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A. M. KLEIN: A Biographical Study

by

Elijah Ezekiel Palnick

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

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Cincinnati, Ohio
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Referee:
Professor Ellis Rivkin
Co-Referee:
Professor Ezra Spicehandler

D I G E S T

The Jewish situation in Montreal differs from the normative Jewish situation in an American city; there is no "melting-pot" context. The French-Canadian desire to perpetuate Quebec's cultural heritage (particularly language and Church) and the age-old enmity between English and French have led to the city's being divided into discreet groupings. The walls of separation have been extended towards later-immigrant groups and the minorities consequently tend to be clannish, cohesive communities. This condition, abetted by the stream of newcomers from Europe, has generated great vitality for the Russian-Jewish religions and cultural traditions.

A. M. Klein was born into an immigrant household and as a child was steeped in Jewish knowledge and traditions. Though Abe was not athletically inclined, he was the possessor of a most fertile mind and quickly achieved distinction in both religious and secular schooling. He became active in young Judea and a fervent Zionist. The son of a "needle-trade" worker, Abe Klein became also a socialist.

At McGill, Abe Klein distinguished himself in debating and literary activities while broadening and deepening his Zionist and socialist contacts. This was the period of cessation of belief in Orthodox religion though the

young poet's pleasant childhood associations remained strong; he never therefore reacted against the faith of his youth. During his years both at McGill and the University of Montreal, A. M. Klein wrote extensively and in 1936, his poetry appeared in New Provinces, which was a joint publication and included the creations of Klein's new friends-Montreal's poetic intelligentia.

After graduation Abe married his childhood sweetheart and began an unsuccessful law-practice. He wrote extensively particularly on Jewish topics. Hath Not a Jew was published in 1940. This volume was followed by The Hitleriad and Poems, both published in 1944. Klein was forced to supplement his income during those years by lecturing for Montreal Jewish organizations, ghost-writing speeches, editing The Canadian Jewish Chronicle and teaching.

Under the influence of the "new poetry" of the mid-forties, A. M. Klein entered his French-Canadian phase, which was to prove most creative. He became the classic English writer on French Canada with the publication of The Rocking Chair and Other Poems in 1948. This volume also contained poems written for other hard-pressed minorities whose plight moved A. M. Klein- the Indian and the Poet. He also projected a book on James Joyce which was never published. His fame as a poet did not help when he ran for Parliament in the intensely Jewish district, Cartier. The newspaper with which he had long been associated did not support him. He was not elected. Klein remained associated

with Mr. S. Bronfman and the Canadian Jewish Congress. He travelled extensively on lecture-tours and wrote The Second Scroll, a novel published in 1951. After the failure of a play which 'folded' in Boston, Klein's frustrations and tensions became opressive and he retired to hermit-like existence. Klein at the age of 50, is far from being an old man and may yet write again. He is presently employed by a distillery in a public-relations capacity.

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P R E F A C E

It is readily apparent that the following pages transgress the presently popular belief that literary criticism should be divorced from biography. As my excuse for stepping outrageously in a direction opposed by the master-critic of our generation, T. S. Eliot, I would offer the following remark of his from which I have derived considerable justification:

> In attempting to win a full understanding of the poetry of a period you are led to the consideration of subjects which at first might appear to have little bearing upon poetry.

Should we desire to consider the author as a human being and understand his works as his specific response to definite needs and influences, we would of necessity, be forced to write biography. We would address ourselves to the history of the author's personality and this is biography. We consider the origin and environment of that personality, and this is biography. We discover and organize the origin and environment of the man, his associates, activities and experiences; for, these are the determinants of the personality that is the author.

In addressing myself to these details, I received the invaluable cooperation of Mr. and Mrs. A. M. Klein who spent long days talking with me and allowed my perusal of

a personal scrap-book which was very helpful in noting and dating many early poems not republished.

My thanks to Irving Layton and Max and Dan Wolofsky for giving so graciously of their time to help reconstruct many of the factors operative upon A. M. Klein.

I am indebted to the Jewish Public Library of Montreal, and particularly to the Librarian, Mr. Rome, for making available to me a bibliography of the works of A.M. Klein and for extending to me the courtesy of long term loan of three vitally-important volumes.

I am grateful to Dr. Ellis Rivkin for any systematizing and organizing abilities manifested in this volume. Dr. Ezra Spicehandler has been most helpful in reading the manuscript for stylistic and literary form. Both professors have been munificently liberal in allowing the author personal scope and freedom of execution.

My gratitude is greatest of all to my wife, Irene Melton Palnick who patiently read and revised the entire manuscript. Her inspiration and constant cooperation have been most important.

For the uses to which I have employed all this material and help, I alone, of course, am responsible.

P R O L O G U E

The history and present situation of the Jew in Canada is inextricably tied up with the rise of capitalism and mercantilism. The Jew was accepted and secure in Canada only because he was in the vanguard of the new system. In the old structure Jews had not been admitted. Yet this very coupling of the rise of the new system and the Jewish preferred position with the authorities at that time was to sow the seeds of future anti-semitism.

The original French settlement of Canada was not deeply-rooted in small land holdings as was that of the English to the south. Canada was settled by the French under the seigneural system, a feudal system with the Bishopric of Quebec and the military Governor-General-ship being of equal importance. Vestiges of this feudal-istic origin still remain today in the province of Quebec. (As late as the early 1950's the church and the Provincial Government allied to break the bitter asbestos strike and through the Catholic Confederations of Labor strive to keep the nascent industrial classes in semi-serfdom.)

By virtue of a decree promulgated in 1685 by Colbert, Prime Minister of Louis XIV, Jews were forbidden to settle in the colonies, the North American colonies included. This decree was intended to bar all non-Catholics, i.e.,

Jews and Huguenots from every French colonial possession. This must be understood in its historical context. Catholic French kings having trouble with non-Catholics, Huguenots and Protestant English.

With the conquest of Canada by the British, the first Jewish settlement in that Colony began. Indeed, one of the most important officers with Wolfe was Captain Schonberg, a Jew, who led many of the English attacks and was instrumental in achieving the victory of the Plains of Abraham.

We must digress now and obtain some general background in Canadian history. When the British conquered French Canada, they, mindful of the revolutionary tenor of the colonies to the south, took measures to secure the loyalty of the French-Canadians. The Quebec Act did this to a large extent but the British were to long regret it. First, all this legislation greatly angered the colonists to the south, providing much of the fuel for the American Revolution; secondly, the safe-guards which the English had given the French-Canadians particularly the Seigneurs and the Church (which was to retain control over education), were to thwart their own commercial interests and to eliminate the necessity of any major change in the habits of the 'Habitant'. The traditional exploiting classes were only too happy to perpetuate the stratified society which they had promulgated; they kept the great mass of French-Canadians in ignorance, scratching out a meager living upon

their rolling farms. The meager land of the free-farmers was further atomized by being subdivided into separate inheritances for each man's many children. This kept the subsequent generations close enough to poverty to be too busy for serious politics while the natural fertility of the Quebec farms and the close church-led community structure led the 'Habitant' to be satisfied with his demagogue leaders' fiery speeches directing all dissatisfaction towards the English. This led to perpetual friction between the old way of life and the new one that the British tried to impose after they (through the Quebec Act) had foolishly shored up the supports of the old system.

The British immigrants and authorities were commercially inclined; the French were agricultural. The Governor-General and his English council were at constant loggerheads with the French-Canadian Assembly, which had control over the levying of new taxes. Montreal was at one time the greatest commercial centre of the new world. When the English merchants tried to tax land to pay for canals, the French Assembly defeated these proposals and planned to tax imports. Montreal, which had had the great advantage of a direct water route to the centre of the continent, was losing to New York, which built canals, the great new trade between the expanding interior and Europe. Subsequently, New York (with its year-round ice-free harbor) was to solidify its position with railroads. By the time Montreal built them, it was too late; for tariff and trade conditions

had changed.

The first Jews in Canada were merchants of Sephardic descent. They were completely identified with the English struggle to commercialize the country and to capture the trade of the opening West. As a result, they became favorites of the Governor-General and the English. Aaron Hart practically owned Three Rivers and the Sephardic community of Montreal was very powerful.

Encouraged by British support, the Jews in Canada figured prominently in society and held public office, although they did not possess the fundamental rights of British subjects. Jews took their oath of office on the Five Books of Moses. Jacob Kuhn was bailiff of Montreal in 1777 and held this position for a period of ten years or more. This may be deduced from the testimony of hearings held in 1787 to reform the administration of Justice in the country. He later became Police Commissioner for a considerable length of time.

This very favored position of the Jew in the New English structure was to sow the seeds of anti-semitism. The French-Canadian recognized the fact that he was being exploited and that his way of life was being threatened. His descendants still passionately hate the English of the rest of the Dominion and the Jews.

Jews were among the signers of all petitions of "British freeholders,merchants and traders in the Province of Quebec".

Gerard Malchelosse in his Les Juifs dans l'histoire Canadienne remarks, "It is astonishing to consider that the Jews of that time, although small in number, were deeply immersed in the course of events in the Metropolis and in the country in general... Their names are constantly to be found on the petitions of the merchants and landowners of Quebec, of Montreal, and of Three Rivers, demanding political reforms. Encouraged, perhaps also favored, by the politics of English protection under which preference was given to the conquerors and their friends and from which the old French colonists were steadily excluded, they were skillful in obtaining certain official and remunerative posts. Aaron Hart was postmaster of Three Rivers (1763-1770). Uriah Judah was prothonotary, also in Three Rivers in 1768. Jacob Kuhn occupied several posts in Montreal; his son, August Ferdinand,was chief secretary in the office of the general warehouse in Quebec. John Franks was the first chief of the Quebec.fire brigade, (1790-1799), and similarly with others."[1]

The Jews were very much involved in Carlton's defence against Montgomery and Arnold. "The provisioning of the Loyalist troops in Canada as well as in America was almost exclusively in the hands of Jews."

The commercial importance of the Canadian Jew at that time was so great that in 1797 a stranger appeared giving his name as Jacob Felt and attempted to convey the impression that he was a Jew. To a few people he confided

that he was a French General sent by M. Audet, the French Ambassador to the United States, to foment an uprising which would bring Canada again under French domination.

He was arrested and exposed as in reality David MacLean, an American who,disguised as a Jew, had come to Canada to incite an uprising against the British. He was in reality a Jew for the F.B.I., or whatever its predecessor was called.

We must remember that in England, Jews had not yet attained full rights. In Canada, Ezekiel Hart was elected in 1807 to the Legislative Assembly and sworn in on the Old Testament. This was valid in British Law,(Status 13,George II), for Jews were forbidden to hold only one office, that of member of the British Parliament. However, as he was a friend to the Governor and so persona non grata to the French Canadian house majority, he was finally ejected on the grounds that the oath was invalid. This was tied in integrally with the British-French, merchant-farmer strife particularly on the tax question. There was a two-month debate between the French members of the house on the one hand and the English members and the Governor-General on the other hand, with the real issue being that Hart represented a French-Canadian district (Three Rivers, which he practically owned) and yet was a member of the English minority. Perhaps if he were not allowed to take his seat a French member would be elected.

A large controversy ensued and this message came from London:

I see no legal objection to the eligibility of a Jew who was elected and sits in the Legislative Assembly after he has taken the required oath.

V. Gibbs, Solicitor General

London, September 24,1807.

Ezekiel Hart was elected again in 1808, took part in a few debates and was again expelled. The French majority presented a Bill to bar Jews from the Legislative Assembly. The Governor-General promptly dissolved the Assembly before the third reading of the Bill. In 1828 a Bill was passed extending to the Jews full civil rights. It was signed by the king in 1832 and became law.

By this time the Joseph family was one of the most important mercantile groups in the commonwealth and even began the "needle trade" in the up and coming city of Toronto. This family, ancestors of the present Israeli minister in charge of developing Israel's oil assets, started the development of the huge Quebec resources of hydro power. Their main interests were shipping and railroads.

Jews were strongly identified with the British ruling faction during the rebellion of 1837. This was to mark the beginning of anti-semitism among the English radicals of expanding Upper Canada who were conscious of the abuses of Family-compact type government and also were mostly Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans struggling to rid themselves of an Established Church and thus were more or less allied with the Habitants of Quebec.

About 1835, Jews became not only merchants but

professional men, doctors and lawyers. Law had always been the only outlet besides the clergy for intelligent French Canadians and they deeply resented being overlooked for the remunerative public offices by the Governor-General's Council. That Jews, too, not only Englishmen, were receiving these appointments was to be long remembered.

There was a new tide of Ashkenazic immigration, mostly from Germany and including many poor people since it now cost more to emigrate to the United States. Jews began to move to the expanding West. By the 1860's, there were many Jews in British Columbia including Lumbey Franklin, the third mayor of Victoria. The Jews of the West were very active in politics. There were many Jews in the upper and lower houses of the Provincial Legislature and, therefore, in the first Canadian Federal Parliament.

The Russian pogroms in 1881 brought many poor immigrants many of whom settled in the middle west centered in Winnipeg. The Roumanian persecution in 1884 also brought many poor Jewish immigrants to Canada. These were followed by immigrants from all over Europe.

Canada, however, did not at this time attract much Jewish immigration. The May Laws which impelled much emigration to the United States and Britain channeled few of the refugees into Canada. The favorable aspects of the Dominion, unlimited land, resources and a democratic government were more than counterbalanced by pejorative reports of its icy wastes and isolated expanses.

The acceleration of immigration after 1900 was caused mainly by the mounting immigration restrictions in the United States which lent impetus and incentive to establishing "temporary" Canadian residence.

The Dominion Statistician could, therefore, write in 1932, as follows;

> We might note in a special paragraph the growth of our Jewish population since Confederation. For the census recently taken we have not as yet the final figure, but it may be safely set down between 155,000 and 160,000. Ten years ago the number of the Jewish race and religion was approximately 125,000. Ten years earlier it was but 75,000, and ten years before that, or at the beginning of the century, but 16,000, at Confederation, perhaps, 1,000 would have represented the sum total. An outstanding feature of the Jewish population is their tendency to cling together. In 1921, a clear majority of them were congregated in the three cities of Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg (the Jewish population of these three cities is in excess of 110,000), while an overwhelming majority of the remainder were in only four other locations." [2]

Jews constituted only 2% of the early twentieth century tide of immigration but, in a country dominated by Galic and Anglo-Saxon stock, they eventually became the seventh largest ethnic group. "By 1950 natural increase brought their numbers to 200,000 out of a total Canadian population of 15,000,000. Three-fourths of these newcomers settled in the three main cities of Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg--43 percent in Montreal..."[3]

Most of the massed thousands of Russian-Jewish immigrants (brushing aside the missionaries who met them at the dock to save their souls and integrate them into the

'great freedom' of Catholic Quebec) ended up living in crowded tenements with their co-religionists in the district bounded by St. Catherine Street on the south, Van Horne on the north (15 blocks), St. Denis Street on the east and Mount Royal to the west (10 blocks). The great majority were employed in the emergingly powerful textile industry- the greatest Jewish contribution to the Canadian economy. Here the wolves quickly separated themselves from the lambs, escaping from the sweat-shops with no minimum wage, no limit to working hours (Saturday and Sunday included), and emerged overnight as "new manufacturers with a fresh line". Determined "to work up" they took advantage of the unorganized labor market and exploited their erstwhile shipmates and the inexhaustible supply of French-Canadian girls capable of running a sewing machine at thirty cents an hour.

Many of the Jews of this period were enmeshed in one of the two secular solutions; Zionism or Socialism. Political ferment and social theory were the major items of reading conversation and interest. The 'Workmen's Circle' (Montreal Branch founded in 1906) became the center of intellectual activity. It was only natural then that a long and bitter struggle to unionize the "needle trade" was begun.

> The attempt at Union organization in the United States between 1900 and 1910 was reflected in the Canadian Needle Trade industries; organizations were formed overnight. Strikes were called and just as quickly as they were settled, the Union seemed to disappear. Once the workers received their increases (or became bosses), they did not need the Union any more and they left it.
>
> Discrimination for Union activity was rampant.

> Stubborness on the part of employers who did not want to recognize the rights of the workers to organize and especially because of the little respect the employers had for their own brethern whom they called "greenies" contributed a great deal to the chaos and numerous strikes that took place. The small unions that were organized, at the time had worshipped many gods in the labor movement (theory of social organization was often the determining factor in affiliation)." 4

Through the pressers and cutters were mostly Jewish, the machine operators were usually French-Canadian girls, and consequently, the strike and organization attempt of 1934 failed, when the labor leaders failed to show proper respect for the arbitration attempts of the Provincial Minister of Labor--Charles Joseph Arcand. "The French-Canadian girls were willing to go out on strike for better working conditions but the open challenge made by leaders to the Provincial Government was too much for them and the day after the challenge was made, the workers began to return to work. The strike lasted ten days altogether." 5

The Union struggles continued through the first decades of the twentieth-century with the American 'International' pouring money into the fray. They fought, among other things, the contract signed in 1937 by Jewish Employers in the dress industry with the Catholic Syndicates in order to defeat the inroads of the I.L.G.W.A. They fought so successfully that in 1941 a labor leader could point with pride to the Union average pay for skilled operators--$32.00 a week, and explain how the benefits even extended to the unexperienced cleaners; these girls were now getting

as much as $15.00 a week (of course, this munificence exists only in Union Shops).

The Union controversy was not the major struggle in which the Jews were embroiled. A complex educational system existed in Quebec as a residue of the Quebec and B.N.A. Acts. Each of the two major cultural-religious groups; the French-Canadian Catholic and the English-Protestant had its own parochial system , supported by real estate taxes. In 1874, the Jewish community had established a parochial school, but in 1876, an agreement was reached with the Protestant school board by which in exchange for the payment by Jews of their taxes into the Protestant 'panel', Jewish children were to be educated at Protestant schools.

