cigar factory. The work was difficult. He had been a student all of his life and physical labor was a new and trying experience for him. After a few weeks Cahan obtained a job in a metal factory. There too the work proved too dificult for him. He would 'count the minutes" till the end of his workday and when it was over he felt "as if I were a convict freed from prison."[15] His experience in the factory with its assembly line techniques brought home to him what he had only read about in books, that the worker was a "mechanical...disinterested cog in a machine...a lifeless instrument."[16] Yet he was favorably impressed with the pace of life. America "lived in one day more than Russia in ten."[17] Almost against his will he had to admit that "America intrigued me - kindled my curiosity. I saw around me an overshelming undertaking; overwhelming riches, an enterprising spirit and broad possibilities for carrying on a useful and interesting life."[18] Abraham thirstily drank in all his new experiences. His feelings were a mixture of homesickness and new found opportunity. He became active in the Socialist movement. When his abilities as a speaker were recognized, he was called upon to give frequent Yiddish lectures to Jewish workers on everything from

socialist theory to Russian literature. After mastering English, in the Autumn of 1883, he obtained a job in an evening school for immigrants sponsored by the Young Men's Hebrew Association.[19] He lived an active social and political life in the company of his fellow Russian-Jewish intellectuals. He had frequent arguments with those Jewish anarchists who claimed there was no more freedom in America than in Russia. Cahan, though aware of America's deficiencies, particularly her economic system, could not close his eyes to the large measure of democracy and freedom which the new world offered.[20]

His first contact with American politics was an exciting experience for him. He became emotionally involved in the Presidential elections of 1884. Despite the double talk, false charges and lack of sincerity, the spirit of excitement captured him.[21] The one thing which troubled him the most was the buying and selling of votes on street corners. It seemed unbelievable to him. While the Jew in Russia was ready to give his life for the right to vote, the Jew in America was prepared to sell his vote for a few dollars to a crooked Tammany politician.[22] He was also disturbed by the low level of politicans in New York, and the open consorting between gangsters and city officials.[23] He was distressed by the controlled press which printed only the side of "the bosses."[24] Most disturbing however was the Haymarket riot of 1886 and the subsequent trials and convictions of the seven "innocent" anarchists. The obvious distortion of justice in the conviction of the seven shook Cahan's belief in American justice to its very foundations.[25] To him and to many of his friends, it was clearly trial by mob hysteria.

When four of the anarchists were hung on November 11, 1887, Cahan and his fellow socialists and anarchists "went about as mourners. To the pain of pity was added the pain of perplexity."[26]

During the eighties Cahan participated in the organization of several Jewish unions, and also helped found a short-lived Socialist Yiddish paper, "The New Time."[27] It was during that period that Cahan moved away from his anarchist leanings to join the Socialist Labor Party under De Leon. His memoirs read like a Who's Who of the Socialist, Labor and Anarchist Movements. In the late eighties, pausing to reflect on anti-semitism and the position of the Jewish worker, Cahan felt that there was little overt anti-semitism. Though a few aristocratic clubs excluded Jews, the Yankee trader liked the competition of the Jew. Besides, there were still relatively few Jews in the country.[28] For the most part the Jewish worker was much better off than in Russia. "America was like a Garden of Eden compared to Russia."[27] The Jewish worker, despite the terrible conditions, had better housing and better clothing. His children were much healthier in America and enjoyed much better opportunities. Also, the political freedom America offered was not something one could dismiss lightly. The Jew in America felt like a whole man, the equal of any Christian. Cahan recognized that "at home my head was always downcast...but here I hold my head upright."[30]

In the third volume of the memoirs, Cahan describes the great difficulty in organizing the Jewish workers. Though conditions in the sweatshops were unbelievably bad, many workers made peace with the situation. The sweatshop still permitted them to observe the Sabbath. Others were too insecure to rebel. Unions had to fight not only the

bad conditions, but lethargy as well.[31] With great effectiveness Cahan describes the Depression of 1894. Though some states passed relief measures, many did not. There were strikes and marches. The Jewish Socialists took measures to care for their own.[32] Some of Cahan's comrades felt that revolution was imminent. A worker's paper ran the headline, "Hunger Grows - Millionaires Uneasy."[33] What followed however was a return to prosperity.[34] A real estate boom took place, and Jews played a vital role in the new prosperity. Former petty merchants and teachers from Eastern-Europe became land speculators and millionaires, almost overnight.[35] After working on a number of newspapers and lecturing all over the country for the Socialist Worker Party, Cahan was invited to become the editor of a new newspaper. This paper was to be representative of the mass of Jewish workers in America and not of small factions. Cahan accepted and the first issue of "The Jewish Daily Forward" appeared on April 22, 1897.[36] Cahan tried to make The Forward a vehicle for educating the masses. He became very unhappy when his fellow workers interpreted the concept of free press to mean chaotic and irresponsible journalism.[37] When Eugene V. Debs created the Social Democratic Party in 1897, Cahan joined its ranks, fully expecting that it would rally all American workers and become a great political force. It was at that point that Cahan resigned as Editor of The Forward.[38]

During the same period Cahan issued the first of his novels, "Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto." Though widely acclaimed by the critics as a "piece of real life,"[39] it was not popular. Cahan ascribed this to the fact that the immigrants preferred escapist literature to

that which dwelled on their own troubles.[40] After resigning from The Daily Forward, Cahan made his living by writing human interest pieces for the New York Evening Post and the New York Sun. When Lincoln Steffens became the City Editor of the New York Commercial Advertiser, one of the oldest newspapers in the country, he hired his friend Abe Cahan as a reporter. This was an invaluable experience for him. Cahan worked as a police reporter before going on general assignment. He writes with some relish about his experiences as a reporter during the Spanish-American War. With some surprise he discovered that the soldiers were not motivated by patriotism but by adventure and personal gain.[41] He also touches on such items as censorship[42] and police complicity in vice rings.[43]

Finally after four years of absence, Cahan returned to The Forward in 1902 and was to remain editor until his death in 1951. Given complete control, Cahan proceeded to make the paper a force in educating the East-European masses. He moderated the paper's extreme stand against all religious practices.[44] He systematically and carefully simplified the language of the paper so that it could be understood by the masses. He made sure the paper was written in the East-side Yiddish vernacular, incorporating many American words and expressions.[45] He used the paper as a vehicle for introducing American life to the East-side Jew and helping him adjust to his new homeland. Cahan tried to make the Jew aware of American and world problems. He used his paper to encourage Yiddish art, theater and literature, and opened his columns to his readers. At one point in its history, in

1910 The Jewish Daily Forward reached a circulation of over 200,000.[46] Under Cahan's tutelage, or what some called his benevolent dictatorship, the paper became a vital force in American-Jewish life. Championing social issues and the cause of the Jewish worker, the paper was often the decisive force in winning strikes and political battles.[47]

The author of hundreds of short stories, four novels, tens of thousands of columns, Abraham Cahan contributed to the lives of hundreds of thousands of struggling immigrants and left his indelible imprint on American-Jewish life and letters. By his courageous efforts on behalf of the Jewish worker, he also helped to secure the democratic rights of all Americans.

MEMOIRS OF MY LIFE

BY

Israel Cohen

In the introduction to his memoirs Israel Cohen modestly explains why he has not called them an autobiography. Autobiography is a name that should be reserved for one who has achieved great renown or monetary success. Since he had achieved neither and was a man of simple attainment, he prefers the title memoirs. On the other hand because he is a simple man, his memoirs are descriptive of the lives of many of his peers.[48]

He was born in a little hamlet in Southern Russia. The date of his birth is a complete mystery. In America, "a civilized country birth records are kept...in older Russia such records were almost non-existent."[49] He explains that people most often associated a birth with an event or a holiday but the year was not considered of significance.

Israel's life was typical of most of the youth of that period. He went to cheder, ate "teg," and suffered the usual beatings by the Russian peasants.[50] Because his father was ill the family lived on contributions from relatives.[51] For awhile he worked as a clerk in a stationery store where his treatment was intolerable. Since his employers knew that he needed the job desperately, they constantly abused him and took advantage of him.[52] Like so many young men, when he was about to be drafted into the army, he borrowed a friend's passport and fled to America. Cohen only got as far as London. There he

met a friend from Pinsk who promised to help him by loaning him some money to show to the American immigration officials. He also promised to give him his brother's address in America. On the boat his friend deserted him. He was terrified lest he be sent back to Russia. However when he came before the immigration officers with only a dollar and seventy five cents in his pocket, he boldly declared, "I have come to America to earn a living."[53] They seemed impressed with his desire to support himself and he was admitted. For a moment Cohen misunderstood and was sure that he was being rejected. When the bystanders assured him that all was well, he felt extremely grateful to America.[54]

His first impressions of America of 1904 were negative ones. He was shocked to see how many people were ready to take advantage of the immigrant's ignorance.[55] When he arrived at the home of his former friend's brother, the stories of his fabled wealth vanished. He found him to be not a garment manufacturer, but a sewing machine operator living on the fifth floor of a dingy tenement.[56] America seemed all bluff.

