

G. Bar-Tzvi (Wortman)

Chapters of Remembrance and Commemoration

Our Shtetl Ternivka

Second and Expanded Edition

A Publication of the Ternivka Landsmanschaft

Tel Aviv, 5732 (1972)

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Dedication



I would like to dedicate this translation to my maternal grandmother's paternal aunt's husband, Fetter Lazar Pollick (Shute) (1896-1987) of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada who was always proud to proclaim that he was from Mestechko Ternovka, Gaisinskiy Uyezd, Podolskaya Guberniya.

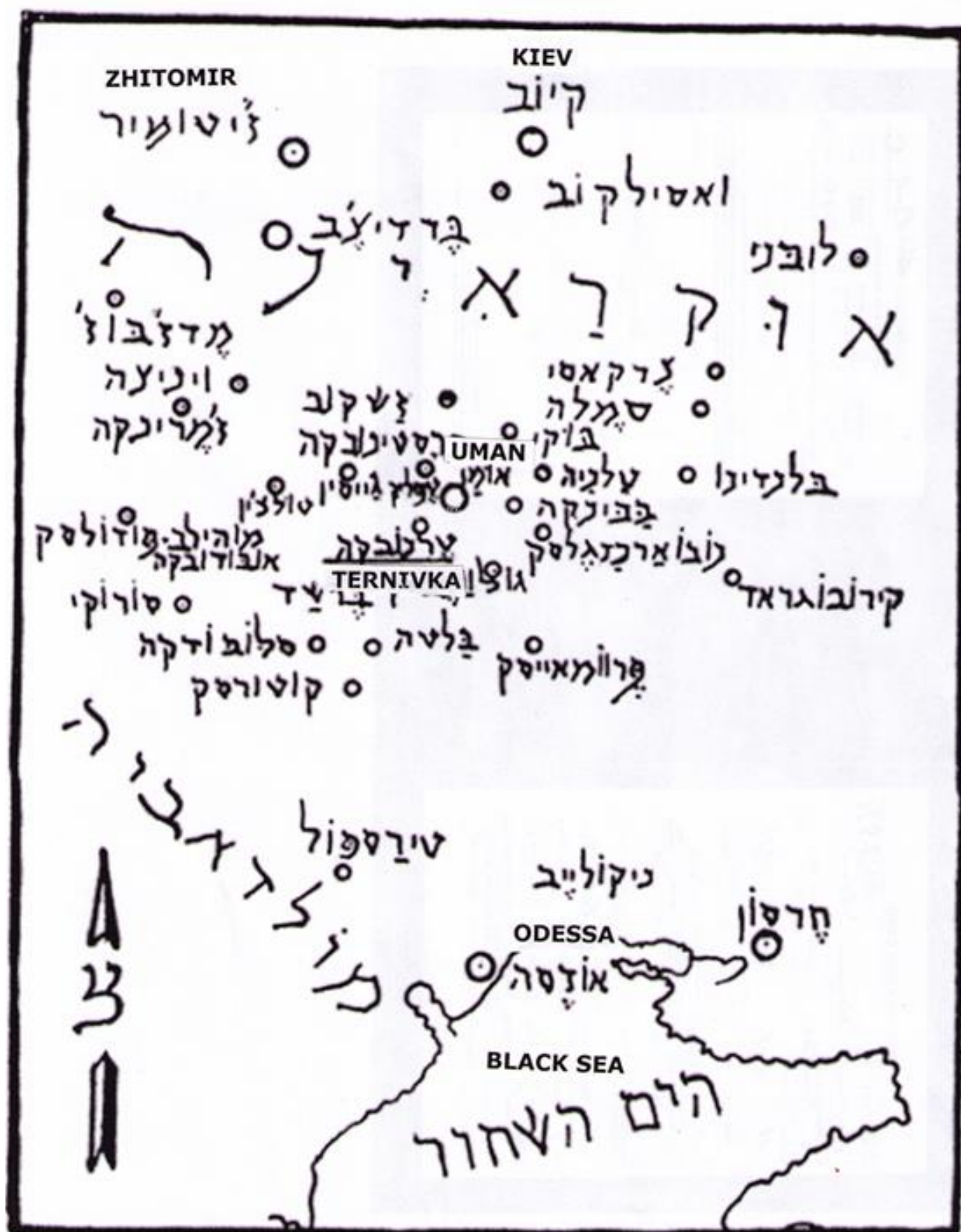
A Note from the Translator

The readers of this translation will note the comments that I have placed in parentheses throughout the translation. This was my attempt at clarifying certain possibly obscure terms and also for the purpose of making the translation more interesting for the reader. Most of the comments were researched from the Internet. I take sole responsibility for any errors or omissions in these comments.

Nathen Gabriel

North Vancouver, BC, Canada

June 1, 2015



במרכז תרשים זה מסומנת העיירה טרנובקה.
 The shtetl Ternivka is marked in the middle of this drawing.

And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged.

(Joel 4:21)

The chronicle of the shtetl of Ternivka that will be related below was written from memory only. I heard many of the events that will be related from my ancestors of blessed memory and from the elders of the shtetl. I myself was an eyewitness to many of the events. I also received from reliable people, natives of the shtetl, feedback on events that occurred in the shtetl after I immigrated to Israel (1920).

As the “Last of the Mohicans” who still lives in his spirit and memory shtetl life and its history (the vast majority of Ternivkers who are still living today in Israel and abroad left the shtetl as children so the events that occurred in the shtetl are not at all clear to them), I decided to relate on these pages the history of the shtetl in which the cruel Nazi enemy annihilated both young and old.

May these words about Ternivka serve as a testimonial and a memorial to the pure souls who died at the hands of human beasts. May God avenge their blood.

Most of the events related here are not in chronological order but are arranged according to subject matter so sometimes earlier events appear after later events because we do not recall our memories in chronological order.

Unfortunately, I don't have any photos to accompany the text that would portray shtetl life, its institutions and personalities. I only have personal family photos that don't at all portray shtetl life.

As far as I can remember, shtetl life and its institutions were never “immortalized” in photos but instead were “immortalized” in events and activities.

G. Bar-Tzvi (Wortman)

Tel Aviv, Israel's 22nd Independence day, 5th day of Iyyar, 5730 (May 11, 1970)

About the Second Edition

The First Edition of Our Shtetl Ternivka that appeared in 5730 (1970) in a limited number of copies and was well received by the critics in the newspapers Davar, Yeda-Am, Forverts and Der Tog sold out completely. Therefore the publishers, the Ternivka Landsmanschaft, decided to publish a Second Edition of this book.

And because, since the publishing of the First Edition, I have remembered more events, activities and personalities of the shtetl, I have also put them to paper and they are appearing here in this Second Edition for the first time.

In this expanded edition 20 new chapters have therefore been added and fitted in according to their subject matter and content. Those additional chapters have been marked with an asterisk in the Table of Contents.

It is clear that even with the addition of these chapters the whole story of this humble shtetl, its vibrant atmosphere and its unique nature, has not been told. But even in the “shaded ember” of these memories, the shtetl of Ternivka is reflected in all of her charm and innocence right up until her bitter end (1942).

G. Bar-Tzvi (Wortman)

Tel Aviv, Israel's 24th Independence Day, 5th day of Iyyar, 5732 (April 19, 1972)

1. This Is How the Shtetl Came Into Being

The shtetl of Ternivka, which was in the Province of Podolia (Podolia Guberniya) and on the border with the Province of Kiev (Kiev Guberniya), belonged to Kiev Oblast during the Soviet period (I believe that it may actually have belonged to Vinnitsa Oblast as it is today). It is surmised that it was called Ternivka after the low prickly bush "Tern" or "Ternovnik" (Prunus spinosa) that was widespread in the area. This bush produces small fruit about the size of a cherry, bluish and edible. The people called the fruit "tarn." It would appear that the word Ternivka is derived from there.

According to tradition, the shtetl was established in the year 1813 and this is how it happened. In the District of Uman (Uman Uyezd) there was a tiny shtetl called Bosivka on land owned by a Polish landlord (Bosivka is about 30 miles north of Ternivka).

One day there was an important wedding. The young prodigy, 18 year old Yankele (Ya'akov), who had already been ordained as a Rabbi and was the son of Rabbi Avraham Wortman, Rabbi of the community, was entering into a life of marriage and the doing of good deeds with the daughter of the Chasidic Rebbe, Rabbi Refa'el of Bershad (1751-1827), an outstanding disciple of the Chasidic Rebbe, Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz (1726-1790), a close disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov (the founder of Chasidism, ca. 1700-1760).

All of the Jews of Bosivka participated in this joyful event and sang and danced all across the shtetl. Just at that time, it happened that the Polish landowner, who was a zealous Catholic and a hater of Jews, passed by and when he saw his "Moshkes," the Jews, joyful and happy, dancing and singing in public view on "his land," he was filled with anger and rage and decreed that his servants, the doers of his will, destroy the homes of the "Zhidi" (Jews) because of this "impertinence."

In those days, the decree of a landowner was like a royal decree and much to the horror and shock of the frightened and frantic Jews, the cruel and insane decree issued by the landowner was quickly carried out despite the pleading and the weeping of the Jews of Bosivka. After the destruction of their homes these wretched souls had no choice but to take their children, their wives and their possessions and wander to another place in order to put a roof over their heads.

About half of the shtetl of Bosivka, which had about 100 families, moved to the neighboring shtetl of “Rachmistrivka” (Rotmistrivka was in fact about 90 miles ENE of Bosivka) and Rabbi Avraham Wortman (the Rabbi of the Jews of Bosivka) with the permission of the local Rabbi, was the Rabbi of the Jews of Bosivka who settled there. The rest of the refugee families spread out among other shtetls – Monastyrishche, Talne, Tulchin and other shtetls.

The “Yeshiva” (seminary) student Rabbi Ya’akov Wortman urged his fellow “Yeshiva” students to go somewhere else and found a new shtetl rather than settle in a shtetl that already existed. His heartfelt and convincing words and the esteem in which he was held persuaded them and about 20 “Yeshiva” students went with him and arrived at the lands of the estate of Ternivka.

When these wanderers stood before the “Puritz” (landowner) and asked his permission to settle on his land and establish a Jewish community there, he willingly agreed because he knew well that the diligent and talented Jews would help him to develop his estate and increase his revenue. He set aside for these Bosivka refugees a plot of land on which to build their homes and establish a Jewish community, a Jewish shtetl. That is how the shtetl of Ternivka came into being. And Rabbi Ya’akov Wortman, who was among its promoters and founders, was its first Rabbi and spiritual advisor. As previously mentioned, this happened in 1813.

This small settlement developed over many years and became a large shtetl because over the years it absorbed more Jews. It would seem that the town was preplanned on engineering principles. All of its streets were as straight as a ruler and parallel to one another. There was only one street across the breadth of the shtetl and it connected a few main streets. There were even a few streets that were paved with flagstones. Only Jews lived in the shtetl itself and surrounding it was the village of Ternivka where the Ukrainian farmers lived. About 4,000 Jews lived in Ternivka at the outbreak of the First World War (1914).

2. A Story about the Rabbi of the Shtetl and the Chasidic Rebbe of Talne

The community of Ternivka conducted itself on calm waters. There was no fuss and no bother. Jews made a living somehow, made do with little and worshipped their Creator with love and awe. But during Rabbi Ya'akov Wortman's elder years the skies over the shtetl grew dark, brewing a strong storm of emotions.

And this is what happened. The Rabbi of the community, Rabbi Ya'akov, was not only the son-in-law of the Chasidic Rebbe, Rabbi Refa'el of Bershad (for decades Rabbi Ya'akov and his family celebrated the first two days of Passover [the Seders] with Rabbi Refa'el of Bershad until Rabbi Refa'el passed away [1827]). He was also a long-time and distinguished disciple.

The Chasidism of Bershad distinguished itself by its simplicity, its modesty and its innocence, its level of humility and its great love for truth. Rabbi Refa'el practised what he preached. He lived a life of simplicity and scarcity unlike the Chasidic Rebbes of Ruzhin, Talne and others who lived lives of splendor and opulence, lives of wealth and luxury, like landowners, living in luxurious palaces and traveling in splendid carriages pulled by prancing horses, wearing the finest silks and using dishes of silver and gold.

Rabbi Ya'akov with his modest and moral ways was greatly admired by the Jews of the shtetl and even by the non-Jews who considered him a man of God, a holy man. Most of the Jews of Ternivka were also followers of the Chasidic Rebbe, Rabbi Refa'el of Bershad. But a certain assertive man in the shtetl by the name of Zaks who was friendly with the "Puritz" (landowner) and with those in power was of course a follower of the Chasidic Rebbe of Talne because this Chasidic Rebbe, like Rabbi Judah the Prince (a 3rd Century CE Rabbi), paid homage to rich men.

One day Rabbi Duvidl of Talne (Rabbi David Twersky, 1808–1882) came to Ternivka to visit his flock, his few but rich and assertive followers. Rabbi Ya'akov, even though he was elderly and advanced in years (about 70 years old) and even though, as mentioned before, he was not a follower of the Chasidic Rebbe of Talne, saw it his duty as the Rabbi of the community to greet the respected visitor who was descended from a distinguished family and the grandson of the Chasidic Rebbe of Chernobyl (Rabbi Menachem Nachum Twersky, 1730–1797) may his merit protect us.

When Rabbi Ya'akov came to the inn where Rabbi Duvidl of Talne was staying (it was the inn of the rich and assertive Zaks where mostly landowners and government officials would stay) in order to greet and welcome him, he saw to his great astonishment, and woe to those eyes that behold such a thing, that the collar of the shirt of Rabbi Duvidl of Talne was not fastened with a lace according to the custom of proper Chasidic Jews but was buttoned with a button according to the custom of landowners, God forbid.

למזל טוב יעלה ויצמח כגן רטוב מצא אשה מצא טוב ויפק רצון מי"י הטוב

המגיד מראשית אחרית הוא יתן שם טוב וסאריה לאלה דברי התנאים והברית שנדברו והותנו בין הני תרי הצדדים היינו מצד אחד ה"ה הרבני המופלא מ"ה ישעיהו בהרבני החסיד מ"ה יצחק העומד מצד בנר הבחור החשוב המופלא כמר ארי' ליב ומצד האי הרבני המופלא מ"ה יעקב בהרבני המנוח מ"ה אברהם העומד מצד הבתולה מרת רבקה תחי' ר"ד הבחור החשוב המופלא כמר ארי' ליב ישא במז"ש את הבתולה המהוללה מרת רבקה בחופה וקדושין כדת משה וישראל ואל יבריתו ואל יעלמו לא זה מזו ולא זו מזה רק יזכרו באהבה וחיבה וישלישו בניכסיהון שזה כשזה אבי החתן התחייב א"ע להפריז על גזן בנו החתן הנ"ל סך עשרים רענול"ך מעות קערבליך לסלק על זמנים המבוארים היינו על חג שבועות הבע"ל יסלק סך עשרים רוח ושליש מסך הנותר יסלק א"ה בח"ש דשנת תקפ"ב ושליש מסך הנותר משנת תקפ"ב יסלק א"ה בח"ש דשנת תקפ"ג והמותר עד תשלום סך הנזן יסלק בח"ש דשנת תקפ"ד לשליש המרובה לשני הצדדים מתנות להכלה היינו בענדאליך שיהא שוה בשופי שנים עשר רוח גם שאל טוב וסיגר טוב גם בריסט"ך טוב מצופה זהב כפי המבואר בראשי פרקים חרץ שארי מתנות קסנים כאורח כל הנגידים ואלה הבנדים אשר יעשה אבי החתן להחתן היינו וזפצע טוב של ראצי מארי טוב גם טיזליק של ראצי מאר גם קאסטין של איילין קוטייא גם טיליש טוב חרץ בנדי חול הכל כנהוג כל הנגידים אבי הכלה התחייב א"ע להפריז על גזן בתו הכלה סך חמישים רענול"ך מעות קערבליך לסלק על זמנים המבוארים היינו כחג שבועות הבע"ל יסלק א"ה סך חמישים רוח ועכ"פ לא פחות מארבעים רוח ושליש מסך הנותר יסלק א"ה בח"ש דשנת תקפ"ב הבע"ל ושליש סך הנותר משנת תקפ"ב יסלק א"ה בח"ש דשנת תקפ"ג והמותר עד תשלום סך הנזן יסלק א"ה בח"ש דשנת תקפ"ד לשליש המרובה לשני הצדדים והפירות שיעשה מעות הנזן אשר יסלקו הצדדים עד החתונה שייך להצדדים לכל אחד כפי מעותיו מתנות להחתן היינו שטריימל טוב בערך חמשה עשר רוח כשפע טלית טוב מצופה זהב בערך שמונה עשר רוח בשפע יארמילקיא מצופה זהב ערך חמשה רוח גם קיטל כתונת שלקוין מצופה זהב ואלה הבנדים אשר יעשה אבי הכלה לבתו הכלה יוסף של מארי טוב מצופה זהב טוב עם פיא מאנזיר של מארי אין מאין חיסטיל של העסטיל טוב מצופה זהב טוב כנהוג כל הנגידים בנדי שבת בנדי חול הכל כנהוג ממ כ"וב הכל כנהוג מוונת להזוג תיכף אחר החתנה על שלחן אבי הכלה שתי שנים רצופים ואחר המשך הנ"ל יחזיק אבי החתן את הווג הנ"ל על שלחנו משך שתי שנים רצופים ואחרי ימי משך הנ"ל יחזיק טוב אבי הכלה את הווג הנ"ל על שלחנו משך שתי שנים רצופים ואבי החתן ילביש וינעיל את בנו החתן כל ימי משך הנ"ל היינו משך ששה שנים רצופים ואבי הכלה ילביש וינעיל את בתו הכלה כל ימי משך מוונתם ושכר לימוד עבור החתן חל על שני הצדדים אחר החתנה לחצאין אך אם ילמוד אבי הכלה בעצמו עם החתן אוי אין צריך אבי החתן ליתן כלום והחתנה תהי' למז"ש מתי שיתרצו הצדדים קנס מצד העובר לצד המקיים חצי גזן וקנס לא יפסוד וכ"י קודם החתנה מחויב אבי הכלה ליתן עבור שכייל החתן מידי זמן סך שלשה רוח והחתנה תהי' משנת תקפ"ב רחש וכ"י לחצאין והחתנה תהי' על הוצאות אבי הכלה מצד החתן ה"ה הרבני המופלא מ"ה עובדי' במ"ה אלעזר והשני ה"ה הרבני המופלא מ"ה יעקב יוסף במ"ה ישכר ומצד הכלה הרבני המופלא מ"ה נח יעקב במ"ה נתן העשיל והשני מ"ה יחזקאל עוזר במ"ה מרדכי וכחויב הצדדים לפצות את הערבות בכדי שלא יגיע להם שום ה"זיק ומחמת עיבור וקיסוס חלילה יעשו כתקבות שום וקנינו מן הצדדי' וכן הערבות על כל הא דכתיב במגו דכשר למקניא ב"י יום א ל"ג בעומר חי אייר שנת תקפ"א פה ק' ב ט ע ר נ י ו ר ק י א .

והכל שריר וקיים

נאם יוסף יצחק במ"ה יהודא ליב יצ"ו

ונאם לוי יצחק במ"ה יהודא ליב יצ"ו

נאם ארי' ליב בהר"ר ישעיהו יצ"ו

A printed version of the handwritten contract on the previous page.

“Woe is me,” Rabbi Ya’akov deeply sighed, “the grandson of the Chasidic Rebbe of Chernobyl is transgressing ‘you must not follow their customs’ (Leviticus 18:3) and buttons the collar of his shirt in the way that the evil landowners do!” These words of admonition were said in the presence of the followers of the Chasidic Rebbe of Talne.

The clever Rabbi Duvidl remained silent and swallowed his pride and did not respond. After all, he (Rabbi Duvidl) was a relative youngster (about 58 years old) compared with the elderly Rabbi Ya’akov (about 70 years old) who was one of the greatest disciples of the Chasidic Rebbe of Bershad. But Rabbi Duvidl remembered this insult and when he returned to Talne he decided to avenge this insult and he sent a Rabbi from among his followers to Ternivka to replace Rabbi Ya’akov as Rabbi of the community.

When this became known in the shtetl, it created a huge storm of protest and the majority revolted against this shameful act, but the assertive Zaks, who as mentioned before, was close to the “Puritz” (landowner) and to those in power and other followers of the Chasidic Rebbe of Talne, rich and assertive men, paid no attention to the protests of the masses and appointed the new Rabbi, Rabbi Hirsch, Rabbi of the community against their will. By the way, this Rabbi (Rabbi Hirsch) was the grandfather of the Hebrew writer, Micha-Yosef Berdichevsky/Bin-Gorion (1865–1921).

When the humble Rabbi Ya’akov saw that God’s name was being desecrated and that a great controversy might erupt, God forbid, with unforeseeable consequences, he decided to relent and to leave the shtetl and the community rabbinate and to immigrate to the Holy Land. With no alternative, the community accepted this and even took it upon itself, of its own good will, to send to Rabbi Ya’akov, for the duration of his life, the salary that he was receiving as the Rabbi of Ternivka.

On the day that Rabbi Ya’akov left the shtetl for the Land of Israel (in 1865), all the stores and the workshops were closed and all of the inhabitants, both young and old, accompanied him for a short distance. When they returned to their homes there was a sudden downpour of rain. The inhabitants of the shtetl then said: “Even the heavens are weeping over the departure of a saint from the town, as our sages of blessed memory have said: ‘When a saint departs from a city, its splendor and glory also depart.’”

Rabbi Ya’akov’s journey to the Land of Israel took many weeks and when he arrived in the Land of Israel after a difficult journey, he decided to settle in Tzefat, one of the Four Holy Cities of the Land of Israel (Jerusalem, Tzefat, Tiberias and Hebron), the city of the “Kabbala” (Jewish mysticism) and the “ARI” (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria [1534–1572]). There he bought himself a small house and gathered around him a few “Yeshiva” (seminary) students and taught them at no charge the Torah and reverence for God. By the way, once, his wife (his second) was walking in the streets of Tzefat and an Arab who was passing by on a donkey hit her with his club, for no good reason, and she fell down and died.

Fifty-five years after Rabbi Ya'akov Wortman immigrated to the city of Safad in the Holy Land (in 1865), one of his great grandsons, the writer of these pages, immigrated to the Land of Israel as a pioneer, and he traveled to Tzefat in search of the "footprints" of his great grandfather, the Rabbi. After much searching, he succeeded in finding an elderly man by the name of Rabbi Nathan who supervised the baking of Matza (this happened close to Passover in the year 5682 [April of 1922]).

The elderly Rabbi Nathan told the great grandson that he himself was one of the "Yeshiva" students who had studied the Torah with Rabbi Ya'akov and he had much to say in his praise and about his great knowledge of the Torah. Rabbi Nathan even led the great grandson to the house of Rabbi Ya'akov. It had long ago fallen into ruin. Only partial walls and the oven of the ruined kitchen could be seen. In those days in 5682 (1922) there were many ruined houses in Tzefat, as if they had no value. Removal of the ruins would have cost more than the lot was worth.

When the elderly man was also asked to point out the grave of Rabbi Ya'akov, he apologized that he would not be able to fulfill this request since a long time had elapsed since Rabbi Ya'akov had died and many old gravestones had fallen over and were broken and he no longer remembered the place of burial of his Rabbi, Rabbi Ya'akov, because he hadn't gone to the cemetery in many years.

By the way, the "Kushan" (Ottoman deed of property) for the house that Rabbi Ya'akov bought in Tzefat was sent for safekeeping to his descendants in Ternivka, as their "inheritance." The deed of property was kept by his son-in-law, Simcha Koifman. After that, it was passed on to his grandsons, the Koifman brothers. Because of the Russian Revolution and the Civil War, the brothers were scattered to different places in Russia and the deed of property was lost.

3. In Praise of Rabbi Ya'akov

Many stories and tales about Rabbi Ya'akov spread in the shtetl of Ternivka. They related that on the Sabbath it was his custom to speak only the Holy Tongue (Hebrew) because he used to say "the Holy Tongue is suitable to the Holy Sabbath." He didn't like positions of power and would quote a saying of our sages of blessed memory, "you should hate positions of power" (Ethics of the Fathers 1:10) and he would educate his scholarly sons to be in awe of the Lord, to work and to have worldly experiences. One of them became a fisherman and the other a merchant. Rabbi Ya'akov would go from door to door and collect donations in his large, red handkerchief which he would later distribute to both Jews and non-Jews "in the interest of peace." He often would walk in the streets of the shtetl and help an elderly person, a woman, a child to carry their load.

Part of a letter or note in the handwriting of Rabbi Ya'akov found in the family collection. Below is a printed copy of the letter.

The letter starts by mentioning that Rabbi Ya'akov stopped in the town of Tarashcha on the eve of the New Moon of Tamuz (June of 1865) on his way to the Holy Land (possibly in order to prostrate himself on the grave of his Rebbe [and father-in-law], Rabbi Refa'el of Bershad who had lived in Tarashcha towards the end of his life and had been buried there in 1827).

