

My Village in the Ukraine

By Moishe Olgin
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Alex's Notes for this 2005 edition

- 1) The page breaks and page numbers of the Esther Ritchie translation are kept in this edition.
- 2) This edition is the full translated Esther Ritchie version, except for pg 12 – 14 for which I merged a section translated by Leo Miller.

Forward

By the time this was written in 1921, Moishe Olgin's (the author) 1st cousin Mordecai Novaminsky and his wife had been beheaded in the Pogroms, their heads wrapped in a Torah. By 1921 all of Mordecai's children, his full siblings and all of their children, and 3 of his half brothers had all fled Ukraine. By the end of 1921 the last of Pinchus Novaminsky's family had escaped to Rumania on their way to the United States. Moishe must certainly have been acquainted with tens of people killed in Pogroms. This entire essay describes Buki as it was in peace (M. Olgin had last seen Buki 8 years before writing this), but there are two references to the Ukrainian Pogroms (probably 1918 – 1921) (End of pg 3, pg 42 – 43).

1

My Village in the Ukraine

It is 25 viorst (0.66 of a mile) from my village to the station. You leave the train, and from all sides, you see the wide, green and yellow fields. You can notice that the station is only a reddish spot in the middle of God's expanse. You suddenly feel at home and warm in your heart. The driver is already here. He's waiting for passengers. He greets you with a Sholem Aleichim, with an expression as though he knew you were coming today. You sit down in the wagon. The wheels turn over in the soft, warm sand. The bells have a velvet ring to them. Suddenly, the station and the train aren't there. From both sides stand walls of corn. Blue flowers mix in with the gold tones of the corn. When you go over the fields, the stalks would hit you in the face or even reach over your head.

The wagon turned right and suddenly appears the side of a hill which is split by long stripes which run from the top of the hill to the river. One stripe is wheat, the other corn, another oats, another flax.

The wheat is reddish-yellow, the corn has a pale green shimmer, the oats shine like silver, and the flax is sky-blue. The field resembles a seldom seen rainbow. Below, a river runs through the tall, dark, grass-Otshereten. Over the river, lies a hunched over bridge, like a joke. Above lies the sky, stretched beyond who knows where in the world. It is warm, the sun shines, the horses aren't in a rush.

One could take a snooze, a light, sweet one, during which you'd feel the fields, also the smell of grass, the pollen, and the flutter of a bird in the grass. You would feel lucky - a pleasure. But the driver hasn't seen you for a few years, and he must converse with you.

A smart Jew – Layzer. A Talner Jew. He knows everything in the city. He knows what's cooking in everyone's pot. He has a joke or witticism for everything. And he loves to talk. He is like Yidl the storekeeper, or Lipa, the scholar, they're all from the same cut and you can tell them apart from the Jews in other villages. They're all the same and love to talk.

Layzer, the driver, has a long neck and is very knowledgeable. If the wagon gets stuck in the mud, he squeezes underneath with his shoulder and gets results. When he walks, he sways from side to side, like a peasant. When he says giddyup or whips the horses, there is something peasant-like about him, but he speaks like a Torah scholar. He occasionally quotes the Posek or Midrash and one thinks: where did this come to him from?

While you're discussing the village, its people, the crops, the military, you pass through several small villages, where the streets are empty and only chickens are sitting on fences in the shade.

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You ride up and down hills. The road stretches like a graceful ribbon. In one spot, water runs over flat rocks, and Layzer stopped the horses there. The water is so clear, that the rocks look like sculptures. At the edge, there grow "Forget-me-nots", and somewhere, a horse is neighing and a scythe in clanging. It's so quiet that your ears ring, or are those crickets?

You ride further. Only one more hill - and you see the village on the other side of the river, as though it was pressed into the ground. You think that someone sprinkled blue, green, yellow, and white boxes and they fell into a pretty pattern. It stretches from the river below to the top of the hill. Maybe even further, but you can't see, because of the sky.

The boxes are the roofs of the houses. In my village, we cover the roofs with tin and paint them as we wish. Thus, the village is lit up with various colors. Here and there, trees stand near the houses so you get a picture dotted with greenery.

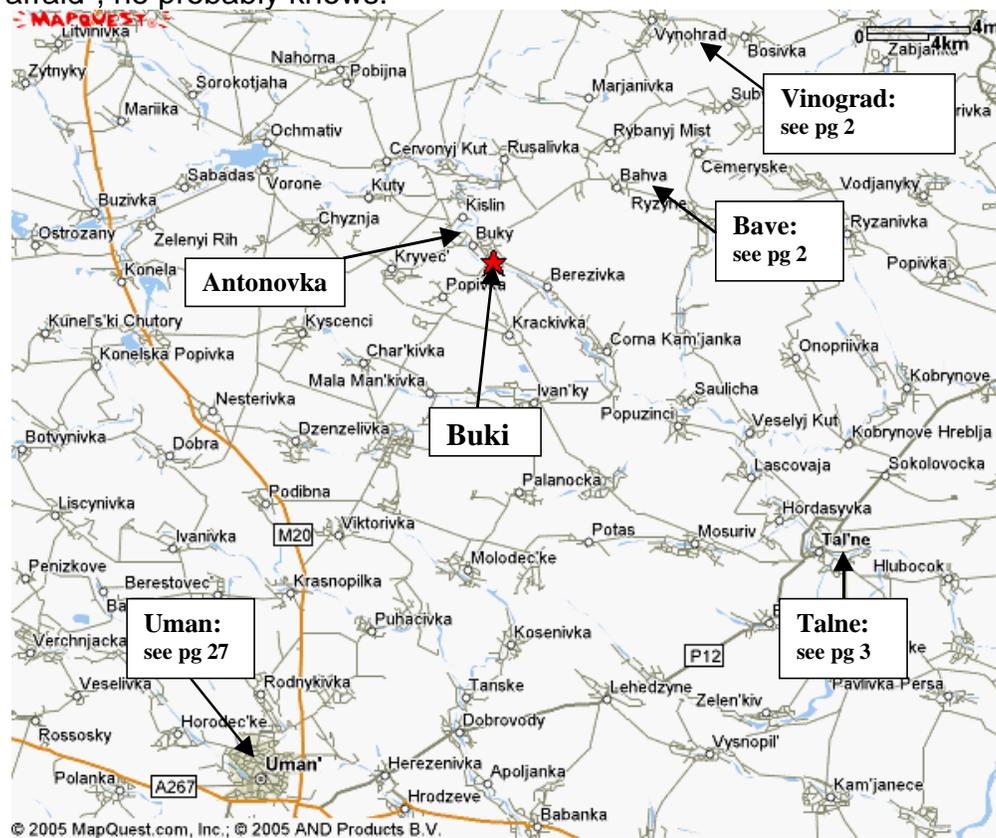
The driver goes slowly downhill to the bridge, and you have time to judge the village. You can read it like a map. Those two long green rows are shops which are in the center of the market. Opposite them are a group of houses - Abraham Koretzky's inn. other inns, and the large clothes store. On the other side, in a corner, the synagogue surrounded by fences. A little further, the cluster with green towers.

On the hill, live the Gentiles. Over there, past the apothecary, the road goes to Bave and Vinograd. On both sides of the road stand old, tall, poplar trees which you can see from here. There are many stories told about those trees.

Down below, one finds the road to Antonovka. There, in the middle of the river, stands the big "Krupshatne" mill. When you pass the brick bridge beyond the mill, you are in the forest...

(NOTE: Antonovka is about 2 km northwest of Buki, but not found on the map below. Around Kislin)

The driver stopped at the river because near this bridge, it's always muddy in winter and summer, and you can barely get the wheels out of the mud. The bridge itself hangs by a miracle. It has no railings and is very narrow. Two wagons can barely fit and it looks like it's sinking in the water. When you pass over, you hear the boards squeak, and you feel like you're sinking. But when Layzer says "Don't be afraid", he probably knows.



2005 Map of Kiev Region showing "My Village in the Ukraine" Buki (a.k.a. Buky)

You're already over the bridge. The road into the city is windy and rocky. There are forges on both sides and you can hear hammers clapping. Sparks are coming from the smoky ovens. Here and there, you see a horse on a chain between poles. Two workers hold his hoofs upright and the blacksmith himself hammers in the nails. Further up, you can smell the iron. This is the street of the blacksmiths. Each trade has its own street in

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my village. I don't know why, but people in similar trades like to live near one another. Perhaps this

was because of the Gentiles.

Every Sunday, there was an open market. The Gentile would come to the village to shop. He knew that the merchants were here.

On the hill, on the other side of Torhovitza, were the builders who made wheels and wagons. Below, on a side street, lived the leather crafters. If a tradesman were to settle elsewhere, the Gentile wouldn't find him. Therefore, they were forced to live near each other and compete for their daily bread. Such was the Jewish luck. To make a living from the Gentile, and learn how to handle him.

After another two-three streets, the market opens up for our vehicle. We have arrived. We are truly in the heart of the village.

But how quiet it is! That's the first thing you feel here. In Talne, you can always feel the commotion, people running around busy and sweaty, In here, it's quiet. It is 35 viorst from Talne. It only gets a little busy when the Gentiles come on Sunday. During the week, there's no reason to run around. The Jew in this village isn't a runner. He is a refined person. Even a pauper knows he's somebody. A village Jew loves to look at everything with a philosophical smile. For every evil or good, he'll have a comment.

The village is quiet. It is already sunset. Gold dots reflect from the few houses against the last rays of the sun. The market breathes with loneliness, as though a misfortune occurred and everything was hiding. Our bell rings in the empty market and fits in with the scary atmosphere. It arouses a little life and here and there, a window opens and a head looks out: who is riding? On a balcony, near a house, an old Jew makes a circle with his hands over his eyes in order to see better. Two boys, running by, suddenly stopped to look at the arriving guest and then ran on. A few youngsters came out of the synagogue. It's now after Mincha, so they're standing and asking, "Who can this be? Someone we know?"

In a minute, they're wishing each other Shalom and words and jokes begin flowing.

One side of the sky is reddish. Stars become visible. The ovens in the houses are lit. Soon, I'll be home....

Oh! Ukraine, Ukraine! It was such a nice home, such a happy corner. What did you do to us? What have you against us?

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HUMOR, JOKES, CLEVER HEADS-ONE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH HIS BRAINS

The Jews of Sokolov were good eaters. They had, how does one say, "A knack for eating". The Vinogradiers were always sleepy; Talne had a lot of lawyers who liked to sue everyone; Ivanker Jews were of no use to either God or man; The Jews of my village were big "Shtukares".

A "Shtukar" is one who loves jokes, words, tricks. For a joke, he would disown his parents. A joke, witticism, a jest, would be repeated with wild enthusiasm, and never be forgotten. You could hear the greatest nicknames in my village. Many of Sholem Aleichim's witticisms were born there. The saying, "Pitsh.patsh, Ih Nikakich" were heard in my village even before he wrote "The Sukkoh" and the "First Commune".

The old Jewish woman who complains for the doctor that her head hurt, it pushes under her heart, her back is breaking, her feet are bending, and besides this, she isn't healthy - this was thought up in my village.

Only what good is a thought up old woman to you? Here is Ari Wolf, a doer in the burial society and the sexton. If there was a corpse, then he would put a price on the burial, and then the bargaining began. When the price was disputed, Ari would itemize, so much for the shrouds, so much for the casket, so much for the candles today, the cake and brandy for the whole society. After itemizing everything to the last penny, he would ask innocently, "What happened to the original price"? This was repeated throughout the village and people didn't stop kvelling over it.