Finally Israel found a place to sleep thru an acquaintance. He then rediscovered a relative, Yossel Velvel, who rented him a corner of an already overcrowded apartment. Though he had no money left for food, he was not concerned for he had already learned "that here in America one does not die of hunger."[57] Though one did not die of hunger, he soon found one could suffer greatly. Though relatives invited him to join them, he was often too ashamed to admit his poverty and would live a full day on a penny's worth of "hot beans" purchased from a street vendor.[58]

Determined to support himself, he arranged to learn the trade of cigar making. His boss took pity on him, cancelled the cost of his lessons and invited Cohen to stay with him. Such friendliness Cohen thought to himself "could only happen in America."[59] In time he got a steady job and was able to rent a new room and purchase a new set of clothes.[60] He felt like "a good pious Jew in the Garden of Eden." When Israel got a chance to go into business for himself, he jumped at the opportunity. Imagine "a stationery store with two rooms in the back."[61] Soon however a depression struck America. One could see "everyday people standing and collecting things from garbage cans." Though he felt this was not America's fault, he wondered why something could not be done to prevent it.[62]

Israel married and one child seemed to follow on another. He recalls "that doctors in those days were afraid of giving out birth control devices." He eked out a living in his candy store and records the difficulties of a candy store owner. He writes of the little children who bought thirty candies for a penny and demanded special attention, and of a regular customer who would buy a lollipop for a child only to insist on exchanging it for another flavor after half had been eaten.[63] He also recalls the difficulties of living in a Catholic neighborhood. His children would come home and "accuse me of killing their friend's God!"[64] In time he supplemented his income by serving as the secretary for his synagogue.

After a succession of jobs, he finally obtained steady work as a clerk in a clothing factory. When fellow members of his synagogue offered to lend him money to purchase his own store, he writes with great

satisfaction, "as you see America is certainly not Pinsk."[65] In America all are ready to help; it was not as in the old country where Israel Cohen, the poor boy, was embarrassed and abused by his rich relatives and the community. It is on that note that Cohen concludes his memoirs. Not unlike his fellow immigrants, his image of America was directly tied to his own treatment and fortunes. When times were good, America was good, when times were bad "a klog oif Columbus."

A MEMOIR

No. 191 Yivo Archives

The author of this memoir who is unidentified was born in a small town near Minsk in Poland. Though their life was a poor one, each person enjoyed a fair amount of dignity and self-respect.[66] His father was unable to keep a job, but his mother somehow made a living and supported her seven children.[67] One incident that stood out in his memory was the "chapping" or kidnapping of a young uncle for military service. The family never heard of him again. The author concludes "that was life in Russia in those days." After the family moved to several towns seeking a livelihood, he went to live with a rich uncle in Minsk.

When regular studies proved impossible, he went to work in a tailor shop at age twelve. He describes with some bitterness the terrible working conditions, the long hours and poor pay.[69] It was in the shop that he was introduced to irreligious young workers who were clean-shaven and sought escape in politics and liquor.[70] The author became involved in the Revolutionary movement and at eighteen was caught and imprisoned.[71] He was subsequently sent to Siberia for four years. There he and his wife suffered greatly. Despite the difficulties they had children and began to settle down to a poor life. As the children grew-up, however, he became concerned about their education and future. An appeal to a brother-in-law in New York brought him ship passage.[72]

After a long and arduous voyage in steerage, the author sighted

the Statue of Liberty. The date was September, 1904. Like so many of his fellow immigrants, he was pushed about, interrogated and generally mishandled. They felt "as if we had come not as free people but as immigrants...so this is how we are received by the delicate madam, the Statue of Liberty...I was terribly upset. I consoled myself with the thought that perhaps I did not understand the ways of this new world."[73]

His first negative impressions were substantiated by other experiences. The strange language and the cold attitude of Aid officials left him forlorn and despondent. His brother-in-law distressed him further by constantly complaining about the long and hard hours he had to put in to keep body and soul together. Yet he was encouraged by the broad boulevards and the beautiful trees and flowers of the city streets. For him it was the first hopeful sign he had seen.[74]

He soon found a job in a factory run by his sister-in-law's father. Everyone was so very kind until he asked for a raise. Then he was fired. Next our author went to work for a small manufacturer. He was overwhelmed when his boss impulsively loaned him money to bring his wife and six children to America. That act by his employer gave him a new sense of dignity. Like all immigrants he had felt lonely and isolated, not like a person with individual needs and self-respect but only a part of a large faceless mass. As an immigrant everyone seemed to dismiss him with the derogatory and all-inclusive "greenhorn."[75] Now he felt whole. His spirits were uplifted. Though he might remain an outsider, at least for his children "there was one bright ray. Through the public school our children would find a place in the world."[76]

This was America.

He began to read the Socialist press and joined the Workmen's Circle. What he found in the workers' ranks was disappointing. "When in Russia we fought for the liberty which we found here (in America) we were prepared to sacrifice our lives. I therefore anticipated that in a land where freedom existed, the people would be more civilized, more friendly, more interesting...free schools, even higher schools... you have freedom of assembly, you can say what you want, you can organize freely both economically and politically. Yet the workers in America were lethargic, depressed, ignorant and often boorish. They found their recreation in cards, in driking and in pornography. Their language was worse than what I heard in a Russian prison."[77]

Somewhat later our author was introduced into shady union politics. When he criticized a relative for not voting in a union election, he was told "you are a greenhorn. The officers are chosen in the office. The voting is only for a show."[78]

Though life was difficult, his hopes rested on his children. He dreamed "of the unlimited possibilities for them in this land."[79] He sacrificed to send his children to school. All of them did well; some became professionals and others businessmen. His memoirs are liberally adorned with the pride he felt in their accomplishments. Though he, himself rose from the sweatshop in 1904 to his own prosperous cloak firm in 1930, no mean accomplishment, it was his children's success that gave him his greatest pleasure. "Such a fortune one may wish for all Jewish families," he concludes.[80] He had come to America to secure a brighter future for his children and that promise was fulfilled. He was grateful.

MY MEMOIRS

By

Benjamin Mayer

Benjamin Mayer was born in the little town of Kalush, eighteen miles from Lemberg, in 1876. When he was eleven months old his father died. His mother barely made enough to provide shelter and food for their little family. When Benjamin was eight years old his mother also passed away. He was left in the custody of an older married sister who cheated him out of his inheritance.[81] He suffered greatly at the hands of his sister. At eleven he was forced to drop out of cheder to become a tinsmith's helper. He made a poor living. When Benjamin was eighteen a marriage was arranged for him with a girl from another poor family. When he protested, he was told to consider himself fortunate for "after all you are only an orphan."[82] Benjamin describes the hypocrisy of many of his townsfolk. Though claiming piety, they did nothing to help alleviate the plight of the poor and orphaned. In fact they went out of their way to insult and deprecate them. Benjamin decided if his life was to improve, he would have to leave. He looked to America. Though his town held few pleasant memories, "I was sad to leave."[83]

Finally arriving in America on June 15, 1896 after much trouble, he was thankful to be in "the God-blessed land."[84] He obtained a room with relatives who granted him the privilege of sleeping in a room with six others for "only three dollars a month." During his first few days in America, Benjamin was attracted to a street corner meeting, and for the first time heard the word socialism. He was deeply impressed by their talk of justice and equality for the worker. He was

particularly touched by their concern for poor children.[85]

Within a few weeks Benjamin got a job in a tinsmith's shop. He was proud of his first week's wages. Eight dollars "was not bad for a greenhorn."[86] He then came upon bad times and was laid off from one job after another. Often his loss of a job was to make way for a younger man who would work for lower wages. He was also disappointed to see that America permitted the existence of "sweatshops that sucked out the worker's blood."[87] What impressed him though was the power of the press. When The Jewish Daily Forward called for support of the famous Bakers' strike, support was forthcoming and a settlement followed quickly.[88] Though he found making a living difficult, he, like many other immigrants, managed to save and send for his relatives to join them.[89]

When Benjamin and his wife lost their little boy, they moved to Pittsburgh to avoid the constant reminders of their tragedy. There he worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad. He describes the many anti-semitic incidents he was involved in because of the prejudices which many of his fellow workers brought with them from Europe.[90]

In time Benjamin realized his dream to have a metal shop of his own. His integrity and good workmanship were appreciated by his American clients and he prospered.[91] His children finished school and launched lives of their own. The business became well-established and he was able to realize yet another dream - to go to Florida every winter.[92] Not bad for the poor little orphan from Kalush! Had he remained in Kalush, he would have had to be content with dreams alone.

THE PATH OF MY LIFE

By

Rachel Kirsch Holtman

Plungian in Lithuania was Rachel Holtman's birthplace.[93] Her father, a learned man, served as a teacher and cantor. Her mother supported their family by running a bakery. At age nine Rachel was enrolled in a Russian-Jewish school for girls.[94] A good student, her parents sent her first to Vilna, and then on to the Gymnasium in Warsaw.[95] It was there that she met Moshe Holtman. He was her teacher. When a general strike broke out in Warsaw in 1905, Holtman, who was involved in the Revolutionary movement was forced to flee. Rachel returned home to Plungian, where she was under constant scrutiny by the police. This became so unbearable that she decided to leave for Berlin. There she studied in an academy and workerd for the Alliance Israelite. At the academy she was deeply influenced by Rosa Luxembourg, the great Socialist.[96] Once after a Socialist rally she and a number of her friends were arrested by the police and told to leave the country. Holtman, her teacher, who had been corresponding with her, invited her to stay with himself and his mother. They were married shortly afterwards in 1909. Rachel worked as a teacher and supported herself and her son while her new husband went off to the university to study engineering.[97]

In 1911 Holtman received his engineering degree. Leaving Rachel and their young son behind, he went off to the United States. By 1912 he had found a position in Minneapolis and was able to send for his

family. Rachel's first reactions were negative. She thought, "I shall never be able to adjust to this land of great opportunities."[98] The cramped quarters, the meager diet, the lack of friends, and the strangeness depressed her. For months she kept her bags packed in anticipation of their return. World War I put an end to those hopes.