קטע ממכתב או מרשימה בכתב־ידו של הרב ר' יעקב
(נמצא בגני המשפחה ; למטה נתון תעתיק המכתב)

צדקה רחמי ביום טבולת צדקה וכו' סגור שיעורו אהרן בן
תנו צדקה לי אבי צדקה וכו' אהרן בן יצחק בן יצחק
אבות זיוט טוב ואתר פיצור אהרן בן יצחק אבי לויאלק פיצור
אבות הלבנות נאמי אשכנזי חן אשכנזי חן אשכנזי חן אשכנזי חן
למך אשכנזי חן

בין ימים הפניות הייט לאזו להיותו אשכנזי חן וכו'
אשכנזי חן וכו' אשכנזי חן וכו' אשכנזי חן וכו' אשכנזי חן וכו'
אשכנזי חן

וע' צוללו אפוא על הגמרא שלשה אפוא ביום ימים
תורה וכו' וכו' וכו' כי התורה שלשה אפוא ביום ימים
וע' החומר מעורו כי כך דרכה של תורה פת במלח תאכל וכו'
כי מתוך ציוני החומר יתגדל ויתרבה כח השכל בסוד אומרי כאשר יענו אותו
כן ירבה וכן יפרוץ וכך איי כתיב בין ארץ אשר לא במסכות
תאכל בה לחם ופי' בעקדה אין הארץ היא — — —

בעת שהייתי בעיר טראשטשע - על סבר מו"ר סרוב נסיעתי לאה"ק בער"ח
תמוז. אמר לי לבי שאמשך א"ע שלא לעשות כי אם רצון השיי גם
להיות איש טוב ואחר ביאתי לאה"ק אמר לי לבי שאמשך א"ע מיה ...
ומדות השפלות ושלא לשנא ח"ו לשום אדם מישראל וכשי"כ שלא
לדבר לשון הרע ח"ו

דין מידות הכרחיות היינו שלא להיות שקרן וכעסן
וגדלן ועקשן ובעל מרה שחורה ושלא לדבר לה"ר ח"ו ולאהוב ארץ
ישראל.

מס' עוללות אפרים על הגמרא שלשה דברים באים ע"י יסורים
תורה וא"י ועה"כ וכתב כי התורה קשה לקבלה מי שלא הורגל ביסורים
ועיבוי החומר מעורו כי כך דרכה של תורה פת במלח תאכל וכו'
כי מתוך ציוני החומר יתגדל ויתרבה כח השכל בסוד אומרי כאשר יענו אותו
כן ירבה וכן יפרוץ וכך איי כתיב בין ארץ אשר לא במסכות
תאכל בה לחם ופי' בעקדה אין הארץ היא — — —

• חותנו ר' רפאל מברשד דר באחרית ימיו בעיר טראשטשע.

It was also related that the Ukrainian man who would every year for forty years on the eve of Passover carry water in special "Passover buckets" from a distant well to the house of Rabbi Ya'akov – died suddenly in the very same year that Rabbi Ya'akov immigrated to Tzefat in the Holy Land... because by his service to Rabbi Ya'akov he had fulfilled his purpose in the world...

By the way, on Passover, those who were very strict in their Jewish observance didn't use the water that the Jewish "Vasser Treggers" (water carriers) would supply them with in their barrels because those barrels were not special "Passover barrels," but were regular barrels in which the Jewish "Vasser Treggers" would carry water all year long and which in honor of the Passover holiday they would just "Kosher" by immersing them in boiling water.

4. The Economy and the Livelihoods in the Shtetl

Like most shtetls, Ternivka also existed from trade, storekeeping and handicrafts. It even had "industry." It had a large steam driven flour mill to which the Ukrainian farmers of the surrounding area would bring their wheat to mill. It had a large and famous beer factory. This beer was famous far and wide. People would come to Ternivka from many large and distant cities and from many shtetls to buy this excellent and famous beer. There were a few different types of beer. These two successful enterprises belonged to the Koifman Brothers who were among the richest and the most respected of the shtetl.

They were among the great grandsons of Rabbi Ya'akov Wortman through their grandfather (Simcha Koifman, Rabbi Ya'akov's son-in-law). They were also large suppliers of sugar beets to the sugar factory of Brodsky (Lazar Brodsky the Jewish "sugar baron," 1848–1904) that was in the vicinity of Ternivka (the writer Yitzchak Norman of blessed memory who was born in Dubovo [23 miles ENE of Ternivka] worked in his youth as a clerk for the Koifmans).

There were also a few horse-powered mills that ground grits in the shtetl, a few small gins for beating and cleaning wool that the farmers would bring after the shearing of their sheep, a large seltzer water factory, two oil presses and also a Passover Matza factory. The degree to which Ternivka was a shtetl of trade and traffic is proven by this fact. There were twelve hotels and low-priced inns in this small shtetl that provided a living for their owners!

Every two weeks on a Tuesday a very large “Yarid” (market day) that was “famous” in the area would be held in Ternivka. I remember one episode connected with the “Yarid” that gave testimony to the “wars of the Jews” over the issue of livelihood. The “Tandetniks,” that’s what the sellers of ready-to-wear clothes, mainly to Ukrainians, were called (Jews almost never bought ready-to-wear clothes because of their plain fabrics and also because of their weak and shabby stitching) who were looking forward to the “Yarid” every two weeks were disappointed by the tents of Jewish “Tandetniks” from other shtetls who were coming to Ternivka for the “Yarid” and selling clothes cheaply, competing with the “Ternivkers” and depriving them of their livelihood.

So what did the locals do? They went and complained to the “Pristav” (Police Chief) about their difficult situation. Of course, this complaint was accompanied by a nice bribe. The “Pristav,” a clever Ukrainian, gave the “Ternivkers” this advice. Even though there was no need for the locals to set up tents to sell clothes like the outsiders since they had stores, he suggested to them that they also set up a row of tents near their stores.

On “Yarid” day when the “Pristav” passed through the different streets in order to supervise what was happening at the “Yarid” he also passed through the “Clothes Street” and when he saw the two rows of tents, of the locals and of the outsiders, he immediately ordered that all of the tents be taken down “because they were interfering with the traffic in the street.” So the tents were taken down without any complaints or back talk (of course the locals did not lose out in this matter) and from then on “Tandetniks” from outside never came to compete with the locals.

5. The Story of a family

In Chapter 4 we already mentioned the Koifman brothers, among the richest and the most respected of the shtetl. The grandfather of these brothers, Simcha Koifman, married the daughter of Rabbi Ya’akov Wortman, the first rabbi of Ternivka. Simcha was a wise and educated scholar and one of the wealthy men of the nearby city of Uman, the metropolis of the region, invited Simcha Koifman to educate and tutor his children. Simcha lived in the home of this wealthy man for twenty years and from time to time would visit his home in Ternivka (about 20 miles to the South-West).

This wealthy person (in Uman) had dealings with many Polish landowners who would visit his home. In that way the educated and intelligent Simcha learned the Polish language and the manners and etiquette of landowners. After twenty years of teaching, Simcha “divorced himself” from tutoring and went into business. He established contacts with the landowners of the region and as an intelligent, honest and trustworthy man he found favor in their eyes and they relied on him for everything.

When Simcha died, his son Avraham Koifman continued to do business with the landowners until he himself became ill and was bedridden for many years until he died. His wife Tzurtel, a valiant and energetic woman, with the help of her sons (she had six sons and one daughter) and especially with the help of her two eldest sons Ya’akov and Chaim who were the pillars of the many branched Koifman family, continued on with these different businesses both when her husband was ill and after he died.

One of the six brothers, Aharon, immigrated in his youth to the United States where he became a streetcar driver and...a socialist. The Koifman brothers asked their brother Aharon to leave the “Golden Land” and the streetcar and return to the shtetl where they promised him an abundant living. But he refused to return. It would seem that as a socialist he didn’t want to return to reactionary Russia and he also did not want to be a beneficiary of the charity of his capitalistic brothers...Only when the Bolshevik Revolution broke out did he return to Russia.

As a speaker of English, he got himself a good Soviet position and as a socialist he was pleased with the Revolution. As for his brothers, the “capitalists,” they became impoverished and were left with nothing. All of their property, the mill, the beer factory, etc. was expropriated. The brothers who were left without a living, left the shtetl and were scattered among the different cities of Russia and suffered like most of the Jews and the inhabitants of Russia during the Revolution.

And so one of the most glorious families, one that was always generous to anyone in trouble and suffering, left the shtetl and was scattered by the storm like chaff before the wind...

6. Education

Jewish children were of course educated in “Cheders” (school rooms where boys between the ages of 3 and 13 were taught the basics of Judaism). Among the “Cheders” in the shtetl there was one “Cheder” that was somewhat modern. Not that it was, God forbid, an “improved Cheder” (with subjects other than Judaism). Rather, its modernity expressed itself in the fact that the teacher in this “Cheder,” Tuvia Kling, a “Yeshiva” (seminary) student, told his pupils not to call him by the title “Rebbe” (“Rabbi”) but to call him “Teacher, Sir.” He also innovated that two students every week would take turns being monitors whose job it was to monitor cleanliness and the wiping of the blackboard (yes, there was also a blackboard in this “Cheder”). This “Melamed” (“Cheder” teacher) also taught his students Hebrew, a bit of grammar and how to write a letter.

Among the “Cheders” of the shtetl, the small “Cheder” of Rabbi Aharon, the son of Rabbi David Kruglyak, the Rabbi of the community, stood out. This Rabbi Aharon, the “Yeshiva” student, had already been ordained as a Rabbi but did not yet have a pulpit in any of the shtetls or cities. But since he needed to support his family he in the meantime gathered around him some of the best boys in the shtetl, sons of important wealthy men, and taught them Torah and a “page of Gemara” (“Talmud”). After that, he was offered a pulpit in the city of Bohuslav in the Province of Kiev (Kiev Guberniya) and he remained there for a few years until after the First World War when he had a bad accident and was left a permanent paraplegic. His daughter who lived in Palestine brought him to Palestine.

In addition to the traditional “Cheders” there was also a private Jewish-Russian school whose founder and principal was a man by the name of Mendelson who was from another city. This Mendelson was certified to teach the Russian language and was somewhat eccentric, a kind of “Yeshiva” student who had “missed the boat.” Since he was not able to teach all of his many students (he had a few classrooms), his wife and his young son and daughter served as teacher’s aides. Later, the Tuvia Kling mentioned above, joined his school to teach Hebrew to the students of his school one hour a day. In that way they fulfilled their “Cheder” obligation to study the Torah...

Mendelson introduced a new custom to the shtetl. With the arrival of the month of May, the month of spring, he would go out with his students into the nearby forest and they would spend the whole day celebrating the “Holiday of Spring” in the bosom of nature. Of course many young men and women would also throng to the forest to have a good time, not to mention hawkers of cold drinks and sweets.

In addition to this Jewish-Russian school there was a real Hebrew school in Ternivka where only Hebrew was spoken. All of the subjects were taught in Hebrew and the students of this school spoke and conversed among themselves, at least within the walls of the school, only in Hebrew. And if anyone uttered a foreign or Yiddish word in the school he was fined...

The founder of this Hebrew school was a young teacher, a native of the shtetl of Savran (about 40 miles South of Ternivka), whose name was Motel (Natan) Shargorodsky, brother of Dr. Fanya (Pu'ah) Shargorodsky (1879–1950), the writer/educator who published Hebrew educational books for new immigrants to Israel and also invented a new kind of Hebrew shorthand. Toward the end of her life she directed the pedagogical library of the Teachers' Union in Israel.

This Hebrew school developed nicely but for some reason N. Shargorodsky suddenly left the shtetl of Ternivka and moved to another city and the school was closed, much to the satisfaction of the "Melameds" ("Cheder" teachers) but to the disappointment of the students and others. After that, another two "modern" schools were opened in which the students learned a half day in Hebrew and half day in Russian. One of the schools belonged to the teacher Avraham-Yankel (Ya'akov) and the other belonged to the teacher Eisenberg, the son-in-law of Yitzchak-Shmu'el (Itzig-Shmelkes).

In addition to these schools and to that of Mendelson there were two Russian schools in the shtetl, one whose curriculum was religious (Russian Orthodox) and belonged to the Church and had only four grades and the other a government elementary school with eight grades that had a good educational standard. Very few Jewish boys studied in this school because studying there required writing on the Sabbath.

Among the few Jews who studied there were the children of the "Gabbay" (Director) of the Beit Hamidrash (one of the synagogues), a wealthy and respected Jew (Sh. K.) but not Torah observant and they of course wrote on the Sabbath. This fact that the children of the "Gabbay" of the Beit Hamidrash wrote in public on the Sabbath aroused the fury of the pious and of the Rabbi and they demanded that he either take his children out of this Russian school or that he resign as "Gabbay."

Those who were not satisfied with just an elementary school education traveled to other cities that had secondary schools and tried to get in to them. Of course this was a “luxury” that only the children of the rich and the well-to-do could allow themselves. There were a few boys, among them my brother Moshe, who traveled to study Torah at the famous “Lida Yeshiva” (Seminary) (near Vilna but now in Belarus) where they studied both Torah and secular studies, an education that was equal to four grades of secondary school. They also studied modern Hebrew literature and the teacher was the well-known pedagogue Pinchas Shifman (1873–1945) of blessed memory who also taught here in Israel. The founder and the head of this “Yeshiva” was the famous Rabbi Y. Reines (1839–1915), the founder of “Mizrachi” (a religious Zionist organization).

A few boys, including those who had already studied at the “Lida Yeshiva,” also traveled to Palestine about a year before the First World War to study at the Jaffa “Gymnasia” (secondary school) and at the Jerusalem Seminar. Among these boys were the veteran Israeli educator Yehoshu’a HaMe’iri and his teacher-brother Shraga of blessed memory. The Haifa engineer-surveyor Ben-Tzion Yanay son of David Yanovsky also immigrated with his family to Israel and studied at the Reali School in Haifa and at others.

In 1919 Ternivka activists took it upon themselves to establish a Hebrew “Gymnasia.” There was a huge old castle in the shtetl that one of the landowners had built about two hundred years earlier. It had numerous rooms, halls and cellars and had been closed and shuttered for many years and only recently had part of it been used to store grain. This huge castle, which had spawned many legends within the shtetl, was built in the shape of a closed rectangle and in the middle of it was a giant courtyard with four gigantic doors in two of its sides.

It seemed that it was just made to serve as a “Gymnasia.” The community started to renovate, students started to enroll and they even hired teachers to teach at the “Gymnasia.” Dr. Fogelman from Uman was hired to be the principal of the “Gymnasia.” He is Dr. Gil’adi (his Israeli name) who was the principal of the Ge’ula Trade School in Tel Aviv, Israel and who now has a psychiatric medical practice.

But just as the shtetl was about to celebrate the opening of a Hebrew “Gymnasia” where all of its subjects would be studied in Hebrew only, a dark wave of pogroms swept over the Jewish shtetls in Ukraine and the “Gymnasia” was never opened. Dr. Gil’adi himself was miraculously saved from death at the hands of a murderous gang at the Koifman home (where he was temporarily staying until his family could be brought to the shtetl) when the youngest of the Koifman brothers, Vanya, was murdered, may God avenge his blood.

7. Private Teachers

There were boys and girls who learned Russian not at school but from a private teacher, especially those who studied only in a “Cheder” (school for young boys). Usually the private teacher would come to the home of the student for an hour a day or every other day and teach the student how to read and write in Russian and in the process provide the student with a general education – geography, arithmetic, etc.

These teachers who taught by the hour were not permanent residents of the shtetl. They came from other places for a year or two and after they earned some money they would leave either to complete their studies or to teach in another shtetl. Even the children of the pious would learn some Russian so that they could read a sign or write an address.

A young boy or girl who knew how to write an address to America was much respected by those who needed such an address. These were mostly very poor folk. Women whose husbands or sons had immigrated to America because of the precariousness of the times would come to these “experts” or to the pedantic “Melamed” (teacher of young children) Sha’ul who knew how to write “addresses” and play chess or to the pharmacist so that they could write an address for them. These unsophisticated and simple women whose letter in Yiddish was not even written by themselves considered the writing of an address to America “supreme wisdom” and magical.

By the way, it was not customary for young girls go to a “Cheder” to learn how to read using a “Siddur” (Prayer Book). They learned the alphabet and how to read from a teacher of small children who would go from door to door teaching the young girl for about half an hour. The name of this “Melamed,” the teacher of young girls, was Yontel (Yom-Tov), an unusual name for an Eastern European Jew (the name is more common among Middle Eastern Jews).

8. The Emissary

One day about two years before the First World War as we youngsters were sitting around the table in the “Cheder” of the “Rebbe” (teacher), Rabbi Aharon Kruglyak, the son of the Rabbi of the shtetl that I already mentioned in the chapter on education, Chapter 6, and swaying over the “Gemara” (Talmud) and repeating the lesson in a bittersweet melody, the door of the “Cheder” opened and in walked a man with a dark complexion who did not at all resemble the Jews of the shtetl.

When the “Rebbe” asked him what he wanted, it became clear that the stranger did not at all understand the question that was asked of course in Yiddish. After that the man started to speak in a strange language that we the students and even our “Rebbe” himself could hardly understand even one word. The “Rebbe” and we students looked at the man as if he were “a chicken among men” and only after much effort and after the man had inserted here and there a word in Yiddish and a word in Russian which it was obvious that he had apparently only recently acquired, did the “Rebbe” understand what it was all about. But it was not easy for the “Rebbe” to understand his words because his ear was not attuned to and used to hearing this kind of speech.

It turns out that this strange man was a Jew and not just any Jew but a Jew from the distant land of Persia, from the land of Shushan (Susa) the Palace, of Akhashverosh (Xerxes) the King and Esther the Queen, of Mordechai the Jew and the wicked Haman and this Jew was not speaking in the language of Persia and Media but in the Holy Tongue (Hebrew). That is what the “Rebbe” Rabbi Aharon told us.

We were really astonished at what our ears were hearing. Is it possible that he is now speaking the Holy Tongue since we the students who are studying “Chumash” (Torah), the Prophets, the Mishna and the Gemara (Talmud) know the Holy Tongue? Why do we not understand even one word of his Holy Tongue? There was no resemblance whatsoever between the language of the Torah and the “Siddur” (Prayer Book) which are written in the Holy Tongue and his Holy Tongue.

Maybe he is speaking in the language of the “Targum” (Aramaic) we said to our “Rebbe.” Then the “Rebbe” explained to us that the Holy Tongue spoken by the Jews of Persia and Sephardic Jews in general is the same Holy Tongue as our own because their Torah is the same as our Torah and that goes for the rest of the Holy Scriptures, except that they pronounce the consonants and the vowels differently.

The “Rebbe” himself tried to speak with him in Ashkenazi Hebrew but his speech was like the speech of man who has had his teeth ground down with gravel. It was with pity that we watched our “Rebbe” tire himself out trying to talk to the Jewish man from “Shushan the Palace.” But only after great mutual effort and after the Jewish man from Persia took a document out of his pocket, a letter of authorization, and showed it to the “Rebbe,” did he understand the purpose of the arrival of this Jewish man.

And this is what our “Rebbe” told us according to the Holy Tongue of this Jewish man and his document:

“Last year severe political riots broke out in Persia (the 1910 Shiraz Blood Libel) and many of the evil Persians took advantage of the situation in the country to carry out pogroms in several Jewish communities in Persia. The perpetrators murdered, wounded, raped and looted, set fire to and burned many homes and brought destruction and annihilation to thousands of Jewish families in Persia.

Now that the riots had subsided and order had been restored these wretched communities decided to send emissaries to the Jews of the Diaspora and among them the Jews of neighboring Russia and ask them to stretch out a helping hand in order to rehabilitate those destroyed communities and generously donate money for the benefit of the injured. Among those emissaries who were sent was this Jewish man who was provided with a letter of authorization from the heads of those communities and their rabbis to collect donations of money.”

After the “Rebbe” had given his donation, the emissary requested of him that he too would add his signature (the emissary knew that he was a Rabbi the son of a Rabbi) to the signatures of the Rabbi and the “Gabbays” (Directors) of the synagogues in the letter of recommendation that he had been given. The Jews of the shtetl were requested in this letter to donate generously for the benefit of the injured. The “Rebbe” agreed to his request and signed the letter.

After the emissary left, we the students were sorry that we had not asked him why the Jews of Persia had not risen up against their enemies as they had in the days of the wicked Haman and those who wished them harm and why they had not smitten all of their enemies with the blow of a sword killing and destroying as written in the Scroll of Esther (Book of Esther)... But when we asked the “Rebbe” this question he evaded answering us...

The image of this Jewish man from Persia-Media, the land of Akhashverosh and Queen Esther, remained before our eyes for a long time...

9. Library and Theater

Neither a library nor a theater existed in the shtetl until the 1917 Revolution. Those who wanted to read a book would buy it or borrow it from one another. In 1912 an agent of the Hebrew book publishing house “Central” in Warsaw came to the shtetl and sold books worth hundreds of rubles to a few Hebrew book aficionados. Even my father, my teacher and master Tzvi Wortman, of blessed memory, bought many Hebrew books from the agent, among them “Each Generation and its Scholars” by Isaac Hirsch Weiss (1815–1905), the books of Peretz Smolenskin (1842–1885) and Micha Yosef Berdichevsky (1865-1921) and others.

By the way, every “Leil Nitzl” (Christmas Eve), when it is not the custom of the pious to read a religious book, our neighbor Rabbi David Kruglyak would send over his son to us with a request to read a secular book, “Each Generation and its Scholars” on the development of the Oral Torah (Talmud) by the scholar Isaac Hirsch Weiss.

And it goes without saying that no theater at all existed in the shtetl. Except in certain districts, a Yiddish theater did not exist because the Russian government forbade it. But there was a “shadow of a theater” in the shtetl. I mean the “Purim Schpiel” (Purim Play). A barber, Yisra’el “Trilipki” (this nickname was given to him because his upper lip was cleft - “Trilipki” – having three lips), would organize every year a troop of actors who would put on the traditional plays, usually in the homes of wealthy people - “Mordechai and Haman,” “Joseph and His Brothers,” etc. as beautifully described by Sholem Aleichem (Shalom Rabinovitz, 1859-1916).

When the Revolution broke out in 1917, a few young men and women took it upon themselves to contribute to the cultural life of the shtetl. They founded a public library whose books they collected from various homes - Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian books. Donations of money were also collected for the library. At the head of this activity for the benefit of the library was the attractive and educated Chava, daughter of Micha’el Yanovsky, who died in her prime shortly after that. At that time an amateur theater was also established. The director was a wandering actor. He received half of the revenue and the other half was divided between the library and the local Zionist organization.

The plays were in Yiddish. At one of the plays, “God, Man and Satan” by the playwright Ya’akov Gordin (1853–1909), a tragedy almost occurred. A student, Sanya by name, the son of the pharmacist, one of the actors in this play, was supposed to “hang himself” in one of the scenes but a mishap occurred at the time of the “hanging.” The stool that was under the feet of the “victim” was knocked over and he was left hanging between the ceiling and the floor and almost suffocated. They rushed a doctor to his side and he was miraculously saved.

A year later, a troop of wandering actors appeared in the shtetl. They were able to put on only a few plays because shortly after their arrival, a wave of pogroms swept the shtetls in the area and no one felt like watching plays. Since the roads were too dangerous to travel, these actors were stuck in the shtetl and remained there for a long time. Had the community not supported them they would have starved to death. Only afterward, when the wave of pogroms and murders subsided, did the actors wander on.

10. The Performer Okun

Like all of the shtetls, Ternivka was not accustomed to performers. What performer would agree to come down from the “Heights of Olympus” of the big city to the remote provinces? Nevertheless, the shtetl was honored with a visit from a multi-talented young performer by the name of Okun. He charmed the audience at an evening of readings and dramatization that he performed in the shtetl in the summer of 1918. At this event he read stories from the Bible, stories from the Talmud and the stories of I.L. Peretz (1852–1915). He brought the images to life as with a magic wand and he dramatized them with an artistic flair.

Among the stories from the Talmud that he read/dramatized was this emotional story. When the High Priest saw that the Temple in Jerusalem was burning (in the year 70 CE) he went up to the top of the roof of the sanctuary with groups of novice priests who were holding the keys of the sanctuary in their hands and they said: “Lord of the Universe, since we did not have the opportunity to serve You, we are delivering to You the keys to Your House” and they threw them Heavenward.

When the artist dramatized the Temple going up in flames and the High Priest enveloped in flames on the burning roof, raising his hand and throwing the keys Heavenward, a shudder went through the audience. They visualized the flames consuming the clothes of the High Priest as he stood serenely but also in a flurry of emotions and threw the keys Heavenward and it seemed to the audience that they themselves were witnessing the burning of the Temple.

And finally he read one of the stories of I.L. Peretz about two sisters, one of them modest and righteous and the other promiscuous and licentious but when they die the tables are turned. The “promiscuous and the licentious” one who was living a life of impurity against her will in the castle of the landowner had a pure soul and longed for a life of purity and holiness among her people and when she died an angel with wings of pure white carried her soul to the Gates of Paradise.

