

Saturday

Bontshe Shvayg

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THE
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READER

BONTSHE SHVAYG

Here on earth the death of Bontshe Shvayg made no impression. Try asking who Bontshe was, how he lived, what he died of (Did his heart give out? Did he drop from exhaustion? Did he break his back beneath too heavy a load?), and no one can give you an answer. For all you know, he might have starved to death.

The death of a tram horse would have caused more excitement. It would have been written up in the papers; hundreds of people would have flocked to see the carcass, or even the place where it lay. But that's only because horses are scarcer than people. Billions of people!

Bontshe lived and died in silence. Like a shadow he passed through this world.

No wine was drunk at Bontshe's circumcision, no glasses clinked in a toast; no speech to show off his knowledge was given at his bar mitzva. He lived like a grain of gray sand at the edge of the sea, beside millions of other grains. No one noticed when the wind whirled him off and carried him to the far shore.

While Bontshe lived, his feet left no tracks in the mud; when he died, the wind blew away the wooden sign marking his grave. The gravedigger's wife found it some distance away and used it to boil potatoes. Do you think that three days after Bontshe was dead anyone knew where he lay? There was not even a gravestone for a future antiquarian to unearth and mouth the name of Bontshe Shvayg one last time.

A shadow! No mind, no heart, preserved his image. Nothing remained of him at all. Not a trace. Alone he lived and alone he died.

Were not humanity so noisy, someone might have heard Bontshe's bones as they cracked beneath their burden. Were the world in less of a hurry, someone might have noticed that Bontshe, a fellow member of the human race, had in his lifetime two lifeless eyes, a pair of sinkholes for cheeks, and, even when no weight bent his back, a head bowed to the ground as if searching for his own grave.

Were men as rare as horses, someone would surely have wondered where he disappeared to.

When Bontshe was brought to the hospital, the corner of the cellar he had called his home did not remain vacant, because ten men bid for it at once; when he was taken from the hospital ward to the morgue, twenty sick paupers were candidates for his bed; when he was carried out of the morgue, forty men killed in the fall of a building were carried in. Think of how many others are waiting to share his plot of earth with him and well may you wonder how long he will rest there in peace.

He was born in silence. He lived in silence. He died in silence. And he was buried in a silence greater yet.

But that's not how it was in the other world. There Bontshe's death was an occasion.

A blast of the Messiah's horn sounded in all seven heavens: "Bontshe Shvayg has passed away! Bontshe has been summoned to his Maker!" the most exalted angels with the brightest wings informed each other in midflight. A joyous din broke out in paradise: "Bontshe Shvayg—it doesn't happen every day!"

Young, silver-booted cherubs with diamond-bright eyes and gold-filigreed wings ran gaily to greet Bontshe when he came. The flapping of their wings, the patter of their boots, and the merry ripple of laughter from their fresh, rosy mouths echoed through the heavens as far as the mercy seat, where God Himself soon knew that Bontshe Shvayg was on his way.

At the gates of heaven stood Father Abraham, his right hand outstretched in cordial welcome and the most radiant of smiles on his old face.

But what was that sound?

It was two angels wheeling a golden chair into paradise for Bontshe to sit on.

And what was that flash?

It was a gold crown set with gleaming jewels. All for Bontshe!

"What, before the Heavenly Tribunal has even handed down its verdict?" marveled the saints, not without envy.

"Ah!" answered the angels. "Everyone knows that's only a formality. The prosecution doesn't have a leg to stand on. The whole business will be over in five minutes. You're not dealing with just anyone, you know!"

When the cherubs raised Bontshe on high and sounded a heavenly fanfare, when Father Abraham reached out to shake his hand like an old friend, when Bontshe heard that a gold crown and chair awaited him in paradise and that the heavenly prosecutor had no case to present, he behaved exactly as he would have in this world—that is, he was too frightened to speak. His heart skipped a beat. He was sure it must be either a dream or a mistake.

He was accustomed to both. More than once in this world of ours he had dreamed of finding gold in the street, whole treasure chests of it, only to awake as great a beggar as before. More than once some passerby had smiled or said hello only to turn aside in disgust upon realizing his error.

That's how my luck is, Bontshe thought.

He was afraid that if he opened his eyes the dream would vanish and he would find himself in a dark cave full of vermin. He was afraid that if he uttered a sound or moved a limb he would be recognized at once and whisked away by the devil.

He was trembling so hard that he did not hear the cherubs sing his praises or see them dance around him. He did not return Father Abraham's hearty greeting or bid the Heavenly Tribunal good day when he was ushered before it.

He was scared out of his wits.

His fright, moreover, grew even greater when his eyes fell involuntarily on the floor of the courtroom. It was solid alabaster inlaid with diamonds! Just look where I'm standing, he thought, too paralyzed to move. Who knows what rich Jew or rabbi they've mixed me up with? In a minute he'll arrive, and that will be the end of me!

He was too frightened to hear the presiding judge call out, "The case of Bontshe Shvayg!" adding as he handed Bontshe's file to the defense counsel, "You have the floor, but be quick!"

The whole courtroom seemed to revolve around him. There was a buzzing in his ears. Gradually, he began to make out the counsel's voice, as sweet as a violin:

"The name of Bontshe Shvayg, Bontshe the Silent," the counsel was saying, "fit him like a tailored suit."

What is he talking about? wondered Bontshe just as the judge remarked impatiently:

"No poetry, please!"

"Not once in his whole life," the counsel for the defense went on, "did he complain to God or to man. Not once did he feel a drop of anger or cast an accusing glance at heaven."

Bontshe still understood nothing. Again the brusque voice interrupted:

"You can skip the rhetoric too!"

"Even Job broke down in the end, whereas this man, who suffered even more—"

"Stick to the facts!" warned the bench.

"At the age of eight days his circumcision was botched by a bungler—"

"That doesn't mean the gory details!"

"—who couldn't even staunch the blood."

"Proceed!"

"He bore it all in silence," continued the counsel for the defense. "Even when, at the age of thirteen, his mother died and her place was taken by a stepmother with the heart of a snake—"

That does sound like me, marveled Bontshe.

"No hearsay evidence!" snapped the judge.

"She scrimped on his food. She fed him moldy bread and gristle while she herself drank coffee with cream in it—"

"Get to the point!"

"She didn't spare him her fingernails, though. His black-and-blue marks showed through the holes in the old rags she dressed him in. She made him chop wood for her on the coldest days of winter, standing barefoot in the yard. He was too young and weak to wield the ax, which was too dull to cut the wood, which was too thick to be cut. He wrenched his arms and froze his feet more times than you can count. But still he kept silent, even before his own father—"

"His father? A drunk!" laughed the prosecutor, sending a chill down Bontshe's spine.