Or maybe you heard of Miriam Favalatcherin? Her first husband deserted her and went to Kire (Estreich). He enlisted and became a sergeant. He was a healthy young man, blood and milk, enjoyed each day, and forgot that he left a living widow. Eventually, his wife realized that he wasn't coming back, so she went looking for him, from city to city, country to country. She lived from donations until she finally found her bargain. The young man soon agreed to a divorce - what did he need her for? But meanwhile, one couldn't be a scoundrel, so he took her to a restaurant and treated her to a meal. At the meal, they served a bottle of port wine. The sergeant poured his wife a glass of wine and when she tasted it, she said, "I don't know how one drinks such bitter wine". The husband sips the cup and answers, "Look here, this is how one survives in a foreign land".

So, the words, "This is how one survives in a foreign land" became a saying in our village.

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In the summer, the sun is shining like a fire on the village. You could die from heat in the market. The sky is pale like ash and it is like the market died. All the shutters are closed.

Even the scholars became weary and went to sleep. A few prankster even snuck out to the river. At the edge of the river, they meet: Yankel the water-carrier, who hitched his horse to a tree. He covered his cart with a sack so his merchandise wouldn't get ruined from the sun, while he lay in the shade and took a nap.

The whole village is sleepy and you couldn't see a living soul. However, the stores had to remain open. It was the rule not to close any shop during the day, so the shopkeepers were sitting and sweating, catching flies and trying not to fall asleep. So, a few of them gathered at Herschel Abraham Yankel's store and told stories. They discussed good Jews, among which included the Lubomirskys, the dukes (who own the village), Laybzy Dyzyk, the recluse, the miracles of a doctor in Talne who performs operations of which there are only one in the world. They discuss people in their home. They conversed about things that may or may not have happened with exaggeration and poetry, but most of all, they loved the short and strong magical stories.

For example; take Itzhak Yehushe, a talented scholar, who is also a God-fearing person. Understandably, he goes to the Rabbi for the High Holidays. In the Rabbi's house, prays a cantor and choir. However, during the Mincha on Rosh Hashonna, the Rabbi asks one of his followers to lead the praying. Once he honored Itzhak Yehushe with this request and his mother's milk escaped from his body. A joke - be a messenger for a congregation of Jews - and when? On Yom Kippur, when even a fish shivers in water - and where? In the Rabbi's house, for such a group of followers. How can he do this? Such a sinful person, made only of dust and ashes. How can he be worthy enough to stand in the Rabbi's, in the name of truth? How can he have the clean conscience and soul to pray for the congregation on Yom Kippur? Perhaps, he might shame the people of Israel? Perhaps his prayers might not please those who live eternally? Today is a day of Atonement - Jews must ask to be sealed in the Good Book. So, he goes to the Rabbi, shivering, and with a pale face and says: "Rabbi, I'm afraid!" The Rabbi smiled and said, "Silly one, who else would I send? One who isn't afraid"?

People have repeated this story hundreds of times and kvelled from the shrewdness.

And here is another Jew, whose name I already forgot. For years and years, he prayed Mincha and Meyriv in an unholy Shul. He was a plain Jew, only

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he had the right to pray for the congregation in Shul. So, they decided to build a new Shul, a magnificent one. They tore down the old one and the new one took 2 years to build. It turned out to be the Temple of Jerusalem. The high walls, stained glass, the sculptured Holy Ark, the names on the wall. Really a stately house of worship. You could fit 10 old Shulen in this one. When the building was done and the congregation came together to pray Mincha for the first time, they called out to our Jew to go up and pray, he looked around and answered, "No, I won't pray: the Shul is too big for me".

The Jews in my village love speculation and arguments, sharp tongues and keen minds. More than this, they like a witticism, a humor, a joke. When one of our Jews speaks to you, you don't know if he's serious, or joking. He would even make humor of his own troubles. "He's laughing through tears", they would say behind his back. But he's laughing, nevertheless.

I think my village had more humor, than the Jewish borders. Through humor, a Jew would rid himself of his problems and keep his self-esteem. Life came hard and making a living was like a celebration. Those who had professions were like celebrities.

Thursdays, when one gave his wife money for Shabbes, was like a day of celebration. Before Pesach and before Rosh Hashanah was like the splitting of the Red Sea. To pay a tutor for a son was accompanied by a stomach ache. To marry a child came with green worms. Things always got worse and the outlook was always sad. Each person had a soul and their brain worked too hard. In my village, each Jew had more brains than meat on the bones, more sense than blood in the veins.

So, his brains showed him the laughter surrounding him. His head told him that he and his small worries and daily constant tragedies, are a piece of mockery. Therefore, he laughed at others and at himself.

Before you laughed at someone else to his bones, you had to know whom you were laughing at. In my village we knew each other like from the same skin. Thank God, we had more than enough time. No Jew could hide from another. Each house and school stood open, like they were made of glass. Everyone looked into each other's bowl, each other's pot, each other's bed. Everyone knew each other's smallest secret, and everyone talked, made jokes, played tricks, and made up stories with reckless abandon.

When I think of my village, I see the tragedy of a people who were oppressed. A whole folk who were cut off from the fountain of life. You had a healthy mind and nothing to do with it. You had a sharp eye, but the horizon was narrowed, nothing to see. One had great talent which went unused. One had a hunger for work and the hands were tied. With the talent and the energy, a desert could have become a blooming piece of land, while here it

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was wasted on subjects like the cabbage business, or a shop which caters to three customers. The Jewish mind and wit had no challenges, only with itself, so it became as sharp as a slaughtering knife. Well, a village Jew is like a village Jew; our own knew how to clip another's wing. How does one say in the village: you don't let one spit in your kashe. But if a stranger fell in, his life was not to be envied. He would come out upside down. "Better in Gentile hands than in Jews' mouths", is a saying here. Among all the Jewish mouths, our village was the sharpest,

Speaking of talent which goes to waste, here's an example: Shmuel Goodshtein. I'm sure that a great mathematician was lost in him. For a fact, I know that he knew algebra, geometry, and trigonometry better than the teacher in my high school. How did it come to him? He loved it. He devoted time to figuring out problems because of the enjoyment. He learned it from Hebrew books, and when someone gave him a problem, he would have to rewrite it with Jewish letters - Aleph's, Beyz's, Gimel's - but there was no problem he couldn't solve, one two, three. His head worked with amazing dexterity and was one of the sharpest in my village. He knew the sayings of the judges and prophets, read Spinoza and other philosophers - all in Hebrew. He had the levellest head among all the village Jews and from what did he live? Only God knows.

Once, in his younger years, he was an employee in a store, but when I knew him, he went around idle. He was a handsome Jew, a fastidious man, clean, exact, had the face of a silky young man, though he was already in his fifties. For days and months, he did nothing except sharpen his mind on unnecessary things. Up to this day, I don't know from what he lived, (though it wasn't much of a life). I only know that once, for several weeks, he was an arbitrator. If Jews had a problem with a religious law, involving disagreeing parties, they would rely on his knowledge to find a solution that would please both sides. He would make a few cents from this, but what would he have accomplished if he would have had a place for his talent!

ARTISTS, SINGERS, PLAYERS, POETS THE LONGING FOR BEAUTY

My village loved beauty. My village longed for people who distracted them from everyday life. My village noticed and appreciated festivity.

An old Jew from my village, a distant relative, told me how they built the big synagogue. With a special fondness, he told me how they made the repository of the Holy Scrolls which was carved out of copper and silver. This repository was about three aisles wide and stretched from the ground up to the ceiling. It was adorned with leaves, grapes, lions and eagles. My relative told me that he saw them hammer this whole scene with his own eyes.

Three Jews came to the village from a far city. Three pious Jews. They did not look like craftsmen. They were very learned and respected. You couldn't really call them craftsmen because they were artists. They would take a sheet of copper or silver, put a stud between their fingers, and you could see a pigeon, a snake, a leopard. In order to do this, one had to have a special gift. They worked in the synagogue and I would stick to them and watch their artistry. I imagined that, in them, was the spark of Bezalel.

In time, they warmed up to me and spoke to me. They were good people, not conceited. I once took myself to heart and asked the oldest how one went about learning how to hammer out living things. He answered that it is not possible to learn this talent: one must be born with it. He himself, can hammer out scenes of everything he sees. Even a bird flying in the air, he could hammer out in gold or silver. He could also paint it with a pen and it would come out like a living thing...

There are blessed hands in the world, my relative would say with a sigh, and he longed after the big world, where there was so much beauty. He didn't realize that perhaps he was reaping as much poetry from this repository as other people reap from art galleries. The point is not how much you see, but how much you enjoy what you see. In our village the only artwork - the repository of the Holy Scrolls - gave generations of Jews the rich blessing of beauty.

In the synagogue, there used to pray a well-traveled cantor. The village was too poor to support a cantor and a choir. But, with God's help, when a good singer fell into town, this was a holiday. Jews with beards stood under the windows to hear him and his helpers sing. For weeks and months following, people would re-sing the melodies. Exaggerations and rumor would spread throughout the village. Stories were told about a boy-cantor with only stubble for a beard who sang so sweetly as to take one's soul out. People talked about how he kept the congregation enthralled until 4 o'clock

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in the afternoon and no one even realized they were hungry. Other stories were told about a famous bass who wasn't a cantor, but a choir boy. He was a healthy young man, like a bear, and loved to make a proper toast. He couldn't sing properly unless he had at least three quarts beer. That was the type of creature he was. Go figure out singers and performers; they're not like ordinary people. When the bass sang, it felt like velvet, like the flutter of pigeons' wings, reverberated like thunder. When he opened his mouth and let out a yell, everyone's ears trembled.

It was told that once, he went to the market during the weekday. The people were sitting on the porches of the shops. When someone asked him what time it was, he opened his mouth and answered, "Half past two", and all the windows started ringing.

With a light in their eyes, and smile on their face, people told of this outstanding singer. The

fantasy was at work. On the wings of a dream, their souls were carried far from the village, from the problems of their work, sick children, under-heated dwellings, empty pockets, torn children's shoes, and overgrown maidens. Their souls reached a world where everything is bright, everything is "naches", everything is bathed in rays of beauty. Each soul laughed at his own root.

And Chaim the Klezmer! There were two brothers in Sakalivka: Asher and Chaim. Asher had a group of Klezmer and was well known in the area. Chaim played the second fiddle. Eventually, he became sick of this, and moved to our village where he started his own Klezmer group. He was a true artist, with half opened, dreamy, red eyes, and a pale, thin face, and long, white, thin fingers. He knew nothing about what was going on in the world. A child could have led him around by the nose. His wife, a practical Jewish woman, had aggravation from him because nothing worried him. The true "doer" in his band was David Masais, a short dark Jew who was not really a great fiddler, but an expert in Hebrew. Another "personage" in his band was Arel, the drummer, who always said, "We're playing the wedding", as though he was the big shot.

Chaim knew nothing about the world, but when he put his cheek on his fiddle and began moving his bow over the strings, he opened up a new world. You felt as though there was a new soul being born in his fiddle which was trying to tear free. The soul was crying and moaning for the people. Jews with beards and hardened faces felt like small children when they heard Chaim the Klezmer. They felt like cuddling to someone, like whining, like a child to a mother, like complaining about his bad luck. The fiddle talked.