Whereas the “modest and righteous” sister who was living among her people was longing all of her life for a life of promiscuity and licentiousness like the landowners and her modesty was just a disguise. And when she died, an angel with black wings leapt forth and grabbed her black soul and threw it into the fires of Hell.

All of the audience was agitated by the power of the performance and the power of the stark contrasts between these two worlds that he presented. This performance by the artist was remembered by those present for a long time. Such is the power of a great artist!

11. Synagogues and Houses of Prayer

There were five houses of prayer for the Jews in the shtetl:

1. The "Beit Midrash" (House of Study) in which guest preachers would preach their sermons in order to raise money for "Yeshivas" (seminaries) in Russia or in the Land of Israel;
2. The old "Kloyz" where the Rabbi prayed;
3. The new "Kloyz," a handsome building in the center of the shtetl that was established by "modern" "Yeshiva" (seminary) students;
4. The "Kleizel" (small "Kloyz") where mainly the inhabitants of the last streets near the river (the Udych River) prayed;
5. The Great Synagogue, a tall and large building was made from panels of wood on the outside and clay and bricks on the inside. This is the "Schul" (Synagogue) in which mainly tradesmen would pray.

They prayed in this synagogue only on the Sabbath and Holidays and the rest of the week they would pray in two small "Schilechlach" (little synagogues) on either side of the entrance to the Great Synagogue. The worshippers in the two "Schilechlach" were mainly "Kadish sayers" in the shtetl ("Kadish" - Prayer for the Dead). These "Kadish sayers" would get up at sunrise in order to pray. There were a number of "Minyanim" (prayer quorums) so that they would have time to travel at daybreak to the "Yarid" (market day in another shtetl), to their businesses and to their trades.

The following occurred when the "Schul" was being built over one hundred years ago. The lands of the shtetl belonged to the Greek "Puritz" (landowner) but there were plots of land within the shtetl that had been in the possession of the Jewish community for a long time and did not belong to the landowner. The Great Synagogue was being built on one of these plots of land.

The landowner claimed that the plot of land was his and one Sabbath day as all of the Jews were wrapped in their prayer shawls and praying in the synagogues, he sent Christian workers to tear down the building that he claimed was on his land. When it became known to the worshippers that the walls of the "Schul" were being torn down, all of the Jews, still wrapped in their prayer shawls, burst out of the synagogues and attacked the workers and drove them away in disgrace. And so the synagogue was built and erected in all of its splendor.

Years later, after the synagogue was renovated, a young painter by the name of Heinich who had studied at the Academy of Art in Odessa (afterwards, during the period of the Revolution, he studied medicine and became a surgeon) was inspired to create beautiful paintings on the high "Eastern Wall" of the synagogue on either side of the new and beautiful Holy Ark. On one side he painted a deer and on the other side he painted a lion and under them the verse from the Talmud (Ethics of the Fathers 5:23): "Be swift as a deer and strong as a lion to do the will of your Heavenly Father."

It was the only work of art in all of the synagogues of the shtetl. The beautiful Holy Ark in the "Schul" was tall and a real work of art. A master carpenter made it over a period of many months. It was donated by a childless wealthy Jewish tax collector from the nearby village of Antonivka (about 10 miles to the East). A holiday was declared in the shtetl on the day that they brought the Holy Ark into the synagogue. Hundreds of Jews and even non-Jews crowded around the Holy Ark that was carried into the Great Synagogue with singing and music and the accompaniment of musical instruments.

By the way, in order to take the Holy Ark out of the carpenter's workshop they had to tear down one of the walls. During the ceremony of bringing in the Holy Ark wine and cake was distributed to the celebrants. The Great Synagogue, the old "Kloyz" and the "Beit Midrash" stood next to each other in the form of a triangle. They stood close to the Police Station and the Fire Station. A young and burly Jewish blacksmith by the name of Bar-David was in charge of the Fire Station and the lighting of the large gas lamps that hung from very tall poles and illuminated to a great distance.

12. Revolt of the Tradesmen

Ayzik Atran was for many years the "Gabbay" (Director) of the Great Synagogue (the "Schul"). He was a simple but assertive Jew, a trusted ally of the landowner and also somewhat close to the authorities. He managed the synagogue with assertiveness. In fact, he was always elected by a small active minority of the worshippers, his friends and those who were close to him. He treated his "subjects," the tradesmen with contempt and would discriminate against them when it came to giving them "Aliyot" (plural of "Aliya" – to be called up to the Torah) and other honorary roles and he would distribute the "Aliyot" and other honorary roles mainly to his allies and to those who were close to him - horse traders, butchers and others.

And then, one Sukkot Holiday (Tabernacles) when they would elect the "Gabbay," they got up the courage and revolted against the "Gabbay for life" and elected as "Gabbay" one of their own. But the assertive "Gabbay for life" was not at all alarmed by them and their large numbers and he said to them that not only would he occupy the "Gabbay's" chair for life but his son, Berele (Dov), who was born to him late in life, would also sit in the "Gabbay's" chair. And just as if a new "Gabbay" had not been elected, he continued as usual to go up onto the "Bima" (platform from which the Torah is read) and sit in the "Gabbay's" chair and distribute "Aliyot."

He relied on his powerful supporters and on the landowner and on the authorities. At this, the tradesmen ran out of patience and forcefully removed him from the "Bima." At that point, serious fist fights erupted between the two sides even to the point of spilling blood and after that fist fights would erupt out on the street whenever the two sides would meet and this lasted a few days and caused a desecration of God's name. In the end, the many tradesmen were victorious and the authorities were forced to approve the new "Gabbay" who had been elected by a huge majority.

In protest against this "shameful deed," the assertive "Gabbay" and those who were close to him left the rebellious "Schul" and rented for themselves a large room and there they established their own "Minyan" (prayer quorum). They dreamt of eventually establishing their own synagogue but it never came to pass. After two or three years this "Minyan" disbanded and all of the worshippers were scattered and spread out among the existing synagogues. Thus ended the revolt by the "proletariat" against the tyrannical "dictator" in Ternivka.

By the way, there were also two churches in Ternivka, one Catholic and the other Russian Orthodox. There was a large square near the Catholic Church at the entrance to the shtetl where the Jews would stroll on the Sabbath just before sunset. The relations between the members of these two faiths was acceptable. Often non-Jews would come to the "Rabbin" (Rabbi) and request of him that he adjudicate their quarrels and disagreements, usually relating to money, because they knew that the "Rabbin" would not distort the truth and that he would be just and could not be bribed.

And there were also cases where Christians would come to the Rabbi in order to convert to Judaism. But, he would usually turn them down and advise them to contact a Rabbi in a large city and in that way he would avoid the conversion problem to which there were many obstacles in Russia.

13. Chatan-Torah

(Person called up for the reading of the last portion of the Torah on the Simchat Torah Holiday.)

As in all of the synagogues and houses of study in the Diaspora, "Aliyot" were also sold in the new "Kloyz" in the shtetl and whoever paid the highest price would get an "Aliya." One year, when the "Shamash" (sexton) of the new "Kloyz," "Moishe the Redhead," announced the sale of "Chatan-Torah" (see above) a serious competition broke out between two rich men, Chaim Koifman, one of the respected brothers and "Moishe Shachor" ("Black Moishe") which is what he was called in Hebrew because of his dark skin, an up and coming "Gvir" (rich man) - a poor man who had become rich.

He was a clever and cunning Jew. Whenever the “Shamash” would announce the sum that was being bid for the “Aliya” he would outbid him and this would go on and on. The worshippers would gasp at the size of the sums being bid in this contest, sums for “Aliyot” that had until now never been heard of. Every one of the worshippers in the “Kloyz” was curious to know who would win this contest. When the sum finally rose to a huge amount, Chaim Koifman quit the contest and “Moishe Shachor” won this “fat Aliya” - “Chatan-Torah.”

Many of the worshippers were doubly disappointed. First of all, that Chaim Koifman had not won “Chatan-Torah,” a crown that was more deserved by him than by his rival and secondly, because he quit the competition too early. If Chaim Koifman had remained in the contest, “Moishe Shachor,” whose ambition it was to win this “fat Aliya” no matter what the cost, would have continued to raise the amount and the “Kloyz” would have benefited. That year this “Chatan-Torah” cost “Moishe Shachor” 50 rubles, a huge amount in those days.

By the way, “Moishe Shachor” was, like his rival Chaim Koifman, the owner of a flour mill although he was not really the owner because he leased it. This mill which made him very rich was located in the village of Yurkivka in the vicinity of Ternivka (about 5 miles to the North-East). By making large donations he managed to push himself into the company of important people. He donated generously to charitable organizations and to religious functionaries. He renovated and painted the rooms and the halls of the beautiful home that he had bought from the rich Tokman family that had moved to another town. He used oil paint which cost him a huge amount of money.

In order to gain more respect in the shtetl, he sent his son, a lad of about 13, to the “Gymnasia” (high school) in Haisin, the chief city of the district. He spent huge amounts of money on the education of this young man at the high school – a large sum to the principal of the high school and to the examiners, nice gifts for the principal and for the teachers of the lad’s class in honor of every Christian holiday and every birthday, a nice monthly salary for a private teacher who helped the lad prepare his lessons, tuition for the high school, room and board in the amount of 40 rubles a month to the lad’s host, a respected lawyer etc., etc. But all of this was worth it to the father who had ambitions that his son would become a doctor.

When the son would return home for the holidays and the father would go with him to the new “Kloyz,” his dark face would radiate great happiness. The son who was dressed royally in the uniform of the high school with its shiny buttons would attract the attention of the worshippers. The father noticed this and his eyes would exude great satisfaction.

Perhaps you are thinking it a trivial thing that a high school student should become a doctor? The writer Yehuda Steinberg (1863–1908) well described in one of his books the Jewish high school student who would come with his father to the synagogue on a holiday and the worshippers who would approach him in awe as if he were royalty and would greet him with a big hello because a Jewish high school student in the small shtetl was a rare thing in the days of the Tsar because there was a quota on Jews.

14. Medical Services in the Shtetl

Even though the hospital was located in the middle of the shtetl the Jews almost never used it, except for very poor people. In this hospital of the “Zemstvo” (local authority) all of the medical staff and all of the employees were non-Jews. The hospital was not particularly attractive to the Jewish patients because of the Christian atmosphere and its low standard. The Jews of the shtetl had a Jewish doctor who had been hired by the community and was partially subsidized by it. The Jewish doctor mostly supported himself through his private medical practice.

There were also two Jewish “Feldshers” (auxiliary health workers) in the shtetl, one of them an old Lithuanian Jew, Avrumke-Roifeh (Avraham the Doctor) and the other a giant Jew Velvel–Roifeh (Velvel the Doctor). They also usually provided their patients with the medications that they themselves prepared. It was mostly the poor and people who were not ill enough to call a real doctor who used their services. The “Feldsher” would receive one third of the salary of a doctor. Even non-Jews would some time use the services of these Jewish “Feldshers” even though they had their own hospital and clinic through the “Zemstvo.” In the shtetl there were also a Jewish lady dentist and a professional Jewish midwife in addition to the amateur Jewish midwives.

In addition to these doctors and “Feldshers” that have already been mentioned there lived on the outskirts of the shtetl an elderly Polish doctor, a specialist, who was brought to the shtetl from abroad many years earlier by the landowners. The Jews from time to time required the services of this Dr. Mikocki whom they very much admired. In the event of serious illness they would transfer the patient to the nearby city of Uman (about 20 miles to the North-East) where there were tens of doctors belonging to all of the faiths and among them the famous Dr. Lisowski.

It was not a rare occurrence that when a wealthy person in Ternivka got sick that his family would invite a big doctor from the city of Uman. This doctor would receive at least 50 rubles over and above the cost of his trip. It was also the custom to invite to the consultation the Jewish doctor and the elderly Polish doctor, Dr. Mikocki. Some of the Jews of the shtetl who were suffering from aches and pains would take advantage of the arrival of the doctor from Uman and come to him to ask his medical advice. When a serious operation was required, the Jews would travel or would be transported to Odessa to the famous private hospital of the surgeon Dr. Zilberberg.

Rheumatism patients would travel to bathe in the waters of the Liman (Estuary) near Odessa which was about 200 miles from Ternivka. Lung patients would travel in the summer to the sanatorium in the pine forest in the vicinity, near the village of Zholonek (about 15 miles to the South-West) or further away in Sosnivka (about 90 miles to the North-West). The hypochondriac wives of rich men would travel to Crimea to take the “grape cure,” more as a matter of status than for healing and health. The doctors would get rid of their rich hypochondriac patients by advising them to go to Crimea to take the “grape cure.”

The young people of the shtetl founded a society called “Visiting the Sick and Charitable Sleepover.” Their task was mostly to help sick poor people find a doctor and also various medicines and even a bowl of soup or a piece of chicken. Quite often these young men and women, members of this society, would fill the role of “nurse” and they would take turns sleeping over in the home of a poor sick person in order to take care of them. The society existed from donations of money contributed by the residents of the shtetl.

15. Epidemics of Plague, Spanish Flu and Typhus

An epidemic of Plague broke out in the middle of the First World War. The authorities undertook strict measures in order to prevent the spread of the Plague. At that time, a Ternivka Jew, A.V. and his two sons, were at a "Yarid" (market day in another shtetl) and he came down there with the Plague. His sons feared that if their father's illness became known to the authorities that they would take him to a hospital, poison him there and burn his body. Such a rumor had spread among the masses.

So what did they do? They immediately hired a wagon and fled using side roads. When this became known to the authorities they immediately sent people to pursue them and apprehend them and bring them back because they feared, and rightly so, that they would spread the disease to other places. But those sent to apprehend them could not find them because they had fled into a forest. There in a forest keeper's hut they treated their father in a primitive manner but it did not help. He died that very night. The sons didn't of course reveal the nature of their father's illness to the forest keeper and miraculously they themselves did not come down with the disease.

Under the cover of night, the sons snuck their father's body back into the shtetl and they quietly and secretly buried him because they feared that if the authorities learned of his death that his body would be burnt and that he would not, God forbid, receive a Jewish burial. They apparently "appeased" the Ternivka authorities with a bribe.

In order to prevent the spread of the disease the authorities warned the public not to drink water that had not been boiled and even erected a special facility in the middle of the shtetl, a tank for the boiling of water where everyone could come and receive boiled water for free.

After World War One the Spanish Flu spread throughout Europe. It was called the Spanish Flu because it originated in Spain and spread from there killing many victims. More people died from the Spanish Flu than died in the War. The disease killed a few victims in Ternivka also and among them a young man, an only and beloved child. A Typhus epidemic also broke out in the shtetl during the period of the gangs and the Civil War and it also killed many victims.

When the Klimenko Gang burst into the shtetl one night in the summer of 1919 they fired into various Jewish homes. A number of Jews were murdered by these shots. One of these bullets struck the foot of a young Jewish man with a family who lived on the top floor of his father-in-law, Avraham Madanek's home. The house had two floors and was in the center of the shtetl.

After the gang had departed they rushed a doctor to the wounded man. When the doctor examined the foot he advised that the man be immediately transported to the city of Uman (about 20 miles to the North-East) where there were expert surgeons. The family immediately hired a wagon and transported the wounded man to Uman. But, tragically, they were forced to return on their tracks to the shtetl because the road to Uman was full of murderous gangs and the journey involved a real risk of death.

The doctors of the shtetl (there were three) who were rushed into a consultation about the patient were all general practitioners and not surgeons and they didn't know what to do. But because they were afraid that the swelling of the foot due to infection and blood poisoning might spread to the rest of his body, they decided with a heavy heart and since they had no choice, to amputate the foot. And this difficult and serious operation was performed in the simple hospital in the shtetl where such a serious operation had never been performed before. It is possible that if he had been treated by an expert surgeon that his leg could have been saved.

16. Tragic Events

On the night of the burning of the Chametz (leaven burned on Passover Eve), at midnight in the year 5674 (Friday, April 10, 1914), we were awakened to the sound of screams and cries that emanated from the home of our neighbor, Chaim-Hirsch Kirzhner. Other neighbors were also awakened. When we rushed to his home we learned about the great tragedy that had befallen our neighbor.

In honor of Passover the whole family had bathed in a hot bath that stood on an apparatus that was heated by wood. First the children bathed, then the father and then the mother. Apparently, when the mother was bathing, the chimney became blocked and the poisonous fumes from the burning wood filled the bathroom. When the father got up in the middle of the night, he noticed to his horror that his wife was not there. He immediately hurried to the bathroom and found his wife lifeless. He immediately awakened his children and when they saw that their mother did not answer them they raised a hue and cry. The neighbors rushed a doctor to her but all of his efforts to save her were in vain.

This tragedy on Passover Eve shocked the shtetl. This young and pleasant woman left behind four orphaned children.

After a few years another tragedy happened to this family. One of the daughters, a girl with an oriental kind of beauty, committed suicide because of unrequited love for a student, a boy from the shtetl from a distinguished family. A year later another young girl committed suicide, also because of unrequited love.

17. Strange Visitors

A. The apostate Rosen

Almost every year, when the courts in the capital city St. Petersburg were in recess, a famous lawyer by the name of Rosen would come from there to the estate of his Christian wife in the vicinity of Ternivka. It was said that this woman had a dispute with her relatives over the estate and that Rosen was her lawyer. Afterwards, when he won the court case for her and she received the estate as her inheritance, he married her. This lawyer was a convert from Judaism.

Because it was very difficult for a Jew in the days of the Tsar to be accepted into a university and even harder for a Jew to be “crowned” with the title “accredited lawyer” (very few Jews in Russia were privileged to be so), Rosen, after much deliberation, decided to take the fateful step and leave his Jewish faith.

But even though he was a convert from Judaism, he was not like other converts from Judaism who held their people in contempt and distanced themselves from them. On the contrary, he loved his people and took an interest in their fate and in the fate of the Jews of the shtetl. Often, during his vacation when he came to his estate to rest, Jews would come to him and request of him donations of money for the benefit of the institutions of the shtetl and he would receive them with respect and would donate generously. He even visited the shtetl and gave a large donation for the building of the new bathhouse that was being built at that time. Thus did the apostate Rosen “atone” for his sin against his people and his religion.

B. The “national-preacher”

Among the different religious preachers who would come to the shtetl to give their sermons there appeared one day a “Zionist preacher” secularly dressed and he introduced himself on the announcements that were posted in the synagogues and on his business card as follows: “the noted Zionist preacher, M. Klausner.”

He introduced himself as a relative of the writer Yosef Klausner (1874–1958). Of course, the intellectuals of the shtetl received him with honor and they hosted him in the home of one of the respected wealthy men who were Zionists. He stayed at the home of his host for about a month and on the Sabbath he would preach loftily in the synagogues about “Zion and the redemption,” empty, meaningless words. Two of the Zionists in the shtetl volunteered to go from door to door to collect donations of money for the “noted national preacher.” In the end it turned out that his name was not Klausner and he was not a relative of the writer Klausner. His name was Kleiner and he permitted himself to make this “slight change” in order to add to his worth.

C. The “authoress”

One day a woman of about 50 years old came to the shtetl and let it be known that she was a writer and as proof she produced a “story” that she had written which anyone who wished could see. And indeed, she had written a “story” in Yiddish that was pitiful and tasteless and she would go from door to door to sell this “story,” a thin little booklet, and not only in Ternivka. In order to be rid of this annoyance people would buy this thin booklet and donate whatever they wished.

But she was not satisfied with just selling the booklet. She would insist that they arrange home “reading receptions” for her where she would read her “great creation.” She did not dare to request a public reading reception because it required a special permit from the police and that was not easily granted. The audience would sit on pins and needles and would have given her all of the money in the world if she would just stop reading so that they could escape. I no longer remember the name of the story but the name of the “authoress” was Le’ah Opshatka.

18. The Turkish Bakery

Turkish bakeries were to be found in many cities and towns in Russia and Ukraine. The Turkish immigrants were experts at managing bakeries and their various baked goods endeared themselves to their clientele. A Turkish bakery was also opened in Ternivka in addition to the Jewish bakery that was in the shtetl.

The owner of the Turkish bakery was about fifty years old, of dark complexion and a pockmarked face, always sullen and easy to anger and spoke a broken Russian. This Turk who was no “Apollo” had, to the amazement of the humble shtetl, a young Jewish wife from the nearby shtetl of Teplik where he first had a bakery. That a Jewish woman would follow a non-Jew, be he even an Ishmaelite, “our cousin,” was very perplexing and unusual in the shtetl. There were people, especially self-righteous women, who would not accept this situation and would keep their distance from her. This young woman whose name was Rachel was a simple woman and the daughter of very poor parents. She started off as a salesperson in his bakery in Teplik and eventually became his wife but they were not married by a Rabbi.

This young woman was very clever and a good salesperson and in fact she took care of the business of the bakery more than he did. She would go to the flour merchant to buy flour and she was the sales clerk. Of course her knowledge of Yiddish made it easy for her to negotiate different matters relating to the bakery and trade contacts. Her life with this angry, gloomy Turk was not idyllic. More than once, when he would get drunk, he would beat her but even so, she would not leave him. On the holidays and especially at the Passover “Seders” she behaved like a “Kosher Jew” and she would be the guest of her poor relatives in the shtetl and celebrate with them the holidays (she would pay them of course). And so this young woman lived her double life.

When the First World War broke out, Turkey as an ally of Germany, declared war on Russia (Russia declared war on Turkey on November 2, 1914). Then all Turkish citizens in Russia were arrested and among them the owner of the bakery who was a Turkish citizen. After that he was expelled to Turkey and Rachel, even though she was not his legal wife, went with him to a remote village in Anatolia where he had a family – a wife and children!

19. The "Grabarny"

That was what a small Jewish neighborhood with a few families that was far from the shtetl and isolated from it was called. It was situated in a small valley next to the houses of the Ukrainians. The land of the neighborhood didn't belong to the Greek landowner of the shtetl and not even to the Ukrainian village but constituted a kind of small Jewish autonomous area. All of the land of the small valley of the "Grabarny" was well watered. At a depth of two to three meters it was possible to find good water. That is why it was here that the Jewish water carriers would draw their water. The Jews of the "Grabarny" were primarily occupied with the tanning of hides from which they made simple summer sandals (called "postales" in the language of the common folk) that the Ukrainians would wear in the summer. The houses of this neighborhood were not situated in the valley itself which was too waterlogged but on a small hill next to the small valley.

The Jews of this neighborhood which was like a "mini state" suffered quite a bit from their isolation from the shtetl. There was no transportation between this neighborhood and the shtetl and people would usually traverse the distance on foot. The children who studied in "Cheder" (school for young boys) would travel a great distance every day as did all of the inhabitants of the neighborhood that had business to attend to in the shtetl whether it was to make purchases in the shops, to slaughter a chicken at the "Shoichet" (Kosher slaughterer) or to pray in the in the synagogue on the Sabbath. And they especially suffered from the non-existence of normal social relations with their acquaintances and friends because it was hard for them to frequently visit one another, especially in the fall when it was rainy and muddy.

It would seem that because they were isolated from the shtetl that a Jewish girl from the "Grabarny" became close to a non-Jewish boy from the adjacent Ukrainian houses and she ended up running away to her lover's home. When it became known to her parents who were simple and good people they made a great fuss, but to no avail. She remained in the home of the young villager. When many Jews streamed toward the Romanian border (after 1920) her family also left the "Grabarny" out of embarrassment and pain and crossed the border and immigrated to Palestine. Their son had immigrated to Palestine earlier with the group of pioneers from Ternivka. After living in Palestine for a few years the family immigrated to the United States. The son who also immigrated (he had a barber shop on Herzl Street in Tel Aviv) later visited Israel.

20. "Disputed Waters"

Usually the Jewish water carriers would bring water to the houses of the Jews in their own barrel and with their own horse. But quite often the Jews suffered from a shortage of water either because the water carrier became ill or because his horse became ill or died. And until the Jews of the shtetl collected donations of money so that the impoverished water carrier could buy himself a new forlorn horse a long time would pass. The Gentiles who would come to the shtetl, especially those who came to the "Yarid" (market day) would also suffer greatly from the shortage of water. They themselves and their animals needed drinking water and there wasn't any. So the "Zemstvo" (local government authority) dug five new wells on different streets. The water was not particularly good. They used the wells only when they had no choice. But this water did make it easier for the residents.

It happened that two Jews, one a well-to-do blacksmith who also had a Matza factory and the other a chicken and egg merchant, became envious of the streets on which the wells were dug so they decided to also dig at their own expense a well on their street near their homes. So there arose the question of where to dig the well. These two Jews did not live next to one another but across from one another, one on one side of the street and the other on the other side of the street. To dig the well in the middle of the street was not possible as it was a thoroughfare and wagons passed through it. It was possible only to dig the well on the sidewalk near one of the two homes.

Of course, each one wanted the well to be next to his home (the width of the road was perhaps about 30 feet wide). The two, even though they were friends, remained stubborn until in the end, each one started to dig, at his own great expense, a well sixty or more feet deep next to his home. But to the great disappointment of the two, the water was bad and very bitter and it was impossible to drink and could only be used for washing floors. And so two wells stood desolate one across from the other as a testimony and a monument to the stubbornness of two Jews, members of a "hard necked people!"