Her husband then obtained a position in Pittsburgh. If Minneapolis had depressed her, the filthy dirty environment of the steel capital left her distraught.[99] The terrible working conditions in the steel mills confirmed her feelings about American capitalism and its exploitation of the working classes.[100] Her negative impressions of capitalist America were deepened during World War I, when in order "to make the world secure for Democracy" and for the sake "of the war to end wars," there was a general suppression of dissent. There were police raids and deportations of the foreign-born. Those who opposed the war, for any reasons, were branded as disloyal and subjected to abuse and loss of position. Freedom of speech and assembly were so much camouflage to hide "the attempts of the ruling classes to bring low the workers."[101] To Rachel American democracy was a sham.

Immediately following the war, Rachel and her husband moved to New York where her husband became the editor of a Communist weekly in Yiddish, called "Der Kampf." It was a forerunner of the later "Morning Freiheit." She worked on the newspaper with her husband - translating, editing and writing.[102] Though the period of Coolidge prosperity seemed to undercut the morale of the worker's movements, Rachel was pleased to see the outbreak of strikes. She saw those as evidence of the working classes' growing awareness of their need to rise against

American capitalism.[103] The notorious Sacco-Vanzetti case with its blatant miscarriage of justice simply provided her with additional evidence for her growing pessimism about America.[104] The great Bituminous Coal Strikes of 1927 with their killings and brutality, the stock market crash, the later Hoovervilles or shanty towns, all confirmed her Marxist perspective.[105]

In the early thirties her husband went off with their son to spend a year and a half in the Soviet Union. On their return Rachel decided to terminate their long-failing marriage.[106] To recuperate she went off to Europe for a few months. On her return to America almost against her better judgement, and contrary to any opinions she held she could not help feeling "that I was coming home, not to a specific place or people but home to my land. I had the feeling I belong somewheres. In Lithuania I felt as if I were a guest. In America I felt at home."[107]

For a time on her return she worked as the woman's page editor on a number of leftist publications. Then in May 1930 she went off to the Soviet Union to live.[108] She lived there for five years, working on a newspaper and then in various educational institutions. She left the Soviet Union in 1935 to visit her brothers who had settled in South Africa. She returned to the United States in the late thirties where she resumed her work for a number of Communist publications.[109] Why she chose to return to the United States she does not explain. Perhaps despite her criticism of its weaknesses, she still considered it to be home.

WHY I LEFT THE OLD HOME

AND WHAT I ACCOMPLISHED IN AMERICA

By

Chayim Eliezer Ben Mordechai

Krementchuk in Russia was Chayim's birthplace. It was a substantial city of some sixty thousand people, half of whom were Jewish.[110] The majority of the Jews were petty merchants as was his own father. Chayim's mother, who had received some secular education, taught her son the Russian language and imbued him with a love of Russian literature. His mother had hopes that he would one day go to University and become an engineer, despite the restrictions placed on Jews. However, even in public school there were strict quotas. When Chayim took exams to enter public school, only five out of one hundred and thirty Jews were accepted. He writes of the heartbreak of those who were refused.[111] Despite the restrictions his school days were quite happy ones. Though there were anti-Jewish feelings, there were few overt acts.[112] With some nostalgia he recalls that there was always a feeling of mutual respect between students and teachers. The emphasis was on academics," not on sports as is the American way."[113] Under the tutelage of his mother and by means of translations, he was well-read in the literature of England, France, and the United States. Yet despite that happy childhood, the latent anti-semitism troubled most Jews. One could not forget that on Easter the supposed holiday of Christian love it was not messages of love that echoed through the streets, but rather the alarm, "they are beating Jews."[114] After the Kishinev pogroms of 1903, "the fear was great, nobody knew what to do. In that atmosphere the thought blossomed - America."[115] Chayim explains

that while "only a little while ago people were ashamed that they had relatives in that 'traife land,' and no right thinking person would ever go there - only the poor and dispossessed without means or lineage,"[116] suddenly it was the thing to do. He remembers having read a series of articles in the Yiddish press which gave a realistic picture of America. The articles by B. Gorin were called, "The Jewish Wanderer In The Golden Land." Gorin said in essence "that everyone including the intelligentsia and the businessman from back home must at first engage in common labor...that acculturation was a difficult process... but that many opportunities await a man who is not lazy, and has the energy, the will and the determination to struggle through to his goal... the children especially could look forward to a bright future."[117]

His father made the decision to go to America in October of 1904.[118] Within three weeks he landed in New York. When the American relatives saw how well his father dressed and that he travelled like a "prince," second class, they treated him with great deference. Arrangements were soon made for the rest of the family, and by April 1905 they were reunited. The author was then seventeen.

Chayim felt very confident that he could find a place in America. He came after all with a good Russian and Jewish education. Also he "possessed an almost religious belief and faith in America, in her freedom in her democratic institutions and was determined to find a place in the new world."[119] He also possessed the optimism of youth.

At first they stayed with relatives. However, after jealousies arose between the relatives and newcomers, Chayim's family moved out.

Chayim took a job in his cousin Yechiael's sweatshop. It was distasteful to him, but he felt he was at least earning money and could look for something better. He could not understand Yechiael or Jimmy as he called himself, or for that matter others like him who freely exploited their workers yet considered themselves socialists.[120] After changing jobs a number of times, the author decided to work for his father during the day and attend night school in the evening. There he was influenced by a teacher who befriended him and encouraged him to continue and expand his studies. When he would leave the classroom to go out into the streets teeming with immigrants, he would constantly reassure himself that "this is not the true America."[121] When the 1904 revolt of the fleet in Russia and the strikes against the Czar took place, his family harbored some thought of returning. The pogroms of 1905 soon put an end to that.

Chayim, unhappy with living off of his parents, went to a trade school and learned how to be an electrician. He got a job in the same houses in Brownsville that his family had first settled in. For him a trade was a respectable occupation, and he "was not ashamed of wearing my work clothes." For his mother "it was a terrible thing."[122] Under the urgings of his mother, he enrolled in Cooper Union to study engineering. Though there was a quota for Jews, he found his non-Jewish classmates friendly and helpful. He writes of a typical scene in the Cooper Union Library: "One could see a whole group of students, moving back and forth, chanting in a half English, half Yiddish sing-song 'you take the parabola and revolve it around the major axis, etc., etc.,'...it was almost like being back in a yeshiva."[123] The author

graduated as an engineer in 1911.

Chayim did not remain an engineer for very long. Instead he began to translate American poetry for the Yiddish press, eventually becoming the editor of a number of journals. He also worked for a time as a representative of the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society. Sometime later, he went on a trip to Europe. On his return he was amazed how different he felt from the first time he came to America: "Then it was a new land...an unknown land with an unknown future...with all the insecurities that surround a new immigrant. But today - today I was coming home...a solid American citizen."[124]

In 1923 Chayim went back to his profession. He obtained a job with the State of New York. It still gave him time to pursue his literary interests. He became a father and writes of his pride in teaching his children all about the Jews' contributions to America. He concludes his memoirs with a few general thoughts on America. Though he "loved America...could not adopt all the practices of my new fatherland; for example, the shameful treatment of the negroes, the exploitation of workers or the pandering to one's gullet. While I love America with my whole heart and soul, I hate her deficiencies and I pray that she may rid herself of them as soon as possible, nevertheless...I feel at home in America."[125] Certainly Chayim Eliezer Ben Mordechai Dov seemed to have succeeded in transplanting himself in America. He was neither overly critical nor overly romantic towards his new home. He accepted her for what she was. It would seem to have been a very happy marriage.

WHAT I REMEMBER FROM MY LIFE

By

Chuna Gottensfeld

With tongue in cheek and a kind of bittersweet humor Chuna Gottensfeld, a noted Yiddish humorist, recounts his experiences in America. Born in the town of Skola in Galicia into a poor Jewish family, his early education was a typical one. Though his family had little money, they enrolled him a gymnasium, a high school, and he acquired a good general education. When his girl friend Raizel began to talk of going to America, he decided that was what he must also do.[126] He got his first briefing about America from a visitor to his home town. The visitor said, "here in Galicia if one wants to work hard he has no chance to do it. If he does work hard he does not even earn enough for water and kashe...in America one may work hard and not be ashamed...for children America is a Garden of Eden. They are well, beautiful and free - they learn, they study and they work. There a youngster is a pleasure to behold. Not like here where he walks bent over, sighing continuously."[127] Chuna listened and dreamed of going.