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The fiddle sang. The fiddle tugged at the soul. Chaim's face would get even paler, his eyes even bigger and darker, and his cheek would press even harder on the fiddle as though it was a living person. Chaim's tones poured into Jewish hearts like a Nilah-melody when the body is dull, the heart weak, the soul troubled. It was like having the sun shine in the eyes and each person becoming unglued, melted, greased in light and longing for the music.

Chaim played for weddings and played even better for himself, often at night, when the village slept, the stars shone, the sky hidden in mystery, and the cherry trees on the gentile streets were being pecked by a nightingale. Jews everywhere would open their windows to hear how Chaim's silent soul tore itself to the sky. Youngsters would stand in the shadows of the houses and hear. Chaim was the poet, the born artist.

What was he longing for in those quiet nights? Maybe for what he couldn't express even with his fiddle? Or maybe for that unexplained light which appears only to the best of the best, and only in very seldom, holy moments?

My village longed for beauty. It was a desolate life, with muddy streets, damp houses, cement floors, smoky ovens, shoes without boots, pillows without pillowcases, a meal of a piece of bread and herring. Poverty was certain. Tomorrow was uncertain. In the midst of this, people had a thirst for beauty, refinement, nicety. There was envy for the nobility, not for their possessions, but for their education and nicer life. There were stories about Nissi Belzer, about the newlywed from Vilna, Yosel Soloway and Stempenyu, because these stories made one forget about the surrounding squalor. People talked about the great painter, singer, and player, because there was consolation in speaking about this. There was a dislike towards Spivakov, the convert, who was Esther-Bayle's brother. He converted for what? In order to become a Volostnoy writer. However, there was talk about his gardens, his mansion with the lawns and the flowers, and his river, and his comforts. There was envy because of his nice life.

The Jews of my village loved nature. A strange thing. There were never any flowers or a little grass near their houses, except for an occasional tree from God knows when. But the Jews loved flowers, trees, fields. They were so harried that it never occurred to them to plant anything. Therefore, they would go walking near the apothecary or to the river Tikatch.

The apothecary was up the hill on the other side of Torhovitze. It stood in the middle of a garden which was surrounded by a white fence. It looked like a green island in a field of gray dust. In the garden, there

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were even pine trees, which were rare in our area. There were sandy footpaths and various growths and shrubs. There was also a cottage. More than one Jewish heart ached with hidden longing when he past the white fence.----Another world, a world of beauty.

Today the Tikatch. The name was carried by the river which ran near our village. It wasn't only water in a river; it was also a capricious poet. It winded its way between cliffs. In one place, it was wide, the other, narrow. In one place, it was wedged between two dark blue walls, which were as high as ten houses. In another place, it ran free over green fields. In one place it bubbled and gurgled, in another, quiet as a lamb. Behind my village, is a place where the riverbed spreads out over large stones. The river is now a waterfall which flows quickly over the thousands of ridges and splashes over flat green ranges and chases further with a strange noise. In another place, there's almost no water. Where did the river go? It probably sunk. From one side to another, lie sloping, wide stones. You can walk around on them without wetting your feet. Further up, at the edge, there rises a tall, heavy cliff and throws a shadow on the water. Here, the river is so deep, that the best swimmer can't get to it. It's also dangerous to swim there. The water whirls in a whirlpool which could even swallow a boat.

On top, at the edge, and further on the hills, where there are nut and wild apple trees, where there grow sour apples, and where there are bees and birds, summer is a harvest for strawberries and cherries.

At the Tikatch, the youngsters of my village captured fresh air, beauty and delight. At the Tikatch, all the romances were woven.

THE WEALTHY AND THE GREAT SCHOLARS

In my village, each Jew was a hidden prince. Every poor man had the spark of a spiritual aristocrat. Therefore, we had more respect for wisdom than for money. Refinement was more important than riches.

Who was the most respected Jew in our village? Not the wealthy Reb Liebtzy or his son, Reb Ber, who was in charge - even though they weren't ignorant. Reb Liebtzy actually kept a tutor in his later years who studied a page of the Talmud each day with him. Reb Ber was a scholar and followed the Jewish laws in his house. However, neither was the elite of the village. They were not spared any respect and even looked up to, but people did not have true reverence for them. People feared them and would never offend them lest they needed their services some day, but esteemed and treasured they were not. Esteemed and treasured were Pinchas Makarever or Abraham Aradovsky or Abraham-Ber, the cantor. They were venerated, valued, and loved because they had a heart, a soul and a brain, and didn't think much about worldly attractions.



Pinchas Makarever (1826 ish – 1910 ish)

That's not to say that Pinchas Makarever, for example, never thought about the real world. He was a Jew, burdened with many children, and not rich, and constantly had to worry about making a living. In his lifetime, he tried having a dry goods store, a grain shop, and other ventures. He often had to get into debt. Many long years he played with the hope of building his own bungalow, but money and business and his house never represented the world for him and never filled up his soul. He felt that without a dream, one is not a man. One can say, that the reason for his existence was a page from the Gemorah, one of the holy book, some issue for acute consideration, a chatty conversation about some worthy person. His office was not in his house, but in the Bess-Medrash (religious academy).

When gentiles came into town with grain, they would look for "Pinchassen" in the "Jewish School". Two Gentiles with high boots and long whips would stand by the alter in the Bess-Medrash, shifting from one foot to the other, and not being sure whether to take off their hats or keep them on. Willy nilly they would stand and watch Pinchas, sitting in his yarmulke and long beard, deep in a holy

book. Sometimes, they would stand for one half an hour not wanting to interrupt this Jew's devotions. And Pinchas had the reputation among the peasants that his word was sacred. A joke - "Pinkas Makarovsky"! And so, between Torah and trade, between synagogue and market, a Jew lived out all his years.

I sometimes think about Pinchas Makarever and I'm jealous. Where do you find such a placid good humor which this man possessed. Where do find such solid earth underfoot. He was like a strong, deep-rooted tree which nothing could pull out of the ground.

New times came. "Education" crept into the village and turned

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the heads of Jewish children. New people began to preach new-fangled notions. One felt as if the Jewish people were slipping somewhere, quickly, who knows where. But Pinchas Makarever remained steady. He only smiled at this news. He wasn't even mad. He didn't curse. He just belittled everything. "Et!" "So what!" "What's it worth!" "It's only a small wave in the water." "Only a bit of dust which the wind will blow away." "When the wave disappears, the water will remain." "When the dust blows away, the earth, the holy, Jewish earth, the foundation of Jewish life - the Torah - will remain." His soul was at peace, his disposition was serene. The sun shone steadily over his head.

Pinchas was not among the most acute scholars. I think that he was drawn more to the poetry of the traditional lore he studied than to the substance of the studies themselves. I think that the "Glow of the Treasures," the beauty enshrined in the old Jewish books was to him a lot more precious than the exercise of scholastic subtleties. It was not without reason that he was Chasidic.

None the less, he was deeply versed in the Mishna and in the later digests of rabbinical law, and could measure up to any ordinary rabbi. He knew by heart the three popular Talmudic tractates, the Baba Kama, the Baba Metzia, and the Baba Batra, and he made good use of them during the long Friday-to-Shabbos nights of winter.

More than once, I spent the night in Pinchas Makarever's house, and I know how he learned. Friday night, it gets dark around 4 o'clock. At six, everyone is home from praying, and at eight, they're done eating. Everything is warm and clean. Their eyes are closing and everyone is tired and sleepy. Pinchas crawls into bed, covers himself with a blanket and rests - he is an old man. After sleeping 5-6 hours, he awakes. It's pitch black. At his bedside, there's a water bowl. He washes his hands in it, sits up in the bed, props himself up with a pillow, and starts studying Gemorah by memory. The night is dark and still. Not a single candle flickers in the village. From the other rooms, could be heard the breathing of the member of the family. Outside the window, the blind winter night looks in. Occasionally, a wind gust howls around the house and sings in the chimney.

Pinchas sits, alone, in his bedroom and goes over, from memory, the law. With assurance and certainty, calm, his beautiful voice intones the text. He recites, one hour, and two, and three, till day begins to break. Then he begins the Book of Psalms. When the family wakes up in the morning and begins to move, Pinchas is already far, far into the Psalms. He is pale, a little tired, but his eyes are bright, on his lips is a blessed smile. He has served his Creator, he has been one with his own soul.

Pinchas Makarever was constantly reciting. When he went from his home to the synagogue, he recited a portion of the prayer book Tefillah. When he went to Antonovka - 2 viorst from the village Buki - he recited the Ashri Temimi Derech. ("Blessed are those who are upright in their ways")

Note by Leo Miller: Pinchas is enjoying a private joke in selecting this passage: he is treading the straight and narrow path of virtue as he walks the straight and narrow road to Antonovka. The original Yiddish text is rich in such plays on words, double meanings and significant allusions.

One could say, that not 1 hour went by without the Torah or Tefillah. And I think that he didn't let a day go by without donating to charity.

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Pinchas engaged himself in spiritual matters. However, he didn't involve himself in the affairs of the synagogue, the Rabbis, hiring a cantor, or other community happenings. Instead, he was concerned with the poor. Our village was full of self-concealed poor. For the world, they appeared to have a stately household, with a paid-for seat in the synagogue, but in reality, they didn't have with what to keep body and soul together. These are the people Pinchas kept in mind through his years. On their behalf he used to cling like a bad penny to all well-to-do householders.

With the community fund (poor house), you understand, Pinchas did not associate, because there any who accepted money had to do so in public. Community fund is for overt paupers. Pinchas, in contrast, kept his clients secret. For them he steadily collected contributions from those who trusted him and asked no questions. Pinchas was a healthy Jew, broad shouldered, with a stately appearance. When he met someone's rich son-in-law, some prosperous visitor, a Jew who had a nickel to his name, Pinchas would grasp his hand with a squeeze so hearty that their eyes would bulge, and good humoredly would cuss him out, "You should be boiled in oil, give me a donation, a soul is practically passing out, you'll save a life."

And they gave to Pinchas because they knew that he was like a father to so many unfortunate and downtrodden.

Another sort was Abraham Oradovsky. He was a very polished, fastidious, and exact Jew. He was removed from the world and never mixed into community affairs. He was never seen in the streets. His large house with high balcony and his large dry goods store faced the market. His store was always full of people, but Abraham Oradovsky sat in another room and studied. He did so secretly. He was a distinguished scholar. He had a sharp mind and his arguments and explanations were a model for scholars. He was always commencing either from a portion of the Talmud, or from a whole book.

I remember the year when he celebrated his 25th commencement from a whole book. There was a celebration in which adult and child -engaged. The village had the same respect for Abraham Oradovsky as they had for a king.

Abraham Ber, the cantor was also a doctor. He was soft, quiet as a pigeon, with a polite manner, and a thin, kind smile. He would go from one patient to another. I don't know how much medical knowledge he had, probably no more than any other doctor, but he brought with him warmth, decency, and a love that money couldn't buy. The poorer a patient was, the more often he would visit and the longer he would stay. There was once an epidemic and Abraham Ber didn't sleep at home once. He wandered from house to house, bed to bed and wherever he went, he brought with him trust, assurance, and courage. He must have known how to calm an uneasy mother or to give hope to someone very ill. He also knew how to use a thermometer, apply a compress,

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massage with vinegar, give the most potent cures. If he saw that it was really serious, he called another doctor. And when Abraham Ber said something, they obeyed without questions.