21. Frozen to Death

On a winter's day in 1912, on a Thursday, the day of the "Yarid" (market day) in the village of Zholonok, about 15 miles from Ternivka, there was a raging blizzard that covered the land with a thick white carpet of snow and blocked the roads. Miraculously, tens of Jews returned safely that evening from the "Yarid." But five Jews, among them a woman, did not return and were missing. On Friday morning as the blizzard continued to rage and heap huge snow banks, two courageous wagon owners, at the request of the families of the missing people, tried to go out and search for those who were lost. But after a short while, they were forced to return on their tracks because the horses sank up to their stomachs in the snow banks and couldn't continue any further and the blizzard also blinded them so that they could see almost nothing.

The snow continued to fall for three full days from Thursday to Sunday. And so it happened for the first time in the history of the shtetl Ternivka that on the Sabbath no Jew, not even the Rabbi, could come to the synagogue to pray. All the houses of prayer were locked shut because snow banks as high as the houses blocked their entrances. No one could get out and no one could get in. On Sunday the blizzard died down and the residents for the first time were able to leave their homes and with various implements to clear a path to the street and to the store. It then became known that three of the men and the woman were found frozen to death.

The farmers of a village who found them frozen in a sleigh tried by various means to revive them, such as immersing them in ice water, a folk remedy for victims of freezing, and other means, but to no avail. The woman indeed showed some vital signs but she did not recover and died. The sorrow in the shtetl over their deaths was great. All of the searching for the fifth missing person was for nought. When many weeks went by and his body was still not found, the family of the missing person (who left behind a young wife and small children), brought a Jewish psychic from one of the shtetls and he promised that he would find the body of the missing person.

The psychic ran around in the nearby fields (it was after Purim – March, 1912) with many of the residents of the shtetl following after him but all of his searching was unsuccessful and the body was not found.

In the month of Nisan (April, 1912), when the last of the snow banks had completely melted, the body was found in the Russian Orthodox cemetery a few kilometers from the shtetl. This young man had been hired by some butchers at the "Yarid" to accompany the cattle they had bought at the "Yarid" back to the shtetl.

He followed the cattle on foot and when he got close to the vicinity of the shtetl he apparently got lost and entered the Russian Orthodox cemetery which was completely covered with snow to a great depth. Tired and helpless, he leaned against a tree and fell asleep and apparently froze to death. The snow which continued to fall completely covered him and the tree so that no one could see him. Only in the month of Nisan, as mentioned before, when the snow had completely melted did the cemetery guard notice the body and notify the authorities. After an investigation it became clear that this was the body of the fifth missing person and he was given a Jewish burial with many people attending the funeral.

The tragedy of those who froze to death shocked and stirred up the emotions of the residents of the shtetl for a long time!

22. How Were They Saved from Freezing?

On that same Thursday, a store owner, a resident of Ternivka by the name of Sholem-Leizer was returning from the city of Uman where he had bought merchandise for his store. Because of all of the snow that had piled up on the road, the sleigh with the merchandise got stuck and could go no further. The store owner and the Ukrainian who owned the sleigh didn't know what to do but to their joy they saw nearby in the field an abandoned shack and they were able to find there shelter. This rickety shack provided them with cover from the snow that continued to fall but not from the biting cold that froze their blood.

In order to save themselves from the death that hovered over them, the two kept themselves warm...by wrestling. During the three days that they were stuck in that wretched shack, most of the time they wrestled to keep themselves warm. They hardly slept because during sleep the danger of freezing is seven times greater. While they stood and leaned against the wall, one of them would doze a bit while the other would remain awake and stand guard in order to wake up the dozer from his nap so that he didn't go to sleep forever. After that the other would doze a bit while the first would stand guard and they kept taking turns. And that is how the Jew and the Ukrainian were saved from death by this rickety shack. In the shtetl rumors had spread that Sholem-Leizer and the Ukrainian had frozen to death but the rumors turned out not to be true.

23. The Boycott of the Butcher

On one of the intermediate days of Passover, a butcher went to the "Pristav" (Chief of Police) to buy a calf from him for slaughter. In honor of the successful conclusion of the purchase (of course, the "Pristav" always comes out on top when he sells to a Jew) the "Pristav" honored the butcher with a cup of frosty beer and they toasted each other. It happened that Simcha Koifman, one of the Koifman brothers who was a regular with the "Pristav" entered and caught the butcher in his transgression as he downed the last drop of beer. The rumor quickly spread in all of the shtetl that Me'ir the butcher drank beer with the "Pristav" on Passover which is one hundred percent "Chometz" (leavened food is forbidden on Passover).

His customers immediately stopped buying meat from him and they boycotted his butcher shop. When the butcher saw what the cup of beer had caused him, he ran to the rabbi of the shtetl, Rabbi David Kruglyak, and he wept and pleaded with him that he save him from this misfortune, from the boycott of his butcher shop. He apologized and justified his actions by saying that he was ignorant and didn't know that beer was "Chometz." The rabbi found him a respectable way out of this nasty business and to make his butcher shop Kosher again and he advised the butcher to travel to his "Rebbe" (Chasidic Rabbi) and that he would certainly find a fitting way out and give him a "Hechsher" ("Kosher" certificate) for his butcher shop.

The butcher didn't take long to think and immediately hired a wagon and hurried to his "Rebbe" in Savran (Rabbi David Gutterman, died 1912), a distance of some 40 miles from Ternvika. He of course did not come to him empty handed. The "Rebbe" gave him, after he had heard all of the details, a "grand declaration" in a number of copies and the butcher posted them in all of the synagogues and in other public places in the shtetl.

The wording of the "grand declaration" went something like this: "Since this Me'ir in question was in error and accepted the penance of "fasting, prayer and charity" and since "penitents are superior to even perfect saints," and since "we help those who have come to be purified," etc., etc. we therefore give testimony and recommend that he is "Kosher" and his butcher shop is "Kosher" and it is permitted and even a "Mitzvah" (holy duty) to buy from him "Kosher" and even "Glatt Kosher" (meticulously "Kosher") meat and let the humble eat and be sated."

Even the sextons who received their salaries from the meat tax proclaimed in Yiddish from every “Bima” in the synagogues (raised platform for the reading of the Torah) the words of the “Rebbe” in the “grand declaration” so that the women would also hear. Gradually his customers returned to buy meat from him. From that day on the butcher stayed far away from beer!

24. The Plant Cutter

No he wasn't God forbid a heretic or a non-believer and he didn't cut the “plants of religion.” He was a religious Jew like most of the rest of the Jews of the shtetl. He would only cut the leaves of the tobacco plant. The evil regime in Russia would issue from time to time edicts against the Jews and their ability to make a living in order to persecute them. More than one Jew was forced to violate the unjust laws of the evil regime and to occupy himself with means of livelihood that were “not kosher” from the point of view of Tzarist law.

That is how one handicapped Jew in the shtetl supported himself, by secretly cutting tobacco leaves. He would sell this cut tobacco only to people he could trust and of course cheaply as it was “exempt” from government excise, a heavy tax. As mentioned, the “plant cutter” was handicapped and walked with the aid of a wooden leg that had been fitted for him by a carpenter. It was told that he became handicapped due to a sudden search conducted by the police when due to great panic and fear he tripped and his leg was injured. But apparently there is no substance to the story (a play of words on the Hebrew word for “leg”).

25. Drafted Army Recruits

Ternivka was a kind of government administrative center for the whole region. For instance, the “Pristav” (Police Chief) who was in charge of three shtetls, Teplik (about 14 miles North-West of Ternivka), Khashchevata (about 16 miles South of Ternivka) and Ternivka, set up his headquarters in Ternivka and from there he directed his “lofty government.” By the way, it was rumored that the income of the “Pristav,” not God forbid from his government salary which was very meager, was fifteen thousand rubles a year and because of that it was the ambition of all of the Police Chiefs to attain this position in Ternivka.

A special military commission which included doctors, officers and clerks would also come to Ternivka every year in the fall to examine the drafted army recruits, both Jews and Ukrainians. Thousands of young men and also many of their parents would gather together from the above mentioned shtetls and from the many villages. The "Starosta" or the Chief Man of each village would accompany the young men from his village and he was responsible to the authorities for the good behavior of the recruits from his village. Of course the reinforced police would also keep an eye on these recruits. These villagers would usually stay in the Jewish inns and the income of the shtetl would soar.

There was a custom among the Jewish recruits that about a month before being called to the army that they would get together at night and spend the time together in light entertainment and a bit of "acting up" in the streets of the shtetl. Often they would pull pranks on various residents. For instance, they would use something to lock doors from the outside or they would change the signs on stores, etc. By the way, there were young men who would purposely go without sleep on the final nights and would force themselves to fast so that their thin bodies would be thinner still so that they would perhaps be disqualified from the army.

The "examining commission" had a tradition of many years that it would examine the Jewish draftees who were few in number first and then the Ukrainian draftees who were many. Of course there were those on this commission who would accept bribes. I remember one year that among the Jewish draftees there were many who were disqualified from serving because of various deformities and not all of them were unintended. So then in order to fill the "Jewish quota" the commission also drafted Jews who were an only son who were usually exempt from service. When their mothers saw this they broke out in weeping and wailing and were about to break into the office of the commission to protest this abominable injustice that was being done to them and to their only child but the police used force to disperse them.

That same year the shtetl was all in a rage over the fact that Pinchas (Pini) the Rabbi's son, an intelligent and very popular "Yeshiva" (seminary) student was taken into the army. He was taken into the army even though his eyesight was poor and he had to wear glasses. Only after a few months and after two local intermediaries were sent to the chief city of the Province (of Podolia), Kamenets Podolsk and not God forbid empty handed, did they succeed after much effort and large bribes to get him released. Unfortunately Pinchas passed away in the "prime of his life" three years after he married, leaving behind a wife, an infant and parents. May his memory be blessed.

26. The 1905 Revolution

The fervor of the 1905 Revolution also reached Ternivka. The Postmaster in the shtetl who was a member of the Black Hundreds (an anti-Semitic organization) organized a large demonstration of local farmers, a demonstration in support of "Batyushka Tsar" ("Daddy Tsar"). They moved through the streets of the shtetl in large numbers after a festive prayer service in the church and they enthusiastically cried out "Long Live the Tsar," "Long Live Holy Russia" and "Long Live the Holy Russian Orthodox Faith." They would accompany these loud cries by simultaneously throwing their many hats into the air until it looked like a veritable cloud of hats. The cries of "Hurrah" and "Long Live" echoed incessantly.

It is understandable that this enthusiastic parade and the "patriotic" cries to defend the "Throne" that "evil men" and "Zhidi" (Jews) were trying to overthrow sent a shudder of fear through the Jews of the shtetl and they quickly locked themselves in their homes. They were particularly fearful of the day of the "Yarid" (market day) which was quickly approaching. But thank God it all transpired peacefully and things calmed down. Of course the Police who kept order and prevented rioting can be given credit for that.

As the Revolutionary fervor increased the Tsar was forced to give Russia a "Constitution." When elections to the "Duma" (Russian Parliament) were announced, Ternivka also participated in them. The vote was given only to property owners. Henrich Slozberg (1863-1937) of St. Petersburg presented his candidacy. He was a well-known activist, a great and famous Jewish jurist and one of the leaders of the all-Russia Kadet Party (Constitutional Democratic Party) that campaigned for a constitutional democratic monarchy like in England. He was not a Zionist.

He "descended" from the capital city to the cities and towns of Ukraine and he attempted to convince the Jews to vote for him. He also visited Ternivka and gave a speech in the Great Synagogue. The very fact that this famous jurist had come from the populous capital city to a small and remote shtetl like Ternivka was a "major event" for the residents of Ternivka and huge crowds came out to hear him speak.

He gave a speech in flowery Russian but it is most doubtful that the majority of those present understood what he was saying. In his flowery speech he promised the Jews of the shtetl that he would fight in the Duma for “equal rights” for the Jews and the improvement of their economic and religious conditions, etc. After that many people voted for him since he promised “all things good” to the Jews of “Mother Russia.”

27. Ternivka and the Romanov Dynasty

In 1913, on the three hundredth anniversary of the House of Romanov (ruling dynasty of Russia), the authorities held many large celebrations. From all corners of Russia various delegations that had been organized by the authorities came to express their submission to the “Throne” and their great joy at the longevity of the “wonderful” Romanov Dynasty. A representative who would participate in one of the delegations to the Tsar was also chosen from Ternivka “Volost” (center of government for the villages in the area) where a large statue of Tsar Alexander II the “Liberator of the Peasants” stood.

The village of Ternivka was picked and the representative was a local Ukrainian, young, husky, affluent, intelligent and with an impressive appearance by the name of Mikita. He accepted this exalted mission with both joy and trepidation. It is no small matter that flesh and blood should stand before the Tsar, “the anointed of God!”

In honor of this mission he wore splendid clothes and purposely peasant clothes and not, God forbid, city clothes, which he was warned against by the government officials who were in charge of this matter. He and the rest of the delegates were also instructed on how to behave in front of the Tsar and how to bow to him, also what to answer the Tsar if he should ask them a question. Mikita was among the delegates who were privileged to present themselves to the Tsar.

When he returned afterward to Ternivka he related “miracles and wonders” about his interview with the Tsar. He related that the Tsar had approached him and held a button on his peasant coat and had asked him where he was from and what he did. He had answered him that he was from the Province of Podolia, etc.

It is highly doubtful that the Tsar recognized the name of this province because there were 170 provinces in Russia and how could he know the names of all of the provinces. All of the Ukrainians in Ternivka Volost were jealous of Mikita because he was privileged to see the Tsar's radiant face. It is understandable that Mikita was not happy about the Revolution and the death of the Tsar and his family!

28. Christmas

Christmas was also a holiday for the Jews because almost all commercial activity ceased and the Jews rested. Some would take advantage of this time to visit their relatives and their children who lived in other places. By the way, Ukrainians, usually the poor, would pay holiday visits to their Jewish acquaintances where they would spread wheat kernels, a symbol of a year of blessing and plenty. Of course they wouldn't do this for altruistic reasons only. The Jews would give them coins as a holiday gift.

Another Christmas custom was that a group of young Ukrainians would get dressed up on Christmas Eve in various disguises of which the main one was in the image of a cow called "Malanka." These "actors" would pay theatrical visits to the houses of the Jews on Christmas Eve and "perform" there. Of course they would not leave empty handed. Ukrainian women would also bring the children of their Jewish acquaintances "Pysanky" (painted hard boiled eggs), usually in red, on Easter. In turn the Jews would honor their Ukrainian acquaintances with Passover Matzah.

29. The Mediator

There were in Ternivka, as in all of the Jewish shtetls, a few Jews who made their living from "luft gescheften" (wheeling and dealing). Among these, one Jewish man by the name of Netan'el stood out, a respected wealthy man, clever, sharp, who supported himself "with his cane." Dressed in his holiday best he would walk around the shtetl with his cane and would "hunt prey" with which to feed the members of his family. He had no permanent vocation.

One day he would be a grain merchant, another day he would be a broker, still another day he would be a money lender to the Ukrainian ranchers in the area and still another day he would be a mediator, for pay of course, in various trade and money disputes between Jews. That is how he would support his large family, eight sons and daughters, may God protect them from the evil eye.

His eldest son immigrated to Canada to escape conscription into the Tsar's army. His eldest daughter fancied herself an "intellectual" because she had read "Anna Karenina" by Tolstoy and "Sanin" by Artsybashev...

One evening, a common young man, a minor grain merchant, came to her parents' home accompanied by a matchmaker to see the "intended bride," the "intellectual" who was so well spoken of. When the young man sat down at the refreshment table the "intellectual" opened her mouth with pearls of wisdom and in shtetl Russian she asked the "groom" a "cultural question:" "Have you read Tolstoy?" This simple young man knew very well the Ukrainian language in which he would negotiate with the Ukrainians in matters of trade but it was very doubtful that he knew how to read Russian and it was even more doubtful that he had ever heard the word "Tolstoy."

When he heard the question of the "intellectual," he got up from the table and said in his mother tongue Yiddish: "Honorable Miss, instead of asking me whether I have read Tolstoy, it would have been better if you had asked me whether I have the means with which to support a wife and children." With that he left the "salon," angrily slammed the door and walked away leaving the refreshments on the table and the "intellectual" and her parents pale-faced.

As mentioned above, Netan'el had a son in Canada and also a brother. The two of them put pressure on the "mediator" to leave the pogroms of Russia and its "luft gescheften" and immigrate to Canada, the land of freedom and equality, the land of "good times." The son and the brother entreated him with various reasons and among them these important reasons: a) In Canada he wouldn't have to worry about a dowry for his older daughters because in Canada, as a nation of immigrants, there is a surplus of men and a shortage of women and the men will grab his daughters like "hotcakes" without a dowry. b) Soon it will be the turn of his second son to be conscripted into the Tsar's army so it would be best that he leave Russia early before they prevent him from leaving.

They tempted the “mediator” until they succeeded. And then one fine day, he liquidated his “luft gescheften” and sold his house and furniture and immigrated to Canada with his large family. After they arrived in the land of “freedom and of eligible men” and after the festive family welcome he had to worry about practical matters, about making a living. It became clear to the “mediator” that as a somewhat older man and the reigning head of a family he was redundant in Canada. He would have to be dependent on his sons and daughters who would work in factories or as pedlars or newspaper sellers because in Canada there was no need for mediators or brokers or any of the other “luft gescheften.”

He fell flat on his face. How could it be that he who in Ternivka was a “big shot,” a “mediator” whose every word was doted on could fall so low, an idler dependent on his sons and daughters. This was not going to happen. He decided to return to the Russian “paradise” where he could once again be a “big shot,” a “mediator,” a broker, a money lender and support himself “with his cane.” So he left! Only his second son who was about to be conscripted into the Russian army stayed in Canada.

When the family returned to the shtetl, he again bought a house and furniture and he bought himself a permanent pew in the “Beit Hamidrash” (synagogue) and he again made his living from “luft gescheften” and walked around the shtetl with his cane as before. “There is no country as wonderful as the country of ‘Fonye Ganef’ (the Tsar)” he would say as he twirled his cane in the air!

30. The First Gramophone

The Jews of Ternivka like the Jews of the rest of Eastern Europe loved to listen to “Chazones” (cantorial music). Whenever a guest “Chazan” (Cantor) would occasionally come to the shtetl and pray at the Great Synagogue, almost all of the Jews of the shtetl would crowd their way in. Afterwards, they would express their opinions on the music of the cantor and on his voice. Often a “Wunderkind” cantor would come and pray before the Holy Ark (of the synagogue). Among these “Wunderkinder” was the boy-Cantor Yudl-Yehuda who became the Cantor of the synagogue at the “Tradesmen’s Center” in Tel Aviv. He was about eleven years old and all of the Jews “licked their fingers” over this “Wunderkind.”

And so, the Jews of Ternivka got to hear not only regular Cantors but also famous Cantors like Kwartin (Zavel Kwartin, 1874-1952), Sirota (Gershon Sirota, 1874-1943) and others. And how did famous Cantors like Kwartin and Sirota come to perform in a remote shtetl like Ternivka?

This is how it happened. There was a childless Jewish man in Ternivka, a well-to-do money lender, always dressed in his holiday best, polished and pressed. He was bored due to his idleness so he became the first Jew in Ternivka to buy a gramophone and records, "Chazones" records, in Uman. Of course, not many people could permit themselves to buy a gramophone which cost a huge sum of money when they first came out.

Only a fortunate few who were invited to his home had the privilege of seeing this wonder the gramophone and to hear "Chazones" records. When the guests would hear Kwartin's "Hashkivenu" (from the Jewish prayer book) they would just melt from the sweetness and would float to high heaven, the heaven of music.

It is true that regular Jews were not privileged to see this gramophone wonder but they were privileged to hear its music. On fine summer evenings the owner of the gramophone, Moishe Altman, would open wide the windows of his home in order to enjoy the fresh air and the gramophone would play its melodies. Many Jews would gather near his home and would listen in silent awe to the music that flooded their very being. That is how the Jews of Ternivka were privileged to hear the great and famous Cantors Kwartin, Sirota and others.

31. A Tale of a Milchig (Dairy) Meal

It was a custom of Ya'akov Koifman, the eldest of the Koifman brothers, to invite a few of the more prominent worshippers at the old "Kloyz" (small synagogue) where he worshipped to a meal at his home (the rest of his brothers worshipped at the new "Kloyz") on the "Jahrzeit" (memorial day) for his father Avraham Koifman, of blessed memory. Avraham Tepliker, a bright and respected scholar (but unfortunately also a bit of a beggar) was among these guests.

Once, when Avraham Tepliker arrived for this rich meal which he looked forward to with much anticipation, he found among the guests Shmu'el Baratz, a clever well-to-do Jew. Since the meal had not yet been served to the table, Shmu'el Baratz snuck into the kitchen and saw that they were preparing a rich "milchig" (dairy) meal and suddenly a prank popped into his head. He said to Mrs. Koifman: "I see that you are preparing a dairy meal for the guests today but I don't feel like having a dairy meal right now. If you don't mind, please give me something 'fleischig' (a meat meal)."

Mrs. Koifman acceded to his request and served him a plate of chicken gizzards and liver that was sitting in a cupboard in the kitchen. Shmu'el Baratz took the plate and thanked her and returned to the dining room. He approached Avraham Tepliker and said: "Mrs. Koifman sent you, in the meantime until the meal is served, this first course. You are no doubt hungry." Avraham Tepliker was happy both for this fine portion of food and for the attention from Mrs. Koifman and he swallowed the food like it was going out of style.

After a few minutes Mrs Koifman and the maid served the guests the dairy meal on trays filled with all good things – blintzes filled with cheese and dripping with sour cream, kreplach filled with mashed potatoes and floating on butter, fish fried in butter, fragrant and delicious borscht with sour cream and butter floating on it, wonderful kugel, sweet and fried in butter, omelettes, custard, pancakes and for dessert chicory with milk and excellent butter shortbread.

When Avraham Tepliker saw this meal fit for a king, this rich dairy meal, his eyes grew dark in their sockets. The enjoyment of all of these wonderful dishes was forbidden to him because he had just eaten a meat dish (it is forbidden to mix meat and milk). Avraham Tepliker realized that the clever joker Shmu'el Baratz had pulled a prank on him so that he would not be able to enjoy this wonderful meal.

At that moment Avraham Tepliker was ready to "devour" Shmu'el Baratz for "turning his world upside down" (a play on the Hebrew words) by denying him this meal fit for a king. He only calmed down when Mrs. Koifman promised him that when he would come to her home at the same time on the following day, that she would serve him the exact same dairy meal. And that is how Shmu'el Baratz pulled a prank on poor Avraham Tepliker at Avraham Koifman's "Jahrzeit!"

By the way, it was told in the shtetl that they once saw Avraham Tepliker eating warm bread that had just been taken out of the oven followed by a glass of cold water. They said to him: "Avraham, God be with you. Don't you know that you are putting your life at risk? You might God forbid die from eating this combination." He answered them: "It is doubtful that I will die if I eat warm bread and after that drink cold water but it is certain that I will die if I don't eat bread and I don't drink water...!"

32. "Aliya" (Immigration) to Palestine

A. During the "Second Aliya" (1904-1914)

These immigrants did not immigrate to Palestine just to study. They also immigrated in order to work the land and to preserve it. In fact, there were only a few immigrants from Ternivka just as there were few immigrants during all of the Second Aliya, one from a shtetl and two from a city. Among these Ternivka immigrants was Yisra'el Meisel of blessed memory, a great grandson of one of the Chasidic "Rebbs" (Rabbis). He ran away from a "Yeshiva" (seminary) in Skvira where he was studying and immigrated to Palestine without the knowledge of his family.

In Palestine he experienced all of the metamorphoses of the workers of the Second Aliya. He was an agricultural worker in various settlements. He was a member of Kibbutz Tira near Haifa that later ceased to exist. He finally settled in Tel Adashim in the Jezreel Valley. After the State of Israel was established (1948) he went to the Negev Desert (southern Israel) to instruct the young "Moshav" (agricultural settlement) workers in agriculture.

Uri Gurfinkel who was an intelligent "Yeshiva" student also immigrated to Palestine at this time followed by his father-in-law Refa'el Taft and his sons. Two of Uri's grandsons, his daughter's sons Yochanan and Amram who were from Kibbutz Kfar Menachem, were killed in the Six Day War (1967). One was a bachelor and the other was married leaving behind his parents, a young widow and an infant son. May God avenge their blood.

Avraham Eisenberg (Barzilai) was also among the immigrants to Palestine at this time. He initially lived in several countries before he finally arrived in Palestine from Argentina and settled in Rosh Pina where he was an agriculturist. After a while he brought his family from Argentina.

B. During the “Third Aliya” (1919-1923)

In 1920, after the First World War and the Russian Revolution, about ten young pioneers from Ternivka immigrated to Palestine and among them was the youngest son of the Rabbi of Ternivka. After them, more families immigrated to Palestine after traversing dangerous roads and borders. These are the families: Balagur, Blatnoy, Berdichevsky, Berman-Shita, Gutmacher, Gorodetsky, Drukarsky, Wortman (including the author), Troyanovsky, M. Taft, Yanovsky, Moldavsky, Marchovsky, Ne’eman, Polivoy, Porer, Paradny, Kushnir, Kravetz , Krotokop and last but not least, Rabbi Aharon Kruglyak who we mentioned in the chapter on Education.