"—he never complained," continued the defense counsel. "He hadn't a soul to turn to. No friends, no schoolmates, no school . . . not one whole item of clothing . . . not a free second of time—"

"The facts!" repeated the bench.

"He even kept silent when his father, in a drunken fit, took him by the neck one snowy winter night and threw him out of the house. He picked himself out of the snow without a peep and followed his feet where they took him. At no time did he ever say a word. Even when half-dead from hunger, he never begged except with his eyes.

"At last, one dizzy, wet spring evening, he arrived in a great city. He vanished in it like a drop of water in the sea, though not before spending his first night in jail for vagrancy. And still he kept silent,

never asking why or how long. He worked at the meanest jobs and said nothing. And don't think it was easy to find them.

"Drenched in his own sweat, doubled over beneath more than a man can carry, his stomach gnawed by hunger, he kept silent!

"Spattered with the mud of city streets, spat on by unknown strangers, driven from the sidewalk to stagger in the gutter with his load beside carriages, wagons, and tram cars, looking death in the eye every minute, he kept silent!

"He never reckoned how many tons he had to carry for each ruble; he kept no track of how often he stumbled and fell; he didn't count the times he had to sweat blood to be paid. Never once did he stop to ask himself why fate was kinder to others. He kept silent!

"He never even raised his voice to demand his meager wage. Like a beggar he stood in doorways, glancing up as humbly as a dog at its master. "Come back later!" he would be told—and like a shadow he was gone, coming back later to beg again for what was his.

"He said nothing when cheated, nothing when paid with bad money.

"He kept silent!"

Why, perhaps they mean me after all, thought Bontshe, taking heart.

"Once," continued the counsel for the defense after a sip of water, "things seemed about to look up. A droshky raced by Bontshe pulled by runaway horses, its coachman thrown senseless on the cobblestones, his skull split wide open. The frightened horses foamed at the mouth, sparks shot from under their hooves, their eyes glittered like torches on a dark night—and in his seat cringed a passenger, more dead than alive.

"And it was Bontshe who stopped the horses!

"The rescued passenger was a generous Jew who rewarded Bontshe for his deed. He handed him the dead driver's whip and made him a coachman, found him a wife and made him a wedding too, and was even thoughtful enough to provide him with a baby boy. . . .

"And Bontshe kept silent!"

It certainly sounds like me, thought Bontshe, almost convinced, though he still did not dare look up at the tribunal. He listened as the counsel went on:

"He kept silent when his benefactor went bankrupt without giving him a day's pay. He kept silent when his wife ran off and left him

with the little infant. And fifteen years later, when the boy was strong enough to throw his father into the street, Bontshe kept silent then too!"

It's me, all right! decided Bontshe happily.

"He even kept silent in the hospital, the one place where a man can scream.

"He kept silent when the doctor would not examine him without half a ruble in advance and when the orderly wanted five kopecks to change his dirty sheets. He kept silent as he lay dying. He kept silent when he died. Not one word against God. Not one word against man.

"The defense rests!"

Once again Bontshe trembled all over. He knew that the defense was followed by the prosecution. Who could tell what the prosecutor might say? Bontshe himself hardly remembered his own life. Back on earth each minute had obliterated the one before. The counsel for the defense had reminded him of many forgotten things; what might he learn from the prosecution?

"Gentlemen!" The voice of the prosecutor was sharp and piercing. At once, however, it broke off.

"Gentlemen . . ." it resumed, although more softly, only to break off again.

When it spoke a third time, it was almost tender. "Gentlemen," it said. "He kept silent. I will do the same."

There was a hush. Then, from the bench, another voice spoke tenderly, tremulously, too. "Bontshe, Bontshe, my child," it said in harplike tones. "My own dearest Bontshe!"

Bontshe felt a lump in his throat. He wanted to open his eyes at last, but his tears had sealed them shut. Never had he known that tears could be so sweet. "My child"; "my Bontshe"—not once since the death of his mother had he been spoken to like that.

"My child," continued the judge, "you have suffered all in silence. There is not an unbroken bone in your body, not a corner of your soul that has not bled. And you have kept silent.

"There, in the world below, no one appreciated you. You yourself never knew that had you cried out but once, you could have brought down the walls of Jericho. You never knew what powers lay within you.

"There, in the World of Deceit, your silence went unrewarded. Here, in the World of Truth, it will be given its full due.

"The Heavenly Tribunal can pass no judgment on you. It is not for us to determine your portion of paradise. Take what you want! It is yours, all yours!"

Bontshe looked up for the first time. His eyes were blinded by the rays of light that streamed at him from all over. Everything glittered, glistened, blazed with light: the walls, the benches, the angels, the judges. So many angels!

He cast his dazed eyes down again. "Truly?" he asked, happy but abashed.

"Why, of course!" the judge said. "Of course! I tell you, it's all yours. All heaven belongs to you. Ask for anything you wish; you can choose what you like."

"Truly?" asked Bontshe again, a bit surer of himself.

"Truly! Truly! Truly!" clamored the heavenly host.

"Well, then," smiled Bontshe, "what I'd like most of all is a warm roll with fresh butter every morning."

The judges and angels hung their heads in shame. The prosecutor laughed.

1894 (translated by Hillel Halkin)

KABBALISTS

When times are bad even Torah—that best of merchandise—finds no takers.

The Lashchev yeshiva was reduced to Reb Yekel, its master, and a single student.

Reb Yekel is a thin old man with a long, disheveled beard and eyes dulled with age. His beloved remaining pupil, Lemech, is a tall, thin young man with a pale face, black, curly sidelocks, black, feverish eyes, parched lips, and a tremulous, pointed Adam's apple. Both are dressed in rags, and their chests are exposed for lack of shirts. Only with difficulty does Reb Yekel drag the heavy peasant boots he wears; his pupil's shoes slip off his bare feet.

That is all that remained of the once-famed yeshiva.

The impoverished town gradually sent less food to the students, provided them with fewer "eating days," and the poor boys went

off, each his own way. But Reb Yekel decided that here he would die, and his remaining pupil would place the potsherds on his eyes.

They frequently suffered hunger. Hunger leads to sleeplessness, and night-long insomnia arouses a desire to delve into the mysteries of Kabbalah.

For it can be considered in this wise: as long as one has to be up all night and suffer hunger all day, let these at least be put to some use; let the hunger be transformed into fasts and self-flagellation; let the gates of the world reveal their mysteries, spirits, and angels.

Teacher and pupil had engaged in Kabbalah for some time. Now they sat alone at the long table. For other people it was already past lunchtime; for them it was still before breakfast. They were accustomed to this. The master of the yeshiva stared into space and spoke; his pupil leaned his head on both hands and listened.