It was a curse to order any prescription before asking Abraham Ber to check the doctor's notes and give his approval. And whatever he said was as holy as the Torah.

All these Jews are dead and the yesterday's village is gone. It was scattered, pushed aside, and pulled up by its roots.

JEWISH CELEBRATIONS

In hearts full of sadness, life was cold and poor, and people wanted to hear a loving word and see a happy smile - so celebrations were made by getting a few friends together and making a holiday.

In my village, everyone waited for a celebration. An opportunity to uplift a burdened life was never passed by. The burden was thrown away for one day, for one hour. Worries were wiped away. Let the person be free. Let the soul be bright.

In my village, they danced and sang more than in any other village. About a wedding, a briss, or engagement, it goes without saying. Liquor was plentiful enough for a king's feast. Jewish eyes flashed, Jewish faces smiled. Rich and poor sat together and kvelled and reaped "naches". Jews, however, didn't wait for these rare occasions. They would gather on a Saturday night just to celebrate that the whole world was still standing.

Winter. The frost burns. The windows are painted with white, graceful, flowers. It's warm in the house. In the oven, a bright fire is burning. A large samovar is cooking and brewing and will soon be done. Youngsters have gathered for the evening. They're warming themselves near the chimney and looking with fiery eyes at the "grown ups" around the table. The youngsters feel that today will be a happy day. The mother didn't borrow glares from the neighbors for nothing nor is the light burning brighter for nothing. For now, mother and father are alone. Soon, the door opens and one, two, and three guests come in. It's still quiet. They discuss their work. "We should know no problems," says one, A sigh and a moan are heard. Now the samovar is put on the table. Tea is poured. Mother takes a bottle of liquor out and they make a L'Chaim. It gets warmer and Jews feel at home. They wish each other well. They tell jokes, witticisms. The bottle is almost empty. But that doesn't matter. One parent winks at his older son and asks, "Do you know where the winekeeper lives'? Who doesn't know where anyone else in the village lives? The parent orders, "Go, bring a quarter jug of wine. He knows what to give us".

The boy takes a few coins from his parent into his hand and shortly will return with a large jug of wine. Soon, he'll have to go out again and again. Each guest will give according to what he drank. In the house, it gets happier. On the table, there will appear hot potatoes. The steam will reach the ceiling. Soon, someone will send for "kishka". Soon, they will start singing. At first, a sad song, a song with morals and melody from a prayer. Later, they'll go over to happier songs. Backs will straighten up,

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hands will clap in time, and feet will kick in the air. "Ha! What do you say, Shlomo-Yosef? Our Jews should live in this world - and I tell you, Abraham-Mordechai, it doesn't pay to worry. Let everything go kaput, and enjoy life!". Hands join other hands, arms join other arms. One lays a hand on another's shoulder and everyone's dancing already.

The cold winter's night has fallen and is looking in. It is, however, hard to look into the frozen window. Around the corners of the windows, are tiny places where the frost didn't reach. If you're going by on the street and hear the tones of the songs, you can look through these places into the house. You will see a minyan of people and youngsters with long coats, with trimmed hats on their heads, with heavy boots on their feet, dancing in a circle. Their eyes shine, their faces are full of joy. Yes, truly, childish clean joy. In my village, people liked to feel like children. But what good is it standing outside? Come inside, whoever you are. They'll pour you a few glasses of apple or cherry

homemade wine or "punch", and tell you stories about what someone did today and you will feel that you are truly a member of the community: Wherever a village Jew may go. Our Jews should live.

In our village, it was the custom to send things to a guest. Let's say Nachem's Hershel came to father for a few days. Saturday after praying, all kinds of good things began arriving in the house: Wine, and nuts, and kugel and honey cake and oranges and beer. Each messenger came in with a plate covered with a cloth. Each messenger, either a small boy or girl, would yell out, "My mother, Sara-Chaya, sends this for your guest". Leah, Nachem's wife takes the gift and thanks the messenger and invites the messenger and his or her family to come later on. After dinner, all the guests, who sent gifts, would arrive saying, "Good Shabbes, Good Shabbes, God love you and your guest. You should live to see Simchas. Everyone sits down, and on the table are all the gifts that were brought. Soon, the singing starts and dancing isn't far off. Yes, we would wage war against loneliness and boredom. There was no better weapon than a melody and a welcoming dance.

In my village, everything was done together. The village was like one big family. The truth is that maybe everyone didn't love each other. Each person knew the other's faults and would laugh at, talk over, or criticize one another's foolishness either behind their back, or in front of them. They would talk about everyone's weaknesses, and who doesn't have weaknesses? The Jews would walk around with open eyes and therefore, never had unrealistic expectations from anybody. If they felt like one big family, it was because they were afraid to be alone. Among many, even death has a nicer face. Jews. They clung to each other like children who were left alone in a large desert. As a group, worries are smaller, burdens are easier, and

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hopes for a better life are higher. Together, each Jew felt surer than they did separately. Therefore, only a few rich men separated themselves from the crowd. They lived behind closed doors. They were all alone - with their money and pride and their problems. Who cared if Laybtzy Dyzyk had a guest? Who was happy when Beryl Dyzyk had a happy occasion? These two wealthy men were out of the group. But if something happened to a village Jew, the whole village would be happy with them, or share in their sadness.

Our Simchas Torah, I'll never forget. On that day, there were no separate houses. All Jews were one happy, wild, brotherhood. All the houses became small rooms in a big palace. The roof of the palace was the blue sky. It's light was the golden sun during the day, and a thousand lanterns by night. In the synagogue, at Hakofes, were Jews, wives, boys and girls. All stood head to head and everyone was flooded with a stream of joy and pride. Everyone kissed the Torah and it seemed like it smelled of perfume. Everyone wished: "Live until next year", and it rang like sweet music. Everyone noticed a bride, or wife, and each look had love and pride in it. The youth were crawling under the feet, clung to their parents, waved with the flags, and yelled with their high voices. It seemed like one large, large, family was celebrating an unusual event which occurs only once in a hundred years. Maybe a king is being crowned? Maybe the most beloved princess is getting married?

After praying, and when everyone left the synagogue, they didn't go home. That would not be in keeping with the holiday. Everyone together went to one house and ate and drank everything that was prepared, and from there they went to a second, third, and fourth house and from each house, they yelled out a big, "Happy holiday!" in a high octave, and wished the lady of the house all the best. She was not, however, always happy. Why? Because she had to work so hard and prepare such good food, that it melts in the mouth. Such delicious mandlen for the soup. But does the crowd know what they're eating? Do they have time to feel the true taste? Nevertheless, each woman would

show off and the crowd knew who was a true housekeeper. After the fifth, sixth, or seventh "progrom", (that's what the women called it), the crowd ate less and took more to the wine goblets. Jews were tipsy, they laughed, who knows from what. They sang melodies, stopped, and started, and smiled like a sick person after a crisis. They came to life. To Hell with everything - Let's live! Who exile, what exile?

Later in the evening, they danced in the streets, according to the schedule of where they were supposed to be. They joined in a circle, turned hopped, and sang.

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And that was Simchas Torah, after praying, and after a whole day. On sundown, when the sun already painted part of the sky with golden fire, people were already at the market, in their stores. They prayed Mincha together under the open sky. One Jew climbed on top of a roof, turned to the east, his back to the setting sun, and said his cantorials. His Shul was the whole village. His pulpit - the hills and trees and fields on the other side of the river. From his high book rest, he could see the green, blue, red, and yellow roofs of the houses. The Jew prayed Mincha. The crowd underneath answered, "Amen". Soon, the celebration will be over. Soon, will begin the cold, wet, fall, with the winds and the mud. But meanwhile, it is a holiday. Jews quietly and heartily accompanied this beautiful day of rest

WHEN THE RABBI COMES TO THE VILLAGE

When the sun grew paler, the month of Elul blew in with its cooler winds, and the cobwebs stretched from tree to tree. Then, the Jews started on the road to see the Rabbi for Rosh Hashanah.

It wasn't far from our village. Long ago, when there was no train, the trip to Makarev took several days. People went by horse and covered wagon, with a driver. They took along food and were often soaked by rain and dunked in mud. There were many stories told about this. Later, people took a horse and wagon just to Patash and from there, took a train to Pastav. From there, they again took a horse and wagon to Makarav. From there, the road was not so long, and the effort became less intense. Nevertheless, the preparation for the trip took weeks. When a Jew thought about making this trip, their face became quietly serious. You could tell by looking at him, that here was a Jew that would soon bare his everyday soul - here is a Jew that would dip his heart in clean thoughts. What does his profession matter now? What does his house and problems and petty grievances which eat away at him like rust, matter now? He would soon go to the Rabbi's. For a few days, he would only hear Tefillath, Torah and songs. He would join other Jews in a heated stream of excitement. He would join together with others in a communal soul and feel like a light in a shiny menorah.

It becomes cooler. The sun is very bright, even more so than in the summer. Perhaps that is why one feels the yellowness of the leaves on the trees even more and the emptiness of the fields across the river. The nearness of fall spreads loneliness in the air. When a Jew goes praying to a late Minyan, he meets another in the market who is a Chosed from the same Rabbi. They discuss the trip to Makarev. They feel like two partners in a golden business, like two members of a secret society. They both enter the synagogue where they hear the loud ringing of the prayer songs. The synagogue is empty during the week. Everything is only temporary. In a few days they'll go to.....

And when the Rabbi came to the village on a rare occasion on a Shabbos, now, the world turned upside down.

Old Rabbi David wouldn't travel outside his locale. It was beneath his dignity. But Rabbi David died and left three sons. Makarav was too small for the three of them, so one opened court in Baranovka, and another in another city. In Rabbi David's place, was his oldest son, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai. The younger crowd no longer came to Makarev. The older people couldn't forget the holiness of the old righteous man, so Rabbi Moishe Mordechai had to

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go visit the cities and towns himself.

Friday evening. The Rabbi sits locked in a room in a house that a Jew let him use over Shabbos. This was his "court", his headquarters. Here, come both young and old from every street. They're standing on the stairs, in the kitchen, straining their ears to hear. The Rabbi is sitting alone and quoting from the Song of Songs. Each word rings with holiness. Sentence after sentence come out in a circle. But, it's not the words that excite the crowd, everyone knows them by heart, it's the melody, a strange one that the Rabbi sings, full of deep sadness. It's not merely a song of Songs, but a song above all songs which comes to the Rabbi, a cry of pain, a song of complaint, drenched in eternal pain. The words are words of love, of beauty. The shepherd and shepherdess on the mountain of Zion telling each other the woes of their love. But the shepherd is the shepherd of Israel, God of Abraham, Itzhak, and Isaac. The Shepherdess is the community of Israel who was driven from her beautiful home. Along with her in exile, was the aura of holiness. The Rabbi sits and

complains about the aura of the exile. His voice is a yell of pain, a string of singing sighs, a complaint to the blessed God. When will the redemption come? A moan like a lion's roar breaks away. A moan which breaks the heart. Chassidim stand on the tips of their toes, afraid to breath. Little by little, the front hall fills up. People pile up near the Rabbi's door. They stick to the walls, packed in, head to head, and they listen. They're afraid to make a sound. The Rabbi sings the song of songs, and high in the sky, his mighty voice breaks through and carries the pain of his people.