> It was at best an unsatisfactory compromise. For many years, Jewish youngsters were segregated into separate classrooms and were denied official permission to be absent during the Jewish Holidays. Moreover, no Jew was permitted to sit on a school board or teach in the school system. After years of fruitless protest in the courts, the Jews finally reached the limits of their patience and made preparations to establish their own parochial schools. Then, at the last moment, in 1931, the Protestant representatives agreed to a modus vivendi."[6]

In effect, however, as a result of population distribution, segregation of Jewish pupils continued. Ninety-four percent of attendance at Bancroft Elementary School and over ninety-eight per cent of students at Baron Byng were Jewish as of 1941.[7]

An ancillary effect of the bitterness over the school situation, compounded by the rise of fascism, was officially

sanctioned, and press-encouraged, anti-semitism. Howard M. Sachar wisely notes factors that made the Quebec situation more serious.

> Wages and working standards were low among the French-Canadians; indeed, Quebec's backwardness and poverty were much worse than in any other province. For one thing Quebec's Catholic Church Hierarchy was among the most obscurantist in the world, and systematically drained the province of its savings. Then, too, the "normal" difficulties of poverty and clerical reaction were seriously compounded by the depression of the 1930's.[8]

Organized Jew-hatred failed, but, there remained the tradition of exclusivism, as practiced both by French and English Canadians. It was difficult for Jewish doctors to secure staff appointments to and sufficient beds in the city hospitals. "No Jew ever held a seat on the Montreal Stock Exchange or on the Curb Market; and by a tacit but effective agreement, no Jew was ever a partner in an insurance company or a bank, Masonic Lodges, the Canadian Legion, the Press Club admitted only a handful of Jews. Very rarely were Christian and Jewish families on visiting terms.

The major factor in this separatism is Canada's tradional "Kulter-kampf" dividing the English and the French. The ill feeling between these "two nations warring within a single womb" created walls of separatism that were extended with equal obstinacy towards the later immigrant groups; Italians, Ukranians, etc., and the minorities driven inward, in turn, tended to be cohesive clannish communities. To the Jewish immigrant group this merely meant a continuance

of the "inner directed life of their own" which was their tradition in the Pale.

Unlike in the United States, therefore, Russian-Jewish religious and cultural traditions remained with great vitality. Almost all of the multitudinous synagogues were Orthodox. Though most Jews attended religious services only a few times a year, their nostalgia for old-country ways kept the ritual and ceremonial close to the way they remembered it in their childhood. The families who spoke no Yiddish were and are few and far between. A Yiddish newspaper, Der Kanadier Adler The Canadian Eagle, flourished in addition to great circulation of the New York Forward and The Day. The Jewish Public Library still is a crowded citadel of culture patronized by almost the entire community, crowded with people reading, arguing and discussing political and social issues. Courses run in the evening by the library in everything from Renaissance Philosophy to beginning English were well attended. Similarly, the Y.M.C.A. School and University, Sir George Williams, had crowded night classes. The Workman's Circle remained a cultural centre for the social-conscious masses; though the followers of the socialist solution were splintered into many groups espousing slightly differing philosophies, the advocates of the other solution, Zionism, surmounted their differences and so united (or semi-united) the community in a passionate devotion to Zionism (the per capita contribution is the highest in the world.) The "landsmann-schäften" associations

] Give all titles in Yiddish

of Jews who had been neighbors in the Pale exist to this day.

As a consequence of this close-knit association into which the Jews were compressed, a set of values was established wherein among the older people who felt most closely their kinship, education and achievement which reflected upon the whole community were most revered. It was an insult to a family's honor if a child did not attend McGill.

Among the younger generation the University contact with the wider world brought the opportunity to attempt to break out of the suffocating confines of the ethnic womb and to be born to frolic in the great free Canadian expanse. After much rebuff, travail and pain almost all fell back enervated into the capacious bosom of the Jewish community and sucked as much sustenance and social standing as they could by making more of a "success" of the family enterprise.

The brilliant young Canadian novelist, Mordecai Richler, who broke through to Europe where he now writes most productively remembers it as follows:

> The ghetto of Montreal has no real walls and no true dimensions. The walls are the habit of atavism and the dimensions are an illusion. But the ghetto exists all the same. The fathers say: ' I work like this so it'll be better for the kids.' A few of the fathers, the dissenters, do not crowd their days with work. They drink instead. But in the end it amounts to the same thing: in the end, work, drink, or what have you, they are all trying to fill the void.
>
> Most of the Jews who live at the diminishing end of the ghetto, on streets named St. Urbain, St. Dominique, Rachel, and City Hall, work in textile or garment factories. Some are orthodox, others are communist. But all

of them do their buying and their praying and their agitating and most of their sinning on St.Lawrence Boulevard, which is the aorta of the ghetto, reaching out in one direction towards Mount Royal, and past that (where it is no longer the ghetto) into the financial district and the factory slums, coming to a hard stop at the waterfront. In the other direction, northwards, St. Lawrence Boulevard approaches the fields at the city limits; where there is a rumor of grass and sun and quick spurious lovemaking.

All day long, St. Lawrence Boulevard, or Main Street, is a frenzy of poor Jews, who gather there to buy groceries, furniture, clothing and meat. Most walls are plastered with fraying election bills, in Yiddish, French and English. The street reeks of garlic and quarrels and bill collectors: orange crates, stuffed full with garbage and decaying fruit, are piled slipshod in most alleys. Swift children gobble pilfered plums, slower cats prowl the fish market. After the water truck has passed, the odd dead rat can be seen floating down the gutter followed fast by rotten apples, cigar butts, chunks of horse manure and a terrifying zigzag of flies. Few stores go in for subtle window displays. Instead, their windows are jammed full and pasted up with streamers that say, ALL GOODS REDUCED or EVERYTHING MUST GO.

Every night St. Lawrence Boulevard is lit up like a neon cake and used-up men stumble out of a hundred different flophouses to mix with rabbinical students and pimps and Trotskyites and poolroom sharks. Hair tonic and water is consumed in back alleys. Swank whores sally at you out of the promised jubilee of all the penny arcades. Crap games flourish under lamp posts. You can take Rita the Polack up to the Liberty Rooms or you can listen to Panofsky speak on Tim Buck and the Worker. You can catch Bubbles Dawson doing her strip at the Roxie Follies. You can study Talmud at the Bnai Jacob Yeshiva, or you can look over the girls at the AZA Stag or Drag.

Conditions improve on the five streets between St. Lawrence Boulevard and Park Avenue. Most of the Jews who live on these streets market what is cut or pressed by their relations below St. Lawrence Boulevard. Others, the

aspiring, own haberdashery stores, junk yards and basement zipper factories.

The employer and professional Jews own their own duplexes in Outremont, a mild residential area which begins above Park Avenue. They belong to the Freemasons, or, if they can't get into that organization, to the Knights of Pythias. Their sons study at McGill, where they are Zionists and opposed to anti-semitic fraternities. They shop on St. Lawrence Boulevard where the Jews speak quaintly like the heroes of nightclub jokes.

In the spring of 1952 the B'nai B'rith published a report saying that anti-semitism was on the decline in Canada and that the Jews joined with the great prime minister of this great country in the great fight against communism. The uranium market boomed. Dr. S.I. Katz, O.B.E., told the Canadian Club that "The Jewish beavers of this land will help make the Maple Leaf a symbol of greatness." But the spring passed fast. Those balmy days which had accounted for the melting of the snows turned longer and more hard. The sun swelled in the sky and a stillness gripped the ghetto. When the heat was but two days old everyone seemed to have forgotten that there had ever been a time of no heat. This was partly sham. For, secretively, the people of the ghetto gloated over every darkening cloud. They supposed that tomorrow there would be rain, and if not tomorrow than at least the day after that. But the sky was a fever and there was no saying how long a day would last or what shape the heat would assume by night. There were the usual heat rumors about the old men going crazy and women swooning in the streets and babies being born prematurely. When the rains came the children danced in the streets clad only in their underwear and the old men sipped lemon tea on their balconies and told tales about the pogroms of the czar. But the rains didn't amount to much. After the rains there was always the heat again. The flies returned, the old men retreated to their beds, and all the missing odours of the heat reappeared with a new intensity.

The heat first appeared in June when it was still too soon to send the family up north for the summer. But, just the same, things were not too bad. Not too bad until the weekends came along. The weekends were hell. All week long you could at

least work but when the weekends came along there was nothing to do. You were on your own. You were free, so to speak.

So on Saturday afternoons the well-to-do Jews walked up and down Queen Mary Road, which was their street. A street of sumptuous supermarkets and banks built of granite, an aquarium in the lobby of the Snowdon Theatre, a synagogue with a soundproof auditorium and a rabbi as modern and quick as the Miss Snowdon restaurant, neon drugstores for all your needs, and delicatessens rich in chromium plating. Buick convertible and Cadillacs parked on both sides: a street without a past. Almost as if these Jews, who had prospered, craved for many lights. Wishing away their past and the dark. Almost as if these Jews, who had prospered, regretted only the solemn sky, which was beyond their reach. Sunny by day, and by night--star-filled: a swirl of asking eyes spying down on them. Watching. Poking fun at their ephemeral lights.

The neither rich nor poor Jews walked up and down Park Avenue--a few of the nervy ones attempting Queen Mary Road. The poor and the elderly kept to St. Lawrence Boulevard. Each street had its own technique of walking, a technique so finely developed that you could always tell a man off his own street.

The Queen Mary Road Jews walked like prosperity, grinning a flabby grin which said money in the bank. Notaries, lawyers, businessmen, doctors. They wore their wives like signposts of their success and dressed them accordingly. The children were big and little proofs, depending on the size of their achievements.

'Lou, meet the boy, Sheldon. He just won a scholarship to McGill.'

'Don't say, eh? Mm. Hey, I hear talk you're gonna expand the factory. That increases your risk, Jack. You come round first thing Monday morning and I'll fix you like a friend. For your own good. You owe it to your family to protect yourself.'

The wives exchanged small flatteries.

'Jack's going to buy a Cadillac. You try to stop him.'

'Me, I don't live for show. Lou doubled his

life insurance instead of buying a new car this year. He says you can never tell...'

Park Avenue was different. It had once been to the prospering what Queen Mary Road was to them now. But the prospering had built a more affluent street for themselves to walk on, a bigger proof, where, twenty years hence, they would again feel the inadequacy of the neon, the need to push on and to flee the past and install brighter lights again. Meanwhile, the new ones, the intruding greeners, were beginning to move in around Park Avenue. Here they mixed with the middling Jews. Knowing the right people was important. The aspiring walked without certainty, pompous and ingratiating by turns.

On St. Lawrence Boulevard the Jews, many of them bearded, walked with their heads bent and their hands clasped behind their backs. They walked down at the pavement or up at the sky, seldom straight ahead. [9]

N O T E S

PROLOGUE - THE SCENE

1 Quoted by B. G. Sack, History of the Jews in Canada (Montreal, 1945), vol. 1, p. 67. More Translation??

2 Robert H. Coats, "One Hundred Years of Canadian Progress", Jewish Daily Eagle Centennial Jubilee Edition (Montreal, 1932), p. 22.

3 Howard M. Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History, (Cleveland, 1958), p. 502.

4 Much of the material and statistics on the Montreal 'needle-trade' is from Bernard Shane, "Labourers and Builders", Canadian Jewish Year Book, 1940-41 (Montreal), p.197ff. The parentheses are my own.

5 Ibid., p. 199.

6 Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History, p. 503.

7 Hyman Neamtan, "The Rise and Fall of Jewish Attendance in the Protestant Schools of Greater Montreal", Canadian Jewish Year Book, 1940-41, p. 181.

8 Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History, p. 503.

9 Mordecai Richler, Son of a Smaller Hero (London, 1955), p. 14ff.

C H A P T E R I

Among the many immigrants to land in Montreal in 1905 were Kalman and Yetta Klein. They had few contacts in the new country; no relatives had sent them boat tickets, no "landsleit" eagerly expected them. They had left Ratno (a small town, sometimes Polish, sometimes Russian, near Kamenets) like thousands of others fleeing from the horrors of the Tzarist-condoned three-year St. Bartholomew's night which was to culminate in frightful slaughter at Bialystok.

In Europe, Kalman (or Kaufman as he was called in the vernacular) Klein had been a pottery merchant traveling from town to town throughout Vohlynia and Podolia buying and selling. He was a quiet, pious man not distinguished by much from his relatives and friends. He had one talent, however, to which his fellow townspeople paid homage. Kaufman Klein had a great flair, positively a gift, for writing wonderful letters. When he was away on business, all postcards that he sent home were eagerly read by the whole 'shtetel'.

Kaufman, a widower with three children, had married Yetta, a widow with two children and when the family picked up their meager possessions and migrated to Canada - they were a group rivaling Jacob's when he left Canaan for Egypt. For when Kaufman Klein, a man in his late thirties, docked in Montreal, besides himself and his wife, he was responsible

for the support of the children; Yankel, Velvel, Chaie-Rochel, Dora, Bessie, and Ben and Pesach Weinper.

Fortunately, jobs were plentiful. The clothing industry was hard up for labor and agents would wait at the boat docks to hire new immigrants. The salary was enough to provide raising a family--two dollars a week. Kaufman became a presser in a sweatshop and, though as his son remembers him "he never thought of economic divisions",[1] in time, a faithful member of the union-Presser's Local 167, The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America.

Kaufman Klein was in his early forties and living in the Basin of Montreal, on St. Charles Borromee (now Clark St.) near Vitre St., in downtown Montreal when in 1909 his wife bore him twins. One son died of scarlet fever a year later, the other son, Abraham, was to develop into a poet of whose work Ludwig Lewisohn would say, "the first contribution of authentic Jewish poetry to the English language".[2]

The Klein family life centered about the synagogue and Abe's earliest associations are of being all 'starched up' from Friday afternoon, when the family waited for father to come home early, until Sunday. Saturday after lunch was consecrated to the father and son reviewing the week's Sedra. The religious motivation of Mr. Klein senior was so strong that at one point he went without work for well over a year until he found a job that did not necessitate his working on the Sabbath. Having found one, he stayed there for twenty years.

It was only natural that young Abraham accompany his father regularly to the synagogue where he soon came to the attention of Rabbi Simcha Garber who took an intensive personal interest in Abe's education and always attended to securing proper teachers for him.

Before Abe was ten years old he was adept in Bava Metzia and going on in his talmudic education.

The Rabbi himself would regularly call him over and point out something in the Talmud and ask him a question or point out a trick. He thought that he had a budding rabbi in the bright young Klein boy who was to later describe the Rabbi in "Portraits of a Minyan" as follows:

> When will there be another such brain?
> Never; unless he rise again,
> Unless Reb Simcha rise once more
> To juggle syllogistic lore.
>
> One placed a pin upon a page
> Of Talmud print, whereat the sage
> Declared what holy word was writ
> Two hundred pages under it!
>
> That skull replete with pilpul tricks
> Has long returned to its matrix,
> Where worms split hair, where Death confutes
> The hope the all-too-hopeful moots.
>
> But I think that in Paradise
> Reb Simcha, with his twinkling eyes,
> Interprets, in some song-spared nook,
> To God the meaning of His book.[3]

When Abe was about ten years old the family in the general population shift of laboring class Montreal Jewry moved north to 963b City Hall Avenue and then to 1381 Clark where they were to live until 1931.

His Jewish education in the main was at the Kerem Yisroel Talmud Torah under Rabbi Garber's supervision. He remembers Tannenbaum, an early teacher, who was short and corpulent with a long beard as "looking just like Eliyahu Ha Novi" and in his novel, The Second Scroll, he describes his early lessons in a vein reminiscent of Bialik's description of a child's first contact with the alphabet (though Klein's is patently a far more pleasant association).

> I was making my first acquaintance with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet-the old Tannenbaum, round little pygmy of eighty, bearded to the breastbone, was my teacher-and I recall how it was his custom, as I struggled with the vowel-signs-those beneath the letters, like nudgers nudging, and those on top, like whisperers whispering-how it was his custom to encourage me forward from each mystic block to the next with repeated promise of pennies from heaven. The angel who presided over my lessons, he would say, would drop down candy-money if I did my lesson well. The angel kept his word, of course. [4]

Young Abe's early teachers at Kerem Yisroel were Messrs. Herscovitch, Handleman and Zenovsky. The latter was the principal and taught Isaiah. He had been an accountant in Russia and under his aegis Abe wrote his first speeches. They were "gory things" during the days of the Pogroms of Petlura.

In due course, there was a Bar Mitzvah at the Chevra T'illim Shull on St. Lawrence Street, opposite the Globe Theatre. Then began the serious Talmud study. For about a year he learned 'Nezikin' and 'Kidushin' from the merchant, Krell, and then until the age of sixteen he studied under the 'shochet'-Reverend Zvi Hirsch Zachashevski, delving into the

super commentaries. The shochet was a very proud handsome figure of a man-proud of his geneology, a descendant of 'rabbonim and negiddim'. In describing him in the summer of /58, Mrs. Klein said, "He looked like someone", to which her husband responded, "He was".

Abe's father would take him even to congregational meetings (in which neither participated, but, on the way home...). This quiet observation and judgment was to be reflected later in much of Klein's poetry, and is a definite antecedent of his "Portraits of a Minyan."