"In this too there are numerous degrees," the master said. "One man knows a part, another knows a half, a third knows the entire melody. The rabbi, of blessed memory, knew the melody in its wholeness, with musical accompaniment, but I," he added mournfully, "I barely merit a little bit, no larger than this"—and he measured the small degree of his knowledge on his bony finger. "There is melody that requires words: this is of low degree. Then there is a higher degree—a melody that sings of itself, without words, a pure melody! But even this melody requires voicing, lips that should shape it, and lips, as you realize, are matter. Even the sound itself is a refined form of matter.

"Let us say that sound is on the borderline between matter and spirit. But in any case, the melody that is heard by means of a voice that depends on lips is still not pure, not entirely pure, not genuine spirit. The true melody sings without voice; it sings within, in the heart and bowels.

"This is the secret meaning of King David's words: 'All my bones shall recite. . . .' The very marrow of the bones should sing. That's where the melody should reside, the highest adoration of God, blessed be He. This is not the melody of man! This is not a composed melody! This is part of the melody with which God created the world; it is part of the soul that He instilled in it.

"This is how the hosts of heaven sing. This is how the rabbi, of blessed memory, sang."

The discourse was interrupted by an unkempt young man girded with a rope about his loins—obviously a porter. He entered the house of study, placed a bowl of grits and a slice of bread beside the master, and said in a coarse voice, "Reb Tevel sends food for

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Protocols

We will have no difficulty in finding as much eloquence among our people for the expression of false sentiments as Christians find in their sincerity and enthusiasm.

So far as possible we must talk to the proletariat, bring it into subjection to those who have the control of money. By this means we will be able to make the masses rise when we wish. We will drive them to upheavals, to revolutions; and each of these catastrophes marks a big step forward for our particular interests and brings us rapidly nearer to our sole aim—world domination as was promised to our father Abraham.

NOTE

"The Rabbi's Speech" is from a novel *Biarritz* (1868) by Hermann Goedsche (1816–1878), published under the

pseudonym of Sir John Retcliffe. In a chapter entitled "In the Jewish Cemetery in Prague," Goedsche purports to describe a secret nocturnal meeting among thirteen Jews (representing the twelve tribes of Israel and the Jews of the Exile) who report on their activities during the century that has elapsed since their last meeting and who vow to have conquered all of their enemies by the time of the next meeting. This frankly fictional episode was soon treated as an authentic record, appearing as a pamphlet first in Russia (1872) and later in Paris and Prague. In 1887 Theodor Fritsch published the "Speech" together with his "Decalogue" (see document 25 in this chapter), and it received a wide circulation in a number of antisemitic publications, enjoying its greatest vogue in post-World War I Germany. The "Speech" was constantly invoked as proof of the authenticity of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (see the following document).

29. PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION (c. 1902)¹

Protocol Number 1: Let us put aside phraseology and discuss the inner meaning of every thought; by comparisons and deductions let us illuminate the situation. In this way I will describe our system, both from our own point of view and from that of the Jews....

Political freedom is not a fact but an idea. One must know how to employ this idea when it becomes necessary to attract popular forces to one's party by mental allurements if it plans to crush the party in power. The task is made easier if the opponent himself has contradicted the idea of freedom, by embracing liberalism, and thereby yielding his power. It is precisely here that the triumph of our theory becomes apparent; the relinquished reins of power are, according to

the laws of nature, immediately seized by a new hand because the blind force of the people cannot remain without a leader even for one day, and the new power merely replaces the old, weakened by liberalism.

In our day the *power of gold* has replaced liberal rulers. There was a time when faith ruled. The idea of freedom cannot be realized because no one knows how to make reasonable use of it. Give the people self-government for a short time and it will become corrupted. From that very moment strife begins and soon develops into social struggles, as a result of which states are set aflame and their authority is reduced to ashes.

Whether the state is exhausted by internal convulsions, or whether civil wars deliver it into the hands

Source: *Protocols of the Meetings of the Zionist Men of Wisdom*, translator not indicated (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1920), pp. 11–22.

of external enemies, in either case it can be regarded as hopelessly lost: it is in our power. The despotism of capital, which is entirely in our hands, holds out to it a straw which the state must grasp, although against its will, or otherwise fall into the abyss....

Politics have nothing in common with morals. The ruler guided by morality is not a skilled politician, and consequently he is not firm on his throne. He who desires to rule must resort to cunning and hypocrisy. The great popular qualities—honesty and frankness—become vices in politics, as they dethrone more surely and more certainly than the most powerful enemy. These qualities must be the attributes of Goy countries; but we by no means should be guided by them.

Our right lies in might. The word right is an abstract idea, unsusceptible of proof. This word means nothing more than: Give me what I desire so that I may have evidence that I am stronger than you.

Where does right begin? Where does it end?... In laying our plans we must turn our attention not so much to the good and moral as to the necessary and useful. Before us lies a plan in which a strategic line is shown, from which we must not deviate on pain of risking the collapse of many centuries of work.

In working out an expedient plan of action it is necessary to take into consideration the meanness, vacillation, changeability of the mob, its inability to appreciate and respect the conditions of its own existence and of its own well-being. It is necessary to realize that the power of the masses is blind, unreasoning, and void of discrimination, prone to listen to right and left. The blind man cannot guide the blind without bringing them to the abyss; consequently, members of the crowd, upstarts from the people, even were they men of genius but incompetent in politics, cannot step forward as leaders of the mob without ruining the entire nation.... Our motto is Power and Hypocrisy. Only power can conquer in politics, especially if it is concealed in talents which are necessary to statesmen. Violence must be the principle; hypocrisy and cunning the rule of those governments which do not wish to lay down their crowns at the feet of the agents of some new power. This evil is the sole means of attaining the good. For this reason we must not hesitate at bribery, fraud and treason when these can help us to reach our end. In politics it is necessary to seize the property of others without hesitation if in so doing we attain submission and power.

Our government, following the line of peaceful conquest, has the right to substitute for the horrors of war less noticeable and more efficient executions, these being necessary to keep up terror, which induces blind submission. A just but inexorable strictness is the greatest factor of governmental power. We must follow a program of violence and hypocrisy, not only for the sake of profit but also as a duty and for the sake of victory.

A doctrine based on calculation is as potent as the means employed by it. That is why not only by these very means, but by the severity of our doctrines, we shall triumph and shall enslave all governments under our super-government.