When the Rabbi gets ready to go to the synagogue, he's accompanied by a large crowd. His stature rises above the surrounding Jews. Reb Moshe Mordechai was a giant, built like a ruler. He threw glances like a king. A true king. Around him, the Jews are captured by fear. The Shabbos lights in the nearby houses are brighter than throughout the rest of the year. The market is quiet, foggy, half-lit, half dark. Overhead, the sky is spreading in a green hue. It is so far this evening, so removed from our village. One star opened an eye, looked down at the dark houses with wonder, looked at the flickering lights, at the half frightened market, at the army of black bodies moving towards the brightly lit synagogue. Inside, the lamps and chandeliers were lit up, including those on the pulpit. The synagogue was packed, a holiness appeared on the faces of the people, a fear in their eyes. They will pray with the Rabbi in one synagogue. The Rabbi alone will pray at the pulpit.

The village lies still. The Jewish houses were riveted to Mother.

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Earth. Darkness enveloped each house and everything was drenched in mystery. The synagogue flickers in the middle of the night like one white piece of fire. It shines like a million large diamonds. There stands in front of the pulpit, the Rabbi, and speaks with the Father in the sky. The Rabbi's face is pale, his eyes are closed, his eyelashes lie across his face like a black line. His lips tremble, but his voice is steady. It can split mountains. From his chest, screams ring out which shake peoples' hearts. The Rabbi does not ask anymore, he demands. He punishes and gets mad at himself. He stands in the name of the people of Israel. Until when? Until when? Vigor and unrest can be heard in his prayer. Force and temper and fire pour from the Jewish souls, but Jews are used to it. Their souls are full of unrest. They imagine that someone strong would take them on large wings, higher and higher. Eyes are dizzy, hearts are pounding, cold waves pour over backs, knees are trembling. People are afraid to move or look down, and still, there is something sweet. A heavenly enjoyment envelops the hearts. People lift themselves up, they fly higher, higher, higher.....

Thus, when the Rabbi ends his praying, everyone is crazy with joy. Just as though they bathed in the fountain of youth, old Jews jump like boys, established, wealthy bureaucrats laugh and play like children, and everyone lets loose and becomes relaxed. They must go home, make Kiddush, and celebrate Shabbos. But what home? What Shabbos? They must run to the Rabbi's, grab his leftover food, fight over a noodle, like brats. Everyone will roll themselves up together like a living ball, they will have drunken eyes, and they will laugh, laugh, laugh. Soon, the singing will start. There are, thank God, enough youngster in the village who can sing. The Rabbi will "set the tone" and the crowd will catch it. The celebration will lift every one from their places and it will become applauding, stamping scene. A Jew who is "over the hill", lifts his head, sticks out his beard like a bastard lifts the tip of his polished boots and soon does a small dance. It doesn't matter to you that he dances a Cossak dance, his soul is Jewish and so is the celebration. After him, will follow another Chosed, after him, a third, Ach! Ti! Almighty! No more troubles. Forget the world. The Rabbi should live, dance, revel, be happy, dance, dance further, dance livelier!...Until late in the night will the Rabbi celebrate his feast.

Sunday morning, the Rabbi started going from house to house; accompanied by a group of Chassidim. When they went into a house, it would be prepared with a table covered by a clear-white tablecloth. The children would be dressed as if it were a holiday. The girls would wear cloths on their heads which also covered parts of their faces. The Rabbi must not see any girlish skin. The mother and father stand like before an emperor. The Rabbi will sit down at the table. They will hand him the "receipt", and he

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will read it and moan. Oi! could the Rabbi moan. Oi! a groan tears out of his heart - with pain, with blood. Perhaps, the Chassidim loved him for this. Not everyone believed in the Rabbi, but everyone enjoyed his sighing. One Jew, out of all the Jews, did nothing else but sigh and moan for everyone in the community. His task was listening to everyone's expectation, knowing everyone's sufferings and sympathizing with everyone. He had everyone's trust and gave everybody good words of belief and courage. "God will help. God will help". Jewish hearts became lighter when they heard this message.

And when the Rabbi finally left the village, he took seven hundred packages with him.

Sits Moishe Chaim's son and is mad. "The village", he says, "is poor". "It's full of paupers. A Jew cooks the water out of himself in order to make twenty five a week. Tens of Jews could have income if they would make a fair. From these seven hundred packages, they could make a cashbox, give interst-free loans, where each Jew could get help. It would ease the eyes of the villagers. But here came one person and robbed the paupers. It's a foolishness and sacrilegious."

Malament the Jew, the variety store keeper, with his small, clever eyes looks and answers smiling: "Oi, Moishenu, are you a fool. That which the Rabbi gave to the village is worth more than seven hundred packages. You can not put a value on it for all the riches in the world. And when you ask our Jews what they prefer, to borrow or to have the Rabbi for Shabbos, they would not even hesitate to have the Rabbi, because money is dirt and the soul is the main thing. "

And "not long after the Rabbi's departure, the Divine Presence in the village rested.

A FAIR IN A UKRAINIAN VILLAGE

Saturday night. Jewish houses are lit up. Lamps are burning and fires are going in the ovens. People are cooking to usher out the queen, but behind the village, it's dark, barely able to see the soft mist which is being drawn to the mowed fields. It is almost Fall and the nights become darker.

Over the dirt roads, Gentile wagons are being pulled by horses or oxen. They are going to tomorrow's fair. They're carrying cabbage and beets, grain, and beans. They're carrying lime pots. They're coming from far away villages to catch a good place in the market. That's why they left on time. They will travel all night over every road to our village. It will still be dark when long lines of wagons will place themselves over the market with their shafts up, in order not to take up too much room.

When the sun rises Sunday morning, it won't recognize the village.

My village is cooking, rushing and full of noise. On one side are mountains of cabbage - greenish-white, large, juicy, making you want to bite into them. A little further, are waves of dark-green watermelons so heavy, that a weak Jew could hardly lift them. In another corner, lie piles of apples - white, red, yellow, big and small, sweet and sour and wild, hard apples from which they make drinks. Further, there are carrots, parsnips, peas, and beans. The Gentiles also have sacks of wheat, corn, flax, grain, and barley, which they harvested from their fields and gardens. They brought them here so that they could trade them for supplies they need. They came to the village to sell the fruits of their labor to the Jews and in turn, they buy from the Jews, clothes, pots, and other items they can't get in their village. Understandably, the Jews were waiting for them and prepared themselves for this business holiday. Already, they've put out packages of items, kegs, barrels and pails, everything new, clean and shining in the sun. There are large kegs with large handles, barrels with iron stands, wooden kegs, beams all made from the same wood. Further up, were displayed tin goods, with green and blue pails, white shimmering quarts, iron pans, graters, and spoons. They shine and reflect in the sun so that it hurts the eyes. Higher up the hill, stand the wheels, axles, wagons, and spools. Closer to the shops, the clothiers put out their wares, piles of hats, black, blue, and green., fine wool jackets, dresses, with fancy trimming, other items with detailed workmanship in modern styles. If a Gentile wore these goods, he'd look like a true dashing gentleman. There were also lambskin hats, black and gray, because winter was approaching. Nearby, the shoemakers put out their goods, boots with long laces, others with iron

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trims or brass studs. Red boots for the Gentile women. The rows of boots resemble soldiers, set up for a parade. Further, in a long line, across from the shops, are the stores of yard goods which look like strangely colored tents in an Oriental country. There are stripes of cloth, red like fire, also hanging are headcloths for Gentile women, black with red flowers, red with yellow flowers, crimsons with all kinds of patterns, it rips tears from the eyes. There are "pieces" of canvas, cotton, and silk of all kinds, of colors and sorts, a display of flowers, a desire in the eyes of the Gentile women. There are small stands where women sell needles, thread, thimbles, ribbons and staples. Oh the ribbons! Like the flags of various armies, they flutter on tall sticks, where the shopkeepers placed them; ribbons, wide and narrow, silk, satin, velvet, from one color, or several, in one color, or with designs, decorations, embroidery, flags like bouquets of flowers, flags which send regards to all the village beauties telling them: come, today is your day. Not far away, is a stand with beads, rings, chains, small knives, pins and earrings made from tin, blown glass, brass and composites, everything you want in the world. If

you want this kind of merchandise, you must buy from the Katzapes (roughnecks from deep Russia). There's no fair without them. They don't speak the Gentile language but have their own gargled expression. They're clever merchants and are experienced. They display their wares on the ground on heavy canvas. One side is open and the other three are covered. Young fellows are drawn to the knives and pipes and crosses which are spread on the ground. Dear crosses! The young fellows can't resist the temptation to steal a cross behind their backs, but the Katzapes catch them, slap and curse them, and there's a big commotion. Not far from the Katzapes is the pottery display with earthen pots, mache, bowls, large and small, pitchers, jars, dishes and noodle dishes. The bowls are glazed inside with beautiful flowers. Some are plain, others are etched. Near the pottery, you hear the clanging of buyers, trying out the merchandise.

On a hill, are the "Torhovitze" (bargainers) - the horse market. Here, you find only three kinds of merchants - Jews, Gentiles, and Gypsies. The Jewish merchants don't have many horses, so they serve as middlemen between buyers and sellers. The Gypsies bring their own or stolen horses. The Gentile touches the horse, looks over the horseshoes and his teeth, tries to harness and ride him, and keeps bargaining. People are swearing, shaking hands, talking incessantly, and clapping. The horse market is full of neighs, stomping, and whip cracking.

The village is boiling and buzzing like a beehive. Every Jew is busy. Even the teachers leave school to look around. Jews stand in their stores.

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and the work burns under their hands. They bargain until they're hoarse. They praise their merchandise to the sky. Money is being taken, merchandise is being measured. Merchants call relatives to keep an eye on their goods, so the customers won't rob them. Jews are running from one wagon to another, bargaining over a sack of wheat, over a calf, over a chicken, a dozen eggs. They grab farmers, nobility, who are walking around the market in high boots and gray vests. The wealthy farmers speak only Polish and are the biggest fools. A Jew could turn them inside out and make a good profit. It's a commotion up to the sky. Faces are burning, hands are busy. Hats are tilted back, foreheads are sweaty. Jews, Gentiles, girls, calves, oxen, wagons, merchandise, all bound together in a noisy mass. Alive and moving.

Gentiles come not only to buy and sell, but to celebrate. This celebration is instead of going to a club, ball, or masquerade. They come to eat, get drunk have fun. They sit in lines, on the ground and buy cooked food. They take out a flask of whisky-from their boots and let loose in the street. Some go to a pub, a teahouse, an inn, or visit friends. Everywhere, they get a bite to eat, tea, a bagel, whiskey and other good things. In the evening, the Gentiles are drunk with a few dollars in their pockets. The whiskey rings in their brains, and it's lively, happy and gay. They kiss and hug each other, telling stories, complaining, and crying. Some are stretched out in the market and can't move. Their women drag them to their wagons, cursing them while doing so.

The market empties out and the wagons leave and go to the bridge. The blacksmith is still busy with horses and selling equipment for the wagons. But in the village, work is done. The Jews pack up, count their income, and are happy. A day of joy! May the Holy Name be blessed. Soon, Jews will go home to rest, grab a hot bite after a hard day's work. It's almost dark. In the empty market, you can still hear a leftover song, but the Fair is over. The piles of straw show you where the merchandise lay. Tomorrow, the goats will eat it up

The dark sky covers the village and wipes up the last voices.