Tens of thousands of refugees from Ukraine streamed to the district of Bessarabia which was then under the rule of Romania. About four hundred refugee families organized themselves as the “Bershad Cooperative.” The organizers of this “Cooperative” were from Bershad, a large shtetl about 30 miles from Ternivka. Many families from other shtetls joined them. The plan of this “Cooperative” was to establish a settlement in Palestine that was both agricultural and industrial but unfortunately this plan never came to fruition. Once in Palestine, the members of the “Bershad Cooperative” dispersed, each one going his own way and managing the best he could.

Among the immigrants and pioneers from Ternivka were the great grandchildren of Rabbi Ya’akov Wortman who immigrated to the Holy Land in 1865. I will mention a few of them: Dr. Moshe Wortman, a jurist and the author of the book “Creation Theory (Cosmogony) in Jewish Tradition” published by the Devir Publishing House in 1932; the educator and children’s writer A. Gad; Aharon Nir (Polivoy) (1900-1955) of blessed memory, a graduate of the first class of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and for many years the literary secretary to the poet Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934) and the author of the books “Bein Hase’ipim”, a book on philosophy published by the Devir Publishing House in 1954 and an important and comprehensive monographical book on the romanticist researcher Shne’ur Zaks (1816-1892).

Aharon Nir also contributed to a number of literary periodicals that were published in Israel. He died in Tel Aviv in midlife in 1955; Yisra’el Amitay, long life to him, a journalist while he served as an army medic in the Israel Defense Forces during the War of Independence, published, together with another expert, a book on the practice of being a medic. By the way, Aharon Wortman, a retired Tel Aviv police officer, is also one of Rabbi Ya’akov Wortman’s great grandsons. He wrote a book about the various personality types that he encountered as a criminal investigator for the police.

33. A Wonderful Meeting

Before the First World War an elderly Jew called Itzi-Shaya “Chasid” (the Chasidic Jew) immigrated to the Holy Land from Ternivka. He immigrated to the Holy Land in order to conclude his life in Torah study and prayer and in order to be buried in the holy soil. A few years after he immigrated to the Holy Land, a semi-educated Ukrainian (he could read a newspaper) by the name of Urady went to the Holy Land as a pilgrim. He was a decent and honest man. The Church had organized and conveyed the pilgrims to the Holy Land at the Church’s expense.

Once when Urady and his group of pilgrims were walking in the streets of Jerusalem he suddenly heard someone calling: “Urady, Urady!” He was astonished and alarmed to hear a voice calling his name. He thought it must be the voice of God because no one in the Holy Land and in Jerusalem knew his name outside of the group of pilgrims with whom he was presently walking! And while he was still filled with wonder, he saw a Jewish man whose “Kapota” (long coat) was flapping in the wind and who had his prayer shawl and his phylacteries in his hand running toward him in great joy. It was Itzi-Shaya “Chasid” coming from his morning prayers in the synagogue.

Urady and Itzi knew each other well in Ternivka. Out of great joy at the unexpected encounter they hugged and kissed much to the astonishment of the pilgrims and of the passersby. Afterwards, the “Chasid” invited Urady to his apartment, honored him with “delicacies fit for a king” and received from him recent and detailed regards from Ternivka and its people. Thus, “Jacob and Esau” met in Jerusalem, the city of holiness and peace, where each of them had favored her with his presence for different religious reasons.

34. A Shared “Etrog”

During the First World War when Palestine was cut off from Russia, it was very difficult to acquire an “Etrog” (ceremonial citron fruit) for the Festival of Sukkot. The Ternivka Jewish community learned that the nearby Teplik Jewish community, a distance of about 15 miles, had miraculously acquired for an enormous sum, an “Etrog.” After much pleading, the Teplik Jewish community agreed to include the Ternivka Jewish community in the “Mitzva” (Torah commandment) concerning the “Etrog” and so the two communities were able to make the benediction on the “Etrog.”

And how was this accomplished? Normally the “Etrog” was in Teplik. In the morning, all of the Jews who wanted to make the benediction on the “Etrog” would gather in the synagogue and they would take turns making the benediction. This ceremony lasted, of course, many hours. When they finished making the benediction on the “Etrog,” they would lock the “Etrog” in a box that had two keys, one in Teplik and one in Ternivka. This box was handed to a Ukrainian horseman and he would transport it to the Great Synagogue in Ternivka.

A large crowd would already be patiently waiting at the Great Synagogue in order to make the benediction on the “Etrog” that was being brought from Teplik. Even though it was already late, two or three o’clock in the afternoon, there were many who had not eaten without first making the benediction on the “Etrog.” This ceremony lasted a long time and the Ukrainian horseman would wait. When they finished making the benediction on the “Etrog,” they would again lock the “Etrog” in the box and give it to the Ukrainian who returned it on the same day to Teplik. This was repeated on each of the days of the Festival of Sukkot (7 days). A “Lulav” (ceremonial date palm frond) was not hard to acquire. One could get one in Russia and many people had a “Lulav” from previous years.

35. Yosyp (Yosef) of Berezivka

There were villages in the vicinity of Ternivka where Jewish families lived. There were villages in which a few Jewish families lived. There were villages in which two Jewish families and even one Jewish family lived. In the village of Berezivka near Ternivka, a distance of two or three miles, there lived a well-to-do Jewish man, a good hearted and hospitable person and he was called Yosyp both by the Jews and the Ukrainians. One day, his wife who was also good hearted and hospitable but not particularly bright was traveling by train to a city. Other Jews were traveling in the same train car and while conversing with one of them she told him incidentally the whole history of her family, its wealth and its importance.

After they parted each to his own way, this Jewish man wrote a humorous story entitled “Yosyp of Berezivka.” This Jewish man was none other than “Sholem Aleichem” (Shalom Rabinovitz, 1859-1916) himself! When Yosyp found out that “Sholem Aleichem” had written a “humorous story” about him and his family, he hurried to the publisher and he paid him and also “Sholem Aleichem” “goodly sums” so that they would remove the story from the book market. And so this story disappeared from the book market from that day on and only a few copies can perhaps still be found in a few isolated libraries.

36. A Story about a “Shoychet” (“Kosher” Slaughterer)

Once or twice a week, a traveling “Shoychet” from Ternivka would visit the above mentioned village Jews. He would slaughter some chickens or a scrawny cow for them. This “Shoychet,” Yeshayahu, was a great and pious scholar and he also knew Russian which was unusual for religious functionaries in the small shtetls. He was later appointed a financial officer with the Koifman brothers who managed large enterprises. He was a traveling “Shoychet” because he had no tenure on slaughtering in the shtetl. He would travel from village to village in his carriage and sometimes when it was muddy he would ride a horse with his “work tools” in his hand. Once, when he was on his way to a village, a robber attacked him and demanded money from him. The “Shoychet” Yeshayahu didn’t panic. He pulled out his large “Chalaf” (butcher’s knife) with which he would slaughter a cow and when the robber saw this, he fled for his life!

37. “Sirka” and “Gematria”

One can also get an understanding of the circumstances of the isolated village Jew from the following incident. In one of the villages, Tashlyk, that was located between the shtetls Ternivka and Teplik (about ten miles NW of Ternivka) there was a large and modern flour mill that belonged to the “Puritz” (landowner) of the village. A couple of Jewish grain merchants from these two shtetls (Ternivka and Teplik) leased this mill from the landowner. The manager of this mill, who was also one of the partners, was Gershon-Me’ir who was both religiously and secularly educated. Incidentally, he initially sent his two young sons, Yehoshu’a and Shraga, whom we have already mentioned, to study at the Lida, Lithuania (now Belarus) “Yeshiva” (seminary) but later he sent them to study in Palestine at the Jerusalem Seminar. After the First World War, he also immigrated with his wife and his daughter and her family to Palestine.

Only one other Jew lived in this village of Tashlyk, an elderly man who was the warehouseman at the mill. And it happened that one Sabbath day, the family of Gershom-Me'ir was sitting down to the second meal of the Sabbath and when the chicken was served he found a "Sirka" (fatty membrane possibly covering a puncture wound). Fearing that the chicken was "Treif" (not "Kosher"), he wrapped up the chicken and immediately sent it with a Ukrainian horseman to the Rabbi in Ternivka, a distance of about ten miles.

The Ukrainian came to our house with the chicken since we were the Rabbi's neighbors and friends of Gershom-Me'ir. One of the children entered our neighbor the Rabbi's home with the chicken in his hands and after an examination the rabbi ruled that the chicken was "Kosher." Now the question arose how to convey the Rabbi's ruling to the family in Tashlyk? Write a note? It was the Sabbath (writing is forbidden on the Sabbath). Put the word "Kosher" in the Ukrainian's mouth? The manager of the mill might suspect that the Ukrainian was purposely saying "Kosher" instead of "Treif" in order to please him (the concepts of "Kosher" and "Treif" were known to the Ukrainians who came in close contact with Jews).

Then it occurred to my father of blessed memory to convey the word "Kosher" to the Ukrainian in numbers and so the Ukrainian messenger was told to please convey to the manager of the mill that the "Rabbin" (Rabbi in Russian) said "pyatsot dvatsat" (five hundred and twenty in Russian) which is "Kosher" in "Gematria" (Numerology). The Ukrainian rehearsed this number a few times until he knew it by heart. When he returned to the village and conveyed the "code number" to the manager of the mill Gershom-Me'ir, he immediately interpreted the "code" and knew that the chicken was "Kosher" and he was able to conduct the Sabbath meal as required by Jewish Law.

38. My Father's Home

I would like to dedicate a few lines to the home of my father, Tzvi Wortman, as a prototype for the well-to-do and respected homes in the shtetl that embodied both "Torah" education and secular education. Both holy books and secular books could be found in our bookcase: "Gemara" ("Talmud"), "Yad Hachazaka" and "Moreh Nevuchim" (both by Maimonides) next to "A Wanderer on the Path of Life" by Peretz Smolenskin (1842-1885), the poems of Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934) and a book in Russian by Tolstoy. The Hebrew newspaper "Hatzefira" that we received for many years (father, of blessed memory, like many other Jews, was among the admirers of its editor, Nachum Sokolow, 1859-1936) existed side by side with the Russian newspaper "Kievskaya Mysl" and before that "Birzheve Vedemosti" from St. Petersburg that were received in our home. We also received the Zionist-Russian weekly "Rassvet" ("Dawn").

For many years, we also received the thick Russian science journal "Vestnik Znanya" that would inform the educated classes in Russia on scientific matters. During the First World War, we received the Hebrew weekly "Ha'am" that was published in Moscow. It was the only Hebrew periodical that was published in Russia at that time. After the Revolution in 1917, "Ha'am" was published as a daily. When we were children, we received the Hebrew weekly for children "Haprachim" and the children's daily in vocalized Hebrew "Hachaver," which appeared for about a year.

It is worth mentioning that in our home no book in Yiddish was to be found because it was "shameful" that the educated well-to-do would, God forbid, read a book in "Jargon," like the tradesmen. It is true that there were a few Yiddish books in our home: "Tsená Ure'ena" ("Women's Bible") and "Shevet Musar" and "Kav Hayashar" (books on Jewish ethics) and others read by my mother Chana, of blessed memory, an uneducated woman who could read and write Yiddish. But a modern Yiddish book? Not even worth mentioning!

My father who was a great admirer of the "Rambam" (Maimonides) would say that if the "Rambam" were alive today he would go to him on foot to the ends of the earth. Even though as a grain and flour merchant he was very busy, he would set aside time to study "Torah," usually during the third watch of the night. At three or four o'clock in the morning, when everyone was sleeping, he would awaken and also waken me and study and teach me a page of "Gemara" (Talmud). It was also his custom every Sabbath morning before prayer to teach his sons "Torah" with "Or Hachayim" and other commentaries.

Father was pious and followed all of the commandments of the "Shulchan Aruch" (Code of Jewish Law) but he was not a religious fanatic. His sons, like all of the young men of the new generation, shaved and did not strictly follow all of the commandments and proscriptions but at home they kept the traditions. Even though my father was from a "Chasidic" home, he was never a "Chasid" and he never went to a "Rebbe" (Chasidic Rabbi) to give him a "Kvittel" (petitionary prayer). He would often give a donation of money to one of the "Rebbs," a scholar from a Rabbinic family who would come to our shtetl. He would donate, but without a "Kvittel."

By the way, this same "Rebbe" would send one of the children of his host to our house whenever he was staying in the shtetl and request to read the "Hatzevira" newspaper (a secular newspaper). This "Rebbe," who I think was a descendant of Rabbi Zusya of Hanipoli (1718-1800), saw no contradiction between reading "Hatzevira" and receiving "Kvitlach" (plural of "Kvittel"). The truth is, that he was not satisfied with making a living in this manner and was more than once sorry that he had not chosen to take a "Rabbinic Chair" in one of the large cities. But, his followers did not permit him to do this.

As mentioned in the chapter on “Library and Theater,” my father bought many books from “Central” (a Warsaw publishing house) and he especially liked to read about weighty matters like science and research and not the lighter “Belles Lettres” preferred by the younger folk. He tolerated “A Wanderer on the Path of Life” and similar works. And so, holy and secular books co-existed in peace together, without one interfering with the other even one bit.

My father Tzvi died in Uman in 5675 (1914/1915) at the age of 56 (lived ca. 1859-ca. 1915) and my mother Chana died in Tel Aviv in 5689 (1928/1929) at the age of 68 (lived ca. 1861-ca. 1929). May their memory be blessed.

39. The House of Yisra’el

A. A Righteous Person

“Thunder was created for the sole purpose of straightening the bend in a heart” (the Talmud).

Even though Yisra’el, Ben Tzion’s son, was a righteous man like the righteous man described in the Book of Psalms (15:2-5): “He who walks with integrity, does what is righteous and speaks the truth in his heart. He who does not slander with his tongue, do evil to a friend, or bring disgrace upon his neighbor. He who despises the reprobate but who honors those that fear the Lord. He who does not lend money at interest...” whenever he heard thunder, he would become very frightened, as if the thunder had come “to straighten the bend in his heart.” Whenever there was thunder, he would hurry to find shelter from it until it passed. Most of the time, he would occupy himself with the study of Torah, with prayer and with the doing of good deeds. His store was mostly run by his wife (see the “Suffragette” below).

As an observer of the Sabbath, he did not leave his home on the Sabbath except to go to the “Kloyz” (small synagogue). But once, he had to go to the Jewish pharmacy to get some medication because of the illness of a member of his family. How astounded he was when he saw in the kitchen of the home of the pharmacist next to the pharmacy (the door happened to be open) a boiling kettle standing on the table.

Of course Yisra’el, Ben Tzion’s son, observed the Biblical verse (Leviticus 19:17): “You must surely reprove your neighbor so that you do not incur sin because of him.” He addressed the pharmacist freely and sternly and asked him to explain the boiling kettle on the Sabbath in a Jewish home.

The clever pharmacist answered him: "The boiling water is used for the preparation of medications necessary to save a human life." When Yisra'el, Ben Tzion's son, heard this, he calmed down and was very sorry that he had suspected an innocent person.

B. The "Suffragette"

Chaya the wife of Yisra'el, a clever and opinionated woman, who as mentioned above, mostly ran their dry goods store, was considered an expert on the subjects of prayer and religion in the women's section of the "Kloyz" where she prayed and they would bring any difficult questions to her. She was a descendant of the Talne line of "Rebbes" (Chasidic Rabbis) and she had within her a spark of the "Maiden of Ludmir" (Chana Rachel Verbermacher, 1805-1888). She would complain that the men appropriated to themselves all six hundred and thirteen of the commandments and left the women only a few "crumbs" of commandments.

In order to anger the egotistical men, she would keep several commandments that were only incumbent upon men. She would pray all three daily prayers every day and she would make almost all of the "one hundred and one benedictions" every day, etc. And that is how she retaliated against the men who appropriated to themselves all of the commandments and discriminated against the women, even claiming that a woman is exempt from the keeping of the commandments...!

C. The Jerusalemite

One of the sons of Yisra'el and Chaya whose name was Yitzchak, uprooted himself from the shtetl a few years before the First World War in order to avoid being drafted into the Tsar's army and immigrated to Palestine under an assumed name and with a forged passport. He was known here in Israel in different circles under this new surname. He settled in Jerusalem and was assimilated into the old moderate religious community.

Sometimes, he would come to Russia concerning the sale of "Etrogim" (ceremonial citron fruits for the Festival of Sukkot), etc. but he was afraid to come to Ternivka because of the local authorities. He would travel incognito to the nearby large city of Uman and his family members in the shtetl would secretly travel to him to Uman and they would meet with him there. And so, Yitzchak would often visit Russia under an assumed name. After the Second World War his brothers and his two married sisters joined him in Israel.

40. Jewish Robbers

The shtetl of Ternivka was far from any railway. The closest train station was in the village of Zholonok a distance of about 15 miles (South-West of Ternivka). The big city, the metropolis of the whole large area, was the city of Uman. It had about forty thousand residents of whom about twenty-five thousand were Jews. Transportation was only by wagon - Jewish wagon owners who transported passengers there and back and Ukrainian wagon owners who mainly transported merchandise. About five Jewish wagon owners would leave Ternivka for Uman every day - on nice days in their carriages and on muddy days in regular wagons. Wagon owners would also leave Ternivka for other shtetls in the area, each wagon owner to a different shtetl.

To the large shtetl of Bershad, a distance of about thirty miles, where it was hard for a wagon owner to return on the same day because of the great distance, the wagon owner would leave and return only every two days. The "Balagule" (wagon owner) on the Bershad route was an elderly man whose right thumb had been cut off. This is how it happened. When he was a small boy, his mother once spotted "Khappers" (kidnappers of young Jewish boys to prepare them for service in the Tsar's army) nearing her home to kidnap her son. She immediately grabbed a cleaver from the kitchen and cut off his right thumb. When the "Khappers" burst into her home, it was already too late and they didn't take the boy since he was now disabled and disqualified from service in the army of Tsar Nikolai I (1825-1855).

By the way, this elderly wagon owner once received a couple of hundred dollars from his son in the United States for his fare to America because he was about to join his son there. He traveled to the bank in Uman in order to withdraw the money. This became known to the Ternivka wagon owners and in the evening, when the elderly wagon owner returned from Uman, they, along with wagon owners from Uman, their partners in crime, lay in wait for him at the side of the road near the forest. They disguised themselves and attacked him, tied him up and stole all of his money from him. In the end, they caught the wagon owner robbers and they were sentenced to prison terms and to fines.

41. The Old "Vasser Tregger" (Water Carrier)

Chezkel (Yechezkel), the elderly "Vasser Tregger" (water carrier), like the elderly "Balagule" (wagon owner), also had the thumb of his right hand cut off. In a similar manner, when his father saw that the "Khappers" were nearing his home to kidnap his son and hand him over to the army of Nikolai I, he hurriedly grabbed a kitchen knife and cut off the thumb of the boy's right hand so that he would be disqualified from the army.

Chezkel supplied the residents of the shtetl with water for decades but barely survived. If it weren't for the little "Chalot" (Sabbath loaves) that his customers would give him every Sabbath Eve, in addition to his measly salary, and from which he was nourished the whole week, his existence would have been seven times as wretched.

He was very proud of his young daughter who was somewhat of a Russian teacher. She knew a bit of Russian and this bit of Russian she would impart to poor children for a paltry fee of a few kopeks. But even though the fee was paltry, the honor was great in the eyes of the "Vasser Tregger."

By the way, there were a few poor children whose parents did not even have a few kopeks to pay this teacher. The educated daughters of well-to-do people would come to their aid and would teach the poor children to read and write Russian at no charge. I remember two poor children who would also come to our home twice a week and my two sisters would teach them Russian and Arithmetic.

42. "Arka Povoroka" (Arka "the Cart")

"Arka Povoroka," "Aharon the Mover," was a household name in Ternivka. Everyone needed his creaky wagon and his poor horse. Arka was the only mover in Ternivka and he had no competitors. If a well-to-do Jewish man bought a bag of flour at the flour store, who would transport this bag of flour so that his wife would not have to walk all the way to the flour store and then schlep the satchel of flour home every week, if not "Arka Povoroka?" And if someone moved, who would transport their possessions - the pillows, the quilts, the chairs, the table, etc., but not all at once God forbid? Who would move them if not "Arka Povoroka?"

Everyone needed “Arka Povożka” and they would often “grease his palm” if he would only hurry up and deliver the load. Only sometimes, when someone needed to transport a large load and all at once and that was greater than the “horse power” of Arka’s poor horse, would he hire a Ukrainian with two horses and a large wagon to transport his heavy load.

Since “Arka Povożka”’s horse was not, God forbid, a thoroughbred, a “Belgian horse,” but a poor little horse, nothing but skin and bones, after a short period of time transporting cargo for Arka, this horse would, if you will excuse me, “spread his legs” (a play on the Hebrew term for going bankrupt) or “gather up his legs” (a play on the Biblical term for dying) and die. Such events would periodically happen to Arka.

It was rumored that when his horse would die, that he would not mourn excessively over the horse because he would often receive more for the hide of the dead horse than the live horse had cost him. And also, that when Arka’s horse would die, that he would not be in any rush to buy another horse, but would go on strike, rest and remain idle.

He would claim: “I have nothing.” He had no money to buy another horse because he had spent the amount that he had received for the hide for his sustenance. The storekeepers of the shtetl had no choice but to chip in and buy him another poor horse because if they didn’t buy him a horse, there was a danger, God forbid, that business in the shtetl would be paralyzed.

“Arka Povożka” was not a strong man and his strength was no greater than the strength of his poor horse. He would say: “I swear that I want to die. My strength is failing me. I am tired of it all – the moving business, the wagon, the horse, and I am even tired of ‘Arka Povożka.’ I swear that I want to die!”

43. The Jewish Postman

During the days of the Tsar, no Jew in the shtetl served in the civil service, but there was one exception. It was a Jewish Postman who was partially paralyzed and would drag one foot, “Herschel the Pochtalyon” (Postman). Because he was a young man with a family, he searched for sources of livelihood. He would buy tens of copies of the Yiddish newspapers “Heint” and “Moment” and he would sell them on a payment plan, but he barely earned a living.

With the outbreak of the First World War, when Warsaw was captured by the Germans, he was left without newspapers and without a living, so activists intervened with the Director of the Post Office in the shtetl and requested that he give this poor Jewish man the job of distributing the mail to the Jews.

Since the Ukrainian Postman had just then been drafted into the War, the Director of the Post Office agreed to give the Jewish man the mail that was addressed to the Jews. The Jewish Postman did not receive a government salary so there was no "loss" to the Director of the Post Office. He would survive on the handouts that the Jewish recipients of the mail would give him. By the way, even though he dragged one foot, he was quicker in delivering the mail than even the previous Ukrainian Postman!

44. The Ukrainian Who Put on "Tefillin" (Phylacteries)

It was difficult to find a Ukrainian who was a tinsmith or a barber or a tailor, but it was not difficult to find a Ukrainian who was a shoemaker. For some reason, the young Ukrainians were drawn to this profession more than to other professions. Usually, these Ukrainians learned this profession from Jewish shoemakers. Since they worked with them for many years, they also learned from them the Yiddish language and Jewish customs.

Among those who worked in their youth for Jews as shoemaker apprentices was a certain Ukrainian by the name of Mikhas, a bearded redhead who would wear a Jewish style hat without the shiny visor that was the custom of the Ukrainians. He knew Yiddish perfectly just like a real Jew. When he came in contact with Jews in order to make a purchase, etc. it was his custom to speak only in Yiddish and not in his own language. He especially liked to speak in Yiddish in the presence of fellow Ukrainians who would listen in astonishment to his fluency in the language of the Jews.

One day, Mikhas traveled to the distant shtetl of Krivoye Ozero (about 60 miles South of Ternivka) to the "Yarid" (market day). There, he entered the home of a certain Jewish man whose daughter had married a man from Ternivka (B.K.) who owned a large and centrally located inn. Mikhas introduced himself to this Jewish man as a Jewish "Balagule" (wagon owner) from Ternivka and he gave him regards from his daughter, her husband and their children. It was morning and he asked the Jewish man to give him a "Tallis" (prayer shawl) and "Tefillin" (phylacteries) so that he could pray the Morning Prayer since he had left Ternivka before dawn and did not have an opportunity to pray.

Of course, the Jewish man willingly gave him the “Tallis” and “Tefillin” as he could not even imagine that he was not a Jew. Mikhas, who had for years observed how the Jewish shoemaker covered himself in the “Tallis,” put on “Tefillin” and said his prayers, now imitated him nicely and he also covered himself in the “Tallis,” put on “Tefillin” and pretended to pray from the prayer book that was given to him, in the melody that he had so often heard the shoemaker use. When he returned to Ternivka, he went to the son-in-law, the owner of the inn, gave him regards from his father-in-law and his family and he related to him with great laughter the prank that he had pulled and how he had fooled his father-in-law in Krivoye Ozero. By the way, this “Ukrainian Jew” was not necessarily a lover of Jews!