It is interesting to contrast Klein's pleasant "shull" association with Reuben Brainin's memoirs:

Montreal, October, 1914

> Yesterday, Atonement Day, I was at the Orthodox Chevra Kadishah Synagogue from morning till evening. I fasted and did not miss a line in the Prayer Book. On the eve of Yom Kippur, too, I attended this synagogue. It is thirty-five years now since I had been present at a Yom Kippur service in an orthodox synagogue. The memory of the House of God in my native town of Liadi still lingers in my mind. I remember hundreds of Jews in tears, all intent on prayer, genuinely confessing and lamenting with accents of sincerity, faces of respected and honored men, grey beards, white robes and skull caps, heaps of straw and grass on the floor, wax candles glimmering and flickering. Hebrew chants and sweet ecstasy reached the inmost depths of my being.
>
> For many years, I had longed, on Yom Kippur, to be in an orthodox synagogue, to re-experience what is peculiar to that awesome day. Only on this last Atonement Day was I able to gratify this pent-up desire. But I regret my return to the House of Prayer. I blushed at the sight of my people's degradation.
>
> The synagogue where I prayed was large and overcrowded with Jews who stood in all corners and

> hallways. But not a moment of spiritual exaltation of religious fervour did I feel all day. I saw men, grim and cold-storekeepers and card players, merchants and businessmen-who came to the House of the Lord, to pray for a happy year, for prosperity and plenty. Each one came to ask of Him who dwells in mystery that he be among those fated to live, to accumulate wealth, to rise in his social status; but he cared not if his friend were to die, to be impoverished or to be humbled. I glanced at those about me and only saw dry, coarse, and ugly faces. I sensed a loss of personal dignity. I realized that I was in the midst of a people of small shopkeepers, of inflated and yet obsequious hucksters. I stood in a front pew from morning till evening, but no echo of the Jewish soul, of the Jewish tragedy, of true humility, of true confession was there in that House of Prayer.[5]

The synagogue, however central, was not the total world of young Abe Klein. When a child of five he fell into a cellar and was taken to the Catholic City hospital, Hotel-Dieu, their ministrations to him on the traumatic occasion were to be memorialized in one of the finest tributes ever to be penned:

FOR THE SISTERS OF THE HOTEL DIEU

> In pairs,
> as if to illustrate their sisterhood,
> the sisters pace the hospital garden walks.
> In their robes black and white immaculate hoods
> they are like birds,
> the safe domestic fowl of the House of God.
> O biblic birds,
> who fluttered to me in my childhood illnesses
> me little, afraid, ill, not of your race,-
> the cool wing for my fever, the hovering solace,
> the sense of angels-
> be thanked, O plumage of paradise, be praised.[6]

The historic three-month strike of 1917 was to be another key childhood memory. In his college years, Abe wrote

a treatise on the history and development of the A.C.W.A. for Professor Stephen Leacock. These social problems involved the poor French-Canadian girls as well as the Jewish workers in the needle trade. Further, the district in which he lived left indelible scars on his social consciousness. Irving Layton has described this district vividly in a poem entitled, De Bullion Street:

> Below this broad street inverted bell-jars
> Hanging from wooden crucifixes drop
> Tiny moons upon the shaven asphalt;
> Rouged whores lean lips to narrow slits: they stop
> The young soldier with his bag of salt.
> Under the night's carapace, the soft lanes
> are listening ears where sudden footfall
> Starts a choir of echoes. A red light winks
> Viciously; and the wind's occasional
> Sigh lifts from the garbage pails their stinks.
>
> Here private lust is public gain and shame;
> Here the Oriental and the skipjack go;
> Where those bleak outsposts of the virtuous
> The corner mission and the walled church grow
> Like hemorrhoids on the city's anus.
>
> O reptilian street whose scaly limbs
> Are crooked stairways and the grocery store,
> Isolate, is your dreaming half-shut eye:
>
> Each virgin at the barricaded door
> Fells your tongue-kiss like a butterfly.[7]

Under Quebec's unique educational system, Abe's secular schooling was at Protestant schools; however, (as I have already delineated) well over 90 percent of his classmates were Jewish children of immigrants. He had always shown a marked bookish ability and with the traditional Jewish emphasis on education he was encouraged constantly, particularly by his mother.

When Abe was ten years old he became the proprietor of a wonderful legacy. His father obtained for him the Books of Knowledge and he would be placed to read in a room where the family congregated. In 1920, at the age of eleven he joined the Jewish Public Library which he used to great advantage and promptly astonished the librarian by requesting, among other authors, Darwin.

This precociousness is congruous with his lack of ability at athletics. He remembers that in High School he didn't play on any teams but was Secretary of the Athletic Association. The reason this stands out as a memory is that in a chemistry class taught by Dr. Spracklin,(a goodnatured man who is notorious in the city for being terrorized by his students as a result of being a poor disciplinarian)Abe tried to leave early and said, "The Secretary of the Athletic Association asked me to come to a meeting."

Abe more than compensated. In an immigrant context where education was a constant theme, and attending a school whose graduates perenially number seven of the top ten students in the province, Abe was always first in his class.

His father affected not to notice his prowess and when someone remarked that Abe came first again, he would say, "a trempe vi alle trempen", but he certainly noticed the occasion when his young son came second. His mother was a very practical woman and would, among other things, deny him new clothes by pointing to a neighbor who is now Dr. Morris Katz, a well-known authority on smoke-abatement

for the National Research Council, who was then at college and wore patches on his clothes. But, education to her came before all else and she would say, "Well, if you need it for school...."

V. F. Calverton notes in a chapter entitled "The Great Man Illusion":

> All genius, as well as everything else in man, originally had to come from external stimuli-conditions. Pythagoras surpassed the other Greeks of Iona and later at Crotona simply because certain conditions in his life (and by life we include his heredity), reacting on his exceedingly impressionable nature, which also was the product of certain early conditions, made it possible for his mind to grow and see beyond the others who had existed or suffered under conditions less propitious. Likewise, Robert Burns became a remarkable poet because the conditions in his life molded him into something finer and more responsive than the other people about him. <u>These conditions can be discovered.</u> Partially they are already known. The futility of past and present thought has largely been due to its concentrated study of effects, which are but manifestations, without searching with any great seriousness into their etiology. That the scientists, too, often leave for the divines, the mystics, and peripatetics. Had not Burns' father been interested in educating his children and employed Murdoch, for instance, who taught them the forms and tricks of verse, Robert Burns, in all likelihood, would never have been a poet. He might have sung ballads, even made them up as he sang, but never would he have achieved greatness with his rhymes.[8]

The greatest formative influence on Abraham Klein's literary penchant was Dr. John S. Astbury who taught Latin and was Principal of Baron Byng High School. Dr. Asbury, and his childhood friend, Mr. Patterson, who taught mathematics, had been brilliant students. They studied at the

very fine small United Church Liberal Arts College, Mount Allison in Sackville, New Brunswick and returned to Montreal where they devoted their lives to years of service at the High School in the Jewish Ghetto. They inspired love,and honest endeavors to master the work, in their students and were frequently gratified by having their graduates bring honor to and reflect glory upon them. Both men were honest and ethical, and motivated emulation.

The sonorous grandeur of Virgil, the sensual imagery of Ovid, the wit of Martial, the sweetness of Horace, all made a deep imprint on the mind of young Abe Klein.

Being so manifestly self-consciously Jewish as he could not help but be; and in a community where Zionism is as common to man as blood and as rarely found to be totally absent among the living; he became very active in Young Judea. Faced with the alternative solutions to his and Israel's problems-Zionism and Socialism, Abe Klein became a Labor-Zionist (with the emphasis on the Zionism). Thus, in his last year of high school, he had a poem published in the Canadian Jewish Chronicle of July 6, 1927, entitled, "To the Jewish Poet", never republished. It is the immature work of a seventeen-year old boy-but the poem gives us an insight into Abraham Klein on the threshold of the university; obsessed with the sorrows and tribulations of bitter Jewish history, the poem ends with the youth's vision:

> And speak about a cup of bitter wine?
> That cup now has a crack, a crack great
> As the whole length and breadth of Palestine.

N O T E S

CHAPTER I - ENTER THE PLAYERS

[1] Personal conversation with A. M. Klein, summer of 1958. All subsequent statements attributed to A. M. Klein, which are not specifically denoted, will stem from personal conversations at the poet's house.

[2] Ludwig Lewisohn, Foreword to Hath Not a Jew (New York, 1940), p. v.

[3] A. M. Klein, Hath Not a Jew, p. 18.

[4] A. M. Klein, The Second Scroll (New York, 1951), p.4.

[5] Reuben Brainan, "Memoires", quoted in Canadian Jewish Year Book, 1940-41, (Montreal), p. 141f.

[6] A. M. Klein, The Rocking Chair and Other Poems (Toronto, 1948), p.6.

[7] Irving Layton, The Improved Binoculars (Highlands,1956), p. 77.

[8] V. F. Calverton, The Newer Spirit (New York, 1925),p.223.

C H A P T E R II

In the fall of 1927, A. M. Klein entered McGill University, a freshman, and enrolled in the pre-Law Liberal Arts course. The sapling remains part of the growing tree though the nourishment of rain and sunshine cause many times as many rings to broaden its stature. So did the early Zionist activities and strong Jewish identification remain at the core of Abe Klein as he grew and extended his branches in the intellectual climate of the University. Nourished by the new rains of new faces, new contacts, new views and new directions, his roots had been solidly planted in Jewish soil and from it he drew the same sustenance as in childhood and raw material to photo-synthesize into ever-expanding creative circles.

Though he studied no more Talmud, Abe remained closely affiliated with Zionist Youth organizations. Indeed, in 1927, he became president of Canadian Young Judea. He contributed to the Judean and later became its editor. Later, in 1925, he was to become the group's Educational Director and in 1936 Assistant Executive Director of the Zionist Organization of Canada. Young Klein was active in the Menorah Society and the Maccabean circle and already publishing in the Judean translations of Moshe Smeliansky, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Abraham Shlonsky and Bialik. It was only natural that the first fruits of his poetic genius were to be directed to the Menorah Journal,[1] the Jewish Chronicle[2], and the Judean.[3]

The McGill years were indeed rich creatively for Abe Klein. He wrote frenetically and copiously. Many poems were never to be republished but many of his early fruit had enough merit to form the fulcrum of a full volume, Hath Not a Jew... published in 1940.

In 1929, the Menorah Journal published Klein's "Five Weapons Against Death", a group of sonnets, not republished, occasioned by the death of Sam Koslov, father of his high school sweetheart, Bessie. Times were bad and so Abe was not able to marry Bessie until 1935, when he graduated Law School. Through the long years they kept company, he often spent the evening at the Koslov home, playing checkers and talking. Bessie, the youngest child and only girl,was very close to her father for whom Abe developed a sincere devotion. Deeply hurt by Mr. Koslov's death, Abe traced the grief-cycle in five sonnets.

In the first, "Arrow of Aloofness", he writes of being forced to face death. The second is a very bitter sonnet entitled, "Irony of Fourteen Blades ", and the third sonnet, "Sword of the Righteous",is quite good in the mood of resignation-"The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away". "Sling for Goliath", the fourth sonnet, lacks any poetic grace as the strong sentiment for his bereaved wife (then fiancée) gushes over. Perhaps the lack of quality in this section of the poem as well as its total organization and bitter occasion account for the author's not rescuing any part of this early effort for revision and republication. The fifth sonnet, entitled, "Club of Final Pain", is

is really a very fine affirmation that life must go on.

A little poem entitled, "Afterward", I feel, merits quotation. Remember the poet was then just twenty years old;

> The crow upon the hawthorn bush
> Picks at the haws until they bleed;
> Or watches some red earthworm push
> Himself along a slimy weed;
> Or meditates the autumn leaf
> Turning to powder and to dust
> He caws in arrant unbelief.

At McGill, A. Klein took only two literature courses, a survey taught by Dean Cyrus McMillan and a course on Chaucer taught by G. W. Latham. To his fertile brain these were to provide great stimulus and clay with which to work.

Marlowe's Dr. Faustus was part of the survey course and in a poem, "Business" (not republished) which appeared in the Canadian Forum of August, 1929, the influence was clearly apparent. Klein, Faustus-like says;

> And I would buy a poem anytime
> and gladly pay it with my soul...

Keats, for his sensual imagery, had been Abe Klein's favorite poet in his high school days, but, having been introduced to the cerebral Donne, by Dean McMillan, Klein quickly became entranced and tremendously influenced by the conceits of the early Seventeenth century. In "A Sequence of Songs"[4], these lines occur;

> My blood shouts very joyous news
> into my heart; and then
> Hurries upon a lively cruise
> To come and shout again".

The poem also contains, however, these promising lines;

> Kisses of mine which lent a grace
> To summer, run a frozen race
> Snow flake kissing all my face.

In the McGilliad a little later (March /31) Klein, under the same influence, published, "Falstaff" - a humorous sketch about the unsuccessful amatory attempts of Shakespear's rollicking hero. The school magazine (April, 1931) also included a short omen of Klein's early technical brilliance, experimentation with form, innovation and exercise. Klein combined the nineteenth and seventeenth centuries in the following;

> Cinquain
>
> The moon
> Is sudden grief.
> Across a star-pricked sky
> It is an interjection, crying
> O!...

In this poem, the author attempted the union of a modern cinquain and a metaphysical conceit expressed in the letter O.

At the age of twenty, in the Canadian Jewish Chronicle, A.M. Klein published the series of Passover sketches entitled, "Haggadah" which reappear in "Hath Not a Jew". The poem is essentially parochial. It is, however, characterized by strong simple images that bring the scene to life.

In the same year of his life, Klein, with tongue in cheek, describes his contemporaries in a vein of comprehensive

tolerance reminiscent of Chaucer at his best. In "Portraits of a Minyan", (Menorah Journal, October, 1929) he uses to great poetic advantage the fruits of his constant synagogue attendance with his father, their quiet observation and forceful subsequent character analyses.

We have already quoted "Sophist", the portrait inspired by his childhood rabbi. There are many others whom we would recognize.

Pintele Yid

Agnostic, he would never tire
To cauterize the orthodox;
But he is here, by paradox
To say the KADDISH for his sire.

Reb. Abraham is a portrait of a vulgar, good-hearted fat-cheeked Jew colored by slightly supercillious affection. It was to take Herman Wouk many pages to characterize Uncle Samson-Aaron, (In Marjorie Morningstar) less effectively than Klein's brilliant grasp of a similar type.

In "Sweet Singer", Klein demonstrates a Hassidic love for the devotedly (but ignorantly) pious.

The following portrait foreshadows Klein's later contempt for the "machers"-the vulgar rich and unpoetic of the Jewish community. I quote a close newspaper associate to the effect that "his real attitude to the Jewish community is 'these people are beneath me' and 'his brother-in-law, Lew Koslov, who became a millionaire was also a poor boy...' These are the people whom A. M. Klein saw making money and looked down upon." When confronted with this statement, Abe

Klein categorically denied it. In any case, here is an excerpt from his brilliant portrait of a, "Junk Dealer";

> While litanies are clamored,
> His loud voice brags
> A Hebrew most ungrammered.
> He sells God rags.

The last is a tender portrait inspired by Abe's uncle Mayer: "and the man Moses was meek". Its strains are those of loving sympathy and in a peretz-like vein it concludes with;

> The meek may trust
> That in his tomb
> He will turn to dust
> To save some room.

A more sombre note, resonating the tragedy of contemporary Jewish history is sounded by Klein in the peem, "Greeting on this Day". It followed his "Sonnet in Time of Affliction" wherein with passion and indignation he speaks of the atrocities committed in 1929 by some Palestinian Arabs. These poems may be considered counterparts to Bialik's - "Poems of Wrath".

The forcefulness of poem III suffers from name-dropping of Jewish scholars which causes immature lines by the twenty-year old poet;

> Your streets, terraced and curved and narrow,
> I climbed in my youth, attending on your sages
> I sat at the feet of Rabbi Joseph Caro,

In poem VI, he demonstrates chauvenistic pride in the

new tough Israel and in poem VII, he says that the answer is to fight the oppressors. This is in contrast to his "Childe Harold's Pilgrimmage" where he eschews this solution ascribing it to Essau and having said;

> Alas, for me that in my ears there sounds
> Always the sixth thunder of Sinai

advocates stoic patience.

Poem VIII reveals the paradox of the Jewish nationalist who is also a socialist, for, in poetry in the Marxian vein of Mayakovsky and Bertolt Brecht, he, the Jewish nationalist posits the supranational community of interest of the exploited working class;

> To them no peace,but unto you,Ofellsheen,
> O workers in the smithy of the sun,
> Dupes of ventriloquists who belch the Unseen,
> Good men deluded by the Evil One;
> I, the son of a worker, and a worker myself,
> I, who have known the sweat that salts the lip,
> The blister on the palm, the aching hip,
> I offer you companionship,
> Saying:

This poem reflects the co-mingling of various influences upon the young Zionist Abe Klein. The socialist position had gradually developed and was to remain with him.

The university was a broad basin wherein many streams co-mingled, and Abe was not to remain unaffected.

He had begun to read Tom Paine and Ingersoll. It was a period of cessation of belief in Orthodox ritual. He respected his parents' views but for himself ceased to believe in all but the ethical verities. In a community where reform

Judaism was anathema, this was to prove an irreplaceable loss for nothing satisfactory could fill the void. He did not react against his background; never quarreled with his parents, just ceased to believe.

There remained, consequently, a sentimental attachment to the pleasant secure childhood association. Though Klein was unable to hold firmly to the beliefs and faith basic to the religious ceremonies of his youth, he remained with a nostalgic affection for the happy memories of synagogue practices and home ritual entwined with the vivid memories of the sights, smells and games played in the childhood ghetto which he recalls in the autobiographical poem appended to, "The Second Scroll", (Knopf, New York, 1951). In this poem in a vein reminiscent of Wordsworth's similar quest in, "Tintern Abbey", Klein says;

> I am no old man fatuously intent
> On memories, but in memory I seek
> The strength and vividness of nonage days
> Not tranquil recollection of event.