Soon, Orka, the watchman, begins clapping on his wooden drum to scare the burglars away.

MY VILLAGE LEARNS

Years ago, when our fathers were still youngsters, there spread a rumor about Zaiman Zvanitsky. Zaiman was a young man, studious, from an honorable family. He had a wife and a child and was supposed to go into business as was befitting a man of his stature. Suddenly, he ran away. Later, it was discovered that he went to study. "Study? From what will he eat?" So the villagers asked. "Eh! Such a business!" The villagers belittled him.

A few years later, when Zaiman finished college, he settled in Uman and started making money as a lawyer. Then, the villagers looked upon him with different eyes. Zaiman Zvanitsky was not from the idealists or culturalists. Speaking "Americanish", he meant business. He developed a large practice and had a big name among lawyers. Uman is only 30 viorst from my village and Jews go back and forth every day. So, stories were told about the worthy "Solomon" Zvanitzky. Nobility comes to him. Clients wait in his corridor and aren't let in without an appointment. The city official himself comes to him for a visit and treats him with respect.

His home today has expensive wallpaper on the walls, hand painted ceilings, nice clocks and fancy tile ovens. His staff includes servants, maids, and his gait is fast - a pair of fiery horses harnessed to a chariot, like a toy, with a mischievous driver. He portrays himself like a prince. You're playing with Zaiman Zvanitsky! Even the lawmakers had respect for him. When he argued a case in court, people would be silent as a kitten, because his tongue was as sharp as a slaughtering knife. He was also an expert in all phases of the law and using every device possible, could change the mind of the greatest judge. So go the stories told in our village about Zaiman Zvanitsky.

These stories were told particularly by his brother, David, one of our villagers. David's wife owned a dry-goods store and he walked around with a stick, involving himself in community affairs. He basked in his brother's glory - the big shot.

It's common knowledge that one nice morning, David Zvantisky appeared with a beard on his chin as big as a copper ten-spot. He combed the beard on his cheeks sideways, which made him look like an old officer of Tzar Nikolay. He also began speaking Russian. How did he learn Russian? His excuse was: when you have a lawyer for a brother, you can also partake in his glory. The fact is, that David Zvanitsky considered himself a real "macher", an expert in all worldly things. He even had a piano in his house and his daughter, Chana, played it like a cat walking on cymbals.

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This goes to show how highly our village thought of Zaiman Zvanitsky. Our Jews saw that a young man from our village, son of a pauper, can, through his brain, and with help from the Gentile bigwigs, make a mensch of himself. True, Zaiman wasn't pious. I don't think he even prayed on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. They told stories about how he would ride in his carriage up to the Shul on Yom Kippur, put on his neck a white silk scarf - a German Tallis, and would spend a half hour upstairs with the most pious Jews. He would allow himself to be called to the Torah, pledge a nice gift, then go to a Gentile restaurant where he ate a big meal of roast pig and drank champagne. However, it would not be heresy if you would reason that this was an exaggeration. The truth is, that our village didn't judge a person like Zaiman Zvanitsky on piety. Because of this, he was above the Jewish law, a doer in the higher window, because he was free of the Jewish rites. Our Jew under stood that a doctor, lawyer, or other "professional" could not carry the burden of serving the Torah. Maybe because of this, people were jealous of Zaiman Zvanitsky; he lives like a count, and he is rid of the Torah. A villager would probably not agree that he felt this way, but more than one silently thought, "it

should only happen to my son".

The youth of the village had little respect for Zaiman Zvanitsky. The old Shlomo, Mordechai's son, made a much deeper impression. Old Shlomo, Mordechai's son, studied not for a diploma or for a chariot with four horses, but for enjoyment and fire that's hidden in pure knowledge. Old Shlomo was originally a child prodigy, a young genius. He would sit night and day over the Gemorah and Book of Verses. He had such a sharp mind, that old students would gape. His opinions and his interpretations were carried in the village, and everyone licked their fingers from them. When he decided to study Russian his excuse was: What good are study-books with children's stories and other silly things? What is actually a language? It's a collection of words. Why can't he. Old Shlomo, understand a Russian book? Because he doesn't know the meanings of the words. So, he took a Russian-Yiddish dictionary and studied all the words from beginning to end. That's how he learned Russian.

He needed to know the language so he could read informational books. In Hebrew, he read study books which he could get in our village. This awoke in him an interest in philosophical questions. He was a burning speculative thinker, a prober, a person with a strong sense for the abstract. His mother told me once, that when he was finishing his prayers once, he looked into a study book. One of the phylacteries was already on the bench while the other one still remained on his arm. He became so engrossed in it's meaning, that he forgot where in the world he was. With one foot on the ground, with the other on a bench, with his Tefilin half off, he stood this way from the

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morning until before night and didn't realize what he was doing. His mother went to the market where she spent a long time, she returned and he was still looking at the study book. He wasn't even reading, but in deep thought, so deep that he forgot about the whole world. When they finally distracted him, he was like he woke from a dream.

Old Shlomo Mordechai's son, then went to Odessa, where he spent a few years. He mingled with educated people, and returned again to the village. If you were to ask a Jew in the village, he would tell you that nothing big ever became of Old Shlomo. Honestly speaking, he spent all his years for nothing. He walked around with worn out shoes and tattered sleeves - he never became a doctor or pharmacist. The truth is, that he was too involved in serious spiritual matters to deal with reality. He was unable to study the ordinary things that a boy of 14 or 15 should know because he was too abstract. Therefore, he remained neither here nor there - like a true philosopher. The ordinary life had no merit compared to the eternal matters of the person's mind.

But, we, the youth, had the highest regard for this quiet philosopher. He was the exact opposite of Zaiman Zvanitsky. In our eyes, he was the real dreamer, thinker, and spiritual aristocrat. He didn't trade his learning for clanging coins. To us, this had greater worth than twenty diplomas. Old Shlomo-Mordechai's remained an old bachelor and his mother never once complained about this in our house even though he blackened her face and people pointed their fingers at her. Where is it heard of that a bachelor of forty should not even think of marrying? But we, the youth, praised him even more for this. A person so removed from daily interests, living only with his pure soul.

Zaiman Zvanitsky and Old Shlomo Mordechai's showed our village a way. I don't think there was even one fellow in our village who didn't think about studying.

Education! Knowledge! A course of several classes! How those magic word rang in young ears. It was a promise that called to us. Knowledge and education opened our eyes, lifted the soul, united a person and his family in poetry, and united scholars and thinkers from all countries.

Knowledge and education lit a torch and led humanity from darkness to an improved world. In those days, we still believed in knowledge and education as a savior. We thought that if people would finally become more educated, more understanding, and more thoughtful, the earth would become the Garden of Eden...golden dreams, silly dreams!

But there was another thing that drove us to education. We lived in poverty and in need. Even the children of the bourgeois had one desire: not to be like their own fathers - deal in grain, open a store, work around the station, sell

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to the nobility, and go to fairs. The only way to better themselves and move to a higher class was through education - and really a diploma. Whoever passes 4 classes becomes an educator; whoever graduates with a house-teacher can open a school. Whoever goes through 6 classes can become a dentist; whoever graduates 8 classes can go to the university, study to be a doctor, lawyer, or chemist, whatever one wants in this world. An educator, a dentist, or legal scholar were already aristocrats. They were equal to the Christians. They were important. Even authorities dealt with them. Everyone had respect for them. They were not regular, everyday people. Being able to climb to a higher class had the greatest worth to us youngsters. We, Jews, weren't born into nobility, nor did we have a privileged class. Among Christians, the son of a nobleman remained a nobleman himself whether he studied in a school or not. He remained privileged whether he took over his father's profession or not. Among us, a son of a Rabbi or a religious Jew was a poor, ordinary person unless he got a diploma. Even a rich, young scholar was ridiculed unless he spoke Russian and had worldly education. Only when a Jew had a diploma and an intelligent profession did he stop being a bleak, exiled Jew.

So we studied. We broke the mold. Mother and father couldn't send their children to school. They couldn't afford a teacher. Who thought of these things then? We had to go after these things when we became adults. So, we slaved after it! We chased it! It cost toil, brains, and heartache!

The story of our uniqueness is the story of our martyrs.

MARTYRS OF EDUCATION

"Education" came to our village in various ways. It was like a dragg?? crank, just as it touched a Jewish soul, it disappeared forever.

At one time, there was only a Hebrew book. There, was no library in our village. There was even no steady book seller. Once every few months, a book dealer from Uman or Zvenigorodka would come and set up a booth in our village. Friends would get together and buy what they could find. Some even ordered books from Warsaw or Vilna by mail. We would come across a "collection" an "Assembly of Israel", later, a "Jewish calendar", and we read it so many times, that we knew it by heart. In our village, there were also circulating old "monthly newspapers", old "Morning Lights" the works of Gotlober, of Vehuda Lieb Cordon, Peretz. Smolensky, Rueben Asher Broide; also several books by Itzhak Ber Levinson; also a Tanach with explanation and with a German translation. Some youngsters even had several old editions of the "Preacher". These journals and books never lay around unread. Our friends would read them with enjoyment and from this, they developed a longing for another world, wider knowledge, a more humane life.

I think, for example, you should take a book like "Lovers of Zion". This wasn't merely an observation. This was a loving, friendly portrait of the old Jewish life in the land of our fathers. It was an old-fashion fiction about the state of Lebanon and the excommunications. This was not to be judged as to the role it played in our spiritual life. Whoever read the book became forever sick with longing for something better. He became sick of the village with its mud, its business, its jobs, its synagogues, with all the noise, with all its poverty. He already dreamed of a world where people are rich and gentle, the language is like pearls, the souls are white as snow and life is a pious holiday. He already took to education - because in this, he saw the key which opened this other wonderful world.

At one time, the institution of education moved a young man with temptation. He would go to Oman, only 30 viorst from our village, not too far away. He would find there a new country. Straight, clean, paved streets; on both sides, rows of houses, built with a plan and with taste. Each house had a garden and in each garden were flowers and plants and various trees, which he never knew could be painted on God s earth. People go in and out of their houses, lightly-dressed, neat, gracious people. Here stands one from our village and feels the clumsiness of his

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coat and the grubbiness of his shoes, which the "red" shoemaker made him for Pesach, and the limpness of his appearance. He feels like he's wearing an eight cornered hat with a button on top of his head; that his collar and tie had the face of poverty; and that he alone is a small town dummy who doesn't know here from there, so, on the spot, he promises that as soon as he comes home, he'll throw everything aside and start his education, studies, and become a "mensch". Oi, will it be hard? will it take years of toil? Our villager isn't afraid of this. He is stubborn. Speaking back to himself; What does he have to lose? Selling herring? Of course not.

Nothing turned on the fantasy of our youngsters like the example of their own friends. I mentioned Zaiman Zavanitsky and old Shlomo Mordechai's. Zaiman was already an older person - not from our time, and old Mordechai remained hanging between heaven and earth, but Chaim's (son) Moshe was another story. Moshe was from our generation. His father, Pinchas's (brother) Chaim was from the "Corenoya" aristocrats of our village. True, he didn't constantly live in the village: he was a chauffer in Reb Liebtzy's woods and previously lived in "zapust", there in Voliner Gubernia, then, several viorst from Piatihor. Every week, or every two or three weeks, he would come to our

village for a Sunday, and the villagers counted him as one of their own. Everyone knew his wife and children and he was as much a villager as his brother, or Abraham Koretzky.