45. “Shmerel Schreiber” (“Shmerel the Letter Writer”)

There were a number of writers of letters of appeal in the shtetl who earned a nice living from this trade. Most of the people who needed them were village Ukrainians who would often become involved in quarrels. Vodka and brandy played a large part in these quarrels. The courthouse where the different cases were heard was in the nearby shtetl of Teplik (about 15 miles North-West of Ternivka). Sometimes, when the cases from the Ternivka area were numerous, the judge would take the trouble to come to Ternivka for a day or two to judge the litigants in the “Volost,” the village administrative office.

The main writer of letters of appeal was “Shmerel Schreiber” (“Shmerel the Letter Writer”). He was called that because of his beginnings. Initially, he taught the Jewish children to read and write the Russian alphabet and enough basic knowledge of the language to write an address in Russian. But later on, he left this profession which provided a meager income and he became a writer of letters of appeal to the courts and different government institutions which brought in a good income and also gave him a more respected status.

“Shmerel Schreiber” had an impressive appearance. He was tall, had a black moustache and wore a “pince-nez” in order to make an impression and elevate himself above the illiterate Ukrainians who would come to him. He had beautiful handwriting and he would write with both hands. That is, he would write with one hand and would place his other hand on the hand that was writing. This was either because his writing hand would shake or it was in order to make an impression on the illiterate Ukrainians.

Once a year, the accredited writers of letters of appeal were permitted to personally appear in court in order to defend their clients. When “Shmerel Schreiber” would appear in court to defend his client, his face would be radiant with happiness and a sense of importance. He would imagine himself an important lawyer, like Kupernik or Gruzenberg, the famous Jewish lawyers in Russia.

“Shmerel Schreiber” who owned “the Statute Books of the Russian Empire” would study them in front of his clients in order to create an impression. By the way, he would often boast that he had even written letters of appeal to His Majesty the Tsar!

“Shmerel Schreiber” had a brother in the shtetl who was a “Melamed” (teacher of young boys). His name was Pesach-Hersch and he would brag about his brother the “lawyer.” When this “Melamed” would quarrel with someone, he would threaten: “Be careful. I have a brother who knows how to write.” – a thinly veiled hint that he might write a letter of complaint to the authorities.

Besides “Shmerel Schreiber,” there were three other writers of letters of appeal, among them a “Yeshiva” (seminary) student by the name of Alter Trazay who lived under his father-in-law’s roof and since he didn’t have a profession, he became a writer of letters of appeal.

46. The Beilis Blood Libel Trial

During the Beilis Blood Libel Trial (September-October, 1913) the whole shtetl was of course on edge and tense. There were several readers of Russian, Hebrew (“Hatzefira,” “Hazeman) and Yiddish (“Heint,” “Moment”) newspapers and they would provide the rest of the Jews with information on the process of the trial. It is true that all of the newspapers that were published, the Russian ones in St. Petersburg and the Hebrew and Yiddish ones in Warsaw and Vilna, arrived in the shtetl only on the third day after they were published and their content was already somewhat stale but that did not at all diminish the great interest in this trial.

The idle in the “Beit Hamidrash” and the “Kloyz” (synagogues) discussed and prayed over every word of the prosecutor, the defense lawyers and the experts on Judaism in this trial and they seriously interpreted their words.

Everyone waited anxiously for the end of the trial and the verdict. The good news on Beilis' release did not become known to the Jews of Ternivka from the newspapers since they arrived to their readers after a long delay. The privilege to announce this good news about the release of Beilis fell to a young man from Ternivka who was working as a clerk in Odessa. As soon as the news article on the release of Beilis was published, he immediately sent a telegram to his parents in Ternivka in Yiddish in these words: "Beilis bafreit" that is, "Beilis has been freed." The telegram arrived in Ternivka at 11:00 at night (Tuesday, October 28, 1913).

Even though Yisra'el Chorny, the father of the young man, was already in bed, he got up and got dressed and hurried to pass on the good news to his neighbors and acquaintances and they passed on the good news to the other residents of the shtetl. Within less than an hour, all of the residents of the shtetl knew about this important event and almost all of them came out of their homes and took long or short walks in the streets of the shtetl and conversed in groups about this joyful good news and the miracle that happened to the Jews. If Beilis had been found guilty, God forbid, the members of the Black Hundreds (an anti-Semitic organization) would have expressed their joy in anti-Jewish pogroms!

47. Nightmares

The Rabbi of the community and his sister and brother-in-law lived in the house next to ours. The brother-in-law had a dry goods store in the shops district which was far from our house. One day, he had the opportunity to buy an apartment in the building in which the store was located. He took advantage of this opportunity and he bought the apartment and he sold his old apartment to a barrel maker who offered him the best price. The Rabbi was very much opposed to the sale of the apartment to the barrel maker, not necessarily because it was below his dignity to live with a "tradesman" but because barrel making is a noisy trade and causes a disturbance.

All day long the barrel maker splits wood in order to make staves for the barrels, saws and planes and hammers on the barrel hoops, etc., activities that are not conducive to reading a book or resting. Because of this sale the Rabbi severed his relations with his sister and brother-in-law for a long time.

Actually, the blame for the sale did not fall on his sister and brother-in-law but on the mother of the brother-in-law, a tyrannical and domineering woman who was the owner of the apartment and the store and this, her only son and his family, were dependent upon her for their livelihood. She did not at all consider the feelings of the Rabbi and his close relationship with his sister and brother-in-law, but only the nice bundle of money that she received from the barrel maker.

Once, about a year after the new neighbor moved into his apartment, my brother and I were sleeping on the porch of our house on a hot summer's night. The houses of the shtetl were almost all of one storey and the porch had a roof on it so that there was no chance that the dew would get us wet at night. This custom of sleeping on the porch on hot summer nights was also the custom of several other residents of the shtetl. Suddenly, at midnight, screams and groans erupted from the porch of the new neighbor, the barrel maker Yissachar (Sucher in Yiddish), a quiet and pleasant man. When we were awoken by the screams and we asked our neighbor who was also sleeping on the porch of his apartment the meaning of his screams and groans, he told us this shocking story.

When bloody pogroms, pogroms of plunder and destruction, broke out in South Russia in hundreds of Jewish communities in the 1880's, provoked and sponsored by the Tsarist government, Balta the town where he lived was also affected. One night, when he was still a small child, about six years old, pogromchiks thirsting for blood and plunder burst into their home and dealt murderous blows to his parents and to his brothers, fatally wounding them and also looting and plundering and destroying their property.

At the sight of this horrendous scene, the boy who was suddenly awoken from his sleep, burst into terrible and frightening screams. Ever since then, for decades, so he told us, at this insane hour, terrible screams and deep and heart rending groans would erupt from him while he sleeps. His poor wife was already accustomed to these screams in the night and now since he was sleeping on the open porch it is no wonder that we also heard his screams. By the way, he told us that over the many years that had gone by since then, that he had sought the advice of different doctors, but they couldn't suggest any remedy for his nightmares, the nightmares of his childhood.

48. A Town Located on a River (the Udych River)

Ternivka was located on two rivers (two branches of the Udych River), a small river on the edge of the shtetl next to which stood the old bathhouse and a large river next to the village of Ternivka (where the Ukrainians lived). These two rivers provided some of the fish that the shtetl consumed in honor of the Sabbath. Because the shtetl was located on a river, it was considered suitable for the conducting of divorce proceedings (according to Jewish Law). There were nearby shtetls that didn't have a river and couples would often come from them to the Rabbi to get a divorce. Because our home was next to the home of the Rabbi, my elder brother was often called to be a witness to the granting of a divorce. I also often accompanied him and saw the divorce ceremony and often saw tears in the eyes of the divorced couple!

49. The Ice Dippers

The old bathhouse was very rickety and about to fall down so they started to build a new bathhouse but because of a shortage of money the building dragged on for many years and in the meantime there was no "Mikveh" (ritual bath) in the shtetl. In the summer, those who were ritually required to immerse themselves in a "Mikveh" would fulfil their duty by immersing themselves in the river. But, in the winter when the river was frozen, many pious women who were required to immerse themselves in the "Mikveh," would travel to a nearby shtetl and immerse themselves there in the "Mikveh." The ultra-orthodox men would immerse themselves in the frozen river.

How would they do that? A few of the pious Jews would equip themselves with warm blankets and warm and large fur cloaks and also with heavy axes and spades. On Friday, on a day of biting frost, this group of pious men would go to the frozen river to immerse themselves in honor of the Sabbath. They would dig a hole in the river ice with the work tools that they were carrying. On the warm blanket that was spread out at the edge of the river and with the help of the wide and large and warm cloak, each one would take his turn to quickly undress and jump into the hole in the ice (the water was not very cold because the ice covering protected it) and immerse himself in the "Mikveh."

When he came out of the water, his friends on the river bank would immediately throw the large and warm cloak over him and he would quickly get dressed as his bare feet that stood on the warm blanket were quickly inserted into warm felt boots.

That was how all of this group of “ice dippers” would conduct themselves. These “ice dippers” were heroes to the other pious men who did not dare to endanger themselves by immersing themselves in the “ice Mikveh” and the butt of jokes by the secular Jews. I remember three of these “ice dippers” – Eliyahu G., Shmu’el- Abba G. and the “Shoychet” (“Kosher” slaughterer) Yeshayahu that we have already mentioned (Chapter 36).

50. The Poor

As in many shtetls and cities in the Diaspora, poor people would also come to Ternivka and go from door to door to ask for charity. Among these poor people there were different types: “professionals” who would brazenly demand money and humble poor people whose faces revealed that they were not used to asking for charity and had only been forced to ask for charity by a change in their luck.

There was a “sanctuary” in the shtetl, a hostel for these wandering poor. They were permitted to stay at the hostel for about a week. In certain circumstances they could stay longer. The director of this hostel was an elderly Jewish man whose wife had been in her youth the wife of the (Israeli) writer-translator Elimelech Ish-Naomi, but they later separated.

Every day this Jewish man would also distribute notes to the poor notifying each one of them with which well-to-do family they could eat the afternoon meal. It was not necessary to distribute notes for the Sabbath Eve because the poor people would come to pray in the various synagogues and every well-to-do person would invite a “guest” to eat at his table. Often there were more invitations than there were poor people to accept them.

In addition to these poor people, wandering Jews called “Beidlech” in Yiddish, would come to the shtetl, but only rarely. They would arrive with their women and children in two or three wagons covered with canvas. They were apparently called “Beidlech” because of the “Boyd” or dome-like covers on their wagons. They would spread out in the shtetl in groups or families and demand “what was coming to them...” The truth can be said that the people of the shtetl looked upon them with a jaundiced eye. They also suspected them of stealing. Seeing them was like going back to the days of Mendele Moycher Sforim (S.J. Abramowitch, 1835-1917) who described these beggars so wonderfully well.

51. "Blind Chezkel"

A Jewish man with somewhat poor vision lived on one of the last streets of the shtetl. He always wore dark glasses. Everyone called him "Blind Chezkel" even though he wasn't at all blind. He owned a house and a small grocery store. Since his wife, a woman of valor, was the storekeeper, he was unemployed. In order not to be idle, he found himself a unique source of income.

He would travel by train and at one of the stops he would suddenly "faint." When the passengers present crowded around him and aroused him with difficulty from his swoon and asked him why he had fainted, he told them as he wept bitterly, that he had in his pocket a wallet containing a few hundred rubles with which to buy merchandise for his store. When he got off the train to buy something to eat in the station snack bar, he became aware that his money had been stolen from him. And upon telling this, he would "faint" again.

The travelers who were mostly Jews, took pity on the poor storekeeper, especially since he was slightly disabled, and together they collected a nice sum of money and gave it to him so that he could buy the merchandise that he needed. He did this for a long time, "fainting" in different stations and accumulating nice sums of money. Of course, each time he had to wander farther and farther to more distant stations. For a few years all went according to plan until finally the secret was out and he was revealed as a "professional fainter" to the train passengers that he would run into at the different stations and they stopped having pity on the "poor man" and granting him donations of money.

After he had collected a goodly sum of money and after he realized that the "game was over," "Blind Chezkel" became sedentary and stayed home and helped his wife a bit in the grocery store and would never again "faint" in the different train stations...!

52. The Story of a "Prikazchik" (Salesman)

The sons of tradesmen and poor people would learn a trade after they finished their "Cheder" studies, usually when they reached "Bar Mitzvah" (13 years old). They would learn a trade from various tradesmen and craftsmen like tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, barbers, etc.

On the other hand, God forbid that the sons of somewhat well-to-do men would learn a trade or a craft in order to earn a living. They would instead be hired out to storekeepers as “Prikazchiks” (salesmen), usually in stores that sold dry goods. It is true that their salary, even after years of seniority, was meager and it was impossible to survive on it. But on the other hand, it was easy and clean work and with the passing of time, when the young man learned about sales and the different kinds of merchandise, he could get married to a woman with a dowry and he could open himself a dry goods store and travel to the “Yarid” (market day in another shtetl).

Among these “Prikazchiks,” was the son of a country Jew who worked in the large haberdashery of Avraham Yanovsky and would immigrate with his family to Palestine. This “salesman” took advantage of the trust that the storekeeper had placed in him and he would pilfer items of merchandise every time that he went home. Because the store and the warehouse were full of merchandise, the storekeeper did not notice this theft which went on for half a year. The salesman would sell this stolen merchandise to the Jewish owner of a small store. But since, in the end, “crime doesn’t pay,” the thief was eventually caught with his stolen goods. After an investigation, he admitted to his “fine deeds” and even revealed who the “buyer” was and how much he had received from him.

When it became known that a Jew had knowingly bought stolen merchandise from another Jew, the shtetl was shocked. This had never happened before. So that the “buyer” would not be charged with a crime, he paid a “goodly sum” for the property that he had bought from the salesman and in that way the two of them, both the “buyer” and the salesman, were saved from many years in prison!

53. Menashe “Pyatkopyechnik” (“Five Kopeks”)

That’s what he was called because he sold every item of his notions merchandise at the fixed price of five kopeks. He didn’t have a permanent store but would carry a portable stand from “Yarid” (market day in another shtetl) to Yarid but, because this income itself was not enough for his survival, he added to his stand another unique source of livelihood, selling luck.

Boxes with rolled up fortune notes written in easy Russian, that could be quickly read, stood on his stand. One box contained fortune notes for unmarried men. A second box contained fortune notes for unmarried women. A third box contained fortune notes for men with a family and a fourth box contained fortune notes for housewives. Each note in the boxes had a different message, predicting the fate of the buyer of the fortune note.

And how were the fortune notes drawn from the boxes? A handsome parrot stood on the stand and would loudly call out “Mazel, Mazel” (“Good Luck, Good Luck”). When someone (the buyers were all Ukrainian) would buy a fortune note, the parrot would draw a note from the appropriate box. Menashe would first determine the marital status of the buyer. When a Ukrainian boy read the fortune note (if he couldn’t read, a knowledgeable member of the crowd would read it to him), his heart would overflow with happiness and joy. The fortune note promised him that he would marry a beautiful and shapely girl, hardworking and that she would bear him many strong sons.

When a Ukrainian girl bought a fortune note, he would promise her a handsome boy, strong and well established and most importantly that he would not get drunk and that he would not beat her. The Ukrainian girl would of course be happy without bound. The fortune notes also promised men with a family happiness and satisfaction from children, good yields and many cattle and pigs. The fortune notes never foretold bad luck, God forbid, but only good luck.

And so Menashe Pyatkopychnik made his living from the selling of notions and luck. But his own luck was not that great since he was very poor all of his life!

54. “Sendrel the Woman”

He was never privileged to be called by his personal name only, Moishe, but only by his name and the name of his wife, Moishe P...’s. And why was that? Because she was in fact the “man” in the family and he was like “Sendrel the woman” (a character in the book *The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third* by S.Y. Abramovitch). He was a weak, pitiable, naïve and idle Jew, divorced from worldly experience, who never earned a single penny by himself. She supported the family. She was the merchant, the haggler who would travel throughout her life to the various market days in the area. She didn’t have a permanent store so she would wander from “Yarid” (market day in another shtetl) to “Yarid” to sell her wares to the Ukrainians who would attend the “Yarid.”

She would sell white cotton cloth and cloth from Morozov of Moscow which was famous in Russia for its quality. In the evening, she would return from the “Yarid” dead tired and before dawn after a few brief hours of sleep she would again wander with her merchandise to another “Yarid.” And so all of the days of the week, all of the days of the year, all the days of her life, she attended the various market days in the frigid winter, in the sweltering summer and in the rainy autumn. She would set up her small stand at the “Yarid,” spread out the rolls of white cloth and advertise her merchandise and in order to prove to the primitive Ukrainians that the cloth that she was selling was superior cloth that would not wear out, she would stick her finger into the cloth to show that it didn’t tear, God forbid.

As mentioned before, her whole life was spent attending market days and moving from place to place in wagons. It was rumored in the shtetl that she gave birth to all of her children in the wagon... And “Sendrel the woman” never accompanied her to even one of the market days, not even at least to make sure that none of the Ukrainians would be tempted to steal a piece of cloth. He would sit at home or near the stove in the “Kloyz” (synagogue) with the other idle men and would occupy himself with important matters... like the politics of the Russian Empire.

Sometimes, when his wife would return frozen and frost bitten on a cold winter’s evening from one of the market days and would unload the rolls of cloth from the wagon in the dark, her husband would do her a favor and hold up a lamp to light her way as she unloaded the merchandise from the wagon. He would be bundled up in a fur cloak or in a warm blanket and would sigh: “It is really dangerous to be standing outside in this cold.”

His big opportunity came when the First World War broke out. Then, his hands were really filled with “work.” He, together with the other idle men of the “Kloyz,” would conduct “the strategy and war tactics” of the German High Command. Of course, he was among the leaders of the “German patriots.” As long as the German High Command obeyed his strategic advice, the Germans enjoyed great victories, but as soon as the Germans stopped heeding his strategic advice, they suffered one defeat after another in the War.

And that is how “Sendrel the woman” lived and operated!

55. Fires

Quite often a fire would break out in the shtetl because Jewish houses could still be found whose roofs were covered with thatch as was the case with the Ukrainian houses. Only in more recent years, were almost all of the roofs of the Jewish houses covered with tin or with shingles.

Among the large fires that I remember was the fire that burnt the house and the large grocery store of a Jewish man by the name of Shmerel. Since it was not customary in the shtetl to insure property against fire, the man was left with nothing. The wealthy residents of the shtetl collected between them a large sum of money in order to rehabilitate him. And indeed, with this money he rebuilt his house and store and he returned to his former status.

There was also a large fire in the oil factory of the Gorodetsky family that was in the center of the shtetl. Since there was a great danger that if the fire ignited the barrels of oil and the bags of sunflower seeds that it would spread to the adjacent houses, many people endangered themselves and broke inside and rolled the barrels of oil outside. They also removed the bags of sunflower seeds. After much effort, the fire was put out after it had almost burnt the building down to its foundation. By the way, the roof of this factory was actually made of tin and shingles.

And then there is the story about a poor Jewish man whose pitiful hut was burnt and who loudly demanded that the community put a roof over his head and if not, he would move into one of the synagogues with his family. And indeed his threat worked and they rehabilitated him!

56. "The Guardian of Israel"

In normal times, before the Russian Revolution, during certain seasons of the year, a few Jewish men would take turns to go out at night and act as night watchmen in Ternivka. This nightly rotation is called "Obkhod" in Russian. The "Desyatnik" (foreman), who in fact served as an emissary of the Police, but wasn't dressed in uniform but in regular clothes, was proud of his two sergeants. He carried a large, thick stick and wore a copper armband on his sleeve on which his Police rank was written. He would come as an emissary of the Police with a list of names in his hand to recruit a number of Jewish men for guard duty. When one of those summoned decided to avoid the "Obkhod," he would bribe the "Desyatnik" with a few kopeks and request that he release him this time "because he wasn't feeling well right now."

The “Desyatnik” would of course agree to his request and he would therefore recruit another Jewish man in order to fill his quota. These guards would do a round or two in the shtetl and would then sit themselves down on a bench near one of the houses and converse about “this and that” or they would take a little nap. Sometimes the “Desyatnik” or a real policeman would appear for an inspection. That is how they did guard duty in the shtetl on many nights...

In addition to this Jewish security, there was the additional security in the shtetl of a Ukrainian. The storekeepers of the shops district of the shtetl would hire a guard at their own expense. It was usually an elderly Ukrainian who was no longer working and was therefore free to sleep during the day and guard at night. This guard would receive a few rubles a month, enough for a meager subsistence. He didn’t guard all of the stores in the shtetl but as mentioned before, only the stores in the shops district.

His “weapon” was a club with which he would hit an empty crate every two or three hours in order to announce to the whole world that the “Guardian of Israel” would not slumber and he would not sleep and that he would not, God forbid, be negligent of his duty, so that all of the robbers, thieves and burglars in the whole world would hear and see that he was standing on guard and would not allow them to touch, God forbid, the large amount of property that had been placed in his care to guard.

Occasionally, once every couple of nights, one of the storekeepers would take his turn to check and make sure that the night watchman was really watching, but quite often, the storekeeper found the elderly night watchman snoring frightful snores. Even so, they would not dismiss him from his guard duty.

When the storekeepers were asked why they didn’t dismiss the night watchman who was negligent of his duty, they would give this unequivocal response that would put an end to all questions. The storekeepers would answer: If they hired a young Ukrainian as watchman in his place, there was a concern that the young watchman himself might steal. Not so this frail Ukrainian with trembling hands. There was no concern that he would break into a store and steal. Indeed, a logical point of view...!

And so, this “Guardian of Israel” kept watch for years and years on the shops district without any incident. And in fact, nothing was stolen in all of the years of his night watchman’s duty simply because... robbers, thieves and burglars were not in abundance in Ternivka and its surroundings...!

About one month before their recruitment into the army, it was the custom of the new recruits, draftees from the shtetl, to get together in the evenings and to “act up” a bit during the nights, to play various tricks and pull various pranks as already mentioned in Chapter 25, “Drafted Army Recruits.”

The new recruits, these jokers, would quite often tie up the old night watchman with a rope as he slept peacefully at night and would move him from his honored spot to some out of the way courtyard. Afterward, when the night watchman would awaken from his deep sleep, he would be confused and at a loss. He wouldn’t at all be able to grasp and couldn’t understand how he had ended up in this strange place with his hands and feet tied.

After he had recovered somewhat from his astonishment and from his confusion, the night watchman would first untie his hands with his teeth and afterward with trembling hands, he would untie his feet, get up and cross himself three times to remove from himself the “Satanic impurity.” And afterward, he would spit three times and drag his tired feet back to his former spot. And he would once again bang on the empty crate with his club, not only to scare and drive away the thieves and the robbers, but also to scare and drive away the “wicked demons and the evil spirits” who always lie in wait for innocent and honest people...!

57. Joyful Occasions and Entertainment in the Shtetl

Usually, the joyful occasions were family ones: a circumcision, a Bar Mitzvah, a wedding, a release from the army, the dedication of a new home, etc. Only on Simchat Torah (after the Festival of Sukkot) was the joy general. This joy was centered on the synagogues and the houses of prayer and around them. Then the Jews allowed themselves to drink some alcohol in order to increase their joy.

The joy was particularly great at the home of a newly elected “Gabbay” (Director of a synagogue). Many of the worshippers at that House of Prayer would come to his home and would be treated to “all good things” that were served to them by the wife of the “Gabbay.” In recent years, it was also the custom for a few “Yeshiva” (seminary) students to come to the home of the Rabbi in the afternoon hours of all of the festivals in order to have a good time there. They would order wine at their own expense and would sing Chasidic songs and cantorial music until the evening.

There were no places of entertainment in the shtetl. Once a “cinema” was brought to the shtetl. This was at the beginning of the development of motion pictures. Many streamed to the hall to see this “wonder.” There was no cinema in the shtetl in the years before the Revolution and for years after it.

Sometimes they would bring a carousel (“Kachali”) to the shtetl and children and young Ukrainian villagers would get dizzy on its wooden horses. The carousel did not operate on electricity but simply by hand power. The person who volunteered three times to operate the carousel by hand would afterward get to ride the carousel once for free.

They would also entertain themselves in the winter with sleigh rides. The wagon owners of the shtetl would for a certain fee, on nice winter Saturday evenings, take their passengers in their sleighs for a few turns around the shtetl. The passengers were mostly young men and women. Children would skate on the ice with their skates.

One year a “dance instructor” appeared in the shtetl and offered dancing lessons in one of the halls. Apparently the news of the success of the “dance instructor” reached another “dance instructor” and one fine day another “dance instructor” appeared and he too offered dancing lessons. At first there was competition between them, but afterward they made peace and cooperated, and the competition ended.

And in that way they “entertained themselves” in the shtetl!

58. The Nature Lover

Even though the Jews of Ternivka, which is in fertile Podolia, were closer to nature, to the field and to the garden, more than the Jews of other provinces, except for the Jews of Bessarabia from whom emanated the fragrance of field and vineyard, gardens next to the houses of the shtetl were almost not be found, except for those of a few of the wealthy that were taken care of by their Ukrainian employees.