Even in olden times we shouted among the people the words *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*. These words have been repeated so many times since by unconscious parrots, which, flocking from all sides to the bait, have ruined the prosperity of the world and true individual freedom, formerly so well protected from the pressure of the mob. The would-be clever and intelligent Goys did not discern the symbolism of the uttered words; did not notice the contradiction in the meaning and the connection between them; did not notice that there is no equality in nature; that there can be no liberty, since nature herself has established inequality of mind, character, and ability, as well as subjection to her laws. They did not reason that the power of the mob is blind; that the upstarts selected for government are just as blind in politics as is the mob itself, whereas the initiated man, even though a fool, is capable of ruling, while the uninitiated, although a genius, will understand nothing of politics. All this has been overlooked by the Goys....

In all parts of the world the words *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity* have brought whole legions into our ranks through our blind agents, carrying our banners with delight. Meanwhile these words were worms which ruined the prosperity of the Goys, everywhere destroying peace, quiet and solidarity, undermining all the foundations of their states. You will see subsequently that this aided our triumph, for it also gave us, among other things, the opportunity to grasp the trump card, the abolition of privileges; in other words, the very essence of the aristocracy of the Goys, which was the only protection of peoples and countries against us.

On the ruins of natural and hereditary aristocracy we have established this new aristocracy on the

qualification of wealth, which is dependent upon us, and also upon science which is promoted by our wise men....

Protocol Number 2: It is necessary for us that wars, whenever possible, should bring no territorial advantages; this will shift war to an economic basis and force nations to realize the strength of our predominance; such a situation will put both sides at the mercy of our million-eyed international agency, which will be unhampered by any frontiers. Then our international rights will do away with national rights, in a limited sense, and will rule the peoples in the same way as the civil power of each state regulates the relation of its subjects among themselves.

The administrators chosen by us from among the people in accordance with their capacity for servility will not be experienced in the art of government, and consequently they will easily become pawns in our game, in the hands of our scientists and wise counselors, specialists trained from early childhood for governing the world. As you are aware, these specialists have obtained the knowledge necessary for government from our political plans, from the study of history, and from the observation of every passing event. The *Goys* are not guided by the practice of impartial historical observation, but by theoretical routine without any critical regard for its results. Therefore, we need give them no consideration. Until the time comes let them amuse themselves, or live in the hope of new amusements or in the memories of those past. Let that play the most important part for them which we have induced them to regard as the laws of science (theory). For this purpose, by means of our press, we increase their blind faith in these laws. Intelligent *Goys* will boast of their knowledge, and verifying it logically they will put into practice all scientific information compiled by our agents for the purpose of educating their minds in the direction which we require.

Do not think that our assertions are without foundation: note the successes of Darwinism, Marxism and Nietzscheism, engineered by us. The demoralizing effects of these doctrines upon the minds of the *Goys* should be already obvious to us....

There is one great force in the hands of modern states which arouses thought movements among the people. That is the press. The role of the press is to indicate necessary demands, to register complaints of the people, and to express and foment dissatisfaction. The

triumph of free babbling is incarnated in the press, but governments were unable to profit by this power and it has fallen into our hands. Through it we have attained influence, while remaining in the background. Thanks to the press, we have gathered gold in our hands, although we had to take it from rivers of blood and tears.

But it cost us the sacrifice of many of our own people. Every sacrifice on our part is worth a thousand *Goys* before God.

Protocol Number 3: To-day I can tell you that our goal is close at hand. Only a small distance remains, and the cycle of the Symbolic Serpent—the symbol of our people—will be complete. When this circle is completed, then all the European states will be enclosed in it as in strong claws....

To induce the lovers of authority to abuse their power, we have placed all the forces in opposition to each other, having developed their liberal tendencies towards independence. We have excited different forms of initiative in that direction; we have armed all the parties; we have made authority the target of all ambitions. We have opened the arenas in different states, where revolts are now occurring, *and disorders and bankruptcy will shortly appear everywhere.*

Unrestrained babbles have converted parliamentary sessions and administrative meetings into oratorical contests. Daring journalists, impudent pamphleteers, make daily attacks on the administrative personnel. The abuse of power is definitely preparing the downfall of all institutions and everything will be overturned by the blows of the infuriated mobs.

The people are shackled by poverty to heavy labor more surely than they were by slavery and serfdom. They could liberate themselves from those in one way or another, whereas they cannot free themselves from misery. We have included in constitutions rights which for the people are fictitious and are not actual rights. All the so-called rights of the people can exist only in the abstract and can never be realized in practice. What difference does it make to the toiling proletarian, bent double by heavy toil, oppressed by his fate, that the babblers receive the right to talk, journalists the right to mix nonsense with reason in their writings, if the proletariat has no other gain from the constitution than the miserable crumbs which we throw from our table in return for his vote to elect our agents? Republican rights are bitter irony to the poor

man, for the necessity of almost daily labor prevents him from using them, and at the same time deprives him of his guarantee of a permanent and certain livelihood by making him dependent upon strikes, organized either by his masters or by his comrades.

Under our guidance the people have exterminated aristocracy, which was their natural protector and guardian, for its own interests are inseparably connected with the well-being of the people. Now, however, with the destruction of this aristocracy the masses have fallen under the power of the profiteers and cunning upstarts, who have settled on the workers as a merciless burden.

We will present ourselves in the guise of saviors of the workers from this oppression when we suggest that they enter our army of Socialists, Anarchists, Communists, to whom we always extend our help, under the guise of the rule of brotherhood demanded by the human solidarity of our *social masonry*. The aristocracy which benefited by the labor of the people by right was interested that the workers should be well-fed, healthy, and strong.

We, on the contrary, are concerned in the opposite—in the degeneration of the *Goys*. Our power lies in the chronic malnutrition and in the weakness of the worker, because through this he falls under our power and is unable to find either strength or energy to combat it.

Hunger gives to capital greater power over the worker than the legal authority of the sovereign ever gave to the aristocracy. Through misery and the resulting jealous hatred we manipulate the mob and crush those who stand in our way.... This hatred will be still more accentuated by the *economic crisis*, which will stop financial transactions and all industrial life. Having organized a general economic crisis by all possible underhanded means, and with the help of gold which is all in our hands, we will throw great crowds of workmen into the street, simultaneously, in all countries of Europe. These crowds will gladly shed the blood of those of whom they, in the simplicity of their ignorance, have been jealous since

childhood and whose property they will then be able to loot.

They will not harm our people because we will know of the time of the attack and we will take measures to protect them....