Finally with the help of some relatives, he travelled to America. The first thing out of the mouth of his uncle who met him was, "nu, you are now in America - the golden land."[128] His uncle explained that America was both good and bad: "While it is bad to sit at a sewing machine all day it is good to have work instead of being unemployed."[129] He also cautioned Chuna not to speak pure Yiddish. That would brand him as a greenhorn. He should say business not "gesheft" and street, not "gaas". His aunt also gave him a lesson in Americana. "Bosses,"

she told him, "are worse off than workers. They never have time off, they must seek business, they have all the responsibilities."[130]

Chuna's Uncle Davis, formerly Doovidle, gave him a job in his factory.[131] He made him the bookkeeper and janitor. He was embarrassed by the menial tasks but did his work and kept silent. He dreamed of leading his uncle's workers on strike and of himself becoming a doctor. When his uncle went on vacation and left him in charge, Chuna let the workers go home early. They repayed him by refusing to do any work and by reporting him to his uncle. He was shocked and decided to give up the task of liberating the workers.[132]

Chuna decided to go out on his own. For awhile he worked as a porter in a cloak factory. The work was arduous and he was miserable. When one of the sketches he had written was accepted for publication, he jubilantly quit his job.[133] He soon discovered that he could not live off his earnings as a writer, and found a job as a Singer Sewing Machine salesman.[133] Again he failed. His mind was on writing. When his uncle lent him some money to return home, a friend who was a poet suggested that they go into business together. Knowing little about running a business, they bought a candy store that was failing. The fact that they barely did any business did not seem something to worry about. On the contrary they were thankful to be left alone so that they might have lots of opportunity to compose literary masterpieces. Suddenly they were confronted with the need to pay for rent and supplies. Early one morning they simply walked out on their business.[134]

Chuna got a series of jobs as theater critic,[138] editor of a Yiddish newspaper in Cleveland[136] and reporter on The Jewish Daily Forward.[137] He finally found his true calling as a humorist and play-

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wright depicting the ways of the immigrant.

It is difficult to discern when Gottensfeld is serious or simply poking fun. Though giving us many good laughs, he contributes few personal insights on America itself. After his initial reactions he remains silent about his adopted country.

MY FIFTY YEARS IN AMERICA

By

Leon Kobrin

"Kobrin in his writings," said Sholem Asch, "not only captured the spirit of old Jewish New York...but also of all Jewish America and the Jewish spiritual contribution to American progress."[139] Who was Kobrin?

Leon Kobrin landed in Philadelphia on October 5, 1892 "with a few gold coins and dreams."[140] He and a number of his friends fled Russia to avoid military service. As the immigrants awaited their medical examinations they did so with mixed feelings. They felt relief and happiness for having finished a difficult voyage, and anxiety over the results of their medical examinations and the unknown future that awaited them. Some of the more pious began to pray for "a good hour (future) in America." Soon all in the waiting crowd had joined in prayer.[141] Kobrin and his intellectual friends came expecting to find capitalist exploitation at every turn.[142] Boris, his revolutionary friend, did not seem to share his anxieties. He reassured his comrades, "We have hands, we are young and we are fighters!"[143]

Kobrin's first impressions were overwhelming. He was taken aback by "the cobbled streets, the big homes, the great buildings, the tramways, the noise, the life and the activity...all the people seemed to be wearing holiday clothes...everyone was rushing about."[144] The joyous demeanor of the people captured even the anxious Kobrin.

He stayed temporarily with his Uncle Avraham Ber and his Aunt Zlateh. His aunt expressed her fears. "How, she would ask, will such

delicate young men fare in America? Look what happened to Avraham Ber. In the old country he was a shopkeeper. He owned a house, a cow and even had a servant. In America he slaves fifteen hours a day in a garment factory."[145] She also complained that in America her daughters ran wild. They would not listen and frequented Socialist meetings. There was no Shabbos and no Yom Tov. Even Moshe Leib, one of the most respected men back home, worked on the Sabbath. Oh America, America![146] Avraham Ber, for his part, refused to revolt against his bosses. He was a strike-breaker and considered all union members heretics.[147]

Leon too was astonished by the change America seemed to work on the immigrants. The "former pious person, the man with ingrained customs and ways...on American soil was converted and reformed as if he were entirely recreated."[148] Everyone discarded honorable names like Leib for Leon. Rivka, who he knew as a sweet, obedient, loving housewife back home, had become an ardent, unbridled anarchist.[149] Moshe Leib, who was so alive and dynamic back home, looked younger without his beard, "yet his glance is no longer alive but apathetic and sleepy."[150] Moshe Leib, the Torah scholar turned cigar maker complained to Leon: "Here we turn the handle and there is water for washing. We turn another handle and there is gas for cooking. Aren't indoor toilets wonderful? O, would that I had been burned alived before I came to America. In America I have no home. I am not a man. I am not a father. I am a dog."[151]

Zelde the fishmonger's wife had her complaints as well. "Back

home," she said, "we heard so much about the gold that wanders in the streets. Until this time we have not found those streets."[152] Others complain to him that at home daughters trembled in a father's presence, in America it was the father who trembled.[153] Kobrin remarks: "While few of them were satisfied with America and the longing for the old home gave them no rest...they each sought to save a few dollars to open a business of their own. While some despaired others had kindled in them a new spirit. The spirit of revolution, of change, of hope."[154]

Kobrin and many of the young immigrants brought their socialist and anarchist baggage with them to America. Some of the strikes in the late 1890's seemed to confirm the immanence of a social revolution in America. His friend Boris constantly complained about his inability to get a steady job. "America" he protested, "was a country without a soul where the few swallow the productivity of millions of hands."[155]

Kobrin tried his hand at a number of occupations. For awhile he was a sewer of sleeves in a shirt factory. That ended in disaster when he was taunted by a fellow worker who so distracted him that he put a needle through his hand.[156] He tried his hand as a presser in a sweatshop but he and his friend Boris were fired for trying to organize the workers.[157] In 1893 Kobrin and his friends were unable to find any work.[158] They were hungry for days on end. For some the unemployment and the relief lines portended of revolution.[159] For Kobrin and Boris it meant empty stomachs, embarrassment and shared cigarette stubs.[160] Leon's only escape was his writing. He escaped to the fantasy world of his stories.

Leon learned about the availability of farm jobs. His friends reassured him that no experience was necessary. He obtained a job on a farm with a Pennsylvania Dutch family and was amazed at the fantastic abundance enjoyed by the farmers. They lived like princes compared to the Russian peasant. No wonder there was no hope for revolution amongst the American farmers![161] His farm work also proved to be a disaster. He began to feel guilty for cheating the farmer. He then projected his guilt outward. It was not he that was guilty but the present capitalist system which drove him to deceit.[162]

After a number of other unsuccessful attempts, Leon returned to Philadelphia. There he found the Jewish immigrant as before, "suffering economic and spiritual want." They lacked the roots they had in Europe. They slaved in the sweatshop. "There was little light in their dark lives." Talk of social revolution appealed to them. It at least gave them some hope.[163]

In time Leon moved to New York and there became active in the anarchist movement. He was deeply involved until one day at an anarchist party, his supposed comrades revealed themselves to be rabid anti-semites.[164] This he claimed returned him to his Jewish sources.

While working as a cigar maker during the day, he used his evenings to develop his first love, his writing. In 1894 a friend of his became the editor of a Yiddish newspaper, "The Philadelphia City Paper." Kobrin worked for him and he was on his way to the career in which he was to distinguish himself. It is at this point that this memoir concludes. He rose to become one of Yiddish America's leading

columnists, playwrights, novelists and critics. In that capacity he helped the Jewish immigrant from Eastern-Europe bear his burdens and eventually find his way into American life.

FORTY YEARS OF LIFE AND STRUGGLE

By

Zvi Hirsch Masliansky

Were you to ask any East-European Jew at the end of the nineteenth century, "Who is the greatest orator of the day?" the answer would undoubtedly have been Masliansky. This silver-tongued preacher, it was said, could raise your spirits to the heaven of heavens one minute and lower you to the bottom of the pit the very next. He travelled far and wide in Europe, lifting the spirits of the people or rousing them to action.

Hounded by the secret police in Europe, but also curious about America, "The Goldene Medinah," he came to the United States in 1895.[165]

Like many another immigrant, he came with mixed feelings - looking forward to new opportunities and experiences yet fearful of the unknown. His fears were heightened by his experiences on Ellis Island, called by many the "Island of Tears." Still as he left the island reunited with a son and a brother, he felt as if "a new epoch had opened up in my life."[166]

His first impressions of America were mixed ones. He was bemused by the fact that Brooklyn served as the cemetery for all New York, and that there were many who were reluctant to travel there "till our time comes."[167] He was also puzzled by the many "kosher" signs on butcher shops and restaurants. Back home in Vilna it was impossible to find anyone who sold non-kosher meat.[168] Such a sign was quite unnecessary.

