

posely, as if to enable the doctor to follow the pulse of life to its very end.

"Go ahead, then, Doctor."

Suddenly something tugged at my heart: the mass heaved a sigh as deep as is the accumulated pain of only one race on this earth — then a long gurgling, whistling "O!" pierced the deathly, ghastly stillness. As if the clenched pain that has been driven to the heart of the Jew from times immemorial — by 'brotherly love' — had cried out in him. And the one intact arm dropped limply off the edge of the stretcher.

The Captain bent closely to the dying boy's head and whispered:

"Ike — boy, here is Sam Abramovitch. Would you speak to him?"

"Yes... Sir..."

The Major motioned to me to go up to the stretcher.

"What can I do for you, Ike?" (I must say that I did not know then who he was, but — when one dies in such loneliness and hopelessness after having been busy lawfully killing for the sake of Civilization, — being called by the first name is in itself comforting.)

With great effort he turned an eye-less, shattered face towards me, and in rasping voice said:

"Ask the Sergeant... take... the package... For... my mother... Send... Hebrew... prayer book... My 'A r b o h - K a n f o s' ... she gave me... and francs... Write... Tell her... not mourn... I die for a Land... that knows no hatred... against Jews..."

He was interrupted for a while by a strange wheezing in his throat. Then again turned his head towards me and whispered:

"Pray... Vidooy with me..."

I must have looked very much downhearted and guilty judging by the way the major anxiously asked me, "What does Isaak want?"

"The Jewish Death-bed prayer and I don't know it, Sir." I answered dejectedly.

Major Adamson sharply turned to the dying boy and bending closely over him asked: "Ike — boy, may we all say this prayer with you?"

"Yes... we all... may..."

We lowered our heads, as if not to see each others faces and the thoughts of the futility of murder expressed on them, and, while Isaak was slowly lipping after us, the Major, with a lump in his throat, slowly prayed: "God, forgive us our bad deeds: for we know naught, and reward us for our good deeds for we have so much suffered for them. Give us Peace, O God. Give Peace to our soul."

Isaak's head fell backwards. Everything was tensely quiet. We spoke no more. I went out.

\* \* \*

Two days later we had straightened up Isaak's last will. But I was completely in the dark as to his identity. How my name had engraved itself on his mind so as not to be forgotten even during the agonies of death was a mystery to me.

Nightfall on that day found us stealthily leaving the front line for billets. "Heavies" kept on rushing over our heads with a sharp, hissing whine and exploding with a piercing zz-ing near enough to make us step up livelier after the mud and debris had settled down again.

Eight o'clock of the evening Jack Harvey, Paul Hoff, Alec Papenheim and myself were seated in a small Estaminet, an old shell-battered inn, at a bottle of vin blanc. The old French lady that had been serving us whenever we used to drop in while out of the 'lines,' placed the wine and four wine-glasses on the table and, holding her knotty hands over her apron, half-stated, half-asked:

"Monsieur Lapman, he napoo?" (killed?)

"Yes, m a d a m e." I answered: his name being to me no more than the name of any poor boy that had appeared on the Casualty List and personally unknown to me.

She tottered away.

"Yes, that was a sad tale, about poor Ike," said Harvey filling the glasses.

"How did he get it, Jack?"

"Ike volunteered to take out some hand-grenades to a stranded scouting party. The party came through all right, but Ike got it on the way back."

"Strange. I can't remember him. And there he was, — asking for me before his very death. How was he to look at?"

"Quite tall. About twenty-four years old. He had a long scar across his right cheek. — Ah, well! — here is to all of us, boys, — dead or alive!"

And there, while drinking my wine, the taste of it suddenly brought back some memories to me of a night spent in the same Estaminet — with that boy with the scar on his right

cheek, — with Isaak Lapman. With swiftness of lightning, flushed faces and glittering eyes, a crackling fire-place and a half empty Estaminet, passed by before my eyes, a sweeping rain and a wailing wind brushed by my ears. As if strengthening my recollections of him, Jack, placing the glass on the table and lighting his pipe, added, "You remember, a few weeks ago we all of us had some drinks with him at this very table. He told us about that Blood-stained Inn, that Russian pogrom. Poor fellow. You remember?"