Remember the French Revolution, which we have called "great"; the secrets of its preparation were well known to us, for it was the work of our hands. Since then we have carried the masses from one disappointment to another, so that they will renounce even us in favor of a *despot sovereign of Zionist blood, whom we are preparing for the world....*

NOTE

1. The *protocols* of secret meetings of an international conference of "the learned elders of Zion" is an anti-semitic literary hoax aimed at showing the existence of an international Jewish conspiracy bent on world dominance. As part of this plot the Jews are said to be behind all the egregious forces of modernity: liberalism, parliamentary democracy, finance capitalism, Marxism, anarchism, the press. The term *elders of Zion* is apparently an allusion to the First Zionist Congress, which was held at the time the *Protocols* were written. The *Protocols* were almost certainly concocted in Paris in the last decade of the nineteenth century by an unknown author working for the Russian secret police; in all probability this volume was intended to influence the policy of Czar Nicholas II toward the interests of the secret police. For his purposes the anonymous author adapted a political satire written in 1864 by Maurice Joly (d. 1879). It is ironic that Joly's work—which has nothing to do with the Jews and which seeks to illuminate the tensions of modern society that led to the authoritarian regime of Napoleon III—is a defense of liberalism. Although first published in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, the *Protocols* enjoyed wide readership only when they were translated into numerous languages after World War I. In the United States they were distributed principally by Henry Ford under the title *The Jewish Peril*. See chapter 9, document 46.

Saturday

Kafka

FRANZ KAFKA

The Complete Stories

EDITED BY
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WITH A FOREWORD BY
John Updike



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1983

A Report to an Academy

HONORED MEMBERS of the Academy!

You have done me the honor of inviting me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape.

I regret that I cannot comply with your request to the extent you desire. It is now nearly five years since I was an ape, a short space of time, perhaps, according to the calendar, but an infinitely long time to gallop through at full speed, as I have done, more or less accompanied by excellent mentors, good advice, applause, and orchestral music, and yet essentially alone, since all my escorts, to keep the image, kept well off the course. I could never have achieved what I have done had I been stubbornly set on clinging to my origins, to the remembrances of my youth. In fact, to give up being stubborn was the supreme commandment I laid upon myself; free ape as I was, I submitted myself to that yoke. In revenge, however, my memory of the past has closed the door against me more and more. I could have returned at first, had human beings allowed it, through an archway as wide as the span of heaven over the earth, but as I spurred myself on in my forced career, the opening narrowed and shrank behind me; I felt more comfortable in the world of men and fitted it better; the strong wind that blew after me out of my past began to slacken; today it is only a gentle puff of air that plays around my heels; and the opening in the distance, through which it comes and through which I once came myself, has grown so small that, even if my strength and my will power sufficed to get me back to it, I should have to scrape the very skin from my body to crawl through. To put it plainly, much as I like expressing myself in images, to put it plainly: your life as apes, gentlemen, insofar as something of that kind lies behind you, cannot be farther removed from you than mine is from me. Yet everyone on earth feels a tickling at the heels; the small chimpanzee and the great Achilles alike.

But to a lesser extent I can perhaps meet your demand, and indeed I do so with the greatest pleasure. The first thing I learned was to give a handshake; a handshake betokens frankness; well, today, now that I stand at the very peak of my career, I hope to add frankness in words to the frankness of that first handshake. What I have to tell the Academy will contribute nothing essentially new, and will fall far behind what you have asked of me and what with the best will in the world I cannot communicate—nonetheless, it should indicate the line an erstwhile ape has had to follow in entering and establishing himself in the world of men. Yet I could not risk putting into words even such insignificant information as I am going to give you if I were not quite sure of myself and if my position on all the great variety stages of the civilized world had not become quite unassailable.

I belong to the Gold Coast. For the story of my capture I must depend on the evidence of others. A hunting expedition sent out by the firm of Hagenbeck—by the way, I have drunk many a bottle of good red wine since then with the leader of that expedition—had taken up its position in the bushes by the shore when I came down for a drink at evening among a troop of apes. They shot at us; I was the only one that was hit; I was hit in two places.

Once in the cheek; a slight wound; but it left a large, naked, red scar which earned me the name of Red Peter, a horrible name, utterly inappropriate, which only some ape could have thought of, as if the only difference between me and the performing ape Peter, who died not so long ago and had some small local reputation, were the red mark on my cheek. This by the way.

The second shot hit me below the hip. It was a severe wound, it is the cause of my limping a little to this day. I read an article recently by one of the ten thousand windbags who vent themselves concerning me in the newspapers, saying: my ape nature is not yet quite under control; the proof being that when visitors come to see me, I have a predilection for taking down my trousers to show them where the shot went in. The hand which wrote that should have its fingers shot away one by one. As for

me, I can take my trousers down before anyone if I like; you would find nothing but a well-groomed fur and the scar made—let me be particular in the choice of a word for this particular purpose, to avoid misunderstanding—the scar made by a wanton shot. Everything is open and aboveboard; there is nothing to conceal; when the plain truth is in question, great minds discard the niceties of refinement. But if the writer of the article were to take down his trousers before a visitor, that would be quite another story, and I will let it stand to his credit that he does not do it. In return, let him leave me alone with his delicacy!

After these two shots I came to myself—and this is where my own memories gradually begin—between decks in the Hagenbeck steamer, inside a cage. It was not a four-sided barred cage; it was only a three-sided cage nailed to a locker; the locker made the fourth side of it. The whole construction was too low for me to stand up in and too narrow to sit down in. So I had to squat with my knees bent and trembling all the time, and also, since probably for a time I wished to see no one, and to stay in the dark, my face was turned toward the locker while the bars of the cage cut into my flesh behind. Such a method of confining wild beasts is supposed to have its advantages during the first days of captivity, and out of my own experiences I cannot deny that from the human point of view this is really the case.

But that did not occur to me then. For the first time in my life I could see no way out; at least no direct way out; directly in front of me was the locker, board fitted close to board. True, there was a gap running right through the boards which I greeted with the blissful howl of ignorance when I first discovered it, but the hole was not even wide enough to stick one's tail through and not all the strength of an ape could enlarge it.

I am supposed to have made uncommonly little noise, as I was later informed, from which the conclusion was drawn that I would either soon die or if I managed to survive the first critical period would be very amenable to training. I did survive this period. Hopelessly sobbing, painfully hunting for fleas, apathetically licking a cocoanut, beating my skull against the locker, sticking out my tongue at anyone who came near me—that was

how I filled in time at first in my new life. But over and above it all only the one feeling: no way out. Of course what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human terms, and therefore I misrepresent it, but although I cannot reach back to the truth of the old ape life, there is no doubt that it lies somewhere in the direction I have indicated.