When a newspaper man suddenly awarded him the title of Herr Doctor Masliansky, he protested, only to be told that "this shows you are a greenhorn. You don't understand American life. We produce doctors everyday without diplomas."[169] Masliansky was astounded. Taken to speak at a large orthodox synagogue, he was puzzled by the emphasis that seemed to be placed on the recital of Kaddish. Services were even held up until certain people arrived to recite this prayer. A friend explained that in America the synagogue received a substantial portion of its revenue from such people. "You see Masliansky," his friend said, "death sustains the life of American Jewishness."[170] When they left the synagogue after Sabbath Services, Masliansky was disturbed to find "ragged Jewish street urchins selling Yiddish papers on the synagogue steps."[171] He was also shocked to find out how certain rabbis were treated. He found Reb Yankel Yosof of Vilna, who was an outstanding scholar, exploited as a kashrut inspector![172] Later he was amazed at an anti-semitic outbreak and riot at the funeral of the learned Rabbi. Was this free America? What kind of beings were American Jews that bemoaned the rabbi during his lifetime but came in the thousands to weep at his funeral?[173]

Masliansky also had some harsh words for the state of Jewish education in New York. He was appalled by the custom of having children attend Hebrew school after a long day in public school, by the lack of curriculum, by the concentration on grammar, and most of all by the unqualified unlearned teachers.[175] Yet despite these somewhat negative impressions of Jewish life in America, Masliansky rejoiced that "in America I felt I was a free citizen...no more police direction. I would

no longer need to use allegorical material in my talks. My tongue is free to speak that which I want and not what others want."[176]

On his travels about the country he was particularly impressed with Chicago, "that young, sprawling, wild and primitive city."[177] In Chicago the stories of violence and corruption seemed to be confirmed. It almost seemed that the police themselves were not secure.[178] In Chicago Masliansky had his first contact with Reform Judaism. He attended Sunday morning Sabbath Services at Chicago's Sinai Temple with Emil G. Hirsch officiating. Aesthetically, the building and its furnishings made a strong impression him. Yet "I found it to be an empty pit with no water in it...a grey temple without prayers, a learned rabbi without Torah, music without Jewish motifs...Jews without Yiddishkeit."[179] He was troubled by the removal of the words Zion and Jerusalem from the prayers, by the announcement of pages from an "exceedingly thin prayer book and by "the quiet monotonous calm...so frozen, cold and dead."[180] What bothered him most was Sabbath Services held on Sunday. "My heart broke," he wrote, "to participate for the first time in a "Shabbos Sheni Shel Golus."[181] The chutzpah of that group to take this cherished name of Sinai!

In Cleveland he attacked the orthodox Jews for their pettiness and divisiveness. He berated them for naming their synagogues the Lithuanian shule, the Roumanian Shule, etc. It was a travesty "to name a synagogue in this free land after the dark countries we escaped from."[182]

Masliansky also described his involvement in a scandal in

Cleveland. The community was ready to lynch a young Reform rabbi who had replaced the Torah scroll in his Ark with an English translation of the Bible.[183] His reactions to the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and to its aged President, Isaac Mayer Wise, form an interesting chapter in his memoirs.[184]

Finally Masliansky decided to settle in New York, "the great modern Alexandria."[185] While there he helped establish a number of welfare agencies for his fellow countrymen. Masliansky was invited to speak at a number of learned institutions. He was deeply touched by his reception at Harvard. "In those days...America was still free of the mire of anti-semitism...so that in temples of knowledge like Harvard College the representatives of Judaism (students and faculty) are not ashamed to display their Judaism before the world."[186] This was a great contrast with Europe.

Several years later because of failing health Masliansky was encouraged to return to Europe. He was never to come back to his adopted country whose "freedom to speak one's own mind" he treasured so deeply.

MEMOIRS OF A TYPESETTER

By

Samuel Sheinfeld

When Shmuel Sheinfeld was a young lad in Odessa, he could not envisage that one day he would become president of the Jewish Typesetters Union in New York, but president he did become.

He was born in Odessa in 1875 but lived for a time in Moscow. His father, in order to live outside the Pale of Settlement, had left Russia temporarily and returned with a Turkish passport. Apparently this was not an uncommon practice.

The pogroms in the early 1880's had motivated a substantial number of Jews to think of emigrating. The young people in particular looked in two directions, Palestine and America.[187] An uncle of Sheinfeld's had gone to America with the "Am Olam" group who were determined to settle on the land. When their colonies began to fail, he found his way to a job in a textile factory in Maine. The letters they received from him were discouraging. His uncle then met a publisher of a weekly. He volunteered to help him with the paper if he would teach him typesetting. In time the two founded a progressive Yiddish newspaper in New York called the "Yiddishe Folkszeitung."[188]

In 1891 Czar Alexander issued a decree ordering all Jews out of Moscow. Those Jews on foreign passports were directed to leave the country within seven months. The American uncle, now in his own business, suggested that Shmuel or Samuel be sent ahead to America. He offered to teach him typesetting so that when the family arrived,

he could contribute to their support.[189]

Sheinfeld arrived in the country at age sixteen in 1891. He describes his feelings of security. It was good to have an uncle to receive him and help him adjust, unlike many of his friends who were completely alone. True to his promise, his uncle taught him a trade and helped him learn the English language.[190]

The America of the immigrant seemed so limited to Sheinfeld. For the newcomer "the psychological boundaries of America were Houston Street on the north side, Cherry Street on the south side, the Bowery on the west side and the East River to the East. Their interests lay only within those boundaries. There they lived and there they struggled."[191]

Samuel joined a Jewish Union of Typesetters and a new world unfolded before him. He questioned his previous philosophy of "let each man rejoice in his portion." America offered the opportunity to a worker to organize and achieve a better living for himself. He was determined to take advantage of that right.[192]

As he walked through the streets of the East side of New York, the sight of people "who slept in the open on wagons for want of a better place" disturbed him.[193] Shortly afterwards, his parents arrived in America. His mother would continually fight with the janitor, who though an immigrant himself, saw "all greenhorns as uncivilized and uncouth."[194] Sheinfeld was also shocked to find people abusing their new freedom in America by selling their votes or even voting twice. To him this was "understandable for the Irish, but for Jews it was inconceivable."[195]

Though he struggled for a living, he was proud of his work. He

felt that his future in America would be better and more secure.[196]

The greatest day in Samuel's life was that day in 1902 when he became a citizen[197] - a great joy for a Russian Jewish boy who could never have dreamed of achieving that in Russia. His faith in America was confirmed when he met the son of a poor Jewish family from Odessa who had become a doctor.[198] Only in America could that happen. Not only that, but in America even he, Shmuel Sheinfeld, could become a union official and eventually president.[199] Truly a wonder! So ends the odyssey of another poor immigrant for whom America opened new doors and new opportunities. Though all the East-European immigrants did not find the streets lined with gold coins, certainly many found them lined with golden opportunities whose worth was priceless.

FRAGMENTS

PORTIONS OF MEMOIRS CULLED

FROM PUBLICATIONS

THE MEMOIRS OF DR. GEORGE M. PRICE

Translated by

Leo Shpall

These memoirs by George M. Price appeared in the Russian-Jewish monthly Voshkod during the years 1890 and 1891. Part of them were later incorporated in a book by the author called "The Russian Jew in America."

George Price, a young Russian-Jewish intellectual who came to this country in the 1880's had some sharp comments to make about America, American Jews and his fellow immigrants. Though critical it would seem that their intention was constructive - to make the host Jewish community aware of certain shortcomings and to help the immigrants achieve a more realistic picture of what awaited them.

The mistakes in handling the immigrants began at the very moment of arrival. The treatment at Castle Gardens was less than humane. He describes that center as "a large building, a gehenna through which all Jewish arrivals must pass to be cleansed before they are considered worthy of breathing freely the air of the land of the almighty dollar."[1] What a terrible shock awaited these Jews who survived the terrors of steerage, who expected to be received with music, but who were cast into a great jail. Many immigrants were cast out on their own to find their own way. Imagine their disappointment when they gathered at the offices of the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society to "find their way blocked by two tall policemen."[2] In the meantime many were cheated out of what little they had by conniving businessmen. Price describes his shock

at being outfitted in the uniform of an insane asylum inmate, by some friendly haberdasher.[3] When the Aid Society found them work as stevedores, they were grateful. They, however, soon found out that they had been hired as strike breakers, and were forced to quit.[4]

When Castle Gardens became overcrowded, they were given temporary shelter on Ward's Island. There hundreds were crowded into barracks, fed almost inedible food and manhandled by an American-Jewish director "who treated us like cattle."[5] "Imagine," writes Price, "after the exodus from Russia, after the triumphant receptions in Europe and the rosy hopes for the best in America...they were suddenly exiled on an island where they were confined in a prison and treated like criminals."[6] It did not take long before the dissatisfaction exploded and the immigrants rioted. They were freed from Ward's Island. Some went their own difficult way; others were exploited by members of the Immigration Society who felt they were doing the immigrants a favor by hiring them, for their own business, at half wages.[7] This was Price's initial reaction to America.

As time went on and as he was able to look back with some perspective, he wrote further articles for Voshkod trying to develop for future immigrants a more realistic set of expectations.

Part of the problems of the immigrants stemmed from their coming to America with no money, no trades and no knowledge of the language. Also, though the aid societies were motivated benevolently, they could not understand that even the lowiest immigrant was entitled to be handled as an individual with some self-respect. They were not cattle.

The high mobility in the American labor market tended to disorient

the immigrant. He pointed to his own experience. In seven years he had been a basket plaiter, had worked in a chair factory, a shirt factory, a boiler factory, dug ditches, been a farm hand, a stevedore, a grocery clerk, a bank clerk, a building manager, a teacher, and an editor of a magazine.[8]

The immigrant tended to migrate to those trades which required little preparation such as shirt-making or cigar-rolling.[9] Life for the immigrant was insecure. There were constant strikes, slack seasons, changes in jobs. It was demoralizing and frustrating.[10]

Still, despite the tribulations, many took advantage even of their hardships. It "hardened them...freed them of many prejudices, developed in them the feeling of self-respect, made them depend on their own strength."