In "The Cripples", after describing the cripples climbing the ninety-nine stairs to the shrine of Brother Andre, Klein concludes;

> And I who in my own faith once had faith like this,
> But, have not now, am crippled more than they.

It was at McGill that with the expansion of his intellect, Klein's faith ebbed away. Perhaps most influential was his friendship with David Lewis, now, national director of

the C.C.F., who in high school had received his kudos for scholarship and at the university in public speaking.

Like Abe Klein, Dave Lewis was active in Mock Parliaments and the Debating Union. The two became debating partners and were legendarily successful. Their skill was hailed far and wide and they became notable figures. They were a unique combination. Lewis, whose father was a Bundist, and whose uncle was a socialist was tough and hard-hitting- "no poetry about him". In an interview with Sir Edward Beatty a prominent member of the Board of the Canadian Pacific Railroad who was then on the Rhodes Scholarship Committee, he was asked the standard question put to Economics-Political Science students; "What legislation would you enact were you the head of the government?" Lewis promptly responded, "The first bill would be to nationalize the C.P.R."

Klein and Lewis had earlier opposed each other in a debate between the Young People's Socialist League and Young Judea on the basic Jewish question of the twenties; "Is Zionism or Socialism the answer?" Two good Jewish boys of low-low middle class parentage, who had taken different roads which had suddenly converged at the University. Strangely enough, at McGill, Klein, not Lewis, became known as "the Red". His flamboyant exuberant response to attention gave Klein a brighter tincture than Lewis' native hue.

David Lewis was to later re-enter A.M. Klein's life and affect it greatly but the two lads' friendship at the university and Lewis' influence should not be underestimated

upon the sensitive son of a sweat-shop worker. It was David Lewis who brought about the meeting of Abe Klein and Irving Layton.[5]

Layton, who today is Canada's most prolific (11 volumes and premier poet (all the major awards) was always a turbulent personality. At that time he had been expelled from Baron Byng High School because of an altercation with a teacher Mr. Steeves. It was but two months before matriculation and his prospects for college were thus very dim. David Lewis arranged for young Layton to meet Abe Klein, who undertook to tutor him in Latin.

Irving Layton remembers that they met at Fletchers Field-the long thin playground that borders much of the Ghetto-separating it from the verdant beauty of Mount Royal. There, in a quiet corner, away from the milling, hard running multi-lingually screaming children, away from the constant fighting between ragged children with long ear-locks and the equally ragged invaders with gleaming St. Christopher's medals, Layton remembers Klein reading with sonority from Book Two of The Aeniad.

Their next encounter was in Klein's small unimpressive room where Irving brought him some short stories to read. Since he was interested in left-wing politics and a friend of David Lewis, the younger poet met his older contemporary many times over a hot pastromi sandwich. They would talk and Layton remembers that Klein's conversation was brilliantly witty.

"The wit covered up the shyness of a lonely man. The man never let his hair down. For me he is always the boy who was no good at games; he had to feel he was intellectually superior to be at home. If you threatened this, he removed himself."

When I mentioned Layton's remembering their first meeting and asked Abraham Klein about their relationship, he responded; "Layton would come to me now and again to show me his poems for criticism. That's all. That's all! "

During these college years (as already indicated) Abe Klein did more than debate and tutor. He was the editor of the McGilliad (a literary magazine which he recalls was often called the "McGill Yid") and contributed a column to the "McGill Daily".

In his reaching out for the larger world he met many Gentiles with common interests. Frank Scott, a Rhodes Scholar and Guggenheim Fellow now Professor of Constitutional Law at his alma mater, McGill, was then as now a poet and a socialist. His intellectual kinship to Klein is manifest in this poem, entitled "Efficiency"[6]

> The efficiency of the capitalist system
> Is rightly admired by important people.
> Our huge steel mills
> Operating at 25 per cent, of capacity
> Are the last word in organization.
> The new grain elevators
> Stored with superfluous wheat
> Can load a grain boat in two hours.
> Marvellous card-sorting machines
> Make it easy to keep track of the unemployed.
> There isn't one unnecessary employee
> In these textile plants
> That require a 75 per cent tarriff protection.

> And when our closed shoe factories re- open
> They will produce more footwear than we can pos-
> Sibly buy.
> So don't let us start experimenting with socialism
> Which everyone knows means inefficiency and waste.

Scott was largely responsible for the publication, in 1936, of an anthology composed of poems written during the early thirties by a group of talented young poets who had met while Klein was at McGill and Law School at the University of Montreal. The anthology was entitled, "New Provinces" and gave its name to its group of authors. The editors of a university textbook, "Canadian Poems" state the following;

> "Canadian poetry took on entirely new interest with the publication of New Provinces in 1936. This was a collection of new and significant poems by six poets; Robert Finch, Leo Kennedy, A.M. Klein, E. J. Pratt, F. R. Scott, and A.J.M. Smith. These people helped to absorb the influence of T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats into the stream of Canadian verse, and they did so with flair and intelligence."[7]

Professor E. K. Brown writes of the group that they were "eager to naturalize in Canada the kind of poetry then being written by Eliot and Pound, all zealots for the metaphysical verse of the Seventeenth century".[8]

A. M. Klein's contribution to the anthology both in quality and reputation was not small. During the years between 1927, when he entered McGill, and 1936, the year after Abraham Klein graduated from the University of Montreal Law School and was married, he had worked hard and published much.

In the early thirties he wrote some social-conscious poetry such as an unrepublished group of radical poems entitled

"Barricade Smith, His Speeches." Poem VIII "Of Soporifics" published in the Canadian Forum is of interest. In essence Klein's message in this poem is Marxist; the theme was that Religion is the opium of the people. Poem IX of this series demonstrates his brilliant wit; written after Mussolini had made his existence felt and Hitler had begun his move, Klein called it; "Of Shirts and Policies of State." The poem concludes with these biting lines;

> Get yourself, therefore, while you can, a patch
> Of rainbow silk of motley linen and-
> Declare another philosophic shirt unfurled!

In 1932, A.M. Klein met Stephen Wise in Montreal, and Rabbi Wise asked him to send some things for his magazine, Opinion then edited by his son, James Waterman Wise. Among other poems which he sporadically submitted there, was "Heirlooms" which name was changed to "Ave Aque Vale" when it became the opening poem in "Hath Not a Jew". The college influence is clearly manifested in the poem along with a hint of a tension which he is rationalizing as Klein demonstrates his enormous Jewish knowledge in explaining that when he leaves Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Jonson, he "Betakes him to no pharisaic crew..." The poem is imbued with a feeling of comforting pleasant associations. The long list of Talmudic Rabbis whom he wittily characterizes in pithy lines are like "Old Friends", and the reader can easily see that to the author would strive to retraat to the refuge of their enfolding company in time of stress.

The December 5th copy of the Jewish Tribune contained a rare anamoly. On the back of an article entitled, "What Makes me a Jew", by Dr. Israel Bettan, a militantly liberal rabbi, there is an early attempt at prose by the agnostic but conservative Montreal Jewish poet, A. M. Klein. It is a romantic short story about Susskind of Trimberg called, "The Meed of the Minnesinger".

One of Abe's earliest poems, the "Haunted House", appeared in the Canadian Forum of January 1929. He never republished it for there were some atrocious lines such as;-

> Silence nullifies the sane.
> And dust settles on the brain.

but there were also some exciting lines demonstrating the poetic genius that was already enfolding and would bloom with such splendor;

> ...the sky-an oriflamme tattered
> a bowl of amethyst shattered
> an inky hieroglyph spattered
> Against a parabolic wall... [9]

These lines, too, displeased their author as he said, "What meaning does 'Oriflamme' convey?" But he agreed with my judgment of the vividness of the image in these lines from the same poem;

> No better way is there
> To ecstacize an autumn midnight
> Than lavishly to stage
> Fury climbing up a broken lightning stair

Epitaph, a poem written for the Y Beacon of 1930, deals

with a recurring theme, the hollowness of life. In this poem the laughter of the cynic is prominent, but an orthodox acceptance is definitely foreshadowed as the author adds, however,

> Yea, I may lay my head perhaps
> Upon the very knees of God.

"Orders", the concluding poem in Hath Not a Jew, was written in 1931 as was "Exorcism Vain" which is an allusion to Cabbalistic practice. The poem shows a brilliant, if parochial, utilization of the Hassidic legends of the author's youth. A sad minor note is struck. The perpetual Jewish [illegible] but somehow, the messiah never arrives;

> The mispronouncement of the syllable
> Conclusive, renders the good deed undone-
> Alas, the hesitancy in thy call,
> The stutter in the tetragrammaton.

A year earlier, in an empassioned poem entitled,"Dance Chassidic", Klein had masterfully captured the enraptured revolutions of the ecstatic Simchas Torah dancers.

Klein's versatility is immediately remarkable and evidenced by the great number of fine children's poems such as, "Elijah" and "Rhymes for a Jewish Child" which among many droll Jewish legends, bubbling over with child-like delight, he wrote for his beloved Judean. The same years also produced the vitriolic "Ballad of the Dancing Bear" which in acid couplets, reminiscent of Pope at his most biting, etches a graphic picture of tortured Jewish life in Poland and

Russia. The portraits of loutish peasant and vicious 'poritz' are so powerful that after reading about "Pan Stanislaus" it requires great restraint to refrain from attacking even such fictional characters as the colonel in "Jacobovski and the Colonel".

During his vacations, Abe worked as spieler on a bus which ran a tour of Distillers Corporation in Ville La Salle near Montreal. (The tour included a free drink). He early made the association of Mr. Sam Bronfman one of the owners of the great Seagram empire; a man who was to become a legendary philanthropist and president of the Canadian Jewish Congress which he made into a really active functioning organization. Sam Bronfman was to remain a good friend of Abe's. They were later to work together for Jewish causes and to this day, A. M. Klein is associated in a public relations capacity with Mr. Bronfman.

Even the early experience of working as a Bus Spieler was fruitful for Klein for it was on the bus that he conceived and wrote his magnificent, "Design for a Medieval Tapestry". In sharp, good poetry, using few adjectives and strong images, the poem deals with Jewish suffering as seen through different people's eyes. I quote the bruisingly powerful conclusion:

> The wrath of the people is like foam and lather,
> Risen against us. Wherefore, Lord, and Why?
> The winds assemble; the cold and hot winds gather
> To scatter us. They do not heed our cry.
> The sun rises and leaps the red horizon,
> And like a bloodhound swoops across the sky.

'Discordia Concors' is T.S. Eliot's term for the unique character of modern and seventeenth-century verse. Nowhere is it more apparent than in Klein's "Reb Levi Yitschok Talks to God". The poem which has as its theme essentially a passionate Chassidic legend is permeated with the influence of a restrained Anglican gentleman who leans towards refined anti-semitism, T. S. Eliot, himself. As in "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock", "Reb Levi Yitschok Talks to God" utilizes two levels, the serious impassioned futile cry and a romantic poetic interlude. In "Prufrock" the yellow fog described as a cat interrupts the despair. This picture is clearly a part of Klein's active associations as after the strong phrase, "and Israel made the buttocks of the earth" in the first italicized interlude Klein writes:

> The moon grinned from the window pane; a cat
> Standing upon a gable, humped and spat.

The very word fog is clearly in the back of his mind as well as cat for a page later it leaps out:

> He suddenly went mild
> Begging the Lord to lead him through the fog;

A further similarity is present in that there is no answer to the all-important question. There is, however, a major difference; Klein's agonized cry is not for ego, the self, but for the group, for his whole people.

The tensions that were straining within the young poet were manifested again and again in his activities

and early poetry. A year after he wrote, "Koheleth", which just like the Biblical book expresses a profound pessimism, "vanity vanity...", he wrote in "The Words of Plocini ben Plocini to Job" this magnificent expression of life being worth living: "Are navels cut to make death easier?"

Further, Klein, the young poet, so enmeshed in his particular Jewish background that it formed so much of the clay with which he worked and created wrote in 1930 a diatribe against religious particularism. He had become good friends with two of the other young poets; A. J. M. Smith and Leo Kennedy. They would often exchange house visits and Abe was greatly grieved by the aggravation and heartache that preceded and followed the marriage of his Catholic friend, Leo Kennedy, to a Jewish girl, Miriam Carpin. "Christian Poet and Hebrew Maid" was a never republished diatribe against religious particularism and intolerance. The poem patiently advocated "universalism" through saccharine lines like-

Mary and Miriam a Kin.

In his joint publication with the other five poets, Klein was reaching out from his parochial Jewish world to the broader universe of Catholic literature. The interesting paradox is that it is from his Jewish hearth that he draws the building blocks for his great creative contribution. Professor M. W. Steinberg feels that Klein's single-minded concern with Jewish life has been an enlarging rather

than limiting one, for it enabled Klein to present his world of characters, events and ideas with a solidarity and intensity...very rare in our literature. [10]

Two of the best of A. M. Klein's early poems were included in the joint publication New Provinces. The "Soirée of Velvel Kleinberger" is a poem composed out of Jewish fabric but patterned largely in design after Eliot. A noted critic remarks concerning the "clipped colloquialisms, and seemingly disjointed phrases combined with the attitude of cynical despair and of pity operating in a framework of contempt as in:

> In back-room dens of delicatessen stores,
> In curtained parlors of garrulous barber-shops;
> While the rest of the world comfortably snores
> On mattresses or more fleshly props." [11]

The Jewish world he knows so well appears in"... teachers, with dirty beards and hungry features".

In a mutation upon a nursery rhyme, "Hum of Sixpence", Klein, the son of a common needle trade worker, an intellectual socialist who was bitterly experiencing the depression, utilized a card game as his vehicle for mature and profound expression.

Another very fine poem appeared in the anthology,"Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens." Here one critic discerningly comments of Klein, "a Jew who turns in discontent from the cosmopolitan world around him."[12] The poem is an empassioned rhapsody on Spinoza. In the second stanza he crucifies institutional religious orthodoxies:

Uriel da Costa
Flightily ranted
Heresies one day,
Next day recanted.

Rabbi and bishop,
Each vies to smuggle
Soul of da Costa
Out of its struggle.

Confessional hears his
Glib pater noster;
Synagogue sees his
Penitent posture.

What is the end of
This catechism?
Bullet brings dogma
That suffers no schism.

Stanza III reveals that hateful doubts are present in his mind; He wants to accept the traditional position for comfort and he castigates his doubting self; but, the doubts remain present.

Malevolent scorpions befoul the chambers
O my heart; they scurry across its floor,
Leaving the slimy vestiges of doubt.

In magnificent free form, Klein's praise of Spinoza pours forth with a power and emotional peak that only classic restraint and the heightened language of poetry can convey. It is this section that gives the poem its name and nominates in turn its author's name for the roles of posterity.

But, it is the concluding stanza that must claim the reader's love; at the end of this empassioned rhapsody, Klein with masterful, indeed with consummate skill, leaves us with this remarkable thought-with this picture of Spinoza;

Think of Spinoza, then, not as you think
Of Shabbathai Svi who for a time of life
Took to himself the Torah for a wife,
And underneath the silken canopy
Made public: Thou art hallowed unto me.
Think of Spinoza, rather, plucking tulips
Within the garden of Mynheer, forgetting
Dutchmen and Rabbins, and consumptive fretting,
Plucking his tulips in the Holland sun,
Remembering the thought of the Adored,
Spinoza, gathering flowers for the One,
The ever-unwedded lover of the Lord.

So in 1936, with the publication of, "New Provinces", A. M. Klein is already deservedly famous: a sensitive Jewish graduate of both McGill and the French Catholic University of Montreal, a lawyer who at the university had demonstrated his forensic brilliance-a stirringly creative young poet stepping out into the larger world: reaching confidently from the solid footing of his Jewish background out, out for brass ring of community fame-of world literary renown.

N O T E S

CHAPTER II - THE HERO EMERGES

1 A. M. Klein, "Five Characters", Memorah Journal,1927.

2 A. M. Klein, "Ballad of Signs and Wonders", Jewish Chronicle, (1928).

3 A. M. Klein, "Two Chanukah Poems", The Judean (December, 1928).

4 A. M. Klein, "A Sequence of Songs", Poetry, A Magazine of Verse (October, 1929).

5 Irving Layton's great ability was virtually unrecognized, except by a few discerning literateurs such as E.E.Cummings, until recently. Though he has been active poetically for many years, Layton was forced to teach at Herzliah High School, the Jewish Public Library and many other places, in order to earn a living. I, who studied under him for three years, was greatly influenced by this powerful man to whom I still feel a strong attachment. Much of the following reminiscences were transmitted during a pleasant day of conversation at his Laurentian cottage where he was perfecting several new poems.

6 F. R. Scott, "Efficiency", A Pocketful of Canada (Toronto, 1948), p. 289.

7 Louis Dudek and Irving Layton, ec., Canadian Poems 1850-1952 (Toronto, 1952), p. 14.

8 E. K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry (Toronto, 1943), p.67.

9 This word "parabolic" is a favourite of Klein's and occurs very forcefully in a later poem "Portrait of a Diver" which is one of the finest descriptive pieces written in the English language. When I mentioned his excellent use of the word "parabolic", Klein said, "Wonderful line-it has the suggestion of the perfection of a circle while it retains its own individuality."