Until then I had had so many ways out of everything, and now I had none. I was pinned down. Had I been nailed down, my right to free movement would not have been lessened. Why so? Scratch your flesh raw between your toes, but you won't find the answer. Press yourself against the bar behind you till it nearly cuts you in two, you won't find the answer. I had no way out but I had to devise one, for without it I could not live. All the time facing that locker—I should certainly have perished. Yet as far as Hagenbeck was concerned, the place for apes was in front of a locker—well then, I had to stop being an ape. A fine, clear train of thought, which I must have constructed somehow with my belly, since apes think with their bellies.

I fear that perhaps you do not quite understand what I mean by "way out." I use the expression in its fullest and most popular sense. I deliberately do not use the word "freedom." I do not mean the spacious feeling of freedom on all sides. As an ape, perhaps, I knew that, and I have met men who yearn for it. But for my part I desired such freedom neither then nor now. In passing: may I say that all too often men are betrayed by the word freedom. And as freedom is counted among the most sublime feelings, so the corresponding disillusionment can be also sublime. In variety theaters I have often watched, before my turn came on, a couple of acrobats performing on trapezes high in the roof. They swung themselves, they rocked to and fro, they sprang into the air, they floated into each other's arms, one hung by the hair from the teeth of the other. "And that too is human freedom," I thought, "self-controlled movement." What a mockery of holy Mother Nature! Were the apes to see such a spectacle, no theater walls could stand the shock of their laughter.

No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out; right

or left, or in any direction; I made no other demand; even should the way out prove to be an illusion; the demand was a small one, the disappointment could be no bigger. To get out somewhere, to get out! Only not to stay motionless with raised arms, crushed against a wooden wall.

Today I can see it clearly; without the most profound inward calm I could never have found my way out. And indeed perhaps I owe all that I have become to the calm that settled within me after my first few days in the ship. And again for that calmness it was the ship's crew I had to thank.

They were good creatures, in spite of everything. I find it still pleasant to remember the sound of their heavy footfalls which used to echo through my half-dreaming head. They had a habit of doing everything as slowly as possible. If one of them wanted to rub his eyes, he lifted a hand as if it were a drooping weight. Their jests were coarse, but hearty. Their laughter had always a gruff bark in it that sounded dangerous but meant nothing. They always had something in their mouths to spit out and did not care where they spat it. They always grumbled that they got fleas from me; yet they were not seriously angry about it; they knew that my fur fostered fleas, and that fleas jump; it was a simple matter of fact to them. When they were off duty some of them often used to sit down in a semicircle around me; they hardly spoke but only grunted to each other; smoked their pipes, stretched out on lockers; smacked their knees as soon as I made the slightest movement; and now and then one of them would take a stick and tickle me where I liked being tickled. If I were to be invited today to take a cruise on that ship I should certainly refuse the invitation, but just as certainly the memories I could recall between its decks would not all be hateful.

The calmness I acquired among these people kept me above all from trying to escape. As I look back now, it seems to me I must have had at least an inkling that I had to find a way out or die, but that my way out could not be reached through flight. I cannot tell now whether escape was possible, but I believe it must have been; for an ape it must always be possible. With my

teeth as they are today I have to be careful even in simply cracking nuts, but at that time I could certainly have managed by degrees to bite through the lock of my cage. I did not do it. What good would it have done me? As soon as I had poked out my head I should have been caught again and put in a worse cage; or I might have slipped among the other animals without being noticed, among the pythons, say, who were opposite me, and so breathed out my life in their embrace; or supposing I had actually succeeded in sneaking out as far as the deck and leaping overboard, I should have rocked for a little on the deep sea and then been drowned. Desperate remedies. I did not think it out in this human way, but under the influence of my surroundings I acted as if I had thought it out.

I did not think things out; but I observed everything quietly. I watched these men go to and fro, always the same faces, the same movements, often it seemed to me there was only the same man. So this man or these men walked about unimpeded. A lofty goal faintly dawned before me. No one promised me that if I became like them the bars of my cage would be taken away. Such promises for apparently impossible contingencies are not given. But if one achieves the impossible, the promises appear later retrospectively precisely where one had looked in vain for them before. Now, these men in themselves had no great attraction for me. Had I been devoted to the aforementioned idea of freedom, I should certainly have preferred the deep sea to the way out that suggested itself in the heavy faces of these men. At any rate, I watched them for a long time before I even thought of such things, indeed, it was only the mass weight of my observations that impelled me in the right direction.

It was so easy to imitate these people. I learned to spit in the very first days. We used to spit in each other's faces; the only difference was that I licked my face clean afterwards and they did not. I could soon smoke a pipe like an old hand; and if I also pressed my thumb into the bowl of the pipe, a roar of appreciation went up between-decks; only it took me a very long time to understand the difference between a full pipe and an empty one.

My worst trouble came from the schnapps bottle. The smell of it revolted me; I forced myself to it as best I could; but it took weeks for me to master my repulsion. This inward conflict, strangely enough, was taken more seriously by the crew than anything else about me. I cannot distinguish the men from each other in my recollection, but there was one of them who came again and again, alone or with friends, by day, by night, at all kinds of hours; he would post himself before me with the bottle and give me instructions. He could not understand me, he wanted to solve the enigma of my being. He would slowly uncork the bottle and then look at me to see if I had followed him; I admit that I always watched him with wildly eager, too eager attention; such a student of humankind no human teacher ever found on earth. After the bottle was uncorked he lifted it to his mouth; I followed it with my eyes right up to his jaws; he would nod, pleased with me, and set the bottle to his lips; I, enchanted with my gradual enlightenment, squealed and scratched myself comprehensively wherever scratching was called for; he rejoiced, tilted the bottle, and took a drink; I, impatient and desperate to emulate him, befouled myself in my cage, which again gave him great satisfaction; and then, holding the bottle at arm's length and bringing it up with a swing, he would empty it at one draught, leaning back at an exaggerated angle for my better instruction. I, exhausted by too much effort, could follow him no farther and hung limply to the bars, while he ended his theoretical exposition by rubbing his belly and grinning.

After theory came practice. Was I not already quite exhausted by my theoretical instruction? Indeed I was; utterly exhausted. That was part of my destiny. And yet I would take hold of the proffered bottle as well as I was able; uncork it, trembling; this successful action would gradually inspire me with new energy; I would lift the bottle, already following my original model almost exactly; put it to my lips and—and then throw it down in disgust, utter disgust, although it was empty and filled only with the smell of the spirit, throw it down on the floor in disgust. To the sorrow of my teacher, to the greater sorrow of myself; neither of us being really comforted by the fact

that I did not forget, even though I had thrown away the bottle, to rub my belly most admirably and to grin.

Far too often my lesson ended in that way. And to the credit of my teacher, he was not angry; sometimes indeed he would hold his burning pipe against my fur, until it began to smolder in some place I could not easily reach, but then he would himself extinguish it with his own kind, enormous hand; he was not angry with me, he perceived that we were both fighting on the same side against the nature of apes and that I had the more difficult task.