Despite all the problems to be faced in transplanting oneself to America, "not a single country all over the globe, not a single people throughout the world can boast of such progress as the United States... true this country is large...but it is united under one flag which symbolizes freedom...in the course of a century...reached the apex of of economic, political and social development."[12] It was good to be a part of it. Still Price cautions his countrymen that "Jews must stop thinking of America...as a land flowing with milk and honey, a land where gold is found in the streets, where challots grow on lanterns and wine for kiddush is piped into every house."[13] Instead the immigrants should be told that "an American is a firm believer in competition. He recognizes the right of every man to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."[19] The Americans for their part must recognize that

America is a land of immigrants, that "in America there are no Aborigines except the Indians...that the settling of Jewish immigrants has had a beneficial influence on America."[15]

Jews must be grateful that they who were "once downtrodden and persecuted have suddenly become full-fledged citizens of this great country and those...who used to be afraid of any Russian police-man...became a component segment of the country with equal rights."[16]

Be proud and of good courage, wrote George Price that "the American press is unanimous in its opinion...they (Russian-Jewish Immigrants) are considered an honest useful ingredient in the American public."[17] Learn from my errors he writes. Come expecting opportunity but an opportunity you will have to struggle for.

PAGES FROM MY STORMY LIFE - AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

By

Melech Epstein

Melech Epstein's parents hoped that their son would someday become a Rabbi in Israel, devoted to perpetuating the religion of his fathers. Instead Melech Epstein was to devote a good portion of his adult life to the religion of Marxism. Born in Ruzhanoi, Byelorussia in 1889, he was exposed to and captured by the socialist revolutionary ideals of his times. At sixteen he was already a semi-official functionary in the local group of the Jewish-Socialist Territorialist Movement. His involvement in the upheaval of 1905 forced him to flee. He emigrated to America in 1912, where he became deeply involved at least for a time, in the activities of the Communist Party.[18] He left the Party after the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, to devote himself to his writing. What follows are a number of his impressions upon coming to America.

Thoroughly committed to the Russian revolts of 1905, and deeply affected by their failure, many young Jewish intellectuals began to emigrate to America. Bolstered by the prospect of spending four years in the Czar's army, Melech Epstein too felt that he "had to call a halt to the past and start anew...this could be achieved only in the new world."[19]

His first contact with America, as for many immigrants, was through immigration officials. An abrupt inspector "with thinly veiled hostility" tried to browbeat the newcomers with his questions. Melech's

underground training, which taught him to hold his tongue, saved him from further trouble. He had been tempted to say, "wasn't America the asylum for all the persecuted and oppressed?"[20] Finally he found himself in America. Among the few whom no one met, he "felt miserable and helpless."[21]

His first glimpse of the living conditions of the immigrant, the dark, drab cheerless rooms of his uncle's flat, depressed him. He was also struck by the breakdown of the old family structure, by "the gulf between...many immigrant parents...with native-born or Americanized offspring."[22]

He found great difficulty in taking "the measure of the country in its entirety."[23] America seemed to him to be a country of contrasts, of the light and the dark. What seemed to be the greatest paradox was the absolute freedom of speech and assembly on the one hand, but the total absence of social legislation, on the other. The "abundance, variety and low price of food were amazing. But so was the want I encountered." The Constitution "guaranteed the right to belong to associations, yet millions of wage earners were arbitrarily denied this right and the protection derived from it."[24] Though America guaranteed freedom of assembly, he "saw policemen swinging their clubs freely over the heads of pickets."[25] On the one hand there was an espousal of equality, yet "I was shocked to learn that discrimination against Jews was rampant in many parts of the country, in hotels, summer places, restaurants and clubs."[26] He was generally taken with the "simplicity and friendliness" of the people of the South. This too was soon shattered by a "For Whites Only" sign in the waiting room

of a Southern station. He records with some amazement the hostility of Negroes in a southern streetcar when he dared to sit in a section reserved for them. The Ludlow Massacre of 1914, in which the tiny colony of striking miners in Colorado was razed by state troopers resulting in the death of eleven children and two women, was incomprehensible in face of the freedoms professed by America. A final paradox, perhaps on the more positive side for Melech Epstein, was to see a foreign-born Jewish labor leader, Samuel Gompers question the millionaire John D. Rockefeller in his appearance before the United States Commisson on Industrial Relations. This would have been inconceivable in czarist Russia.[27] The contrast between ideology and reality perplexed Epstein continuously. America seemed to him, as well as to many of the young intelligentsia, a "maze of contradictions."[28]

Yet when a number of his friends decided to return to Russia in 1917, he could not conceive of it. For "to me as to the overwhelming majority of my fellow Jews, America was home."[29] With his decision to remain in America, Epstein undertook a program of orientation. He began with learning the language. He was perturbed yet amused at the children's books that were used to teach adult immigrants English. Finally he decided to learn the language on his own by reading newspapers and periodicals. However he found these surprisingly provincial and one-sided.

While material life was stringent, it "was compensated for by a fuller cultural life...than in Russia."[30] He recalls with particular satisfaction the Lewisohn Stadium concerts and the dance recitals of Isadora Duncan. The abundance of Yiddish artistic life served "to cushion

the painful process of acclimatization and adjustment for me and others like me. There was little time for brooding over disappointments or facets of American life we disliked."[31]

In time Epstein became the labor editor of the Yiddish daily, The Day. In that capacity he wielded a good deal of influence in shaping the opinion of the Jewish worker. In observing the social movements on the working scene, he was drawn into further involvement with the Left. The Socialist movement seemed to him ineffectual. The labor unions with their "ripening seeds of bureaucracy" and with their frequent abuses of power and funds seemed to offer no better solution to the great social problems. For awhile Epstein found his place among the Labor Zionists as a staff member of their Yiddish daily, The Zeit. However this too ended unhappily after he dared to critize one of their supporters. Moving further to the left, he became a staff member and later editor of the communist Yiddish paper, The Freiheit.[32] In time he ran into friction with the party bigwigs who wanted to completely dictate the paper's policy. After a number of clashes, he became suspect in the party. Finally after the Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939 he resigned.

He then made a living, for awhile, as a correspondent for The Forward. He left that paper as well when pressure was placed on him by Abraham Cahan, its editor, to turn on his former associates and testify before the Dies Un-American Activities Committee. After a number of other jobs he has settled down to writing several books on the Communist Party, on his own life and various labor personalities. His thoughtful memoirs rank among the best for their analytical and rational insights.

PART II

"TO EACH HIS OWN - IMAGE"

Ours has been a quest - a quest for the image of America in the eyes of the Eastern-European Jewish immigrant who came to America between 1880 and 1920. In the first part of our study we attempted to let the immigrant speak for himself by means of his memoirs, with little intrusion or interpolation. In this second part we shall attempt to delineate the image, and analyze some of the factors which influenced its formation.

In undertaking our search we had hoped that Autobiography would prove a rich and valuable source. However in the fairly representative sample we have chosen we have found a considerable number of common inadequacies and pitfalls. It has proved disappointing as a source. The immigrant concentrated on his immediate problems and had little patience or time for reflection. It must be noted also that this genre of literature is particularly suceptible to self-glorification and distortion - distortion based not only on the conscious desire to present as positive a picture of oneself as possible, but also distortion caused by the idiosyncracies of recall and memory. They tend to both extremes; the blindly euphoric or the hopelessly pessimistic. There was no distinction in these regards between the English and Yiddish materials.

Before proceeding to our portrayal of the immigrant's image, it would be well to note a number of general characteristics which do emerge, as one carefully makes his way along the paths and byways of the immigrant's memories. Certainly one cannot escape the fact that though there are areas of general agreement, it is impossible to speak of "a" image; one must rather speak of images. We have therefore called

this part of our study "To Each His Own - Image." For indeed as one examines these materials, one cannot help but be impressed with the fact that an image is a very personal affair, crystallized in the crucible of one's own mind, and transmuted by one's attitudes, experiences and fortunes. Because of this, it is subject to change and often contradiction, as America itself was subject to change and contradiction. It may also vary in its scope. For some, America was confined to a few city blocks of the East-side ghetto, and a very limited range on the socio-economic ladder. For others, America's image was as broad as the face of this great land, and as varied as its many attributes. What necessarily emerges therefore is a dynamic concept; a variety of images, often in the mind of the same immigrant, some of which remain fixed while others shift and change.

The immigrant's first image of America was often a creation of his own mind. At times it was based on pure fantasy as the mind anticipated a release from the poverty, the persecution and the hopelessness of life in Eastern Europe. Often the early images were based on fragments of information that drifted back to the villages and hamlets of Europe, distorted out of all proportions as they were handed on from person to person. Many times the image of the "Goldene Medinah" on the one hand, or of the "Traife Medinah" on the other, were based on the subjective reports of relatives who struggled to find a place for themselves in the new world. For the most part these first images were twisted beyond all reality, and served as an unreal poetic prelude to the rude awakening which was to follow.