10 M. W. Steinberg, "The Stature of A. M. Klein", Canadian Jewish Review (Montreal, December 13, 1957), p.14.

11 E. K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry, p. 70.

12 Ibid., p. 71.

C H A P T E R III

The brass ring of success is hard to grasp and even harder to retain for it is the nature of the carrousel of life that it goes round and round returning over and over again to certain previous locations. Thus the rider though intoxicated by the calliope dishearteningly finds certain themes recurring in the rondo of passing and repassing the same fundamental positions.

Money had never been present in superfluous quantities in the house of Kaufman and Yetta Klein. Upon graduation from the university, married, and within a year the father of a young child, their son Abe also felt the pinch of necessity as did everyone. It was the height of the depression and bright young lawyers were a dime a,dozen. Certainly poets were a luxury that the community would not tolerate or support.

During his last year at law-school, Abe had partially supported himself by working for the Zionist-organization as assistant to the executive director, Rabbi Schwartz. Poets have to eat and this position didn't sufficiently provide for Klein's needs. His hope nurtured by his great forensic intellectual reputation had been that in the practice of law he could make enough money to both provide for his family and give him the means and time to continue writing. The last requirement, it did fulfill. As the author

himself phrased it, "In my law-practice, I had plenty of time for poetry".

It was unfortunately, too, true that A. M. Klein did not become a successful lawyer. It was his thorny destiny to watch lesser men, who at the university had demonstrated their inferiority, through family contacts and friends, become associated with well-known law firms and prosper while he struggled. Perhaps his socialist reputation was a factor in cancelling out the great advantage his Zionist participation gave him; in effect while the businessmen of the community were glad to have the young poet associated with them on social-action and Zionist committees, they took their legal business elsewhere.

Abraham Klein did have some good friends. One of them Max Garmaise, had decided that the way to beat the depression was to move away to a smaller expanding town and practice law there. For him it proved so satisfactory that to this day, the Garmaise family lives in Royen-Noranda. Prompted by his friend, and fortified by his fluency in French painfully acquired by studying law at the Université de Montréal, Abe and Bessie Klein with their newborn infant, Coleman, migrated in 1937 to Northern Quebec where Abe joined Max Garmaise's law office.

For the Kleins, it was not a successful experiment. Though Royen had a nice small Jewish community, they quickly missed their family and friends, the libraries and intellectual life of the big city.

After a year, they returned to Montreal, where Klein entered the office of Chate and Wasserman, later Chate, Klein and Aranovitch. Sam Chate was a friend from college and Young Judea. He was president of that organization when Abe became its executive director. After practicing alone for a while, Klein returned to be associated with Chate for about ten years.

The years were turbulent also in the macrocosm. Europe was rent with strife; riot and civil war were crescending to their eventual culmination in a maelstrom of violence. Abe's cry against warfare, " Blueprint for a Monument of War", appeared in the Canadian Forum, and the Canadian Jewish Chronicle of June 1938 published a poem of Klein's entitled, "Of Castles in Spain". It was written for a friend, Sam Abramson, who like so many American and Canadian idealists had gone to fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War.

The increasingly tragic condition of the Jew forced Abe Klein to return to a more intensive involvement with his own people. He was increasingly compelled to remember the lessons of his youth, continuously conscious of Jewish dilemma - no rest - never allowed to be anything but the Jew:

> Always and ever,
> Whether in caftan robed, or in tuxedo slicked,
> Whether of bearded chin, or of the jowls shaved blue,
> Always and ever have I been the Jew
> Bewildered, and a man who has been tricked,
> Examining
> A passport of polyglot decision.[1]

Poem V of "Sonnets Semitic" clearly manifests the inner tension caused by having tried to break away from the

strong bonds of Orthodox youth, and his guilt at not being constantly, militantly "Jewish"; he feels something must be wrong when he is invited to visit Gentiles. Anxiety puts a chip on his poetic shoulder and he is convinced (maybe rightly so) that 'Es vet helfen vi a taiten bankes' - it won't make any difference. To the Gentiles he remains not A. M. Klein, poet - but Abe Klein, Jew.

> Now we will suffer loss of memory;
> We will forget the tongue our mothers knew;
> We will munch ham, and guzzle milk thereto,
> And this on hallowed fast days, purposely...
> Abe will elude his base-nativity.
> The kike will be a phantom; we will rue
> Our bearded ancestry, my nasal cue,
> And like the Gentiles we will strive to be.
> Our recompense-emancipation day.
> We will have friend where once we had a foe.
> Impunging epithets will glance astray.
> To gentile parties we will proudly go;
> And Christians, anecdoting us, will say:
> "Mr. and Mrs. Klein - the Jews, you know..."[2]

His preoccupation with the bestiality of the Nazis and the resurgent anti-semitism is best evidenced by, "Childe Herold's Pilgrimmage", from which we have already quoted. Here he raises the whole problem of evil and man's relation to God. The problem is well stated. The solution, however, is not so easy to come by. After rejecting violence or suicide, admitting that he doesn't have the (faith given) strength of his forefathers, the author advocates "a frozen patience" - stoic endurance.

Thus, when in 1940 Behrman published Klein's first volume of poetry, it contained not a single poem that did not deal with Jewish experience. The book received its title,

"Hath Not a Jew"...from Shylock's famous lament in the Merchant of Venice.

The book contained a foreward by Ludwig Lewisohn who rhapsodized with lack of critical comment the praises of A. M. Klein with such statements as:

> The first Jew to contribute authentic poetry to the literatures of English speech...
>
> As we are born into the use of a given language or of several given languages, so are we born into a group, a tradition, a religion, a set of memories and attitudes concerning love and death, man and God. We need not blindly accept our heritage; we may legitimately rebel against it. But he who blankly "represses" it, denies it, flees from it, cannot evidently be a poet. For deep and strong poetry is the concrete, as Goethe was never tired of declaring, that becomes the universal. That perishable thing which is only symbol is an immensely concrete, individualized thing-a thing that has taken generations to grow, to become itself, never a thing contrived and constructed or limited. Only the poet who has a substance of his very own will be able to create a style of his very own. And so an apparent paradox becomes a necessary truth: Abraham Klein, the most Jewish poet who has ever used the English tongue, is the only Jew who has ever contributed a new note of style, of expression, of creative enlargement to the poetry of that tongue. He is a far better English poet than the Jewish poets who tried to be non-Jewish English poets. In high things and low, honesty is not only the best policy; it is the only policy that makes for life.

Leon Edel commented as follows:

> Klein, heir to authentic Jewish tradition, reflects that tradition in every line...His wit is the dry wit of the medieval scholar; his reasoning is legalistic, not because he happens to be a lawyer, but the talmudists were great reasoners and hair splitters. [3]

There were, dissenters to this acclaim. The critics were mostly from the ranks of non-Jewish literateurs. The

same E. K. Brown who is so frankly an admirer of much of Klein's poetry wrote:

> The Christians he presents are cruel oppressors from Polish barons who think nothing of ordering the slaughter of Jews, to Montreal bourgeois who can never forget that their Jewish friends are Jews. Over against the Christians who are seen always from the outside he sets a Jew-world which is full of charm and kindness.

In an article for the Canadian Forum, Louis Dudek, who besides being a well-known Canadian poet, is professor of modern poetry at McGill, writes in an even more critical vein of Klein's first volume;

> The secret of Klein's development as a poet is to be found in the dates of his published books, Hath Not a Jew, though published in 1940, was for the most part, written in the late twenties or early thirties. Klein's religious poetry belongs to his earliest stage of development, but since then, Klein has veered from his religious poetry and directed the core of his creations towards a realistic and cosmopolitan view. The first traditional and unquestioning period produced, Hath Not a Jew which reveals his religious emotions and is, consequently, not a response to the demands of the whole personality, but the idealism of a growing mind, a romantic expression of boyhood loves.[4]

Because of the manifest excellence of such poems as, "Portrait of a Minyan" and "Out of the Pulver and Polished Lens", I feel free from the danger of the reader's not appreciating the spark of genius that is manifested now and again even in Klein's early work. I, therefore, feel at liberty to quote at length from an extra severely critical review by the Yiddish and English publicists, Louis M. Benjamin, a practicing barrister who has translated Jean

Christophe.

A reading of the work of several of the outstanding poets in whose firmament A. M. Klein shines as the brightest star induces a somewhat gloomy mood. In the foreward to Klein's latest volume of poems bearing the self-conscious title, Hath Not a Jew... Ludwig Lewisohn rightly and righteously castigates those Jewish poets who "Had sought to make themselves indistinguishable from the non-Jewish poets". At the same time, however, this latter-day Jeremiah omits all reference to those Jewish poets who have fallen into the equally grievous error of attempting to render themselves indistinguishable by assuming the facade of a way of living which no longer exists. Either way, particularly for poets, is equally false and leads only to sterility.

Mr. Lewisohn himself is an excellent case in point. Having, at the outset of his career, attempted to divert his considerable talents into one channel with results not wholly satisfactory, he has latterly, with loud and repentant hosannahs, somewhat in the style of a "Gher" taken to a mystic and otherworld Judaism-and Zionism. The results, in terms of creative output, have been no more gratifying than his former espousel of the philosophy of assimilation was in moral terms--and Lewisohn remains a rather pathetic, frustrated figure, shouting the "Hatikvah" zealously-but off key.

With these brief obiter dicta (as Mr. Klein would put it) we may turn to a consideration of Canada's outstanding post. At the outset the reviewer finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. For the very appearance of a volume of verse by a Canadian Jew-so rare a phenomenon-is an occasion for rejoicing and the writer is, naturally, hesitant to assume the role of the spectre at the feast lest the appetite of the guests be ruined forever. At the same time, the critic must not be unmindful of his duty to preserve as much as possible than objectivity of appraisal which is the justification for his raison d'etre.

Lewisohn contends that Klein is "the first Jew to contribute authentic poetry to the literature of English speech!" After allowing the first flush of pride to subside, however, it is necessary to subject this statement to a careful evaluation. True, A. M. Klein is the foremost Canadian-Jewish poet writing in English. None will dispute that. For both in quality and quantity, he ranks among the best of Canadian poets as a whole.

> Until some time ago, some of the more alert critics were sanguinely pointing to him as the white knight of Canadian letters in the Dominion. Latterly, however, Klein is more rarely seen on the literary horizon and although he appears again with the publication of his book it is evident that he has fulfilled less than his original promise. For Hath Not a Jew in itself an achievement, reveals clearly the author's limitations. Klein's poetic reaction to the Jewish problem in the main accounts for it.
>
> The Jewish problem, or rather the problem of the Jews today, is very complex and has many facets. A writer who seeks to develop a positive creative approach to it within the extremely subjective and personalized medium of poetry must face many painful and torturous struggles. The Jewish poet-as well as the true historian and sociologist-must contend with many facts. He must realize that the Jews are not a unified whole; that there has been a serious disintegration in Jewish religious, national and cultural life; that it is not possible to speak of Jewry as a homogeneous entity except in terms so broad that they lose their validity; and that despite what some call the salubrious effects of fascist terrorism on the inner Jewish consciousness, there has been no marked resurgence of physical or spiritual unity. Faced with all this, it is not sufficient for the Jewish poet to laugh rapturously or to weep piteously. His is a creative mission; he has a message to impart, he must bring courage and strength to the hearts of all men-or at least to those of Jews.
>
> Klein, however, has no answer to the challenge that confronts the Jewish artist. Instead-he turns to the past which, seen in a dimmer perspective, eliminates the diffuseness which the picture of contemporary life presents and creates the illusion of that compactness and unity which the artist ever strives to capture. Hence Klein's nostalgia for medievalism and his fascination for it-for that era when the word Jew had a simpler connotation than it has today; for that period when the Ghetto set definite boundaries to Jewish aspirations and as a consequence, produced a certain homogeneousness.[5]

Though his last review is patently over critical, it is obvious to the biographer that A. M. Klein's continued involvement with the Jew and "Jewish problem" is at the same time a creative and destructive occupation. Whenever he

starts with himself, his own feelings and observations and treats them poetically with restraint, he writes good poetry. Whenever he attempts by some flight of Romantic hallucination to slip into some halcyon age of past Jewish glory, he feels compelled to shed his critical faculties with the other modern impedimenta and so though his escape is often accompanied by some good lines, he is often left wandering alone in some no-man's-land, deserted by the muse of truly great poetry; for, this last can only be found when solidly grounded in reality.

Klein's submergence into the deep dark lake of the Jewish people was accelerated by economic factors. If his law practice gave him time to write poetry (in which occupation he would gladly have spent his days) it fell short of providing sufficient sustenance for the growing family.[6] The muse, too, in an age wherein poets are square pegs, unwanted by society's round holes, did not provide bread along with inspiration.

Oliver Goldsmith had written the Vicar of Wakefield to keep the pot boiling. Klein found that his poetry did not sell enough to keep the landlord happy and was forced to earn a supplementary income through less creative writing.

In 1939, Rabbi Bender, editor of the Canadian Jewish Chronicle, returned to England for a two-month vacation. During this time, Abe wrote the editorials for this supplement to the Canadian Jewish Eagle. He continued to submit potboiling articles and the occasional editorial until 1943 when he became the editor. He often translated

from Bialik's Sefer Agadah and poetry for the Chronicle, Jimmy Wise's Opinion, and Chaim Greenberg's Jewish Frontier.

It was because of friendship with the elderly pioneer in Canadian Jewish journalism, Harry Wolofsky, that Klein became and remained associated with the Chronicle. The old man had been the first one to give him a dollar for his costume on Purim when Abe had been a little boy and Abe was long to remember it.

Max Wolofsky, the present publisher says of Klein, who could come in unprepared and in no time dash off an editorial, "Abe was a genius, but he knew it". There was only one man in the composing room who could read Klein's hahdwriting and Wolofsky said that his editor "was a great one for using classical allusions-Latin and Greek-sometimes we couldn't make them out and just changed them around".

The part-time position paid eighty dollars a month and went up to one hundred dollars where it stayed fixed. Dan Wolofsky who first met the poet when he filled in for Rabbi Bender was obviously impressed by him. He described him as, "At home in everybody's company-from grey-bearded orthodox rabbis to....scum-always the life of the party." And yet, his strongest association concerning Klein is of, "a proud man who became bitter; his sorry lot to become a socialist." The poet's big frustration, according to Wolofsky was that he felt that people were using him-" The community calls on me when they need me, I lecture, I raise money but they forget I'm a lawyer." The publisher remembers that "He used to say, 'I need a cheque-I can't

break the line'-the bank-book line, that is, he didn't want to withdraw money, always worried about a book. Even when he eventually bought the home (on Querbes Avenue) he was annoyedthat he had a mortgage--someone else owned the home till he payed it up."

When I mentioned these reminiscences to the poet during the summer of 1958, he said, "I never had any complaints about my income." Regarding the Jewish community, Klein said, "They owe me nothing. Whatever I did, I didn't do because I expected the Jewish community...I was part of the Jewish community."

His next two volumes which were published in 1940 were written at this time. The Hitleriad, published by New Directions is a deep-rowelling satire 'cataloguing the Nazis and their crimes'. The sharp biting poem is reminiscent of the style of Donne's satires. Dryden wrote concerning the latter that "John Donne for the not keeping of rhythm deserved hanging." Dr. Hayward, editor of the Everyman's edition of Donne notes with great insight that the jar in rhythm often serves as a useful device in communicating the acid punch of satire. Klein's Hitleriad certainly uses this jar powerfully, if,too frequently.

At the beginning of the poem, the author deplores the fact that though he would rather write poetry than polemic, he, "the grandson of the prophets" feels impelled by anger and indignation not to "seal lips against iniquity." Many of his friends and Canadian men of letters would rather he had remained silent. The book was almost universally

derrogated as poetry though it is powerful polemic. Perhaps it shares the inadequacy of all literary efforts to come to grips with the overwhelming horror of Hitlerism. I feel that it is mostly in the lack of classical restraint that the poem falls short. Even Klein's sharp wit fails to raise this biting indictment to the level of poetry which by heightened language and strong imagery might far better convey the horror than his fustian Senecan lines. In satire, often the well-directed stilleto is more lethal than the clumsy saber-swipe. "The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates." "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion."[7]

A far better attempt to deal with the European tragedy, entitled, "In re Solomon Warshower", appears in his volume Poems also published in 1944. At one point in the poem the poet has the embattled Jew who is surrounded by torturing Germans and Poles cry out:

> Whom have I hurt? Against whose silk have I brushed?
> On which of your women looked too long?
> I tell you I have done no wrong!
> Send home your children lifting hardened dung,
> And let your curs be hushed!
> For I am beard and breathlessness, and chased enough.
> Leave me in peace, and let me go my way...

In the midst of his protestations, Klein has:

> It was at this point the S.S. men arrived.
> The Jew was interrupted; when he was revived,
> He deposed as follows:

Through this method of juxtaposing the Jew's passionate

appeal with terse statement about the Gestapo, by suggesting with restraint and letting the reader fill in the subhuman German cruelty, Klein is far more successful in conveying a powerful emotional sense of black tragedy.

The volume in which the poem appeared was published by J.P.S. Lewisohn whom the Klein had met before, asked them to come to Burlington, spent the day there with them and was instrumental in its publication. Though the book also contains a romantic narrative poem, "Yehuda Halevi, His Pilgrimage", the best poetry is the, "Psalter of Avram Hakteni", an obvious translation of the author's own name. Particularly meritorious are the series of movingly beautiful poems alluding to his own nuptials and the traditional marriage ceremony. The thirty-six Psalms, including Petrarchan and Elizabethan Sonnets and a host of various difficult forms such as terza-rims, do,indeed, comprise an effective modern psalter.