What a triumph it was then both for him and for me, when one evening before a large circle of spectators—perhaps there was a celebration of some kind, a gramophone was playing, an officer was circulating among the crew—when on this evening, just as no one was looking, I took hold of a schnapps bottle that had been carelessly left standing before my cage, uncorked it in the best style, while the company began to watch me with mounting attention, set it to my lips without hesitation, with no grimace, like a professional drinker, with rolling eyes and full throat, actually and truly drank it empty; then threw the bottle away, not this time in despair but as an artistic performer; forgot, indeed, to rub my belly; but instead of that, because I could not help it, because my senses were reeling, called a brief and unmistakable “Hallo!” breaking into human speech, and with this outburst broke into the human community, and felt its echo: “Listen, he’s talking!” like a caress over the whole of my sweat-drenched body.

I repeat: there was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason. And even that triumph of mine did not achieve much. I lost my human voice again at once; it did not come back for months; my aversion for the schnapps bottle returned again with even greater force. But the line I was to follow had in any case been decided; once for all.

When I was handed over to my first trainer in Hamburg I soon realized that there were two alternatives before me: the Zoological Gardens or the variety stage. I did not hesitate. I said

to myself: do your utmost to get onto the variety stage; the Zoological Gardens means only a new cage; once there, you are done for.

And so I learned things, gentlemen. Ah, one learns when one has to; one learns when one needs a way out; one learns at all costs. One stands over oneself with a whip; one flays oneself at the slightest opposition. My ape nature fled out of me, head over heels and away, so that my first teacher was almost himself turned into an ape by it, had soon to give up teaching and was taken away to a mental hospital. Fortunately he was soon let out again.

But I used up many teachers, indeed, several teachers at once. As I became more confident of my abilities, as the public took an interest in my progress and my future began to look bright, I engaged teachers for myself, established them in five communicating rooms, and took lessons from them all at once by dint of leaping from one room to the other.

That progress of mine! How the rays of knowledge penetrated from all sides into my awakening brain! I do not deny it: I found it exhilarating. But I must also confess: I did not overestimate it, not even then, much less now. With an effort which up till now has never been repeated I managed to reach the cultural level of an average European. In itself that might be nothing to speak of, but it is something insofar as it has helped me out of my cage and opened a special way out for me, the way of humanity. There is an excellent idiom: to fight one's way through the thick of things; that is what I have done, I have fought through the thick of things. There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice.

As I look back over my development and survey what I have achieved so far, I do not complain, but I am not complacent either. With my hands in my trouser pockets, my bottle of wine on the table, I half lie and half sit in my rocking chair and gaze out of the window: if a visitor arrives, I receive him with propriety. My manager sits in the anteroom; when I ring, he comes and listens to what I have to say. Nearly every evening I give a

performance, and I have a success that could hardly be increased. When I come home late at night from banquets, from scientific receptions, from social gatherings, there sits waiting for me a half-trained little chimpanzee and I take comfort from her as apes do. By day I cannot bear to see her; for she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eye; no one else sees it, but I do, and I cannot bear it. On the whole, at any rate, I have achieved what I set out to achieve. But do not tell me that it was not worth the trouble. In any case, I am not appealing for any man's verdict, I am only imparting knowledge, I am only making a report. To you also, honored Members of the Academy, I have only made a report.

Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir

A Report to an Academy: Two Fragments

WE ALL KNOW Rotpeter, just as half the world knows him. But when he came to our town for a guest performance, I decided to get to know him personally. It is not difficult to be admitted. In big cities where everyone in the know clamors to watch celebrities breathe from as close as possible, great difficulties may be encountered; but in our town one is content to marvel at the marvelous from the pit. Thus I was the only one so far, as the hotel servant told me, to have announced his visit. Herr Busenau, the impresario, received me with extreme courtesy. I had not expected to meet a man so modest, indeed almost timid. He was sitting in the anteroom of Rotpeter's apartment, eating an omelet. Although it was morning he already sat there in the evening clothes in which he appears at the performances. Hardly had he caught sight of me—me the unknown, the unimportant guest—when he, possessor of highly distinguished medals, king of trainers, honorary doctor of great universities, jumped up, shook me by both hands, urged me to sit down, wiped his spoon

on the tablecloth, and amiably offered it to me so that I might finish his omelet. He would not accept my grateful refusal and promptly tried to feed me. I had some trouble calming him down and warding him off, as well as his spoon and plate.

"Very kind of you to have come," he said with a strong foreign accent. "Most kind. You've also come at the right time, for alas Rotpeter cannot always receive. Seeing people is often repugnant to him; on these occasions no one, it does not matter who he may be, is admitted; then I, even I can see him only on business, so to speak, on the stage. And immediately after the performance I have to disappear, he drives home alone, locks himself in his room, and usually remains like that until the following evening. He always has a big hamper of fruit in his bedroom, this is what he lives on at these times. But I, who of course dare not let him out of my sight, always rent the apartment opposite his and watch him from behind curtains."

When I sit opposite you like this, Rotpeter, listening to you talk, drinking your health, I really and truly forget—whether you take it as a compliment or not, it's the truth—that you are a chimpanzee. Only gradually, when I have forced myself out of my thoughts back to reality, do my eyes show me again whose guest I am.

Yes.

You're so silent suddenly, I wonder why? Just a moment ago you were pronouncing such astonishingly correct opinions about our town, and now you're so silent.

Silent?

Is something wrong? Shall I call the trainer? Perhaps you're in the habit of taking a meal at this hour?

No, no. It's quite all right. I can tell you what it was. Sometimes I'm overcome with such an aversion to human beings that I can barely refrain from retching. This, of course, has nothing to do with the individual human being, least of all with your charming presence. It concerns all human beings. There's nothing extraordinary about this. Suppose, for instance, that you were to live continuously with apes, you'd probably have similar

attacks, however great your self-control. Actually, it's not the smell of human beings that repels me so much, it's the human smell which I have contracted and which mingles with the smell from my native land. Smell for yourself! Here, on my chest! Put your nose deeper into the fur! Deeper, I say!

I'm sorry, but I can't smell anything special. Just the ordinary smell of a well-groomed body, that's all. The nose of a city-dweller, of course, is no fair test. You, no doubt, can scent thousands of things that evade us.

Once upon a time, sir, once upon a time. That's over.

Since you brought it up yourself, I dare to ask: How long have you actually been living among us?

Five years. On the fifth of April it will be five years.

Terrific achievement. To cast off apehood in five years and gallop through the whole evolution of mankind! Certainly no one has ever done that before! On this racecourse you have no rival.