Assumed to be the family of Pinchus's brother Chaim Novaminsky.

Mustache man standing assumed to be Moishe (Novaminsky) Olgin who wrote this remembrance of the village Buki

Photo courtesy of Max Robbins



Confirmed photo of Moishe (Novaminsky) Olgin from his 1939 obituary

Chaim's son, Moshe, suddenly deliberated and passed his exams for eight classes and entered the university. He came into the village wearing a blue student's hat with gold buttons. What happened then is something that truly set the village on wheels.

The story with Moshe (son of) Chaim is as follows. He was already a fellow of 21. He wasn't too handsome - not ay-ay-ay: merely a fellow who knew how to read and write a little Russian. When his father began having bad luck, he left home to become a teacher in a small village 10 viorst from the village. His first boss was Boruch Shatalyo, a store owner, who had 2 small boys and 2 girls with long noses, and plenty of income. They paid Moshe 10 (dollars) a month with food. For this, he had to sit and study with the children from morning until night. He taught them Bible, Rashi, and Tanach and Yiddish writing and Russian and German and everything else he knew. Occasionally, he had to help in the store too. He wandered around to various small villages, served in the military, and got engaged to a village girl - to Fayge Yehushe Priderke's daughter. They put money away in a dowry with the postmaster in Sberegatelni, and the wedding was to take place on the Shabbos after Shvuot. Suddenly, our groom decided to forget the match and prepare for the exams without tying himself down. It would take him several years, he didn't want to take on a burden, he wanted to be free as a bird.

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How did Moshe Chaim's come to think about taking the exams? This is also a curious story. While he was teaching in one of the villages, he got sick and was taken to a nearby village. He remained there several weeks until he recovered. The doctor that cured him was a young Jewish doctor from Kazan, a wonderful man, a diamond. He wasn't a show off, and befriended Moshe Chain's. He probably noticed that Moishe had a good head on his shoulders because he once said, half jokingly, half seriously, "Why is a fellow like you wandering around? Why don't you try studying courses like those in high school and then take the exam?" Asked Moshe, "How is this possible without a school or without a teacher?" The doctor told him that he never attended high school and he prepared for the exams himself and made out well; if Moshe wanted, he too could do this in 2 - 3 years.

When our fellow heard this, he felt like a bullet hit him. Right then and there, he found out what books he needed and what subjects he needed to study. After that week, he decided to send for the material he needed, and sit down and study.

As soon as his term of study ended, he moved to another village in the area of Voliner and began studying for the exam. He had income from tutoring. There were village Jews who wanted to teach their children and agreed to pay him 3 rubles a month. True, the old teacher, Shmuel, got only 75 kopikes for a whole semester, but Shmuel didn't study separately with each child; he would teach 20 or 30 in one class and only teach them writing an hour each day. Moshe Chaim's promised to study with each child separately - and not only writing, but grammar, geography, history, arithmetic, and all 70 wisdoms. By tutoring students privately for 7 hour a day, he made from 18 to 20 rubles a month, enough to live on. The other 8 hours in the day, he prepared for the exams.

It was hard labor. For 3 years, this fellow worked 15 hours a day, winter and summer, in the greatest heat and greatest cold; seven hours with the students, and eight hours alone. It's a wonder he didn't fall from this load. But our villagers are stubborn. When they get something into their head, it could thunder and lightening; they'll do what they want. Moshe Chaim's worked 3 years continuously, 15 hours per day on the clock. When he started, he was a crude boy: barely able to read and write Russian, with little command of arithmetic and even less of history. A high school

student of the second class certainly knew more than he did. When he finished the 3 years, he was an educated person; knowing not only the course of 8 classes in high school, including Latin and Greek, but also the new Russian literature. He read Darwin, Spencer, Millen, and

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other works of societal questions. His exam was a story of a thousand and one nights. The teacher in Belotzerkover high school said that he knew as much as they did. The director carried him around like a jewel, he was considered priceless , then he passed his test in a first class manner, and in the end of summer, he was accepted in the university in Kiev.

At that time, he was poor, "hollow as a Catholic", and couldn't afford his tuition. Because of this, he came to our village one Saturday and wanted to borrow a few rubles. If a prince were to arrive in a golden charriot, it wouldn't have made as big an impression as Moshe Chaim's did with the gold buttons on his uniform and his blue hat. Young and old came to see him. Old Jews beamed. Even his uncle, Pinchas Makarever, smiled under his gray mustache and said jokingly, "Aha, you should be saved, you really carried out your plan to become a Gentile student!" This made an unbelievable impression on the village youth.

Not one Jewish soul lifted Moshe Chaim's to the road of education. He did it himself.

I want to mention Hershel Nachem's. Nachem was Pinchas's son, a pious Jew, a "crusader" who feared education like a ghost feared poisoned gas. Hershel was his older son, a studier, a synagogue goer, also engaged to be married. Suddenly, he goes away to Szitomir. You should know that this did not happened easily. He had to sneak out of his father's house like a thief. In Szitomir, he wandered around a few months without income, living in a hallway, sleeping on boards, eating soldiers' food which he would buy in the barracks dirt cheap, so that for 5 kopecks, he would have enough for a whole week. All of this didn't matter; the reason - he was studying, preparing for the exam. Just playing around, he covered 4 classes, and in another year - in one year! - he covered all 8 classes. He couldn't enter the university because his test grade wasn't high enough, so he went to America, learned English, worked in the docks as a ship-worker, and also studied medicine in the university. Now he's a doctor in Boston.



Henry (Hershel) Norman with wife Manya and son Ted, Boston circa 1910

As the situation of the Jews in our village worsened, the more they began thinking about the exams: to be a teacher, a doctor, a pharmacist, or a privileged proviser, which serves only 2 years.

Tests for 3,4,5,6 classes, tests for boys and girls. The whole village was engrossed in tests. The old ideological "education" almost disappeared. The new education was practical, business-like, exact, income-orientated. A dentist could live outside his area to help his income. A tutor is better than being a grain merchant or a small-goods shopkeeper. People were no longer willing to live their life for the Torah alone. They wanted to "catch" an exam - sometimes by swindling, sometimes with bribery, sometimes with luck, as

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though they were playing cards: some passed just barely even though it took a long time. In the village, there appeared teachers who specialized only in training their pupils in how to answer the questions on the exam. The parents no longer waged war with their children for wanting to study subjects for this exam and no longer burned their books in the oven because they objected to what their children were being taught. They too wanted their children to "pass".

Each May, a whole group of youngsters from our village would leave for Uman in Bielotzerkva - to take the exam. There was joy. A few occasional heads passed, the others went home in disgrace, but they didn't abandon their plan. Efraim Priderke tried eight times in a row and finally entered the university. Now he's a doctor somewhere.

Behind this whole strenuous work, lay a restless spirit and a burning soul. My village sought something better. It didn't want to fall into detachment and despair. My village was different from tens of other Jewish villages.

We alone can boast that our village produced two painters, one well known, one not so famous, one writer, tens of doctors, several engineers, a certain number of culturalists. This all came from a community which was as big as a yawn.

JEWISH INCOME

In my village, each Jew lived from the earth. How so, for example? Quite clear; people drew their professions from the grain and fruit that grow in the fields.

There were no factories in the village. In general, there were no factories in the whole area except in Goralnies and Zavoden in which there were sugar and whiskey factories, which also worked the fruit of the earth. The earth was oily, rich and the best earth in the whole Ukraina. The corn was so high that one could hide in it. The stalks of wheat were so heavy. like they were filled with lead. A beet weighed maybe seven or eight pounds and when it was roasted in the hot coals and eaten, it had a taste dripping with honey. A head of cabbage was as big as a sieve. Forests with sun-flowers stretch for miles. Oil was made from the kernels. From the kernel of hemp, the inferior oil was made. The Gentiles used this oil during Lent.

The land was blessed with rich grains, rich fruit, and rich gardens. The peasant didn't concern himself with anything else but working the land. He sat securely on his black, dear, trusted earth and didn't think of any other profession. However, he couldn't spare the items he needed for the work. For example, he needed scythes and sickles and plows and mattocks in order to work his fields. He needed salt and kerosene and sugar and tea and oil and fish in his household. He learned to wear clothes from wool instead of the old-fashioned Gentile clothing made of canvas. He became a buyer of products that couldn't be found on the farm and couldn't exist without the village as his forefathers did. In order to buy these things, he needed money. Where did he get it? He sold part of his grain and other blessings of the earth. Whom did he sell it to? The Jews. From whom did he buy his goods? The Jews. It's understood that Jewish income was tightly entwined in the fruit of the earth. If it was a productive year for the farmers. the Jews also profited. If there was an abundance, prices fell and it was bad for both the farmer and the Jew. However, if it was a bad year and no produce grew, hunger was prevalent. That's how the Jew and the farmer couldn't exist without each other.

But a black cloud hovered over both sides. The population increased in both the farms and the village and eventually the earth could not support everybody. The farmers tightened their belts and the Jews began thrashing around like dying fish.

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True, if all the land was in the hands of the farmers, it would have been salvation for everyone, but land in each farm belonged to a noble who owned a big estate and no one profited from him. He paid the farmers very little for developing the land, but the few Jews who dealt with the noble did alright. But how many Jews had such luck? Maybe 1 or 2 in each village. The income that the noble had, he spent in Paris, Vienna, or Krakow and the farmers and villagers didn't enjoy the profit. They felt that things were getting worse.

The Jews of my village could be compared to an arrow that flies away from the bow and lands only where money would be found. The village was full of grain merchants, large, small, smaller, and tiny. The large merchants sent merchandise by train to Keonigsburg. They bought grain from the noble before it was even picked. The smaller merchants also bought smaller amounts of grain because they had less money, and the smallest merchants bought sackfulls or potfulls because they only had a few rubles. Our village was full of these.

Winter. The frost burns. The Jewish houses sleep. Not even one window is lit. The snow is hard as a rock and crackles under the feet. Little by little, the Jews leave their houses with shawls on their shoulders, with earmuffs on their ears, and boots; others wear only small coats and rags on their

feet instead of boots. Where are they going so early? They're going behind the city to "capture" the Gentiles who are coming to sell something. Whoever will get up earlier, go farther, will "capture" the bargains. They go on dirt roads to Antonovke and Kratchkivke and Vinhorade. They sometimes go a viorst or 2 away from the village. They stand. They wait. They tap one foot against the other. They jump to keep warm. They blow on their red, chapped hands. They move them around, they push them into their sleeves. It is cold. The wind blows. The frost eats into the bones. Daylight is still far away. The fields lie dead, wrapped in a gray cover. The scraping of a sled is heard. Aha! A Gentile is coming! "What have you to sell?" Not waiting, a hand is placed into the sled. A look, a touch. Have you corn? Have you flax? Have you anything substantial? The Gentile curses, "Leave things alone, you crazy person". He isn't happy. He knows others are waiting along the way. It's not easy to tear away from the first Jew. He runs along with the sled, dances, holding the sides, asking, "How much do you want? Give a price!" The Gentile scratches his head: on one hand, he hates to lose a customer, on the other, he's doesn't want to get cheated. The bargaining begins as does the screaming. Soon, a second and third Jew joins in. "Away!