The romantic image of America was often dissipated by the

immigrant's first contact with this land via Castle Gardens, the notorious reception center. Questioned, intimidated, jostled by immigration officials who treated them like cattle, there was good reason for it being called "an Isle of Tears" by Zvi Masliansky,[1] or "a Gehenna" by George Price.[2] Who can forget Israel Kasovich's shock when an American official tore down the flag of his "Am Olam" group and cast it into the sea as they were about to triumphantly debark for their new and free home?[3] Was this really the land of equality and freedom, the immigrant asked himself? Anyone who has spent time on Ellis Island can testify to the bitter irony of being detained within view of the Statue of Liberty and in a sense, reading the words of Emma Lazarus' poem Colossus through prison bars. For others, the negative image of America was reinforced by the aloof and bumbling representatives of the Jewish aid societies who tended to treat the immigrants as a faceless mass with little regard for their individual dignity or self-respect.[4] To some, America seemed a land of robbers and thieves. These new arrivals' first greeting was to have their baggage stolen or to be cheated by ruthless shopkeepers.[5] Yet for others who were met by relatives, who guided their first steps in the new land, these initial negative feelings were practically non-existent.[6]

When the immigrants left their ships and sought a place to live, their reactions varied. For little Mary Antin, the tenements of Boston were like palaces, higher and more beautiful than she had ever seen in her life.[7] While for Anzia Yezierska, the tenements were dark, filthy, stinking cubby holes cut off from light and air, and fertile breeding

places for consumption and despair.[8]

After finding shelter, usually in an overcrowded tenement flat, the newcomer was confronted with the vital necessity of earning a living to support himself and his family. The preoccupation of the immigrant with the economic image of America is perfectly understandable. It tends to confirm Will Maslow's theory of a hierarchy of needs which postulates that an individual's first concern is with his own immediate physical needs. The economic image of America varies greatly. To a sewing-machine operator in a sweatshop who worked sixty hours a week under intolerable conditions to eke out a bare living, who was regularly cheated by his employers who deliberately miscounted his piece-work or absconded with his pay, who was subjected to the uncertainties of the slack season, America was the land of capitalist exploitation and of class struggle.[9] Talk, by some, of such things as the dignity of labor,[10] of the respectability of all occupations[11] and of the great opportunities which America offered were meaningless. When his Jewish bosses hired Italian gangsters to beat up Jewish-union members,[12] or when the state police burned down a striker's camp in Colorado killing defenceless women and children,[13] his image of America as another "Egypt" was confirmed. He was readily attracted by Socialist and Anarchist movements that promised a new exodus and a new promised land of hope and plenty. Yet there were others who welcomed even the evils of the sweatshop and the indignities of peddling as an improvement over their former estate.

To some, the promise of America seemed a false and empty one. To Jonah Gerson, the respected former chairman of the Vaslui Hospital

Committee,who stood selling lollipops on an East side street corner,[14] or to Ephraim Lisitsky who found peddling no better than begging, America was the land of degradation. In Europe, they would argue, a poor man wore his poverty as an ornament, like a red ribbon on a white horse, while in America poverty was something to be ashamed of; it was a sign of failure and inferiority.[15] In Europe even the poorest man, they pondered, had a certain degree of self-respect. He had status, albeit a low one. His neighbors would never hesitate to greet him nor his community accept him. In America he was "a human creature cut adrift from its moorings, the most pitiable sight to be met on this earth."[16] The material comforts and potentials of America held little meaning for one who had lost his status, his manhood. To others, America was indeed the "Goldene Medinah," whereby dint of perseverence, hard work, frugality, and a little "mazal," one could quickly move up the ladder of success.[17] For a Sam Goldfarb or an Isaac Molk and the many like them who came to America penniless and who achieved considerable financial success, America was indeed the land of unlimited opportunities. In Europe such achievements would have been impossible. As Max Winkler said, they knew when to grab that "golden moment,"[13] and as Harry Golden would surely add, "Only in America." Marcus Ravage summed it up when he wrote that for those who succeeded financially, America was "an all-right country," while for those who failed, it tended to be the country of "fakers and bluffers."[19] It must be added that the economic image of America was not only affected by personal success or failure, but very often by the

ideological baggage which one brought with him. For some who came expecting to find exploitation, they could easily assemble ample evidence to substantiate their views.[20] For others who fled the hopelessness of European poverty, even the sweatshop could seem like a Garden of Eden.[21]

Though America's economic image varied widely in the eyes of the immigrants, there was at least one area, one image on which they could unite. America's free public school system, open to all of its citizens was truly wonderful and remarkable. Gone for the most part, were the discrimination and quotas of Eastern Europe which shattered the hopes of even the most brilliant students. Even those living in direst poverty could see a ray of light for their children. The educational opportunities which America alone offered were a sure path out of the darkness of poverty. David Blaustein was right. Education was "the" way into American life and its opportunities.[22] The little old lady who stood all day in the cold by her pushcart so that her son or daughter could become "a professional mentch" was typical of thousands of Eastern-European immigrants who scrimped and starved so that their children might reap the benefits of a higher education. This the Jew could understand, this he could appreciate, this was one aspect of America that was not strange, but was coherent with his own passion for learning.[23] As if this were not truly wonderful enough, even the older immigrants could go to the many night schools, attend the many lectures at settlement houses, take advantage of the flourishing Yiddish cultural life or make use of the magnificent libraries with their countless treasures.[24] The emphasis on sports

in the schools which troubled some, the seeming lack of respect between pupils and teachers which bothered others, the quotas of some professional schools, and even the occasional epithet of "sheeny," were for the most part inconsequential in view of the broad new opportunities offered. America was the land of educational opportunity and the immigrant grabbed hold with both hands.

There also seemed to be a fair degree of unanimity regarding the political opportunities of America. For the first time in thousands of years the Jew was offered the golden prize of full citizenship with all of its privileges and responsibilities. Max Winkler directed that "the Star-Spangled Banner" be played at his funeral so that the mourners be reminded how sad it was not to be able "to hear the golden tones of our national anthem."[25] Pincus Puchkoff was at the courthouse two days after his arrival and crusaded amongst his fellow workers to apply for their citizenship papers. These incidents were typical of the Eastern-European immigrant's hunger for the political equality which America offered. This of course does not mean to imply that there were not people who neglected to take advantage of the opportunities offered or even those who abused them, as for example, those who were willing to sell their votes for a few dollars.[26] Nor does this imply that there were not those who were severly critical of American politics. There were indeed many who were disturbed by the corruption in local politics,[27] by politicians who spoke at length saying nothing,[28] by the abuses of the World War I Espionage Act which quashed all dissent,[29] by the treatment of Negroes,[30] and by the blatant miscarriage of justice in the Sacco-Vanzetti case.[31] Still the majority

were thrilled by the opportunity to sleep without fear for the first time in their lives,[32] were grateful for the right to be able to own property in their own names,[33] and for not having to hide at the sight of police and soldiers.[34] Few possessed the eloquence to express the thankfulness of those immigrants for living in a country where one could speak his mind freely without having to resort to allegory,[35] where a Jew of humble foreign birth could be invited to the White House and even be elected to office,[36] where one could buy a Socialist paper openly on any street corner,[37] or openly protest the killing of a young Jewish immigrant by a Chief of Police,[38] or "vunder iber vunder," see a Jewish immigrant, Samuel Gompers question the millionaire John D. Rockefeller, Sr.[39] Despite all of their problems and all of the abuses they may have suffered, America was still the land of political freedom and privilege for the Eastern-European Jewish immigrant; that is when he could turn his attention from the struggle of making a living. He expressed his gratitude by taking advantage of those privileges, and by becoming an active participant in America's political life.

As much as he was grateful for the political opportunities of his new homeland, it still held many terrors for him. He had uprooted himself from the small shtetl with its strong spirit of tradition and community to come to a new and unknown land where he felt little of either. The need to adjust to the new society with its strange mores and values often meant the breaking of strong ties which had bound the Jewish family together for generations and helped to preserve it. Because the father was faced with the difficult, all-consuming task of

making a living, he often lost contact with his children. Because of the child's relative ease of adjustment to the new culture as compared with his parents, they soon discovered that they were living in two different worlds, and that they did not even speak a common language. In the democratic atmosphere of America with its disdain for traditional authority and because of his newly acquired savoire-faire, the child often became the authority figure in the family. It was he who interpreted American life to the family. Whereas in the old country the daughters would "tremble" in the presence of their father, it was now the father who trembled at the command of, "Sharrap tateh," shut-up father.[41] Though many weathered the breaking of family ties, there are others who still pay the penalty for its disintegration. Of course in the eyes of many, it was America that was to blame.

There were also other values and mores in America which seemed to conflict with those that the immigrant brought with him and which caused him endless heartache. Though some saw America as a nation under God,[42] there were those who bemoaned the fact that America's God had become gold.[43] Money seemed to be America's test of success and personal worth.[44] Yet there were others who recognized that America offered anyone the chance to be "a somebody,"[45] and that each person, regardless of money, power or station could leave his imprint on his adopted country.[46]

The immigrant's image of Americans, native Americans that is, was an ambiguous one for the most part. Though he smarted under their frequent use of "greenhorn" and "sheeny,"[47] he found them largely free of the vicious kind of Jew hatred he had experienced in Eastern-Europe.[48]

For some their contact with non-Jewish Americans marked their first real relations with a "chreestch." Though some Americans took advantage of him and exploited him, he often found others who were forthright, helpful and generous,[49] and not the soulless heathens he had imagined they would be.[50] Though their loudness and grossness often shocked the Jewish immigrant,[51] he could not help but admire their proud carriage[52] and their trusting nature. The wonder of it, leaving precious pennies in unguarded milk bottles on one's front porch![53] Still there were many things about the American that puzzled and perplexed him. The pace of the American's life he found exciting yet frightening.[54] He could not understand why the American catered so much to his stomach,[55] why rent seemed so sacred,[56] what was so attractive about baseball,[57] why Americans moved about so much,[58] and why one was forced to pay double for something if one did not possess cash.[59] The intricate techniques of wooing and winning a mate both amused and bedevilled them.[60] Americans and their ways were the cause of amusement, perplexity, unhappiness and admiration at one and the same time.