It's a great deal, I know, and sometimes it surpasses even my understanding. In tranquil moments, however, I feel less exuberant about it. Do you know how I was caught?

I've read everything that's been printed about you. You were shot at and then caught.

Yes, I was hit twice, once here in the cheek—the wound of course was far larger than the scar you see—and the second time below the hip. I'll take my trousers down so you can see that scar, too. Here then was where the bullet entered; this was the severe, decisive wound. I fell from the tree and when I came to I was in a cage between decks.

In a cage! Between decks! It's one thing to read your story, and quite another to hear you tell it!

And yet another, sir, to have experienced it. Until then I had never known what it means to have no way out. It was not a four-sided barred cage, it had only three sides nailed to a locker, the locker forming the fourth side. The whole contrivance was so low that I could not stand upright, and so narrow that I could not even sit down. All I could do was squat there with bent knees. In my rage I refused to see anyone, and so remained fac-

ing the locker; for days and nights I squatted there with trembling knees while behind me the bars cut into my flesh. This manner of confining wild animals is considered to have its advantages during the first days of captivity, and from my experience I cannot deny that from the human point of view this actually is the case. But at that time I was not interested in the human point of view. I had the locker in front of me. Break the boards, bite a hole through them, squeeze yourself through an opening which in reality hardly allows you to see through it and which, when you first discover it, you greet with the blissful howl of ignorance! Where do you want to go? Beyond the boards the forest begins. . . .

Translated by Tania and James Stern

The Refusal

OUR LITTLE TOWN does not lie on the frontier, nowhere near; it is so far from the frontier, in fact, that perhaps no one from our town has ever been there; desolate highlands have to be crossed as well as wide fertile plains. To imagine even part of the road makes one tired, and more than part one just cannot imagine. There are also big towns on the road, each far larger than ours. Ten little towns like ours laid side by side, and ten more forced down from above, still would not produce one of these enormous, overcrowded towns. If one does not get lost on the way one is bound to lose oneself in these towns, and to avoid them is impossible on account of their size.

But what is even further from our town than the frontier, if such distances can be compared at all—it's like saying that a man of three hundred years is older than one of two hundred—what is even further than the frontier is the capital. Whereas we do get news of the frontier wars now and again, of the capital we learn next to nothing—we civilians that is, for of course the government officials have very good connections with the capital; they can get news from there in as little as three months, so they claim at least.

Now it is remarkable and I am continually being surprised by the way we in our town humbly submit to all orders issued in the capital. For centuries no political change has been brought about by the citizens themselves. In the capital great rulers have superseded each other—indeed, even dynasties have been deposed or annihilated, and new ones have started; in the past century even the capital itself was destroyed, a new one was founded far away from it, later on this too was destroyed and the old one rebuilt, yet none of this had any influence on our little town. Our officials have always remained at their posts; the highest officials came from the capital, the less high from other towns, and the lowest from among ourselves—that is how it has always been and it has suited us. The highest official is the chief

Saturday

Bialik, City of Slaughter

The City of Slaughter

Haim Nahman Bialik

Arise and go now to the city of slaughter;
Into its courtyard wind thy way;
There with thine own hand touch, and with the eyes of thine head,
Behold on tree, on stone, on fence, on mural clay,
The spattered blood and dried brains of the dead.
Proceed thence to the ruins, the split walls reach,
Where wider grows the hollow, and greater grows the breach;
Pass over the shattered hearth, attain the broken wall
Those burnt and barren brick, whose charred stones reveal
The open mouths of such wounds, that no mending
Shall ever mend, nor healing ever heal.
There will thy feet in feathers sink, and stumble
On wreckage doubly wrecked, scroll heaped on manuscript.
Fragments again fragmented

Pause not upon this havoc; go thy way
Unto the attic mount, upon thy feet and hands;
Behold the shadow of death among the shadows stands.
Crushed in their shame, they saw it all;
They did not pluck their eyes out; they
Beat not their brains against the wall!
Perhaps, perhaps, each watcher bad it in his heart to pray:
A miracle, O Lord, and spare my skin this day!

Come, now, and I will bring thee to their lairs
The privies, jakes and pigpens where the heirs
Of Hasmoneans lay, with trembling knees,
Concealed and cowering -the sons of the Maccabees!
The seed of saints, the scions of the lions!
Who, crammed by scores in all the sanctuaries of their shame
So sanctified My name!
It was the flight of mice they fled,
The scurrying of roaches was their flight;
They died like dogs, and they were dead!
And on the next morn, after the terrible night
The son who was not murdered found
The spurned cadaver of his father on the ground.
Now wherefore dost thou weep, O son of Man?...

Descend then, to the cellars of the town,
There where the virginal daughters of thy folk were fouled,
Where seven heathen flung a woman down,
The daughter in the presence of her mother,
The mother in the presence of her daughter,
Before slaughter, during slaughter and after slaughter!

Note also, do not fail to note,
In that dark corner, and behind that cask
Crouched husbands, bridegrooms, brothers, peering from the cracks,
Watching the sacred bodies struggling underneath
The bestial breath,
Stifled in filth, and swallowing their blood!
Such silence will take hold of thee, thy heart will fail
With pain and shame, yet I
Will let no tear fall from thine eye.
Though thou wilt long to bellow like the driven ox
That bellows, and before the Altar balks,
I will make hard thy heart, yea, I
Will not permit a sigh.
See, see, the slaughtered calves, so smitten and so laid;
Is there a price for their death? How shall that price be paid?
Forgive, ye shamed of the earth, yours is a pauper-Lord!
Poor was He during your life, and poorer still of late.
When to my door you come to ask for your reward,
I'll open wide: See, I am fallen from My high estate.
I grieve for you, my children. My heart is sad for you.
Your dead were vainly dead; and neither I nor you
Know why you died or wherefore, for whom, nor by what laws;
Your deaths are without reason; your lives are without cause.

Turn, then, thy gaze from the dead, and I will lead
Thee from the graveyard to thy living brothers,
And thou wilt come, with those of thine own breed,
Into the synagogue, and on a day of fasting,
To hear the cry of their agony,
Their weeping everlasting.
Thy skin will grow cold, the hair on thy skin stand up,
And thou wilt be by fear and trembling tossed;
Thus groans a people which is lost.
Look in their hearts - behold a dreary waste,
Where even vengeance can revive no growth,
And yet upon their lips no mighty malediction
Rises, no blasphemous oath.
Speak to them, bid them rage!
Let them against me raise the outraged hand,
Let them demand!
Demand the retribution for the shamed
Of all the centuries and every age!
Let fists be flung like stone
Against the heavens and the heavenly Throne!...