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It's my Gentile! My possession!" You hear him, but like a tomcat. Everyone is making deals for everything in the world. Everyone is turning the Gentile's brain. He forgets who his first customer was. "Leave me alone", he screams, "I want to go into the village, then I'll see". The Jews warn him, "Wait, in the village you will have competition, you won't be the only one". The Gentile and the Jews begin boiling. The frost cuts like a knife and the cold drives the sense out of the bones. Even when a Jew buys a sack of corn, or a wagon load of straw or some flax, he still doesn't know if he'll make a profit on it. He can't take it to the terminal alone, so he must sell it then and there for the best price and sometimes, a merchant can give him such a low price that it becomes dark in his eyes.

Just like the grain merchantniks, so were the chicken handlers, and egg merchants and shopkeepers and craftsmen. There were too many of them compared. to the amount of business that could be done. In my village only 2 iron merchants could make a living. When a third came, he had to break his back to make a living, or all three became paupers. In my village, everyone had to tear each other apart for a groshen, and had to do the cleverest deals for a loaf of bread. Even if one outsmarted another merchant and cut him out like a sharp knife, no one still ate well. It was a life of constant dread, chasing, and momentum: and if there was any drive left, one still lived and breathed and married off children and even thought of a better life, and how this was possible was truly a wonder. The patience of the Jewish people and the cleverness was the spirit of our village. Nevertheless, there still remained a place for gentleness and Torah and nicety.

Many bourgeoisie lived a quiet life and didn't fear tomorrow. Those were the lucky ones who left the daily life of the village and involved themselves with the big world. One dealt in timber, another helped build railroad tracks, another Jew stocked products in the stores in Uman. One Jew bought grain from a noble, another help construct a building or a road or a bridge. A Jew owned a mill in a small town. There were several Jews who bought land and held leases, they were called possessors, even though according to law, Jews weren't allowed to lease any land. These Jews had a free hand and didn't feel like anyone was standing behind them with a whip.

Even higher than these bourgeoisie were the wealthy, the honorable, and the top echelon. These were only a few families who bathed in luxury.

The village in general, the majority of the folks, were trapped in poverty, like a fly in a web. People dried out their brains and the juice from their hearts was drained.

And the Jews were needed! Just like the land could not survive without the

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workers who tended the land, so did it need the artisans and merchants. But go have complaints! No one was allowed to go outside the limits and the road to other professions was almost closed. One felt like the air was diminishing and the earth was disappearing under his feet.

We must point out, that in the worst of times, the Jew of my village remained a decent person. The poverty didn't eat up his soul or break his spirit. A smile, a word, a joke about himself or another, a tasty story - and he already conquered the problems of income. He shook the loneliness from himself, he was free. He didn't give a damn about anything. Not worth a turn. As long as the person was a "mensch".

THE JEW AND THE GENTILE IN THE UKRAINIAN VILLAGE

In my village, the Gentile didn't hate the Jew and the Jew didn't hate the Gentile. If other parties didn't mix in, they would have lived forever in peace.

I grew up in small towns and forests. In my younger years, I saw more Gentiles than Jews. I spoke their language as well as mine and was never angry at anyone because they were not a Jew.

This doesn't mean that there was always love between everyone. How indeed can there be love when peoples' hearts are burdened and no one is sure where the next piece of bread will come from. The Jew and Gentile lived from the same piece of land, and, in need. The Gentile expected more for his grain, the Jew wanted to give him less. The Gentile tried to fool the Jew, the Jew "outsmarted" the Gentile. If a shoemaker made a pair of boots for a Gentile and the Gentile owed him one ruble, he would say goodbye to him forever. If a Gentile brought barley into the city, he would have to guard it with seven eyes in case he caught the Jew "playing tricks". If he did catch the Jew, the slaps would fly. If a Gentile came into a Jewish store, he would have to be watched in case something stuck to his finger. If this did happen, the Gentile discovered how much a pound of trouble could cost.

This was a weekly occurrence and it couldn't be otherwise in a country with poverty and despair. But this didn't spread from one individual to the general public. The Jew knew that there were honest, kosher, Gentiles who's word was holy. The Gentiles knew that there were nice Jews, sincere businessmen on whom they could depend. Even more: there was common knowledge that the ordinary Jew was not bad. There was a neighborly upbringing, a good-spirited friendship between the Jew and Gentile.

Naturally, the Jew didn't believe in the Gentile's God. However, he didn't fear him. There was a difference in language, culture, religion and schooling. But, they lived so close to one another, that they understood each other. There was no secrecy in the Gentile ceremonies and holidays. We knew when they had "lent" and other non-Jewish holidays, when they celebrated Christmas and Easter. We didn't care one bit that the Gentiles didn't go to the synagogue or pray from the Book of Psalms.

With regards to how the Gentiles related to the Jews, they knew everything about Jews and Jewish life. They had a certain respect for the Jewish religion and its customs. If a Jew passed through a village and stopped to pray in the house of a Gentile, no one made fun of his Tallis and Tefilin. On the contrary, the Gentiles would tell the youngsters who were staring at the Jew, "you mustn't

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bother him, he's asking from his God", and that was enough. The Gentile woman knew that a Jew mustn't eat non-kosher meat or pig, so she would feed him only crackers, rolls, and roast potatoes. She didn't hate him for his Jewish "zababones" which is what they called the Jewish God. Who could have complaints?

In our village, Jews and Gentiles often visited each other. When Pesach or Succoth came. Gentile merchants went to Jewish merchants to wish them happy holiday. They would sit at their table, had conversations, drank a glass of whiskey and wished everyone well. Likewise, when a Gentile holiday came, Jewish fellows went to the Gentile streets. True, a prominent Jew or a scholar wouldn't lower himself to go celebrate with Gentiles. This was beneath his dignity. The difference in

culture was generally felt. The Jew understood a lot more than the Gentile. He could read and write and thought himself above the general crowd. There were plain Jews, crude brothers, who felt better in the company of Gentiles than in the company of Jews. There were drivers, shoemakers, wheelwrights, and tanners who befriended Gentiles and attended their celebrations, ate their "colored eggs" (for Easter), and drank their whiskey. There were close ties between the Jewish and Gentile streets and villages. In Gentile villages, there were a few Jewish shops or merchants and they were treated like their own. The Gentiles protected the Jews and wouldn't let anyone hurt even one hair on their heads. Gentile and Jewish children lived like brothers. If a Jew drove into a village and the Gentile youngsters ran after him with hat in mouth and yelled, "Jew may you be cursed" it was done as a joke, not out of anger.

In our village, there was a Gentile family with the name Varitch. They were the richest merchants, the most pugnacious, the biggest drinkers, and the strangest-people. A Varitch would appear on the street wearing a white linen shirt, which shimmered like fallen snow. The shirt was embroidered with red and blue and yellow designs - crosses- which completely captured the eye. On his feet, he wore expensive boots with decorated brass nails on the back of the heel. On top of the boots he wore rubber galoshes which shone for a mile. For a coat, he wore a black cape, from a home made fabric which was softer than factory made cloth. He wore the cape over one sleeve as if to show everyone that he couldn't care less about them. Make way! A Varitch is coming. These Varitches were as healthy as iron, with white faces, long black moustaches, and heaps of hair on their heads. They were true "Bad Russians" Real murderers, these Varitches.

Gentiles had much to say and sing about them. If a Varitch had a misunderstanding with another Gentile, it would be all-over for his -friend.

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It happened once that Gentiles came to a fair and started arguing with Jews from our village. It almost came to blows. The Gentiles went for their whips and whatever was in their wagons and who knows what would have happened. A fear came over the Jews. The strange Gentiles were excited and aroused - and the Jews had no strength against them. Well, they let the Varitches know and a whole gang of them came into the market, healthy as bears. They threw themselves on the strange Gentiles and broke their bones and saved the Jews.

Actually, there was no ground for any hatred between the Gentiles and the Jews. The Gentile needed the Jew just as the Jew needed the Gentile. Both folk lived on the same earth for hundreds of years and both had a right to their place under the sun. Firstly, when the Russian Revolutionary movement and the pogrom agitators moved into the government, then hatred appeared, but it didn't penetrate deep into the masses. The hatred didn't come from within, but from the outside. It came from newly arrived, agitators from the establishment, from priests whom they called upon to "unite the Russian folk", from nobility who wanted to throw their guilt upon the Jews. This hatred was created and blown up. They told the peasant that the Jew was an exploiter, that the Jew was draining his blood. But how could he drain blood when he alone was hungry and forlorn. The peasant was told that the Jew was an enemy of his religion, of his God. They began this process and told the masses that Jews needed Christian blood for Pesach. They aroused the patriotic instinct of the peasant: he was told that Jews want to bring down his dear father. Tzar Nicolay. This agitation brought out the bad blood of the peasants and created a bad mood.

Even this bad mood wasn't terrible. It's been 8 years since I was in that place. I traveled to many villages and spoke to many Jews. In large part, it was the same as before. The peasants in my

sister's village still regarded "their" Jews as their own. The peasants looked upon the village Jews as their neighbors. True, the situation for both the peasants and the Jews got much worse. The pale hardship appeared everywhere. The peasants started learning the practice of co-operation. Co-operative shops opened in various towns. This was no danger, since the Jews sold everything cheaper than they did. But it could have gotten worse. The economic fundamentals became smaller under the feet of the Jews.

In those days, however, we were all sure that when Russia becomes free, and the Jew acquires full rights, then the smallest trace of hate

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will dissipate from Ukrainia, We believed in the power of light. We hoped that Jews would live their lives in a free country.

Ukrainia! Ukrainia! What kind of stigma spilled on you! What became of this golden, blessed land!

Note 1

Discussion of the translation of the section discussing Pinchas Makarever
by Leo Miller January 12, 1979

Pinchas is a Bible name. In English it is Phineas. (The first was son of Aaron, and nephew of Moses),

Pinchas Makarever lived in Buki, in the Ukraine, in the second half of the nineteenth century. He had a number of children, among whom were Cheved Feldstein (mother of Sol, Ben and Martin Feldstein) and Chana Greenblatt (mother of Sheila Cheimets) and so is ancestor to their progeny, as well as to assorted Normans of Buffalo, Boston, etc.

This sketch of his personality is a translation of an extract from a Yiddish book, *Mein Shtetl in Ukraina* ("My Home Town in the Ukraine"), published in New York in 1921, written by Moissaye J. Olgin, a nephew of Pinchas's.

The portrait of Pinchas, as a devout, charitable and traditionalist old country Jewish tradesman, might seem idealized and sentimentalized: but Olgin was an extreme radical in politics and a thorough atheist in philosophy, who had fled from everything that the shtetl stood for.

To render this literary likeness into English, retaining the conversational tone of the original, it has been necessary to depart from strict literalism in translating Yiddish idioms and Hebrew phrases. Literal renditions would too often be unintelligible and even misleading to American-born readers unfamiliar with the atmosphere of Tsarist Russia, where Ukrainian peasants and Jewish tradespeople lived side by side in worlds apart.

To do full justice to all the local color in this vignette would require more footnotes than most great-grandchildren nowadays will tolerate. One point, however. In a situation where one read from the Holy Scriptures and the prayerbook every day of one's life, and read very little else, it was not at all uncommon for a pious Jew to be able to repeat by heart what may seem incredibly long passages from those classics.