If America in general was a source of contradictory images, American-Jewish life was no less so. The Eastern-European immigrant had little love for the native-American Jew. Though they helped him through their various philanthropic societies, for which he was grateful, he could not help but feel that they looked down upon him and were ashamed to associate with him.[61] Many an immigrant considered American Jews to be people of little culture and learning.[62] He thought of them as traitors, ready to discard tradition for the "empty pit" of Reform,[63]

though he himself was often little better. He could not understand their reluctance to speak up as Jews, and found their fears of double loyalty unrealistic.[64] Though quickly adopting many of the practices of American Jews, he was disturbed, at least initially, by their willingness to put business before piety,[68] by their gross treatment of their rabbis,[66] by their divisiveness,[67] and by their drift from orthodoxy. Particularly disturbing was the practice of according positions of leadership in the Jewish community to business people rather than to scholars. Jewish education in America he found to be in a terrible mess, though he himself often did not bother to send his children to such educational institutions. On the other hand, he found the Yiddish culture of the East side with its theaters, its newspapers, its books, its lectures, its many political groups and cultural activities a wonderfully enriching experience, a marvelous escape from his immediate troubles and a valuable outlet for both his strivings and his frustrations.[68]

We have seen that the immigrant's image of America and the various aspects of American life were varied and manifold. They varied not only between individuals, but often within the same individual as he struggled to accommodate himself to his new land, and to find a place for himself within its physical and philosophical boundaries. The images changed with time, as his station and perspective changed. It must be recognized that the contradictory images were not only a creation of the immigrant's mind, but were often inherent in America itself. It was a land of great contrasts and contradictions, a land where professed ideals often remained only so many words. Many of the immigrants were

perplexed and confused by what they found; a confusion that lasted throughout their lives. Still others accepted the challenge and set out to help remold the reality of America to the ideals of America, to make life itself match its promise of freedom, equality, justice, and opportunity. It is to those immigrants that we owe much of the progress of the pasty seventy-five years of American history.

There were many factors that affected the immigrant's image of America. A full examination of those factors would involve a comprehensive study of the process of acculturation which is beyond the scope of this work. However these factors must at least be alluded to here.

Certainly the realities of life in America were the basic factors influencing the immigrant's image. No matter how objective or subjective was his evaluation of the situation, it was the situation itself that elicited the response. There was exploitation. There was political corruption. There was opportunity. How the immigrant viewed these, what emphasis and importance he gave to them was a reflection of himself and often of his own experiences. His judgements were highly subjective.

Let us begin sequentially. Certainly one of the main factors influencing the immigrant's image of America and his response to it was the expectations with which he came. These held sway for considerable time while he struggled to adjust to his new homeland. Many came with visions of gold-lined streets, of a free and easy life, of no persecution or exploitation or prejudice. These immigrants were in for a harsh and abrupt awakening as they confronted not only the realities of life in

America, but more particularly the realities of an immigrant's life with its exceedingly difficult and painful task of acculturation. A goodly number never managed to overcome the image created by a callous immigration official or an insensitive HIAS representative. When they gathered to talk about America, those first impressions persisted. Yet others reminisced with fond nostalgia about the early days when family or friends, an understanding teacher or a compassionate settlement-house worker guided their first faltering and unsteady steps into American life.

Others struggled for years to develop a more balanced view. Many came with the unreal utopian visions of a Goldie Stone, few came with the realistic picture of a Chayim Eliezer who had been fortunate enough to read an objective account of the life of an immigrant in America in a European periodical and knew what to expect.[70] Most faced the traumatic disappointment of a Marcus Ravage.[71] Few came with a Nathan Kushin's minimal expectations which were easily fulfilled and surpassed.[72]

Certainly closely related to the factor of expectation was the factor of motivation. The "why" of coming often affected what was found. A young lad who fled military service, a couple who escaped from under the shadow of a pogrom, a student seeking higher education were likely to have their dreams fulfilled. Those who came seeking easy fortunes were headed toward almost certain disappointment. Some did find fortunes, but their road was seldom an easy one. Max Thorek said it best: "Had thirst for gold been our motive in coming to American soil I believe none of us could have borne it. But poor as we were,

...friendless as we were, bewildered as we were, we put behind us the cruel shadow...of our homeland and set our faces to the future."[73]

Age too affected the immigrant's adjustment and hence his image. The younger the immigrant the better. There were fewer old ways to be uprooted or reshaped. The young mind was a less cluttered slate upon which to inscribe the patterns of American life. Young Sam Goldfarb who came to America at age three grew up with little more trauma than a native American child,[74] while for Anzia Yezierska's father or Israel Kasovish's father-in-law, the adjustment period was like "the seven pyres of hell."[75] Of course America was to blame. America was the cause of their pain, the break-up of their families, their poverty and the indignities which they suffered. Some never overcame that image, as they lived out their lives in a kind of no man's land between their past and their present.

Most certainly influencing the immigrant's image of America were such factors as economic success, language, their previous education, status or ideology. Benjamin Halevi, who came from extreme poverty yet with the trade of tinsmith, found a ready place for himself in America. Whatever America offered him was better than his past. To eventually achieve a shop of his own was beyond his wildest dreams.[76] America was good to him. America was indeed the land of unlimited opportunities for him. Isaac Molk, the Talmud prodigy, who rose from modest circumstances to become an oil millionaire, would surely nod, amen. To Moshe Leib, however, the respected merchant and Baal Maftir, in the old country, who was reduced to rolling cigars for a meager living, America was a Gehenna. He could only say, "would

that I had been burned alive before I came to America."[77] There were those also who imported their Socialist ideologies and who could see nothing but bitter exploitation everywhere they turned.[78] Nothing in America was good. It was one big sweatshop. For many of these people, Joseph Freeman concluded, "their hatred of American capitalism far exceeded their understanding of it."[79] For others, those same socialist views helped motivate them to transform, if not the character, at least the face of American capitalism.

For many others, the America they knew was not only confined to their own limited experiences but to a limited few blocks of the East-side ghetto. For some this was most comforting. America was simply a replay of the record of their former lives in Eastern Europe under somewhat better and different conditions. For others who reached out beyond the ghetto walls via the Yiddish newspapers, lectures, community centers and universities, America became an exciting and wonderful place in which to live. They eagerly sought to take advantage of all that it offered, culturally and materially. Certainly the community in which they lived helped to determine their image of America. Where the atmosphere was fearful, hostile, suspicious, the image was bound to be negative. There were few who could rise above it while yet in its midst. Where the community environment was hopeful, determined and expansive, the image of America tended to be bright and positive.

There were certainly other sociological and psychological factors which influenced the immigrant's struggle with the challenges of acculturation. How he himself fared in that struggle almost always

affected his image of America. For some, their personal psychological problems which they were unable to solve colored their perspective of their adopted land. It was only coincidental that America became the canvass for expressing their personal anxieties and frustrations. But as such its image bore the brunt of that expression.

Many of the images were subject to change. As the poor little cheder boy, who was constantly beleagured with "greenhorn" and "sheeny" grew to manhood and found a place for himself in American society; as yesterday's haggard and troubled sweatshop worker became today's boss; as the young wild-eyed radical of yesteryear became today's sociology professor, the image of America often changed, as it should. For an image to be significant and meaningful it must change and accommodate itself to changing perspectives, circumstances and conditions. One must beware of the static image for it implies rigidity and stagnation on the part of the beholder as well as the beholden.

Looking back at our study there are but a few words of summation and conclusion that we wish to make. In the first part of our presentation we attempted to let the Eastern-European Jewish immigrant speak on his own behalf as regards his image of America. In the second part of our study we attempted to delineate the many images of America held by him and to analyze some of the factors influencing their formation. We found it impossible to talk of a single image. The immigrant's images of America were manifold, varied, and sometimes contradictory, but always affected by personal as well as environmental factors. Economic success played a major role in their formation. We found that the images were almost always changeable in nature, significantly affected by the process

of personal adjustment, of acculturation and by the changing face of America. This dynamic nature of America's image we consider legitimate and healthy; it is the symbol of a vigorous interaction between people and country.

Hazarding the pitfalls of any generalization, we feel that we can nevertheless conclude that the immigrant's images of America were largely positive ones. Despite his problems and struggles and often his agonies, the immigrant did find America a land of immeasurably greater opportunity and freedom than his former home in Eastern Europe. The fact that only four percent of the Eastern-European Jewish immigrants returned to their countries of origin as compared with sixteen percent of the Italian immigrants during the period between 1880 and 1920 is certainly some verification of their predominatly positive image. With all of its problems and contradictions America was still home. Even Rachel Holtman, the avowed Communist, who found much to criticize could not help but write on her return to America: "I felt that I was coming home. Not to a specific place, or people but home to my land. I had the feeling I belong somewheres. In Lithuania I felt as a guest. In America I felt at home."[80] The Eastern-European immigrant settled down to make that home a more perfect one.

As we end this study we cannot help but remember the words of James T. Farrell. "We came not to weep, not to laugh but to understand." God willing we have achieved some understanding.

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