It was inconceivable that any thinking Jew would stop his learning, his trading and his working at his craft and would occupy himself with trees and lawns and would say: "How beautiful is this tree, how beautiful is this meadow!" - like the non-Jews, God forbid...!

That said, there was one man in the shtetl who was unusual, an enthusiastic lover of nature who had a beautiful garden next to his home that he took care of all by himself, with devotion and great love. This unusual Jewish man's name was "Re'uven Schneider" ("Re'uven the Tailor"). He was a woman's tailor, but not just any tailor. He was an artisan tailor with few who could match him. The wives of wealthy men and the wives of the many landowners in the vicinity of Ternivka "stood in line" for him because they well knew that there was no superb tailor like him, even in the nearby city of Uman.

He was a religious Jew with a beard, easygoing, modest, not talkative and introverted. Even though he dealt exclusively with women, many of them young and beautiful, he paid no attention to them but regarded them as "white geese" like Rabbi Gidal in the Talmud. Re'uven was wealthy and owned two large homes. At one time, the Hebrew school of Natan Shargarodsky that we already mentioned (see Chapter 6), was located in one of them. A doctor lived in the other house which was near the hospital.

He educated his sons both in religious and secular studies. One of them was the painter Heinrich, who as mentioned above (see Chapter 11), painted the "Eastern Wall" (where the Holy Ark is situated) of the Great Synagogue. His pretty daughter Sonia also studied together with his sons in the Hebrew school that was located in his home and she knew a bit of Hebrew which was quite rare for the girls of the shtetl. His sons did not associate, "God forbid," with the sons of tailors and tradesmen but with the sons of the well-to-do. His wife, a woman of valor, would always brag that she was not the daughter of a tradesman but the daughter of a "Gemara Melamed" (a teacher of the Talmud), "almost a Rabbi," but because they were hard up, her father was forced to marry her off to a tailor... "Heaven protect us."

She would show everyone who came to her home the enlarged patriarchal photo of her father that hung on the "Eastern Wall" of her salon. Re'uven, even though he was always inundated with work with a number of young seamstresses working for him, would often abandon his "urgent sewing work" and go out into his garden and with love and compassion would take care of his trees, bushes and flowers or he would simply stretch out on his lawn in the shadow of one of the trees and lie there and dream.

He also raised many pigeons in the dovecote in his garden and he would take care of them with love and devotion and he would listen to their cooing with strong emotion as they flew into their pigeonholes. The pigeons, the trees, the flowers and the grass were dear to him and more precious than anything.

His wife would loudly complain that he was occupying himself with the activities of young girls - trees, bushes, flowers, grass, pigeons, etc. and neglecting his lucrative trade and losing a fortune. But Re'even, as an enthusiastic lover of nature, kept on with his devoted caring for his garden and his pigeons. In those hours, he would feel a supreme satisfaction, a lightening of corporeality and a rising above his gray and boring life, a life of needle and thread, a life of rattling and nerve wracking sewing machines.

The garden, the trees, the flowers, the pigeons were the joy of his life, the life of "Re'even Schneider!"

59. The Fortune Telling Shoemaker

There lived in the shtetl a shoemaker, "Moishe Schuster" ("Moishe the Shoemaker"). He wasn't an artisan shoemaker but would put patches on shoes and he was very poor. In order to increase his meager income, he adopted another "trade," that of fortune telling. Naïve Ukrainians, both men and women, would sometimes come to him and ask him to "read their fortune" and this provided him with some additional income.

He lived at the edge of the shtetl in a pitiable shack, half of which was sunk in the earth, and whoever entered it had to bend his head. One day, the "Fortune Telling Shoemaker" decided to erect over his shack, whose roof was covered with thatch, a frame of wooden posts and a roof of tin. Because he didn't have enough money to buy all of the posts and beams and tin that were necessary, he would from time to time buy a wooden post and a piece of tin. And in that way, over a period of a few years, he accumulated all of the wooden posts, beams and pieces of tin necessary for the frame and the roof.

When this structure was erected over the shack, it looked like someone had put a giant hat on the head of an infant. Eventually, he and his family members made mud bricks and built walls onto this frame.

And so "Moishe Schuster," with "patience of steel" and "the industriousness of ants," built his new home!

60. The First World War

When the First World War broke out, the population was in shock. It was “Tish’a B’Av” (“The Ninth of Av”, the anniversary of the destruction of both Jewish Temples), 5674 (August 2, 1914). And indeed, the sadness of “Tish’a B’Av” prevailed in the shtetl. The husbands and sons of many families were taken into the Army. A few of these recruits were later wounded in the War and a few were made prisoners of war.

About one year into the War, one of the young recruits, the son of Nachman Kozidoy the “Shamash” (sexton) of the “Schul” (Great Synagogue), returned with an amputated hand. His hand was not severed in the War but in an accident while he was working in a factory as a prisoner of war. During an exchange of disabled prisoners of war between Russia and Austria, he was also exchanged and so he returned to the shtetl.

During the War, the authorities recruited many men, both Jews and Ukrainians, to dig trenches at the rear of the War front. The authorities at that time permitted the civilians who had been recruited to send paid workers to replace them. Well-to-do Jews took advantage of this opportunity and hired Ukrainian workers who received, for the times, a high wage. There were cases where workers did not return and died there...

Because the Russian Army feared that it would have to retreat from Galicia, they paved, just in case, roads in our area on which the Army could retreat. Thousands of farmers were recruited with their wagons and they transported material from the hills in the area with which to pave the roads.

Since the road that was being paved was supposed to pass through one of the streets of the shtetl where there was a deep well that the “Zemstvo” (local government authority) had dug just a few years earlier (see Chapter 20), they demolished the well and sealed it and the road was built over it. In the end, they never used the road. Later, the War front disintegrated, and the heavy weapons and the equipment of the Russian Army were abandoned on the battle field.

61. The Russian Patriot

A Jew, a giant of a man, a redhead, a simple and popular Jew who everyone, both Jew and Ukrainian, called Berka Ternivsky, Dov of Ternivka. And why did he especially have the privilege of being named after the shtetl Ternivka?

Because he once left Ternivka and settled in a village in the vicinity of Ternivka and the Ukrainians called him "Berka Ternivsky" after the shtetl from which he was from. When he returned to Ternivka, this nickname "Berka Ternivsky," stuck to him also in Ternivka itself. He was childless and so he adopted the son of one of his relatives in the shtetl who was blessed with many children, God protect them from the evil eye.

The apartment of "Berka Ternivsky" was unusual in the shtetl. There were no windows in its walls because his apartment was pressed between two neighboring apartments in the same house and its walls also served as the walls of the neighbors. There were stores at the front and the back of this house which stood between two parallel streets and among them his flour store, such that no direct ray of light penetrated his apartment. What did Berka do in order to illuminate the darkness of his apartment which was shut up from the front and the back and the sides? He cut out windows in the ceiling and in the roof and through them the sunlight penetrated into his apartment.

During the First World War, when the worshippers of the "Kloyz" (synagogue) prayed, like the majority of Jews, for the downfall of the Tsar and his tyrannical regime and all were "German patriots," "Berka Ternivsky" was unusual in the "Kloyz." He was a "Russian patriot." He proved with signs and wonders that the Russians would flatten the Germans. The "German patriots" who conducted the "strategy and the war tactics" of the German High Command from next to the stove in the "Kloyz" (synagogue) wanted to actually devour the "traitor," "Berka Ternivsky" for "helping" "Fonye Ganef," the Tsar, who decreed harsh decrees against the Jews.

But Berka remained one-pointed that it was for the good of the Jews that the "Deitsch" (German) should not win because the "Deitsch" does not tolerate any "funny business." He only knows the "Gesetz" (law), the dry and hard law and it is impossible to bribe him the way it is possible to bribe "Fonye Ganef," and without bribery, so claimed "Berka Ternivsky," the Jews cannot survive among the non-Jews. The Jew, even in those countries in which there is supposedly equal rights for the Jews, cannot survive under their laws and the Jew is often forced to circumvent the law, either with the aid of bribery or in some other way, and under the "Deitsch," this would be harder than the "parting of the Red Sea!"

And so, these arguments between the "Germans" and the "Russian" continued throughout the First World War between "Mincha" (the afternoon prayer) and "Ma'ariv" (the evening prayer), until the Germans and the Austrians invaded Ukraine in 1918.

Strictly speaking, they invaded supposedly to help the Ukrainians repel the Red Army. Ukraine was then divided between German and Austrian rule. Ternivka fell under Austrian rule.

The Austro-German commander who governed the shtetl was like every German, super strict about the rules of hygiene in the shtetl. He would make “crazy and strange” demands. For example, to neatly sweep around each house, to not throw garbage into the street, to not dump sewage on the sidewalk, to not shake out empty sacks in the street so as not to create a lot of dust, to not pluck chicken feathers near the house so that the wind would not spread them throughout the shtetl, to install proper toilets so that their smell would not be wafted to a distance, etc. and other such “evil decrees.” And the commander would fine anyone who violated these “decrees” with a heavy monetary fine.

More than one Jew in the shtetl would then sigh and complain the complaint of the Jew in the writings of “Sholem Aleichem” (humorous writer in Yiddish): “I don’t understand. The house is mine. The sidewalk next to my house is mine. The sewage is mine and when I dump my sewage on my sidewalk next to my house, a policeman comes and gives me a fine. Have you ever heard of such a scandal in your life?”

During Russian rule, if ever, once in a blue moon, “Ivan” the policeman was about to issue a fine for violation of the laws of hygiene, it was possible to bribe him with a glass of vodka or with a few kopeks and he would cancel the fine, but that was not possible with the foolish and strict German. There was no “funny business” here. You had to pay all of the fine that was imposed on you.

How did many then sigh over the heaviness of the yoke of this rule, that of the foolish “Deitsch,” that wants no more and no less than that the Jew should be strict about hygiene every day as if it were Passover Eve when the “Chametz” (leaven) is burned. Then would “Berka Ternivsky” celebrate his complete victory and say: “Nu, didn’t I always tell you that for us the Jews ‘Fonye Ganef’ is one hundred times better than the foolish ‘Deitsch’ who is strict about every jot and tittle of the law, the ‘Gesetz.’ You prayed for his victory. You wanted him. You looked forward to him, the ‘Deitsch.’ You yearned for him and here he is in all of his glory and stupidity!”

And the faces of the “German patriots” in the “Kloyz” grew white. They hid their faces in shame and were now very sorry that sitting next to the stove in the “Kloyz,” they had “helped” the German with his “strategy” to defeat the Russians!

62. The Revolution is Coming

When the February, 1917 Revolution broke out and the Tsar was removed from his throne, Ternivka also welcomed the Revolution with joy. A young lad of about 16 years of age by the name of Aharon, of blessed memory, a native of Ternivka, became so excited about the Revolution that he was moved to write a Hebrew song in honor of the Revolution. I still remember the first stanza of this simple song that was sung by his friends to the tune of the Marseillaise:

“Flags of glory are waving from our hands. Today is a holiday of liberty. The old regime has been totally cut off. It has descended into the abyss.”

The heads of the Jewish, Ukrainian and Polish communities decided between them to hold a festive parade in honor of this historic event. The parade, in which large crowds of people participated, passed through the main streets of the shtetl and stopped at the houses of worship of all of the religions. Torah scrolls and crosses and icons were carried in the parade. Speakers from all of the communities and a young army officer, a social-democrat, gave enthusiastic speeches about the Revolution, about “freedom, equality and brotherhood,” about “the wolf dwelling with the lamb,” etc. Musicians whose music had gone silent during the period of the War, even at weddings, played their happy melodies and of course also the Marseillaise.

The first sign that equality was indeed now in effect was that a Jewish lad was accepted as a trainee postal clerk in Ternivka. His name was Grisha Kishinevsky who later (in 1920) immigrated to Palestine with the first group of pioneers from Ternivka. Here in Israel he served in the post office all of his life and was even promoted to Director of the Post Office in Haifa. His name in Israel was Tzvi Barkoni.

In the beginning, there were also a few Jewish members of the militia. Many boys and girls thronged to high schools in other cities as there was no high school in Ternivka at that time. In those days, a “Soviet” (workers’ council) was established in the shtetl, most of whose members were Jews. The role of this “Soviet” was mostly to protect the various salaried workers, both Jews and non-Jews. The political authority was still in the hands of the Provisional Government and not in the hands of the “Soviet.”

63. Zionism in the Shtetl

Even though the Revolution opened the gates of “equality of rights” to the Jews of Russia and many opportunities were revealed for the development of their Jewishness, the Jews did not take their hearts and minds off of Zion, and the Zionist Movement in Russia took giant steps in its development. Zionism took root also in Ternivka and a “Zionist Organization,” whose activists were principally from the Wortman family (the author’s family), was established in the shtetl. A small “Po’alei Tzion” (“Workers of Zion”) group also existed but its activity was almost not felt in the shtetl. There were no non-Zionist movements in the shtetl. A Hebrew speaking sports organization with the name “Maccabi,” headed by the above mentioned “Grisha” (Tzvi Barkoni), was also established.

Ya’akov Moldavsky was among the outstanding and interesting personalities in the Zionist movement in the shtetl. His was a personality that was at once both well rounded and full of contradictions. He was a “Shoychet” (“Kosher” slaughterer) and as a person with a secular education he served as the Zionist Movement’s “rabbi.” As a religious and God-fearing man, he was close to the religious community, but as a secularly educated and modern man, he also socialized with the younger generation who were freer in their thinking and brought them close to him.

He was also a “Chazan” (Cantor) and was often invited by neighboring shtetls to lead the prayers there during the “Days of Awe” (Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur) accompanied by a choir that he had organized. When the new “Kloyz” (synagogue) of the “young people” was established, he became its Cantor and Torah Reader. He was much respected and loved by the public because of his noble qualities.

With the “Third Aliyah” (third wave of immigration to Palestine, 1919-1923) he and his family also immigrated to Palestine and settled in Haifa. It pained him to see the “fraternal quarrels” in both the “Yeshuv” (pre-state Israel) and in the State of Israel and he even published a manifesto against this “unjustified hatred.” He died suddenly in Haifa. May his memory be blessed.

In the summer of 1918, Tzvi Bumfeld, the Zionist activist who was well-known in our area, was brought to Ternivka. He was a jurist and a talented speaker, a member of the Zionist Center in Ukraine and the head of the Zionist Organization in Uman.

After his wonderful and rousing speech in the evening to a large crowd that packed into the new “Kloyz,” the Zionists invited the shtetl “Klezmer” (Jewish band) to accompany him from the new “Kloyz” to the home of his host, one of the Koifman brothers, at the edge of the shtetl. They played various Zionist melodies and among them, of course, “Hatikva” (Israel’s national anthem). Large crowds accompanied him to his lodgings. Here in Israel, Tzvi Bumfeld was active in the Revisionist Movement (right wing movement), but not for long, as he passed away before his time. May his memory be blessed.

When the day arrived to vote for the All Russia Constituent Assembly (November, 1917), all of the Jews of the shtetl voted for the Zionist slate, headed by the well-known Rabbi Ya’akov Mazeh (1859–1924) and the famous lawyer Oskar Gruzenberg (1866–1940). The Jews of Russia gratefully remembered their wonderful and courageous defense of Mendel Beilis (1913), the victim of a “Blood Libel” in Kiev (see Chapter 46). As is well-known, the Bolsheviks seized power and forcibly dissolved the Constituent Assembly even though they only represented a small minority in it.

64. The Balfour Declaration

When the Balfour Declaration (1917) became known in Ternivka, respect for the Zionist activists in the shtetl greatly increased, since it was “thanks to them” that this Declaration had been granted to the Jewish People. The Jews of the shtetl considered this Declaration a declaration of the founding of a Jewish state and the newspapers even published a list of the members of the “Government of the State of Israel:” “President” – Louis Brandeis (American Supreme Court Justice); “Prime Minister” – Max Nordau (co-founder of the World Zionist Organization); “Foreign Minister” - Nachum Sokolov (Secretary General of the World Zionist Congress); “Minister of Culture and Education” - Chaim Nachman Bialik (Hebrew poet); “Minister of Defense and Security” - Ze’ev Jabotinsky (soldier and future Zionist Revisionist leader); “Minister of Agriculture and Labor” – Menachem Ussishkin (Secretary of the First Zionist Congress), etc., etc.

The Jews of Ternivka were proud of this distinguished “government” in which were represented the greatest Zionists and Jews. “A government like this will not be put to shame by even the governments of mighty nations,” declared secularly educated “Yeshiva” (seminary) students. The excitement was especially great when they read in the newspapers about the huge demonstration-procession of the Jews of Odessa in honor of the Balfour Declaration. Many of the Jews of Ternivka waited impatiently for the opening of the exit gates from Russia and the entry gates into the Land of Israel.

One Jewish man, the owner of a dry goods store, the Rabbi's brother-in-law, a frail and somewhat simpleminded man, begged the Zionist activists in the shtetl to tell him if the government of the Jewish state would permit him, when he would immigrate God willing to the Land of Israel, to open a dry goods store, since he didn't have the strength to be a farmer and plow the earth. That every single Jew who would immigrate to the Land of Israel would be a farmer and a sower of seeds was not doubted by anyone in the shtetl!

And that is how the Jews of the shtetl dreamt about a Jewish state in the Land of Israel when the Balfour Declaration was published...

65. Between Regimes

When the Bolsheviks seized power and the War front disintegrated, many soldiers deserted. At that time, as the War front disintegrated, various nationalist armies organized themselves – Ukrainian, Polish, Latvian etc. During this period at the end of 1917, a fully armed Polish division passed through Ternivka from the front. It camped for one week in the large square near the Catholic church. It was well disciplined and the Polish soldiers did not harm the residents of the shtetl. A few young Poles, both local and from the vicinity, volunteered to serve in this Polish army. The intention of this army was to return to the Polish homeland which was then under German rule.

During the change of regimes, there was almost no rule of law in the shtetl and everyone did as he pleased. Quite often, especially in the evenings, rifle shots, for no particular reason, could be heard because every deserting or immobilized soldier had a rifle. At one of the "Yarids" (market days) some riff raff that came in from the villages attacked the Jewish stores and the pedlars, mostly of dry goods, and looted them. Suddenly, a few shots were heard and all of the visitors to the "Yarid" fled for their lives back to their villages.

At the next "Yarid," the storekeepers organized a kind of "civil guard" of about one hundred "riflemen" or more. Most of the volunteers to this "civil guard" were Ternivka Ukrainians who, of course, were well paid for their security services at the "Yarid." And indeed, from then, on the "Yarids" were held peacefully with no acts of plundering or looting happening again.

After the Ukrainian “Rada” (Council) declared Ukrainian independence and the Bolsheviks expelled it from Kiev and seized power (February 8, 1918), the Ukrainians asked the Germans for help and they expelled the Bolsheviks from Ukraine. But the “Rada” was also not in power for long, because under the influence and protection of the Germans, estate owners, the “Khaliborov,” got together and instigated a right wing revolution (April 29, 1918) that put in power the Hetman (Commander) Pavel Skoropadsky, the owner of a large estate.

The Germans dispersed the “Rada” in the name of the “Revolution” and the Hetman imposed order in Ukraine. But with the defeat of the Germans on the Western Front (November 11, 1918) and the exit of Germany from the lands that it had conquered, including Ukraine, the “Rada” once again seized power and the days of commotion and confusion returned.

66. The Petliura Pogroms and the Gangs

The “Ukrainian Directorate,” the executive committee of the “Rada,” again seized power (February, 1919). In fact, power was mainly in the hands of Symon Petliura (1879-1926) and his associates. He knew well that the Ukrainian farmers did not have any Ukrainian national awareness and that they saw themselves as part of the Russian People. Petliura, therefore, decided to tug at the heartstrings of the Ukrainians through Pogroms against the Jews. Jewish blood would, therefore, serve as the lubricating grease on the wheels of Ukrainian independence. He then carried out the terrible slaughter of the Jews of Proskurov (February 16, 1919) in which about 5,000 Jews were murdered. He also carried out Pogroms in other cities and shtetls. About three hundred thousand Jews were murdered or wounded in Ukraine by Petliura and the Gangs.

In the Summer of 1919, the Klimenko Gang broke into Ternivka at night. That was the first murderous gang in Ternivka. They robbed and murdered a few Jews. The following morning, Klimenko convened a meeting of the Ternivka farmers in the square of the “Volost” (center of the village authority) and he gave a speech advocating for a Pogrom against the Jews because they, the “Zhido-Communists,” were destroying Christian churches, smashing crosses and holy icons, killing Russian Orthodox priests and intending to steal the lands of the Christian farmers and turn them into slaves and serfs of the Jews.

Everyone who wanted to save the motherland and the Christian religion should, therefore rise up against the “Zhido-Communists” and join his men, the saviors of the Motherland. No sign of agreement could be heard or seen to his Pogrom advocating speech. The Ukrainians of Ternivka took a dim view of murderers and robbers coming to their town to murder and rob “their Jews.”

During all of the years that Jews had lived in Ternivka there were good neighborly relations between the Jews and the Ukrainians. The economic situation of the Ukrainians of the town was many times better than that of those in the more distant villages because the locals earned a good living in transporting the merchandise of the storekeepers and the shtetl served as a market place for their agricultural produce. When the gang realized that the local farmers were not at all enthusiastic about their “fine plans,” they removed themselves from the shtetl.

Later, more gangs arrived. The rumor reached them that the local farmers took a dim view of their “heroism.” In all of the years of the Pogroms, not one local farmer participated in the robbery, not to mention, the murder of Jews. The gang leaders would then summon the heads of the Jewish community. Among them, Moishe-Nuchum stood out. He was a well-to-do Jewish man and an enthusiastic follower of the Talner Rebbe (Chasidic Rabbi). He was a bit like “Reb Sender the Rich Man” in the theatrical play the “Dybbuk.” By the way, his son Mordechai was among the group of students who immigrated to Palestine in 1913 to study at the “Gymnasia” (high school) in Jaffa.

The gang leaders would say to the heads of the Jewish community: “We know that you ‘Zhidi’ (Jews) of Ternivka are not Communists like the others Jews who are abusing our Christian ‘brothers’ and murdering them and that you live in peace with the ‘people,’ that is the Ukrainians. We will therefore not kill you or rob you but we will impose upon you a ‘contribution’ for the maintenance of our army so that we can fight to liberate the Christians from the ‘Zhido-Communists!’ You must therefore give us by a certain hour, a certain number of pairs of boots, a certain amount of tobacco, a certain amount of cloth, a certain amount of salt, etc., etc. If you don’t, we will take it ourselves!”

The heads of the community would maintain, and rightly so, that the Jews of the shtetl had become impoverished from the abundance of “contributions” that had been imposed upon them by various “armies” and besides, it was impossible to obtain this merchandise because of the disruption in transportation and the breakdown of trade. But the gang leaders demanded a “contribution” and would not hear otherwise. After much bargaining, they somehow reached a compromise with them and this repeated itself with every gang.

Often, the gang leader would place his sword on the neck of Moishe-Nuchum and threaten to kill him if he didn't fulfil his demand.

That said, compared with other shtetls in the area, where hundreds of Jews were killed, Ternivka got off easily, even though about fifteen Jews were also murdered in Ternivka during the time of the Pogroms of the Gangs. Ternivka was considered an "oasis of peace" by the Jews of other shtetls and many Jews who fled from the Gangs to Ternivka, settled there, until things calmed down in their own shtetls.

Various armies passed through Ternivka, such as the army of the anarchist Nestor Makhno which didn't do much harm to the shtetl and also the cavalry of Semyon Budyonny, the Cossack leader of the "Red Army," who pursued the Poles who were retreating from Ukraine after Petliura had asked them for help against the Bolsheviks.

The soldiers of Budyonny didn't harm the residents of the shtetl. The heads of the community greeted them at the "gates" of the shtetl with bread and salt and distributed cigarettes to every soldier. By the way, among the retreating Polish soldiers (they weren't in Ternivka itself but in the vicinity) a Jewish soldier deserted and stayed in the shtetl a few weeks, until he could be smuggled into Romania on a forged passport. From there, he immigrated to his relatives in the United States.

Commerce and trade almost came to a standstill in all of the shtetls because of the anarchy, lawlessness, murder and robbery. The economic situation in Ternivka also worsened to the point where many of the residents of the shtetl had to make themselves "suits," but especially pants, from sacks of wheat and sugar. Many also wore wooden clogs, especially in the summer, because leather shoes were very expensive at that time. In those days of scarcity, many young men and women, even from the wealthier class, went out into the fields to weed between the beds of sugar beets and they earned whatever they could.

67. Breslov Chasidim

During the tumultuous days that prevailed at that time in Ternivka, when the roads were too dangerous to travel, three bearded men and a boy suddenly appeared in Ternivka. They were different in their dress and in their Yiddish speech from the rest of the Jews of Ukraine. They were Jews from Poland who had, at great danger to their lives, traveled on foot and by catching rides on wagons to the nearby city of Uman where their “Rebbe” (Chasidic Rabbi), Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772–1810) of blessed and saintly memory, is buried. They were “Chasidim” (disciples) of this “Rebbe” and they decided to prostrate themselves on his grave, even at great danger to their lives.