Psalm IX is subtitled, ' a psalm to be preserved against two wicked words':

> I am not of the saints, O Lord, to wear
> The broken shoes of poverty, and dance.
> For I am made sick at heart with terrible fear
> Seeing the poor man spurned, looked at askance,
> Standing, his cap in hand, and speaking low,
> And never getting his fellow's heart or ear.
> O may I never beg my daily bread,
> Never efface my pride, like a dirty word;
> And never grovel that my little chick be fed.
> Preserve me from poverty, O Lord.
> Preserve me too, and Thou knowest hearts,
> Know'st this prayer does from the heart arise,
> Preserve me from possession, from the marts,
> The mints, the mansions, all the worldly goods,
> Debasing even the man of noblest parts.

From too much wealth that warps the very saints,
From power that ambushes the soul by stealth,
From suzerainty that fevers, and then faints:
Preserve me, Lord, from wealth.

But in Thy wisdom Thou canst so ordain
That wealth and poverty be known no more.
Then hadst Thou answered me, again and again,
Answered Thy servant, neither rich nor poor.

Perhaps, even more moving is the cry of the modern intellectual faced with the tensions and anxieties that produce so many 'nervous breakdowns'. Psalm XXII is an eloquent prayer against madness:

Lord, for the days allotted me,
Preserve me whole, preserve me hale!
Spare me the scourge of surgery.
Let not my blood nor members fail.

But if Thy will be otherwise,
And I am chosen such an one
For maiming and for maladies
So be it; and Thy will be done.

Palsy the keepers of the house;
And of the strongmen take Thy toll.
Break down the twigs; break down
the boughs.
But touch not, Lord, the golden bowl!

O, I have seen these touched ones-
Their fallow looks, their barren eyes-
For whom have perished all the suns
And vanished all fertilities;

Who, docile, sit within their cells
Like weeds, within a stagnant pool.
I have seen also their fierce hells,
Their flight from echo, their fight
with ghoul.

Behold him scrabbling on the door!
His spittle falls upon his beard,
As, cowering, he whines before
The voices and the visions, feared.

Not these can serve Thee, Lord,
if such

The stumbling that awaits my path-
Grant me Thy grace, thy mortal
touch,
The full death-quiver of Thy wrath!

Some of the tensions operating within A. M. Klein are readily apparent. Intellectually,he has discarded the naive faith of his father and forefathers. Emotionally, he is constantly trying to fill this vacuum usually by unconsciously slipping back to the more secure childhood associations. Intellectually, he admires what is classic- in poetry but a contemporary poet calls him, "A Romantic mind, limited, orthodox, sensitive-the last lost Romantic."[8]

Klein admired and wished to emulate Joyce, Eliot and Yeates-for their "incomparable technical skill" but the deeper motivation for his selection of these 'moderns' may be that they are logical, legal and even pilpulistic- to understand them you have to look at the commentaries. At the same time as he was engrossed in reading the rebel Joyce, Abe would slip in the Yavne synagogue, a half-block from where he lived and relax doing a page of Talmud with whoever was there. He wanted to write poetry, but constrained by financial difficulties he tried to practice law. Although active in the community, lecturing and working for Zionist causes- he wasn't in demand as a barrister and his law practice was far from lucrative. Klein the poet was forced into journalistic pot-boiling to make ends meet. His publisher noted that Abe was polysyllabic-would never use a two syllable word when a bigger one could be used. When

asked sometimes to simplify an editorial, Abe would say, "Let them go to a dictionary and rise to my level, I'm not going down to theirs."

A friend says of his relationship to the Jewish community in whose work he was so involved- "In private he made disparaging comments about these 'balabatim', the reception groups, the businessmen. Yet he never allowed this to enter his poetry. He would disguise this contempt, rationalize it. Abe was inhibited from destroying this image even if it meant the destruction of his own personality. The lack of freedom-this is his tragedy."[9]

The sensitive young man who wanted to write poetry and who had the genius for it was thus forced into law- at which he was not successful while lesser men waxed rich. He ghost-wrote speeches. He lectured for the Ganadian Jewish Congress. He edited the Chronicle; in short, he felt himself (though he won't straightforwardly admit it) wasting away often, away from beloved poetry in search of a satisfactory living for his wife and children.

In 1943, he was offered what looked like a way out of the evertightening straight-jacket of overpowering peripherial pot-boiling work. It was moreover a way out with honor. Dean Cyrus McMillan, who had been Klein's own teacher, was now the head of the English Department at McGill University. He asked A. M. Klein to teach English 100: The basic course required by all students. In addition, Klein was made 'visiting lecturer in poetry' and taught modern poetry at the

university. Perhaps because unlike a good teacher, A. M. Klein didn't relate well with his students, perhaps because he always held much of himself back, or because his creative mind found the work boring and he was not interested in the repetitive process, he only taught at McGill for three years.

The early 1940's were then years of tension and disappointment. The middle years of that decade were, however, to be years of great promise-indeed of fulfillment. Abe was to bloom as the brightest blossom in a new garden of Canadian poets.

N O T E S

CHAPTER III - CRISIS

1 A. M. Klein, Hath Not a Jew (New York , 1940), p.6.

2 Ibid., p. 71f.

3 Leon Edel, Poetry, A Magazine of Verse (1940), quoted by Steinberg, "The Stature of A. M. Klein, Distinguished Canadian Writer", Canadian Jewish Review (Montreal, December 13, 1957), p.14.

4 L. Dudek, Canadian Forum (vol. 30, April, 1950),pp.10-12.

5 L. Benjamin, "A. M. Klein", Canadian Jewish Year Book, 1940-41, p.161ff. Mr. Benjamin's criticism is, I feel, unfair. Many brains have tackled the problems of modern Jewry and posited many different solutions, some perhaps closer to that desired by the reviewer. The Poet is, however, not necessarily a paid propogandist and is under no obligation to provide anything but poetry. For Shelley was wrong-poets are not the "legislators of the world".

6 A second son, Sandor, named after Mr. Koslov, Bessie's father, was born on April 3, 1941.

7 T. S. Eliot, as quoted by David Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature (Englewood Cliffs, 1956),p.243.

8 Irving Layton, Conversation withe the author, 1958.

9 Ibid.

C H A P T E R IV

In 1943 a new and vital influence began to permeate the Canadian literary scene, Montreal's poetic intelligentsia gathered around John Sutherland who as "a sort of persistent continuous storm centre" [1] sponsored a series of little magazines. Sutherland at the time got hold of a printing press, set it up in a dusty room on Craig Street (in Montreal's Bowery), and printed a publication called, First Statement. Around it clustered Irving Layton (who was married to Sutherland's sister, Betty-a well-known Canadian artist), F. R. Scott, A. J. M. Smith, Patricia Page and many others.

The editors of Canadian Poems 1850-1952 say the following about this group:

> Around 1940, the poets of the thirties joined with those of a younger generation to bring about a second outburst of newpoetry, this time fired with leftist politics and Freudian psychology. Stimulated by the anti-fascist character of the war, Patrick Anderson fresh from England, combined the rhythms of Dylan Thomas with the ideas of Karl Marx to produce a score of exciting poems. He was, however, a middleman of the English poets of the thirties to the Canadian poets who had not yet heard of them rather than an original force himself. Much of his work today seems ostentatiously figurative, diffuse, and unconvincing. P. K. Page, a gifted poetess, placed a neurotic sensibility at the service of a unique talent; her poems are disturbing in their combination of insight and innocence. Other poets of the period included Ronald Hambleton, James Wreford, Miriam Waddington, Raymond Souster, and the two editors of this collection. These turned a sharp critical eye at contemporary social life: poverty, neurosis, racial discrimination. The 'general

> tradition' which had been responsible for a vast amount of insipid magazine and newspaper verse was rejected by these poets. They scorned inhibition and pretence; their language was frequently coarse; but there was an honesty and seriousness to them that could not fail to engage all but the incurably timid. They wrestled with new ideas and experimental forms. Theywent to school with the contemporary British and American poets. They learned from Auden, Spender, Thomas, Fearing, and Kenneth Patchen. But they were never merely imitators, and they understood perhaps better than the older generation of romantic poets that the writing of good poems is difficult and can be dangerous; that poetry, in brief, no less than religion, has its martyrs and saints. This activity centered in the magazines Preview, First Statement (now Northern Review), Contemporary Verse, and Direction.
>
> Canada now had its "little magazines" in which the poets could try their skills. Several anthologies, Other Canadians, Unit of Five, and A. J. M. Smith's Book of Canadian Poetry have placed on record this poetry of the forties. Today, this movement continues with undiminished strength, in the magazines (including the new arrival, Contact, which publishes the present anthology), and in new books like Reaney's The Red Heart, and Cerberus.[2]

A. M. Klein was jolted by what was going on; the world seemed to be opening up. There were new philosophic, intellectual and literary influences. He responded for a glorious while. An erudite man, he reacted to the new attitudes and emotions and quickly grasped the techniques. Indeed, he became the brightest luminary of the group.

He stopped writing the previous Jewish poetry; this marked the end of his 'Jewish phase'. It appeared that he would burst from the cramping effects of his background and associates about whom he previously made disparaging

comments. Klein was still earning twenty-five dollars a week at the Chronicle at the time he entered his second and most creative phase - the 'French Canadian'.

There was much in the life of the 'Habitant'[3] to commend it to Klein's interest. The poet, conscious of an old tradition himself is respectful of that of the 'Canadian'. His description is penetrating and sympathetic; though, now and again, his razor-like pen cuts deep and his criticism of the naivete' of the simple Habitant and those who exploit him, draws blood. Klein, the Jew, became in fact the master interpreter of French-Canadian life and his little volume, "The Rocking Chair" a landmark in Canadian letters.

Malcolm Ross had the following to say in his review of the Rocking Chair:

> ...In his poetry Klein has come close to creating an archetypal Canadian pattern-a dense organic fusion of traditional idiom, ancient myth and cult, the contrapuntal dialectic of our French-English relationship, the sophisticated technical reach of man alive in this age and in whom all ages are alive.[4]

And Charles Bruce, the noted Ottawa poet says that in Klein's earlier verse we hear the vows and see the living flesh of the poet's Jewish inheritance. In the Rocking Chair and other poems he does the same thing for Montreal and Quebec and of course, himself. "This is not parochial, it is merely that Montreal and Quebec are parts of a world that Klein knows best; his characters are not merely

Quebecers; they belong to the human race."[5] A selection from the volume was distributed by the Canadian Jewish Congress with a French introduction by Jean Marie Poirier, the literary critic of La Presse, and received an excellent review by an official Catholic publication, which noted particularly his felicitous phrasing.[6]

Indeed, as a consequence of the Rocking Chair, Klein twice made the august pages of the Times Literary Supplement:

> The basic stock is Anglo-Saxon but other races, daily increasing through emigration, are providing significant elements in the national character; the evolution of this character should be interpreted in poetry. One poet, Mr. A. M. Klein, has already attempted such an interpretation, and his work is among the most impressive of recent years. Mr. Klein was born and lives in Montreal and in his poetry are fused three traditions, the Jewish, the English, and the French Canadian; and the deep and subtle comprehension lent him by this fusion is illustrated in his last and finest book of verse, The Rocking Chair and Other Poems...[7]

The next year's edition contained this paragraph:

> Mr. A. M. Klein's The Rocking Chair still remains the best interpretation of French Canada by an English poet. His awkward use of language well fits his subject matter.[8]

What the Times calls "awkward use of language" is really a priceless advantage. Klein's comprehensive knowledge of French helps him find the right word and is invaluable both in creating the impression he desires, and in evoking the atmosphere and presence of Montreal, two thirds of whose residents are French. One might say that

the author's English is Gallicized. In a poem called, "Montreal", in which he strives to achieve a "billingue-faction", this ability is most clearly manifested.

> Grand port of navigations, multiple
> The lexicons uncargo'd at your quays,
> Sonnant though strange to me; but chiefest, I,
> Auditor of your music, cherish the
> Joined double-melodied vocabulaire
> Where English vocable and roll Ecossic,
> Mollified by the parle of French
> Billinguefact your air!
>
> Such your suaver voice, hushed Hochelaga!
> But for me also your potencies,
> Fortissimos of sirens fluvial,
> Bruit of manufactory, and thunder
> From foundry issuant, all puissant tone
> Implenishing your hebdomad; and then
> Sanct silence, and your argent belfries
> Clamant in orison!

In the volume's title poem, The Rocking Chair, Klein has masterfully captured the spirit, pace and mood of the slow conservatism of Quebec life. He seizes upon this ubiquitous item of furniture and describes the family life which centres around it:

> ...To its time, the evenings are rolled away;
> And in its peace the pensive mother knits
> contentment to be worn by her family,
> grown up, but still cradled by the chair in
> which she sits.
>
> It is also the old man's pet, pair to his pipe,
> the two aids of his arithmetic and plans,
> plans rocking and puffing into market-shape;
> and it is the toddler's game and dangerous dance.

Klein then moves to using the chair as a symbol for Quebec and its people:

> ...it is tradition. Centuries have been flicked

> from its arcs, alternately flicked and pinned;
> It rolls with the gait of St. Malo. It is act
> and symbol, symbol of this static folk
> which moves in segments, and returns to base,-
> a sunken pendulum; invoke, revoke:
> loosed yon, leashed hither, motion on no space.[9]

One of the sights of Montreal no tourist is permitted to miss is the Shrine of St. Joseph, a bowl-roofed edifice perched upon the northwest slope of Mount Royal. The deformed from all over the province come flocking to it, climbing up its myriad steps on their knees and stopping at each station to recite the appropriate blessings. Innumerable crutches left behind, at least temporarily, not needed, testify to the efficacy of the 'Oratoire' to which a bus brings new pilgrims every three minutes. Klein's masterful summary is entitled The Cripples.

> ...How rich, how plumped with blessing is that dome!
> The gourd of Brother Andre!...
>
> ...Whither the heads, upon ninety-nine stair trays,
> the palsied, who double their aspen selves, the lame,
> the unsymmetrical, the dead limbed raise.
>
> Their look, their hope, and the idea fixe of their maim,
> knowing the surgery's in the heart. Are not
> the ransomed crutches worshippers? And the fame
>
> They know, they know, that suddenly their cares
> and orthopedics will fall from them, and they
> stand whole again.
>
> Roll empty away, wheelchairs,
> and crutches, without armpits, hop away!
>
> And I who in my own faith once had faith like this
> but have not now, am crippled more than they.[10]

Thus does Klein sadly include his own emotional reaction after having described the cripple-pocked stairs of "St. Joseph's ladder."

In contrast to Klein's sympathetic approach to the French-Canadian, F. R. Scott expresses in the following little poem the aggravation of the Protestant Anglo-Saxon:

Bonne Entente

The advantage of living with two cultures
Strike one at every turn,
Especially when one finds a notice in an office building;
"This elevator will not run on Ascension Day";
or reads in the Montreal Star:
"Tomorrow being the Feast of the Immaculate Conception,
There will be no collection of garbage in the city";
Or sees on the restaurant menu the bilingual dish:

DEEP APPLE PIE

TARTE AUX POMMES PROFONDES

Klein is one of the world's greatest commentators and authorities on the writings of James Joyce. He is influenced by the Joycean ideas of combining words. Joyce attempted to convey a total vision of life. He, thus, began his trilogy by attempting to directly evoke childhood in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. "Once upon a time there was a moocow coming down along the road and the moocow that was down along the road met a nicens little boy named Tuckoo."

With an opulently symbolic presentation of old age and death, Finnegan's Wake concludes thusly, " and it's old and old it's sad and old it's sad and weary I go back to you my cold mad father, my cold mad feary father, till the near sight of the mere size of him, the moyles and

moyles of it, moananoaning, makes me seasilt saltsick and I rush, my only, into your arms." Between them his style, progressively more complex, parallels the development of the maturing mind. The symbolism is laden with more and more meaning yielding upon exploration further meaning in a clarity of continuous discovery.

Unlike Joyce who utilizes a juxtaposition of a number of syllables whose sound and appearance in print is supposed to evoke the desired thought or emotion; with Klein it is always a sensible combination. He joins two words which are so closely related that the intention is obvious, such as "hamsin" or "subzeros". In the following poem he felicitously coins a word, "Josephdream".

Grain Elevator

> Up from the low-roofed dockyard warehouses
> it rises blind and babylonian...
>
> But even when known, it's more than what it is;
> for here, as in a Josephdream, bow down
> the sheaves, the grains, the scruples of the sun
> garnered for darkness: and Saskatchewan
> is rolled like a rug of a thick and golden thread.