"A shark in literature. Went to college together. Nicknamed him 'Ike Shakespeare,'" added Paul Hoff in his usual beginningless and unfinished sentences.

Yes, I remembered him. I had just met him then for the first and last time — in 'good condition.' That night the picture of our first meeting passed before my eyes again most vividly in all its sadness and gruesomeness. Now it all appeared to me one monstrous nightmare, his experience in the Blood-stained Inn and his death.

\* \* \*

It happened in the same Estaminet, in the early part of April 1917, the night before D Company, Nth Battalion, Ike's gang, went into the lines for the first time. We had all met there accidentally and we were trying to tell Ike that was not so bad — once one gets used to it: it then, so-to-speak, becomes a second habit. He smiled, his face becoming oval and flushed, his scar turning into a white thread.

"If I'd tell you, fellows, what had once happened to me when I was only a kid of thirteen, you'd agree with me that nothing could throw me into shivers now."

We, experienced trench-rats that we thought ourselves, glanced at each other significantly and smiled, and it was I who had challenged him to tell of the heroic deeds that would make war — the war where people had to fight machines, — look pale.

"I understand that you are a Jew, Abramovitch," he stated abruptly.

"I am," I answered, puzzled by what bearing that might have on his not being scared of the front lines.

"All right, then listen: though you have been born in a free country, echoes are hidden within you that will totter back to you, first yelping, then trumpeting, then thundering. — Now, listen, all. I am somewhat flowery of speech, but you'll have to take this, once you want the story."

\* \* \*

Unable to appreciate the depth of his uttering dropped on my account, I thought him something of a phrase-maker, but a squalid rain was pouring outside and a murky night was falling earlier than is usual for April, and the expectation of having a blood-and-gore story, wine, and a crackling fireplace, moved our chairs close together, and Lapman began his story.

"When I was thirteen years old, that was in the summer of 1909, I had finished Yevreyskoe Narodnoe Otschlylytscheh, a special Jewish-Russian secular school, corresponding to our Public School and situated in the Capital city of the Province. I was always a great walker, and, because our little town was only sixty-three versts or some forty odd miles away, I decided to hoof it. I enjoyed the walk right from the hour I set out, at five o'clock in the morning, to the very moment twilight set in. The June-fields were pregnant with wheat, rye, oats, and the orchards were smiling with all kinds of fruit. Now and again, I would stop for a chat with a shepherd-boy, now in a peasant's hut for a drink. And so the whole day long I trotted on leisurely, whistling or singing at the top of my lungs. But things changed when night began falling rapidly. I found myself at the entrance of an aged forest that stretched itself for eight miles. Thick shadows began gathering quickly, and a strange silence spread about me. Through the thick-branched tree tops a star would twinkle like a sparkling drop of blood, frightfully. I sat down on the dew-covered grass. I felt that my feet could not obey my will any longer. My head dropped by degrees, and so did my courage. I began to think anxiously about my critical situation. My home, eighteen miles away from this side of the forest, was the nearest inhabited place. The expectation of having to spend the night in the forest brought to my mind stories of robber bands, pictures of hissing snakes and howling hungry wolves."

Here Lapman took his glass of wine, held it up level with his eyes, looked at it, took a sip, placed it back on the table, and, smiling quietly, went on with his story.