What did they care about gangs of murderers?! What did they care about regiments of enemy soldiers compared with the supreme joy of “conversing” with the “Rebbe,” Rabbi Nachman, and pouring out their hearts to him?! Because, as everyone knows, Rabbi Nachman is not dead, as it is written in the Talmud: “The righteous in their death are considered alive,” and he will surely hear the prayers of his disciples. Other Chasidic Jews mocked the Breslov Chasidim and they called them “dead Chasidim” since the “Rebbe,” Rabbi Nachman, didn’t leave a successor to perpetuate his dynasty.

Their journey to Uman took about a year. After they spent a few weeks in Uman, they returned to Poland via Ternivka. They refused to listen when the residents of Ternivka warned them that there was great danger in venturing out onto the road and suggested to them that they wait in Ternivka until things calmed down. One day, they disappeared and left Ternivka, without fear, because the virtue of the “Rebbe,” Rabbi Nachman, who keeps a watchful eye on his disciples, would protect them from all trouble. Whether they ever reached Poland, no one knows.

68. Denikin’s Army

Amidst the various gangs and the various and strange “armies” that often visited Ternivka, Denikin’s army also appeared one day. This “White Army” came to “restore the former glory” and to enforce “law and order” in Russia and its motto was “One United Russia.” They behaved like a regular and organized army and they didn’t cause any disturbance (this was before they suffered any defeats).

The headquarters of the regiment was in the home of the wealthy Koifman brothers. They also confiscated other rooms, and among them, the clubhouse of the "Zionist Organization" and they housed officers in them. In order to prove that they were enforcing "law and order," they hung a few young Ukrainians whom they suspected of being Bolsheviks. In order to be "even handed" with the hangings, they caught a young Jew who was a bit mentally unbalanced, the son of a tinsmith, who was just wandering around in the vicinity of the camp of the regiment and they hung him in the center of the shtetl as a "Communist spy."

They also apprehended another young Jew from a respected family who had been working in Moscow as a pharmacist and had returned to Ternivka because his father Herschel Dintzis had been murdered in a Pogrom by one of the murderous gangs. Since he had come from Moscow, he was suspected of being a Communist and they were going to hang him. The Koifman women fell at the feet of the officers and swore that he was not a Communist, which he indeed was not. They begged them to have mercy on him and they told the officers about the Petliura gang that had murdered his father. In the end, they softened their hearts and they freed him.

When Denikin's regiment departed for the front, they left a "civilian government," a "Pristav" (Police Chief) and a new police force. Not many days passed and a "new army" appeared out of nowhere, not quite a gang, not quite an army platoon. The soldiers of this platoon, Ukrainians, were disposed toward the Bolsheviks. They immediately apprehended the "Pristav," took him out of the shtetl and shot him. Before he died, he begged the soldiers and asked them to have mercy on his eight children who would become orphans and he proved to them "with signs and wonders" that he had never fought in any army and especially not in Denikin's army, and that he was only a civilian official. But, they paid no heed to his words and they murdered him. And in fact, this "Pristav" was a quiet and modest middle aged man and not a Denikin Pogromchik.

And so the shtetl was in a state of fear and terror until finally, the Bolshevik Government established itself. From time to time, a Bolshevik regiment under the command of the officer Goretz would appear and he would attack the gangs that wandered around in the area but after Goretz departed the gang would appear again. A few ranchers who owned small estates in the area of Ternivka also organized themselves into a gang under the command of one of the ranchers, "Chernovol" ("Black Ox") and they would mostly attack institutions of the Bolshevik Government and small squads of Bolshevik soldiers. Afterwards, they would run away and hide.

Many Jews migrated to the interior of Russia, to industrial areas, because of the bad economic situation in the shtetls and they did as best they could there. Many also emigrated from Russia to Palestine and to other countries, endangering themselves by stealing across borders. Only about half of the Jews remained in the shtetl where they lived a meager and modest existence until the Second World War.

69. The “Puritz” of the Shtetl

As already mentioned in one of the first chapters, the “Puritz” (landowner) of the shtetl of Ternivka was of Greek origin. The last link in this line of landowners was a man in the prime of his life, a disabled bachelor. He was like a “white crow” when compared with the other landowners in the area. The vast majority of them were of Polish-Catholic origin, a remnant of Polish rule in Podolia before it was annexed to Russia in 1793. The Greek landowner did not belong in the company of these landowners, not by religion which was Greek Orthodox and not by nationality. He was therefore alone in observing his holidays. Even though he had much property, he was very miserly (his estate in Ternivka was spread over two thousand “Desyatin” or about 2,000 hectares of choice land including a few hundred “Desyatin” of forest). He never donated anything to any cultural institution whether Jewish or Christian.

A story was told about him in the shtetl. Once a wandering beggar came to him and asked for a donation and said: “Please have mercy on me for I am disabled.” The landowner answered him and said: “I myself deserve mercy for I am also disabled.” And he didn’t give him any charity. It is no wonder, therefore, that this landowner was not particularly loved by anyone. And when one night, his young housekeeper, who was not from this area, ran off with twenty thousand rubles that she stole from his safe, many residents of the shtetl were happy at his loss.

There was a legal dispute over property that lasted many years between this “generous” landowner and a Jewish tailor in the shtetl by the name of Leizer (Elazar, the brother of Re’uven, the ladies tailor mentioned in Chapter 58).

The crux of the matter was this: Leizer the tailor claimed and proved with “signs and wonders” that his house, like most of the houses of the shtetl, stood on an “old” lot owned by him in perpetuity and that he was therefore liable to the landowner for only symbolic leasing fees like all of the “old” houses in the shtetl. For his part, the Landlord claimed that the tailor’s house stood on a “new” lot and that even though he had paid for it in full, it was still only a leased lot like many of the “new” lots on which many houses had been built and that he was, therefore, liable for annual leasing fees and not just symbolic ones.

As mentioned, this legal dispute over property lasted many years and impoverished the tailor but he, as a member of a “stiff necked people,” was stubborn and said: “I will fight to the last kopek against this dog of a landowner and I will teach him a lesson.” If it weren’t for the Revolution that happened in Russia in 1917, this legal dispute would no doubt have continued.

When the Bolshevik Revolution broke out, a military regiment of the Eighth Red Army, that was known for its wildness, and was famous for its poor discipline and the lawlessness of its soldiers, came to the shtetl. Instead of maintaining order and protecting the safety of the residents from the various gangs and robbers, they themselves needed to be watched and supervised because they often engaged in looting and robbery.

The commanders of the regiment immediately apprehended the landowner as a feudal counter-revolutionary and were intending to shoot him but he was freed the next day because he bribed them with a huge amount of ransom money. After he was released, he left the shtetl and escaped by the skin of his teeth to the metropolis of Odessa where there had long been many Greeks. He melted into their midst and even secured a government position. In those days, the first days of the Communist Revolution, days of chaos in Russia and in the government apparatus, when the civil servants of the Tsarist government declared a kind of “sabotage,” it was not hard for him to get along and “lay low” until things calmed down.

And indeed, after a few months, the “Whites,” the army of Denikin, captured Odessa from the “Reds” and passenger ships and freighters once again sailed between Odessa and Constantinople. The landowner, the “Soviet civil servant,” took advantage of this opportunity to return to his Greek homeland, that he had never seen.

And that was the end of the story of the landowner who didn’t know how to enjoy his wealth!

70. During the “Military Communism”

At the beginning of the Bolshevik period, during the “Military Communism,” the residents had not yet gotten used to the urgent and frequent orders, commands and prohibitions that the Bolsheviks would frequently issue. The residents weren’t particularly strict about fully implementing them, especially when the bad economic situation often compelled them to violate these decrees. In those days, a young Jewish man with a family, a native of Ternivka, bought a ton of sugar at one of the sugar factories in the area. It is true that officially, all of the sugar factories had been nationalized, but the factory clerks ignored this and permitted themselves to secretly sell sugar because the wages paid to them by the Communist Government were not enough, even for a meager living.

When this Jewish man transported the sugar by wagon to the shtetl, he encountered agents of the Cheka (Bolshevik Secret Police). They immediately confiscated the sugar and arrested him. After a short trial in the city of Uman, they shot and killed him. By the way, they didn’t lay a hand on the sugar factory clerks or the Ukrainian man who hauled the sugar. This incident shocked and stirred up the shtetl and filled it with fear and terror.

71. The Immigration to Palestine of the Ternivka Pioneers

In those terrible days, about ten young men in Ternivka organized themselves and decided to immigrate to Palestine, despite the dangers they would encounter on the roads and at the borders. They hired a Jewish wagon owner to transport them to the (Romanian) border, the Dniester River. They traveled for about three days on back roads until they arrived in the shtetl of Kamienka, about 200 miles from Ternivka and there, a group of pioneers from Kamienka joined the Ternivka group. With their help and on their recommendation, we made contact with a young Jewish smuggler and he, with the help of Moldovan non-Jews and by bribing the border guards, safely transported us in a boat at night to the other side of the Dniester River, to Bessarabia, Romania.

Among these pioneers from Kamienka was the veteran agriculturist Ya’akov Shechtman from Balfouria (Palestine) and Shmu’el Kahana, the owner of the well-known theatrical bureau in Jerusalem.

After passing through various shtetls and cities of Bessarabia, we arrived at the port city of Galatz (Romania) and we sailed from there to Constantinople (Turkey). When we arrived, we were housed in the Jewish agricultural colony, "Mesila Chadasha" ("New Path") that was founded by the Jewish Colonization Association. During the period of our stay, the residents became fewer and fewer. A few immigrated to Palestine and a few immigrated to the United States. Very few were left.

The wonderful Rabbi of the Colony, Rabbi Shapira, took care of the pioneers like a father and saw to all of their needs. Afterwards, he immigrated to Palestine. After a few weeks, when the immigration certificates arrived, we sailed for Palestine aboard the ship "Mahmudiye" and disembarked in Haifa with many other immigrants. We arrived on the Eve of Chanuka, 5681 (December, 1920).

72. The Winding Life Path of an Orphan

A young woman was murdered during the murderous attacks of one of the gangs, leaving behind two small orphaned girls. Her husband traded in leather goods. This family, the Nathanson family, was descended from the well-known Rabbi from Lvov, Yosef Sha'ul Halevi Nathanson (1810-1875). At the time that many Jews were streaming toward the Romanian border, a sister of the murdered woman was among them. In order to make it easier for her brother-in-law the widower, she took with her one of the orphaned girls whose name was Shifra and who was about ten years old. At this time, representatives of a philanthropic institution of German Jews called "Ezra" ("Help") came to Bessarabia (Romania) in order to adopt a few of the orphans of the Pogroms in Ukraine for the institution. Shifra, the orphan from Ternivka, was included among these orphans.

She received a good education at this institution which was of a religious-traditional nature and she graduated from high school with great success. Since she excelled in her studies and in her good manners, the directorate of the "Ezra" institution decided to send her to Palestine to study education at the "Mizrachi" Girls' Seminar so that when she returned to Germany, she could teach in that institution.

When she finished her studies at the Mizrachi Seminar, she decided that she was not inclined toward education but to the study of medicine and with the institution's permission, she and her husband M. Ernst, whom she had met in Palestine, traveled to London to study psychiatric medicine. A few years after the establishment of the State of Israel, after having practised in London for many years, she decided to return to Israel and together with Dr. Batar, founded and directed the Institute for Psychological-Psychiatric Consultation of the City of Haifa.

Two years before her untimely death, she traveled to Russia, to Odessa, to be reunited with her only sister, whom she had not seen in forty-five years. In 1968 she became seriously ill and died. She died at the age of 58 leaving behind a husband and two married daughters living in England. May her memory be blessed.

73. The Teacher-Educator

One day in the year 5673 (1912/1913), a lad of about 14, the son of the “Shoychet” (“Kosher” slaughterer) brother of Rabbi David Kruglyak, the Rabbi of Ternivka, came to the Rabbi from the shtetl of Bohuslav in the District of Uman (actually in the District of Kanev). This lad, Motl Kruglyak, an only child, was sent by his parents to Rabbi David to study with him Torah and the fear of the Lord. This lad was “unusual” among the lads of Ternivka. He wore a “Kapoteh” (long coat), grew his “Peyos” (side locks) and “just to irritate,” he prematurely grew a beard. He was very studious and all day long he immersed himself with his uncle the Rabbi in the ocean of the Talmud and its commentaries.

The Rabbi who was very pleased with this nephew, predicted great things for him and considered him a future great educator among the Jewish People. About a year after World War One broke out, his parents returned him to their shtetl. They were afraid that in another year, they would take him into the army, because during the War, the government was conscripting younger soldiers, even an only child, and so his parents decided, in order to save his life, to enroll him in a Russian “Gymnasia” (high school) so that his conscription into the army would be delayed until he finished his studies and by then, the War would be over.

Even though Motl barely knew what a Russian letter looked like, with the help of a teacher, within a short period of time, he prepared for the entrance exams and did well and was accepted as a student in the “Gymnasia.” His parents were absolutely sure that he would not go wrong in the “Gymnasia,” God forbid, and that he would not stray from the straight path, the path of the Torah, and that he would behave like the Talmudic Rabbi Me’ir, who “found a pomegranate, ate its contents, and threw away its peel,” but it didn’t turn out the way they imagined.

Motl peeked and was smitten: He peeked at the teachings of Darwin and the teachings of the astronomer Kant-Laplace, etc. and his eyes “were opened” to see that the creation of the universe and of man were not at all as depicted in the Book of Genesis. He then abandoned his religion and became an atheist.

Because his education up until the age of sixteen-seventeen had been one-sided, ultra-orthodox, and he knew absolutely nothing about a secular Hebrew education, this extreme and sudden transition from the naive world of religion to the world of secular knowledge shook him to his very core and he became “someone else.”

When the February Revolution broke out in Russia in 1917 and various political parties appeared in the Jewish street, Motl was one of the followers of the “United Party” (S.S + Y.S) or “Syemovtsym.” They preached a secular culture in Yiddish and Jewish autonomy in the lands of the Diaspora and were totally opposed to Zionism and the revival of the Hebrew language. And he was one of the most extreme members of this party.

Motl Kruglyak returned to Ternivka in the summer of 1918 during the vacation months at the government colleges. He didn’t return to study the Talmud and its commentaries, God forbid! He returned to give private Russian lessons to young Jewish boys in order to earn some cash for the continuation of his studies at university. Those who knew him before, didn’t recognize him now: He wore a short coat, shaved his beard and cut off his side locks and wore a hat with a shiny visor (like a Ukrainian).

When his uncle the Rabbi saw him thus, he was horrified. His heart wept inwardly that this lad who had been on fire for the Torah, this prodigy, the son of his brother, had gone so wrong. Even though Motl was also this time the guest of his uncle the Rabbi, there was almost no spiritual intercourse between them. I would often meet with him and we would take long or short walks and talk about this and that. I would talk to him in Hebrew and he, even though he knew Hebrew well, would, “on principle,” answer me in Yiddish. After a few months of teaching, he left the shtetl and disappeared from view.

One day in the year 5731 (1970/1971), after fifty years and more since he had disappeared from my view, I happened by chance once more upon the name Motl Kruglyak, but not in person. Mrs. Esther Rosenthal-Schneiderman who had immigrated to Israel years before, published her memoirs about her past as a Yiddish teacher in the 5731 edition of “Ha’Avar” (“The Past”).

Among other subjects, she also mentions Motl Kruglyak and this is what she writes: "At the time, I didn't know the names of the speakers at the first "All Russian Congress of Jewish Activists" on the methodology of socialist education that took place in Moscow in 1926, but I remember well one of them who gave a fiery speech. He was the non-political Motl Kruglyak, the son of a "Shoychet" ("Kosher" slaughterer) from a small shtetl, zealous in his devotion to left-wing Yiddish culture and he himself, a great scholar, who as a young man had the reputation of being a prodigy. I couldn't forget his name because I later studied with him at the "Institute of Jewish Culture" in Kiev and afterwards we worked together there and published a few papers.

Today, Motl Kruglyak is a member of the Communist Party and a Professor of Psychology at the Pedagogical Institute in Niezhin, Ukraine. He publishes papers on Pedagogy and Psychology in the Ukrainian and Russian journals. Before the Communist Party uprooted the network of Jewish education, he wrote a lot for the Jewish pedagogical journals. He was the author of text books in Yiddish and did research work in the Jewish schools.

Such is the story of a young religious boy who dwelt with his uncle in Ternivka in the world of Torah. The Rabbi hoped that he would eventually become a teacher-educator among the Jewish People and indeed Motl did become a teacher-educator, a Ukrainian Communist teacher-educator!

74. The "Apikoros" (The "Heretic")

When the Bolshevik regime became established in the shtetl, "heretical" propagandists, "Bezvozhnik"s (atheists), would come to the shtetl and would conduct anti-religious propaganda. Among those who were swayed by this cheap propaganda, was an ignorant and illiterate Jewish man. He was a middle-aged part-time wagon driver and part-time cattle merchant with a family. In order to demonstrate his "heresy," he stopped going to the synagogue to pray, even on "Yom Kippur" ("Day of Atonement"). And just to irritate people, he also raised pigs!

And then one “Yom Kippur,” when he couldn’t sleep and he arose early at dawn, he saw to his amazement, a certain young man, the son-in-law of a certain Moishe, leave the shtetl on foot, followed at some distance by a Ukrainian farmer’s wagon and on it “English scales” to weigh grain and also many empty sacks. When the “Apikoros” (“Heretic”) asked the Ukrainian where he was going and to where he was transporting this load, the Ukrainian innocently replied that he was going to the “Yarid” (“market day”) in Troyany (about 15 miles South-East of Ternivka) and that the young man who hired him, would get on board the wagon outside of the shtetl.

The young man apparently went with the approval of his father-in-law, since the son-in-law and the father-in-law were partners in the grain business. It would appear that the young man purposely traveled to the “Yarid” on “Yom Kippur” so that he would be, as the saying goes, “the only one at the Fair.” He knew very well that no other Jew would come to the “Yarid” and that he would have no competition and would therefore do a good business. Now, the ignorant “Apikoros” found an opportunity to pay back and take revenge on the “beautiful Jews” who deceive both man and God.

Later, he sent a small boy to the synagogue in which the father-in-law Moishe was praying and when all of the Jews were standing wrapped in their “Tallises” (prayer shawls) and in their “Kittels” (white robes) (the Bolsheviks had not yet closed all of the Jewish houses of prayer) and pouring out the bitterness of their hearts to their Creator. The small boy entered the synagogue and told the worshippers that the son-in-law of Moishe the grain merchant, who had traveled that morning to the “Yarid” in the village of Troyany, had been murdered on the road and that his money had been stolen!

Both turmoil and fear prevailed in the synagogue. Fear over the murder of a young Jewish man and turmoil over this disgraceful and embarrassing act, that a Jew, the son-in-law of Moishe the grain merchant, an observant Jew, would travel on “Yom Kippur” to the “Yarid” in order to do business. It is understandable that the mourning and the moaning and the weeping in the family of the “victim” was great, as was the disgrace and the shame. This strong flurry of emotions prevailed throughout “Yom Kippur” until the evening when the young man appeared in his home, stealthily of course, sound of body, healthy, alive and flourishing!

Thus the “Apikoros” took revenge on the “beautiful religious Jews.” He bragged in front of everyone about how he had “fixed” the liars and the hypocrites and he strutted around like a rooster with pride and a great sense of importance!

75. The Faithful Religious Man

Among those Ternivka Jews and the Jews of other shtetls who migrated into the interior of Greater Russia, was a native of Ternivka by the name of Zelig, one of the great-grandsons of Rabbi Ya'akov Wortman and a son of the "Shoychet" ("Kosher" slaughterer) Yeshayahu who has already been mentioned (see Chapter 36). He was a religious and scholarly man. Zelig had a daughter, an only child. When she was a student at the University of Leningrad, she fell in love with a student who was not Jewish. When this became known to her father he created a fuss and he declared that he would never give his daughter to a non-Jew but she refused to sever relations with him as her father had demanded.

Once when he was walking with his daughter and discussing this subject with her and she refused to accede to his pleading that she sever her relations with the non-Jew, he jumped onto the tracks of an electric tram and tried to commit suicide. The driver of the electric tram was miraculously able to stop so as not to run him over and kill him. This created a disturbance and a commotion and the police had to intervene in the matter. The daughter then swore to her father, that she would sever her relations with the non-Jew and would marry a Jew, and she kept her promise and is now a doctor.

76. The Destruction of Ternivka

When Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union (June 22, 1941), the Jews of Ukraine, Russia and the other areas knew little about the horrific acts of the Nazis against the Jews. The Stalinist regime, which had signed a "friendship treaty" with the Nazis (1939), was reluctant to publicize in the Soviet Union the "nice acts" of its "ally." So when the Nazi army invaded Ukraine and Russia, almost no Jews fled to the interior of Russia. The vast majority remained where they lived.

The Jews thought that the German Army that was now invading the Soviet Union was like the German Army that was in Ukraine during the time of the Hetman (1918). The Nazis, who deceptively and secretly burned the Jews of Europe in the gas ovens of Auschwitz, did not behave similarly in Ukraine by sending its Jews to Auschwitz. They knew well that they didn't have to "be shy" in front of the Ukrainians and cover up their horrific acts as they did in the countries of Western Europe.

Here in the bloody land of Khmelnytsky (1648-1649), Gonta-Zheleznyak (1788), Petliura and the murderous gangs (1919-1920), they had nothing to hide. Here it was possible to commit their horrific acts in public and in the full light of day and even with the blessing of the Ukrainians, so they murdered the Jews of Ukraine wherever they found them and in full view of the Ukrainians.

One day, the Germans recruited both Ukrainians and Jews to dig trenches outside of the shtetl. The workers thought that they were digging defensive trenches as is common during times of war. But, the following day, the real reason for the trenches was revealed. The Germans issued an order using Nazi town criers who went through the streets of the shtetl and announced that all of the Jews of the shtetl, both young and old were, were on pain of death, to gather the following morning in the "Stapok," the large square next to the Catholic Church at the edge of the shtetl.

At eight o'clock in the morning, when all of the Jews of the shtetl, who had never even considered the horrific tragedy that was awaiting them, had gathered together, the Nazis ordered them to leave the shtetl and walk to the village of Posukhivka, a distance of 3-4 miles (to the East), where they would be temporarily staying. That is how the Nazis deceived them.

When these wretched souls passed by the trenches outside of the shtetl, heavy gunfire from machine guns suddenly rained down on them and all of the Jews of Ternivka, both young and old, were cut down and slaughtered and their bodies fell into or were thrown into those trenches. Only three Jews succeeded in escaping from this valley of death to one of the villages in the area but the Ukrainians of that village murdered two of them. Among them was Yosef Troyanovsky whose grandson, Kalman son of Levi, fell in Israel's War of Independence (1948-1949). Only the third man who survived as an eye witness to the terrible slaughter was able to tell about it and the bitter and abrupt end of the Jews of Ternivka.

When the Nazi murderers returned from their blood bath to the shtetl, the tens of Bavarian Germans who had settled as colonists on the rich soil of Ternivka prepared a joyful party for the "Nazi heroes," a party with music and singing and dancing and gluttony and drunken debauchery, a party of "victory" over the slaughtered Jews of Ternivka, men women and children.

This terrible slaughter took place on Wednesday, the 11th day of Sivan in the year 5702 (May 27, 1942).

Thus did the cruel annihilator descend on this modest, deep-rooted shtetl that had existed for about one hundred and thirty years (1813-1942) and had woven its humble life in the spirit of the Jewish People and in the spark of the ancient hope, the hope for the redemption of the Jewish People in its ancient homeland.

After the defeat of the Nazis, a few of the Jews of Ternivka who had scattered across Russia got together and returned to the shtetl and they are surviving there a meager existence (as of 2008 only one Jew, Khaim Shtein who is married to a Ukrainian woman, is still living in Ternivka).

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/ternivka/holocaust.asp>

Epilogue

As I write down on these pages the chronicles of our shtetl Ternivka up until its tragic, bitter and sudden end, I see before my eyes the words of our national lamenter (Jeremiah): "I have restrained my sorrow, my heart is sick within me" (Jeremiah 8:18). I have therefore restrained the sorrow of my soul and the sickness of my heart. I have held back my pen and my spirit and I have lectured about the history of the shtetl and its chronicles simply and dispassionately, but now, with the completion of the last chapter, the chapter in the chronicle of Ternivka about its destruction and extinction, I can no longer hold back my raging spirit and my yearning soul and from my aching heart bursts forth the lamentation of the national lamenter: "If only my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night for all of my people who have been slaughtered" (Jeremiah 9:1) – the slaughtered of a humble Jewish shtetl whose simple and honest Jews preserved throughout the ages and in the midst of the impurity of their cruel enemies the image of God and man, a beloved Jewish shtetl in which was preserved the splendor and the simplicity of the spirit of ancient Israel, a shtetl that was the life blood of the Jewish People, that caused fresh and healthy energy to flow into the body of the Jewish People that preserved it from degeneration and exhaustion. This wonderful Jewish shtetl is no more because it has been erased from under God's heavens by the impure bearers of the swastika. May God avenge their blood!