"Klein has not been untouched, I think by the less happy effects of the attempt in modern poetry to get away from easy sound patterns and flat diction. Only a completely matured independence escapes the ill effects of T. S. Eliotism. When in The Sugaring, Klein talks of the "ichor of dulcitude", and, telling of the little golden brown cakes of sugar which the French Canadian farm women

make in their kitchens in the spring sunlight, says-

> And the pious pour unto the honeyed dies
> the sacred hearts, the crowns,
> thanking their saints for syrups of their dying,

When Klein writes in that strain, challenging though the strain is, he seems at least one remove from the grace and ease of first-rate poetry. But Klein's scope is broad and his insights sharpened again and again into arresting beauty. His work will stand anywhere. In a little piece called, Dress Manufacturer: Fisherman, he sees his man dangling the thread of his preoccupation... into the stipple and smooth of natural things. That alone is enough to mark him a poet."[11]

This last line cited with such praise by Prof.Phelps never fails to remind me of the line from Thomas Hood which alone makes of him a poet for me. In describing a sweat-shop, Hood wrote of the workers, "sewing at once with a double thread, a shroud as well as a shirt." The Klein poem is rooted in familiar Montreal phenomena. Almost all Jewish families spend the summer in the Laurentians. "The mountain air will be good for the kinder". Father comes up on weekends and the children anxiously await his companionship while fishing and their chance to show him how well they can row to some good spot they've discovered. When grown up, the erstwhile children, now with their own offspring, try to recapture their own carefree pre-adolescent summers. It is of these weekend idylls, "Far from the lint and swatches,

among lillies," that Klein has written.[12]

Another poem of Klein's concerning someone at recreation in my estimation merits his being ranked with the literary best of the twentieth century. The images in the following lines are masterful; the distinguishing marks of a genius, they paint the picture of a "Lone Bather";

> Upon the ecstatic diving board the diver,
> poised for parabolas, lets go
> lets go his manshape to become a bird.
> Is bird, and topsy-turvy
> the pool floats overhead, and the white tiles snow
> their crazy hexagons. Is dolphin. Then
> is plant with lilies bursting from his heels.
>
> Himself, suddenly mysterious and marine,
> bobs up a merman leaning on his hills. [13]

The Rocking Chair and Other Poems includes a beautifully descriptive poem occasioned by the famous view from atop the "Lookout: Mount Royal", and a poem entitled simply "The Mountain" wherein the author captures and expresses magnificently the memories of half of Montreal's younger Jewish generations by writing of his own recollections,- from the days frollicking among the dandelions in secret pockets shielded by trees, through the riotous times we had aiming snow balls at the nude figures of the monument near Rachel Street to the free band-concerts where an impecunious youth might take a girl who was sufficiently attached to him as to enjoy without sneering the poor-man's floor show.

"Pastoral of the City Streets" is a poem which deals with the "meadows of macadam", wherein played these

children too poor to summer in the Laurentians. Using Biblical repetition like, "Glares the glare," rather than adjectives, for emphasis, Klein writes an ecologue of the city, where the only horses are dray-horses, where:-

> On curbrook and on stairstump the clustered kids
> resting let slide some afternoon; then restless
> hop to the game of the sprung haunches; skid
> to the safe place; jump up; stir a wind in the heats:
> laugh, puffed and sweat-streaked.
>
> O for the crystal stream!
>
> Comes a friend's father
> with his pet of a hose,
> and plays the sidewalk black
> cavelike and cool.
>
> O crisscross beneath the spray, those pelting petals
> and peas
> those white soft whisks
> brushing off heat!
>
> O underneath these acrobatic fountains
> among the crystal,
> like raindrops a sunshower of youngsters dance:
> small-nipplied self-hugged boys
> and girls with water sheer, going Ah and Ah.

The 'Hero' of the book is not Montreal-the city, but its inhabitants-in the main French Canadian. It is of them that Klein writes; it is their life that with delicacy and accuracy he depicts.

His range is broad, from the gentleness of the "Sisters of the Hotel Dieu" to the despair of the multi-class patrons of a "Quebec Liquor Commission Store". Klein categorizes the law students of the Universite de Montreal who though frivolous now, "warp and wrinkle into avocats". He foresees their forsaking their "innocence and fun" for "the fees and

fetters of career" becoming "solid men...haggler and schemer and electioneer". In a poem entitled, "The Spinning Wheel" he begins what seems to be a poem in the mode of his own "Rocking Chair", or Adjutor Rivard's celebrated "The Cradle". But Rivard piously concluded:

> O God do Thou bless the houses where the cradle is held in honor! Bless these hearths where many a birth comes to cheer the ancient cradle and bring it perpetual youth! Bless the families who hold in reverence the virtues of former days, to the glory of our Church and our Country!" 14

Klein's poem, however, as it continues, snappingly bites at the old alliance of church and seignory which still exploits the Habitant.

Even more strikingly in contrast to Rivard, the French-Canadian, is Klein's "Annual Banquet: Chambre de Commerce":

> ...Quebec: the place for industry
> Cheap power, cheap labor,
> No taxes (first three years),
> No isms (forever).
>
> Verso, the guest beheld; and smiled;
> Photograph of Mr. and Mrs. Damase Laberge
> on the occasion of their 25th wedding anniversary,
> surrounded by their children and grandchildren
> to the number of thirty-two; from left to right...
>
> O love which moves the stars and factories...

There are those, among the subjects of the author's candid portraits, whom he treats gently, or wistfully as he does the proprietor of "Librairie Delorme".

> Monsieur Delorme...Stooped and with doctoral beard

he is all anecdote and courtesy,
one who loves bindings and the old regime
that in his mind is gobelin'd fleur de lys
and in the chapel of his speech revered.
Nonetheless seems at peace with the con-
queror's state,
is casual, diffident, a-political;
and from his manner you would never dream
he was a man was putting up for sale
his family heirlooms and his family plate.[15]

The heart of Klein, the bibliophile, the lover of tradition, the sentimentalist, goes out in sympathy to his French-Canadian brother.

Shadows and shadings are deeper when the author portrays the lonely spinsters in a fine poem entitled, "Les Filles Majeures".

Evenings, they walk arm in arm, in pairs,-
as if to emphasize their incompleteness,-
and friendly together make an ambiguous form,
like a folded loneliness,
or like mirrors that reflect only each other.

And in the daytime, they are aunts; they pet,
they censor their sisters' children, take them for walks
help them with their privacies, and buy them presents,
It is baby talk
and precocity that is their topic, their event.

Their life is like a diary, to be filled...

Klein's claws hidden behind his sensitive gloves of civilization scratch a little as he portrays "The Notary", a professional made important by the B.N.A. Act which granted Quebec as its civil law the Napoleonic Code. The traditional 'good family' always numbered among the brothers (one of whom became a priest, one who ran the family enterprise) a notary to better facilitate and ground in tradition

and legal flourish, the milching of the naive Habitant.

The man whose father worked in a sweat-shop and who drove a bus to pay for his education really thrusts out with masterful form at the Paris-educated supercillious French upper class type in a poem entitled,"M. Bertrand." Its hero who

"stalks deaf and hungry
among the barbarians who were never seasick"

winces with pain at the vulgar patois of the gauche "Canadiens" and lives for the occasions when he is visited by a classmate from the Sorbonne upon whom he lavishes:

"jowl-kiss, hand-kiss, and other kisses Parisian."

Klein does not spare the poor Habitant who becomes a toadie or a thug for the regime which is noted for its political control of lucrative liquor licences and a rough, club-wielding political organization. In a poem entitled, "Monsieur Gaston", he describes a neighborhood tough;' the scented Gaston', a poolroom habitue; for whom everyone predicted a bad end-

In clover now. Through politics Monsieur Gaston.
They say the Minister of a certain department does
not move
Without him; and they say, to make it innocent,-
Chauffer.
But everyone understands, Why, wherever our
Gaston smiles
A nightclub rises and the neons flash.
To his slightest whisper
the bottled rye like a fawning pet-dog, gurgles.
The burlesque queen will not undress
unless Gaston says yes.
And the Madame will shake her head behind the
curtain rods
unless he nods.
A changed man, Gaston; almost a civil servant,...

Perhaps the best example of the precise scalpel so incisively wielded by Klein is his disection of a "Political Meeting (for Camillien Houde)" who was interned for fascist sympathies during the war but was so beloved by the French people that he was overwhelmingly re-elected Mayor of Montreal. Houde, a very bright man was well read and fluent in classics and English but he would capitalize on the fact that he was monstrously fat, affect a heavy French Canadian accent and maintain the pose of a country-bumpkin so that the English citizens entertained by this apparent simple clown never organized, never realized how shrewd and dangerous he was, and never fought him very hard.

The poem begins with a description of the meeting hall, the speakers on the school platform awaiting their glass of water, and-

...Upon the wall the agonized Y initials their faith.

> Here all are laic; the skirted brothers have gone.
> Still, their equivocal absence is felt,like a breeze
> that gives curtains the sounds of surplices.

With a brilliant image, describing the ubiquitous crucifix, which lends authority, Klein sets the scene. The priests who are ostensibly 'apolitical' are present at the beginning lending ecclesiastical sanction. They leave early loosing the audiences restraints;

Next, begins the singing of what is almost the Quebec anthem, <u>Alouette:</u>

> suddenly some one lets loose upon the air
> the ritual bird which the crowd in snares
> of singing

catches and plucks, throat, wings, and
little limbs.
Fall the feathers of sound,...

The chairman arises full of witty asides and the loud-speaker carries the demagogue's harrangue to the throngs who could not get in to sit-

(Outside, in the dark, the street is body-tall,

flowered with faces intent on the scarecrow thing
that shouts to thousands the echoing
of their own wishes)...

And then, the main attraction-

The Orator has risen!

Worshipped and loved, their favorite visitor,
a country uncle with sunflower seeds in his
pockets,
full of wonderful moods, tricks, imitative talk,

he is their idol: like themselves, not handsome,
not snobbish,...

He jokes with them intimately, pricks the opposition, laughs also at himself-

in the third person, slings slang and winks with
folklore;
and knows that he has them, kith and kin.
Calmly, therefore, he begins to speak of war,

praises the virtue of being Canadien,
of being at peace, of faith, of family,
and suddenly his other voice: Where are your sons?

Tearfully the master demagogue-plays on the theme of French-Canadian 'autonomy'-hints the clever English are to blame.

Where are your sons?
The whole street wears one face,
shadowed and grim; and in the darkness rises
the body-odour of race.[16]

After writing of the demagogues and the exploited of the French-Canadian minority, Klein turned to an even

smaller group: "Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga". Here, too, close to Montreal, he found a group with a heroic past, a rich tradition of a prior 'golden age'.

> Where are the braves, the faces like autumn fruit,
> Who stared at the child from the colored frontispiece?
> And the monosyllabic chief who spoke with his throat?

How the mighty have fallen? The gloried splendour of the fierce Iroquois is not to be seen in the squalor of their reservation. The only thing exotic left to them is the name Caughnawaga. Rotting frame houses and curio shops of dying wood-that is the harsh reality.

> ...With French names, without paint, in overalls,
> their bronze, like their nobility expunged,-
> the men. Beneath their alimentary shawls
> sit like black tents their squaws; while for the tourists
> brown pennies scattered at the old church door,
> the ragged papooses jump, and bite the dust.
> Their past is sold in a shop: the beaded shoes,
> the sweetgrass basket, the curio Indian,
> burnt wood and gaudy cloth and inch-canoes-
> trophies and scalpings for a traveller's den.
> Sometimes, it's true they dance, but for a bribe;
> After a deal don the bedraggled feather-
> and welcome a white mayor to the tribe.
> This is a grassy ghetto, and no home.
> And these are fauna in a museum kept...

After writing about the 'Vanishing Redman', A. M. Klein moved to the smallest minority of all, in our age- the poet. Mr. Herbert Read, in a recent book, Phases of English Poetry , says, "The poet makes his signals to a numb and indifferent body." In other words, there is no audience for the modern poet.[17] Concerning Klein's magnificent analyses, Charles Bruce (himself a fine poet and novelist) writes;

"'Portrait of the Poet as a Landscape' is much more than a portrait; it is clinically revelatory as successful cutouts in an old-fashioned 'Doctor's Book'. First the flesh and successively the circulatory system, bones, organs, and intestines." 18

In a review for Saturday Night, L. A. MacKay wrote: "It admirably combines balance of judgment with resolute intensity of convictions. It is an incisive and open-minded criticism, equally free from illusion and irresolution, of the place alloted to the poet in the modern world, and the places poets have allowed themselves to take or attempted to make for themselves in that world."

The poem ends with Klein talking to himself like a comforter to the bereaved:

> These are not mean ambitions. It is already
> something merely to entertain them. Meanwhile,
> he makes of his status as zero a rich garland,
> a halo of his anonymity,
> and lives alone, and in his secret shrines
> like phospherous, at the bottom of the sea.

Whether Klein with this paragraph wrote the eulogy to his poetic life I don't know. Except for a few pieces in the appendices to, "The Second Scroll"(many written earlier) he turned to prose and has lately published very little (if any) poetry.

A fellow Canadian poet remarked concerning Klein's poetic journey from minority to minority that "He's got to have a lost cause-a Sir Walter Scott in 'tzitzis'. A journey down a funnel-ever narrowing-into a cul de sac- to an impasse". 19

When A. M. Klein himself was asked to comment on this analysis he responded, "I never regarded myself as a particular champion, just a commentator."

Louis Dudek sums up his view of the literary contribution of A. M. Klein in the following paragraph:

> A fecund writer, Mr. Klein has produced five books, each of them as idiosyncratic as his own signature. In the tragic history and martyrdom of his people, he has found a powerful subject to hand-and the gifts of wit and imagination, it should be added, to make use of it. It is to the frail, the insecure, the disappearing, the what-was and-will-no-longer-be, that Mr. Klein habitually addresses himself and from which his poems derive their infectious charm. They have the charm, the slippered urbanity, of reminiscence, of pathos, of the happy stories one tells oneself when one is alone and sad. For Mr. Klein has consistently written about hard-pressed minorities romantically fighting for survival-Jews, French-Canadians, Indians, poets-in that order of fractional distillation-in a prosaic and heedless world. His best poems are full-bodied and civilized and have the arresting excellence of verve, originality, and compassion. His recently published, The Second Scroll, (a novel) and The Rocking Chair, (second edition) are landmarks in the history of Canadian letters.[20]

Certainly, to this observer, no better poetry has been written describing Quebec. He remains the most perceptive writer in English on French-Canadian life. Arthur Clutton-Brock wrote that one could not always produce great lines and it is the frequency with which they occur in Shakespeare that marks him as immortal in English letters. The Rocking Chair and Other Poems demonstrates an incidence of poetic phrases that genius-like is seldom paralleled in the twentieth century. In form, Klein is a marvelously

creative innovator following in the tradition of Hopkins (Joyce) and Eliot. Partly to increase the richness of language, partly to better evoke the subtle relationships between images and ideas, Klein makes good use of alliteration, assonance, internal full-and half rhyme and subtle vocalic scales which Hopkins called. "Vowelling on" and "Vowelling off". Equally striking is Klein's genius for compounding words to make new and distinctive wholes. Indeed, almost all critics would agree that in quality his work is premier among Canadian poets of his generation. Along with the universal acclaim accorded to The Rocking Chair, A. M. Klein received a further, and justly-deserved tribute: He was awarded the Governor-General's Award for Poetry.

N O T E S

CHAPTER IV - RESOLUTION

1 A. Phelps, Canadian Writers (Toronto, 1951),p.115.

2 L. Dudek and I. Layton, ed., Canadian Poems 1850-1952 (Toronto, 1952),p.15f.

3 French-Canadian

4 M. Rose, Canadian Forum (January,1952), p. 31.

5 Charles Bruce, Canadian Poetry(December,1948),pp.32-33.

6 Les Cornets Viatoriens (Joliette, P.Q., January,1948), published by the Priests of St. Viateur. "Voila une chansons d'exceptionelle valeur. Son accent sobre et emu, tendre et pourtant viril, interesse humblement a tout l'object de la vision circonvoisine, son sens de l'aspect poetique et du mot qui l'exprime, tout cela touche l'ame et rejoit l'esprit."

7 The Times Literary Supplement, (London, Nov. 5, 1954).

8 The Times Literary Supplement, (London, Aug. 5, 1955).

9 A. M. Klein, The Rocking Chair and Other Poems (Toronto, 1948), p.1.

10 Ibid., p.10.

11 A. Phelps, Canadian Writers, p.117f.

12 A. M. Klein, The Rocking Chair...,p.20f.

13 Ibid., p.37.

14 A. Rivard, "The Cradle", A Pocketful of Canada (Toronto, 1948),p.16.

15 A. M. Klein, The Rocking Chair...,p.44.

16 Ibid., p.15f.

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17 Quoted by A. Phelps, Canadian Writers, p.112.

18 C. Bruce, Canadian Poetry (vol.12, Dec.,1948), pp.32-33.

19 I. Layton, personal conversation, August, 1958.

20 L. Dudek and I. Layton, ed., Canadian Poems...,p.15.

C H A P T E R V

In 1948, when Klein was awarded the Governor-General's medal for poetry, it came at a most fortuitous but fortunate time; for A. M. Klein was in the midst of a campaign to be elected as C. C. F. (Labor Party) Member of Parliament for Montreal-Cartier.

The poet had been most inactive politically for many years but acceded to the request of his old friend, David Lewis, and ran for election in Cartier.

The constituency he sought to represent should have been an ideal one for a poet and scholar active in the affairs of the Jewish community. Cartier was, in the main, the lower middle class ghetto. There were some French Canadians who resided there and a goodly number of Slavs but the majority of the registered voters were Jewish needle-trade workers and their families.

It had been Cartier which had elected Fred Rose as the lone Labor Progressive (communist) Party Member. I remember how, in that campaign, every Jewish house had been canvassed by L.P.P. workers who explained that Rose was bound to receive a certain percentage of the 'die-hard' communist vote (particularly that of the Slovaks) and that unless the Jewish community voted for him 'en-masse', Masse (who was labeled an anti-semite) of the Bloc Populaire Party would win.

As a result of this hard fought campaign, Rose was

elected and proceeded to reward the faith of his Jewish constituents by becoming entangled in a Russian Espionage scandal exposed by the defeated file-clerk, Igor Gouzenko. Fred Rose was impeached and sent to the Federal Penitentiary where he served out his seven years as a librarian. The Jewish electorate of Cartier felt the stigma of his conviction and suffered the consequent reputation.

As a consequence of Rose's impeachment in 1946, a By-Election was held wherein the electorate of Cartier signified its dissociation from left-wing politics by overwhelmingly electing Maurice Hartt, the standard-bearer of the Liberal Party, (then the government by an astronomically popular mandate).