"Well, I was sitting there, drowsy and frightened to death. The old pine trees were creaking and whispering overhead. My thoughts were full of weird nursery stories. 'What if there really is a devil, a horned, many-eyed devil, exercising his evil doings there in the forest?' Suddenly an idea flashed through my mind. Two miles south of the forest was an old ruined inn. It stood at

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## The Supreme Test

By RABBI SOLOMON FRANK

Deliverance had come to the children of Israel. Little had they dreamed that the enslavement would come ever to an end. It had seemed interminable in length. Days gave way to weeks and weeks to years, generations had fled and yet no redeemer had appeared. Slowly the people were losing faith. What was the promise that they had heard in their childhood days that had been made to their ancestor? His very figure stood as but a shadow and the promise made him seemed to have no more reality to it than the mist melting into sunlight. Bricks, Bricks. Bricks everlasting. Taskmasters came, oppressed, persecuted, maltreated and died. Others appeared fresh on the scene. Pharaoh would brook no interference for bricks were wanted. The treasure cities had to be built. And mausoleums constructed, honorably to inter the great one of Egypt. Bricks, everlasting bricks, and only the Israelites to make them. It seemed as if no end, save death itself, would bring the final word of release, the only fulfillment of the ancient pledge. And now from distant lands there had come back one of their own, one of their flesh and blood, one fearless and unafraid, even of the august Pharaoh himself. He had interceded on their behalf, and when intercession had failed, he demanded and threatened. After these had been rejected in derision, he had made good his threats and now they are free. Free from the taskmaster's lash, free from his stinging blows, free from the curses and maledictions of his underlings, demanding in Pharaoh's name, the daily motley of bricks, or their children in their place. And with uplifted hand, they left the accursed land.



Rabbi Solomon Frank

Wending their way, heavily laden with the good things of life, in partial reward for their years and days of suffering they come to the Red Sea. They come with shouting and song in token of their deliverance, their spirits run high, their hearts leap with a joy. But of a sudden all this is turned into gripping terror. The cohorts of a repentant Pharaoh are behind them, the raging torrents in front: death on the one hand, misery of the worst sort on the other. Small wonder it is that Scripture, faithful even to the minutest detail, depicts the terror that raged in every Israelitish breast. "They were sore afraid, and they cried to Moses, 'Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?' " Moses knows that he has done the best possible, and so in great sorrow he turns to God. Then the truly great test occurs. The revelation comes to Moses, "Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Thus assured they plunge into the sea and are saved.

The Passover would have been without meaning had it not been for this one act of faith. And, primarily, by this one act of faith the Jews justified their existence.

Thus from the great festival of freedom, we not only learn the lesson of God's power and God's justice, but we take from it the more important message of the need of faith.

Faith is the essence of belief in God. Faith in God's justice preserved the chosen few who remained faithful in Egypt. Faith enabled them to penetrate the desert. Faith helped them to reach the Promised Land, and faith has given the Jew the power to carry on.

Nay, more, faith in God is that which is most needed in our own day and age, to enable us to overcome the obstacles of our own construction. Without faith in God social stability and all that is worthwhile in life, ceases; with faith, all is serene.

Passover to the Jew spells freedom. Not, however, the liberty synonymous with license, but freedom to divert himself of the dross of life, enabling him to find in God the Great Companion and Eternal Friend. Faith enables every good man and woman to see God in all things, and therefore to find happiness.

A poet of a former day phrased just this thought beautifully:

"I have known Thee, in the whirlwind,  
I have known Thee, on the hill,  
I have loved Thee, in the voice of birds,  
Or the music of the rill.  
I dreamt Thee in the shadow,  
I saw Thee in the light,  
I heard Thee in the thunder-peal,  
And worshipped in the night.  
All beauty, while it spoke of Thee,  
Still made my soul rejoice,  
And my spirit bowed within itself,  
To hear Thy 'still small voice.'  
I have not felt myself a thing  
Far from Thy presence driven,  
By flaming sword or waving wing,  
Shut out from Thee and Heaven."

Passover is not merely a declaration of faith; it is an act of faith. It comes to us every year, reminding us to have faith in Him Who is Creator and Father of all.

Israel standing on the shores of the Red Sea is puny and small, engulfed in fear; but Israel plunging courageously into the torrents, achieves immortality.

Such is the reward of an act of faith!

Best Wishes for a very Joyous Passover to all  
my Jewish Friends

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