In opposition to Hartt (running for re-election), Massé, and Guy Caron the L.P.P. candidate, the C.C.F. ran the well-known community figure, A. M. Klein. The socialists did not have giant campaign contributions, and Klein, with the help of small loyal committee, (particularly Steve Perkel, Norman Margler and Bea Silcoff of the hat-makers-union) did most of the work. Max Garmaize came down from Royen to spend a few weeks managing the campaign and Sam Chate, who was not interested in politics, worked strenuously, but the brunt of the campaign fell on the shoulders of Abe Klein.

Klein was constantly at the offices of the influential Jewish paper, The Eagle, trying to enlist their aid. He had long been associated with the paper as editor of the

Chronicle and was particularly close to the elderly publisher, Harry Wolofsky, who, now ailing, left much of the policy making in the hands of his sons.

Max Wolofsky remembers with gratitude that a year later, when his father died, "Abe Klein was raising money for 'Congress' in some God-forsaken town in Saskatchewan (actually Brandon, Manitoba) when father died, and sat right down and wrote a beautiful editorial." Besides wiring his tribute, A. M. Klein spoke at the "Haskora" a month later, after 'Shloshim'. Earlier, he had translated Harry Wolofsky's autobiography, The Journey of my Life, and Of Jewish Music-Ancient and Modern, a book by another Eagle editor, Yisroel Rabinovitch.

But during the election, though Klein would passsionately request support, the Eagle remained a Liberal paper. Perhaps because Leon Crestohl, since then elected as M.P. for Cartier and already active in the Liberal Party at that time, was married to the publisher's daughter, the Eagle, though it didn't attack Klein, 'strung along with Hartt.'

With this influential support, Maurice Hartt, a rough, hard-hitting practical politician, fought a knock-down campaign. Born, like many of his constituents, in Europe (Dorohoi, a small Roumanian town) Hartt had previously been a Member of the Provincial Legislature and stressed his practical experience as opposed to Klein's ivory-tower record. With the full backing of the well-stocked Liberal campaign coffers, supporting speeches by cabinet ministers,

and running in a district ashamed of its national reputation as "red", Hartt was elected over his socialist rival, A. M. Klein.

Though, in reminiscing, the defeated candidate might say, "The campaign was exhilerating; I really didn't expect to win", in truth, he had invested heavily emotionally.

Many acquaintances remarked that he was bitter over the Jewish community's rejecting him who had labored so long and hard in their vineyards. "The Romantic in Klein was shocked when the Jewish community failed to elect him, poet, scholar, honorable man."

So the father of three (a daughter, Sharon, had been born in 1945) who had the genius and the desire to write poetry, found another escape-door from his unsuccessful law practice had been slammed in his face.

The expense in time expended was also close to bankrupting. Klein had long admired the writings of Joyce. Professor Arthur Phelps says of Klein that, "It is a part of his equipment as poet that he is one of the English-speaking world's most studious and authoritative interpreters of James Joyce."[1] In 1947, Klein had begun to write a book on Joyce. He delivered two papers before the Joyce Society in New York.[2] The election interfered with his completing the work.

Irving Layton remembers Klein's loss as follows:

> He had written several excellent essays on Joyce, but didn't have time to finish the book. He ran for Parliament. Someone else caught the insight and Klein lost his feverish race against time. He was heartbroken; he reproached himself for publishing the essays.

The nature of Klein is such that when I asked him about his work on Joyce he could not consciously express any disappointment. In a vein similar to all his far from bitter, semi-humorous answers to questions about some of his life's frustrations, he said, "I toyed with the idea of writing a book on Joyce, I was in the midst of writing an article when the election came up...Time disposes." He had not the time. He pointed out that he had laid the grund-- shrift for someone to follow.

In his review of The Loved and the Lost, a novel by Morley Callaghan, Professor A. Phelps has written of a strange parallel to the life of A. M. Klein, writing of the heroine, Peggy, who becomes the symbol of an innocence the world must destroy because it cannot live up to it, he says:

> At that pivotal point in the novel, McAlpine is offered a moment when he and he alone could be the one man with complete faith in Peggy. He has a chance, through his faith in her, to commit himself to what she really is. But, with a self-deceit which makes evasion seem moral, he fails her.
>
> 'I understand' she said gently. There was a silence. With a compassionate understanding, she was letting him keep his belief in his good faith.
>
> But she had a new calmness. She raised her head with a shy dignity. The loneliness in

her steady eyes and the strange calmness revealed that she knew he had betrayed himself and her, and that at last she was left alone.

That, I think, is the core of the book. Peggy is too unstudied, too honest, too friendly for the world of jealousy, suspicion, evasion and duplicity she tries to live in. It isn't that she is innocent of the ways of the world in a negative sense. She knows all about that world. She is innocent in the sense that, having accumulated knowledge of good and evil, she remains innocent of evil. Foley, the cynical newspaperman, who introduces Peggy to McAlpine, says - "Don't you like meeting someone fresh as a daisy..? We may end up believing the dew is still on the grass."
Foley doesn't give up his cynicism. but he makes his tribute. Wolgast, the Jewish proprietor of a popular bar and night club who had come up the hard way to what he considered a place in society, lined up ultimately with the forces that destroyed Peggy because one day she brought a friend, a young Negro, into his bar. "Why did she have to pick on me?" he asked. McAlpine answered him out of his faith in Peggy, this time that faith standing its test. "Because she knows you and likes you and thinks you have no prejudices...it was her tribute to you as a human being." Then he added: "Which the whole of history compels you to take as an insult." But Wolgast knows where the issue lies for him. If he lets her in, "Soon I'm running a nigger joint," he says, "and I'm through."

...Between playing periods, McAlpine bumps into a little priest enthusiastic about the game, but he only sees again, imaginatively, with his deeper vision, Peggy in the priest's confessional, Peggy saying, "I confess to the Almighty God and to thee, Father. I confess to having no sense of discrimination-I confess to not keeping my love for the right ones..." And with bitterness he hears again in his deeper mind the priest saying, "My dear child, it's complicated. You must not be a nuisance..."[3]

The 1948 election was a similar pivotal point in the relationships of A. M. Klein. The Jewish community was offered a moment it and it alone could have manifested complete faith in Klein but the only response Klein, the

idealist, the scholar, the socialist, received was, "my dear child, it's complicated. You must not be a nuisance..."

The electorate of Cartier, indeed the heart of Montreal Jewish community for which Abe Klein had long toiled, did not return the same interest and concern for their own poet's reputation and life as he had manifested in their welfare. There were some, however, who were insightful enough to recognize his great gifts. The Canadian Jewish Congress and its president, Sam Bronfman, remained interested in Klein and what he had to offer the community. Mr. Bronfman had made a fortune in the distillery business partly because of his great gift for recognizing what talents a man had and how much the organization could benefit from his specific contribution. He had brought this talent with him when he became interested in the social welfare of the community. As president he converted the Canadian Jewish Congress into an efficient, smooth-running organization.

Immediately after the election, under their auspices, Abe made arrangements to go to Europe and Israel. It was a critical time for World Jewry-a new state was born and Zionist Montreal was interested in what would be the lucid Klein's comments. He did not disappoint them for out of this trip Klein was to produce a novel, The Second Scroll. The novel was published in 1951. The years between the trip that proved to be its inception and its publication were spent in other trips. Tours for the Zionist campaign throughout the country were the erstwhile poet's occupation. After his return from Israel he made a

cross-Canada trip for the U. J. A., and spoke for Abba Hillel Silver in Cleveland as well as at Los Angeles, Florida and St. Louis.

Dan Wolofsky remembers that "Klein lectured on twenty or thirty subjects and commanded a big fee." Irving Layton, speaking of the sponsored lecture tours on which Klein was a "money collector for congress", says that, "being a domestic-type, Abe was very unhappy."

This impression of Layton's is corroborated by Wolofsky who says of Klein: "Though, the man did like feminineity and a raw joke and ordinary gutter conversation of you know what I mean...a strong streak of lust...still, he was a domestic-type. Characteristic of Abe...He was in Paris all alone, congress paid all expenses; the itinerary called for three or four days. He moved heaven and earth to get a plane out...When he was lecturing for J.D.S.., he was offered six thousand dollars to go to Australia to lecture; he turned it down." Thus, Abe Klein the poet whom his neighbors remember as taciturn and symbolized by the tightly buttoned collar and bow-tie-even on the hottest days, but, who, in his own words was "never shy on the platform" was very unhappy on his lecture tours.

His novel, "The Second Scroll" tells of his search for his uncle Melech Davidson through Europe, its D.P. camps; through the mellahs of North Africa to Israel. He never quite catches up to this uncle for he arrives in Palestine only to find his uncle, the first casualty of the

birth-struggle that followed the exodus of the British, and a martyr become "the symbol of the Yishuv's sense of outrage."

The novel operates on two levels. On the symbolic level, Melech Davidson=King Solomon=the Jewish people (as foreshadowed by his usage in "In Re Solomon Warshawer"). The author's companion on the airplane is in reality-the assimilated businessman, the Monsignor in the book stands for the intellectual priest of the Church-Militant. The plot itself symbolizes the Diaspora.

One reviewer says of the book, that there is present a unity of characterization, like an old-fashioned melodrama. The hero-Melech- is all white and pure. Like Dickens it is brilliant characterization stretched almost to the pale so that it verges upon caricature.[4]

The reader to whom the book was submitted was Maurice Samuel. He was very enthusiastic about the book and it was published simultaneously by Alfred E. Knopf in the United States and by McClelland and Stewart in Canada. The reviews reflected his enthusiasm and were generally very fine. In The Nation, Harvey Swados wrote: "The most profoundly creative summation of the Jewish condition by a Jewish man of letters since the European catastrophe."[5]

Prof. W. Steinberg's review of Klein's novel follows:

> The framework of The Second Scroll is a simple and moving tale of a young journalist's search for a long lost uncle who survived the Nazi holocaust in Europe. The author makes extensive use of symbols so that the story becomes in effect an allegory, relating the modern Jew's search for identification with his people, and his attempt to re-establish

> himself in the Judaic tradition. At the same time, through inter-related symbols, Klein suggests that the search is also the Jewish people's quest for Zion. Not only do the contemporary historic events culminating in the establishment of the Jewish State provide the background for the story, but the symbolic interpretation of the event, reveals the climatic fulfillment of the yearnings of a people.
>
> It is not without reason that this book has been called a neo-Zionist novel. The novel is Zionist, but also religious; for Zionism, in the framework of Klein's novel, is an expression of the Jewish religious spirit. Though it was given impetus by the monstrous anti-semitism of our day, it was conceived and has been maintained in the category of holiness. The achievement of the miracle of the return, made possible in part through the vile agency of the Nazis gives the author a new insight into the question of evil. This question, which has always troubled religious thinkers, runs through this book, as it did through many of his poems.

Professor Steinberg also notes Klein's remarkable description of the Sistine Chapel in, "Gloss Gimel",one of the many appendices to the book. He adds that "In the vigor of his language, his fondness for compounding and telescoping words to create startling and desirable effects, as well as in the richness of allusion, Klein reveals that he has assimilated successfully some of the technical achievements of James Joyce, an author he has studied and admired.[6]

Though an artistic success, the book received some reviews damaging to its popularity and discouraging the normal reader of 'Book-Club novels' from buying it. Indeed, less than ten thousand copies were sold. In the Montreal

Gazette, for instance, their influential book critic, Roy Kerwin, bewailed:

> The stories he tells are of average Jewish people; the language he uses is far above average.
>
> The most irritating thing for me, a Gentile, in reading Klein, is that Klein is writing only for Jews. His talent is too great, too powerful, too fine to be so jealously directed. Couldn't he write for us too?

This review reminds us of the earlier criticism (quoted in a previous chapter) of another poet and well-known Canadian man of letters, Louis Dudek. Professor Dudek had written that, "Klein's religious poetry belongs to his earliest stage of development," but that afterwards he had directed the core of his creation towards a realistic and cosmopolitan view. Hath Not a Jew and the other poetry on Jewish themes, concluded Dr. Dudek, are consequently "not a response of the whole personality, but the idealism of a growing mind, a romantic expression of boyhood loves." The Second Scroll, for Louis Dudek, would be a regression. The world of literature might have expected more of the accomplished poet who manifested consummate mastery of poetic form and theme in The Rocking Chair.

Irving Layton, who noted with great pleasure Klein's responding for a little while to the new influences on Canadian literature that made themselves felt in 1943, felt that Klein, withdrew; could not break away from his family background and childhood associations. He noted a parallel with Klein's favorite author, James Joyce.

Klein came from a Jewish background and did not accept Orthodoxy. Joyce stemmed from a Catholic background and did not accept Orthodoxy. Both have the same background as, in private, Klein often expressed his disenchantment. But Joyce freed himself from bondage; he made the journey as a free man. Klein got the letter of Joyce-but not the spirit.

The Second Scroll was tremendously influenced by Joycean techniques-time-bombs on page 3, 15 etc...yet unlike Joyce, after rejecting the false solutions, Klein still ended up by accepting the old answer of his youth. He couldn't permit himself to be free. Layton concluded that Klein "could have been a challenging critic, but ends up parochial, Impasse!"

Perhaps the answer is apprehended by the writer in the Times Literary Supplement who applauded so bountifully The Rocking Chair. Earlier in the article he wrote:

> Unlike the United States with her "melting pot" of races, Canadians come into their own when they acknowledge their various racial and cultural backgrounds. The most distinctive Canadian social trait since the last war is the acceptance not only of the 'two nations' but of 'others' as well. This encouragement for multiple face has produced paradoxically, a strong desire on the part of the newcomers to conform. Take any boatload of immigrants; the Germans, Italians, British, Dutch, will head towards those cities where a community of their countrymen exists. In due course, the newcomer will speak an English that is colorful, vigorous and made distinctive by a syntax patterned on the community's native tongues.
>
> Not only is the changling language one of the Canadian writer's greatest assets but the continual arrival of immigrants (to quarters where

> neighbors have lost their European characteristics and taken on North American values) provides him with a 'centre of tension'. For many of the present generation see history visibly repeating itself, while their parents see, in the newcomers, reminders of themselves as they once were...[7]

Perhaps living in a 'centre of tension' was too much for the sensitive mind of A. M. Klein and he was overcome by conflicts and anxieties. Perhaps, his life contained too many frustrations.

In 1952 Klein translated and adapted a play of Maurice Schwartz's with an unusual twist-audience participation (like theatre in the round). He scheduled a big tour and ran ads.- It opened in Boston, was panned by critics and ran one night. Max Wolofsky recalls that this was a "big blow to Abe. He had exerted a great effort and had expected to make a lot of money."

Perhaps this disappointment culminated a life of frustrations for Abe Klein. We have seen him unhappily doing a great many things he didn't want to. He wanted to be a scholar and a poet; he had the necessary talent, even genius; but one tragic flaw led to unhappy consequences. The age did not really appreciate a poet, and even a poet, driven on by the urge to create, must, in the milieu of Philistines, earn a living for his wife and children.

Abe Klein- goes into law.

He ghost-writes.

He edits the Chronicle.

He lectures to unresponsive students.

He runs for Parliament.

He projects a book on Joyce.

He lectures for the U. J. A.

ALL WERE UNHAPPY EXPERIENCES.

His books were critically well received. In June of 1957 he received the Royal Society of Canada medal for his distinguished contribution to Canadian literature. But, the public didn't buy his books and they were financial failures. Klein's themes are evernarrowing battles for minorities: first the Jew, then the French-Canadian, then the Indian, eventually the poet, and finally regressing back to the Jew.

Perhaps this life, of frustration, of living with tensions till they overcame him, is what forced A. M. Klein into his present non-creative hibernation; perhaps he will soon rouse himself and again startle the world with the blinding light of his flashing genius.

One would imagine that it is compounded frustration rather than background that has driven Klein to his den on 'Querbes Street' from which he rarely emerges. Mordecai Richler, the brilliant young novelist now writing in England stemmed from the same background but was not inhibited; he dared to strike out; whereas, Klein, Hamlet-like, compromised till he lost all ability to act. A. M. Klein retreated into his shell. He said that he would come whenever F. R. Scott or Smith or Layton invited him, but he never showed up. His old newspaper cronies report they never see

him and when requested for a review of a few lines for the jacket of the Hadassah book-A Treasure for my Daughter, Klein was very insulted and shouted a NO that could have been heard without the telephone. When Folkways Record Company pressed a disk entitled, "Six Montreal Poets", Klein after promising to appear didn't showup. So, they were forced to use an old recording made when he was lecturing at McGill.

It is ironic that among the few friends who persistently stood by Abe Klein, was Sam Bronfman, the tycoon. To this day, A. M. Klein, poet, socialist and idealist is on the payroll of Distillers Limited-his capacity-"Public Relations".

N O T E S

CHAPTER V - TRAGEDY

[1] A. Phelps, Canadian Writers (Toronto, 1951), p.117.

[2] These were later published as critical essays: A.M.Klein, "The Black Panther", a study of Joyce in Accent (Spring, 1950), pp.139-155. A. M. Klein, "A Shout in the Streets", an analysis of the second chapter of Joyce's Ulysses in New Directions in Prose and Poetry (1951),pp.327-45.

[3] A. Phelps, Canadian Writers, pp.15-17.

[4] J. A. Scullion, "Klein, A.M., Etude et Critique", M.A. Thesis, Universite de Montreal.

[5] H. Swados, "The Second Scroll," a review in The Nation (Nov. 3, 1951).

[6] M. W. Steinberg, "The Stature of A. M. Klein", Congress Bulletin (Montreal, Jan., 1958), p.2.

[7] The Times Literary Supplement, (London, Friday, August 5, 1955).

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