

DISAPPOINTED EXPECTATIONS:  
An Immigrant Arrives in Western Pennsylvania

Edited by  
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**I**MMIGRATION is a traumatic experience for those who undergo it. Jewish immigrants of East European background, like others of the great nineteenth-century migration, found the change from the medieval world of their homelands to twentieth-century America overwhelming. In the words of one authority on the subject, Oscar Handlin,

The immigrants lived in crisis because they were uprooted. In transplantation, while the old roots were sundered, before the new were established, the immigrants existed in an extreme situation. The shock and the effects of the shock persisted for many years, and their influence reached down to generations which themselves never paid the cost of the crossing.<sup>1</sup>

To embark on such a perilous undertaking one needed to have great incentive. The dream of a better life in the "golden land" was the lure that drew the immigrant away from the security of his little village through a long, uncertain voyage which reached its destination in the crowded port of New York City. This vision, powerful enough to move whole villages across an ocean, was responsible also for the disappointment that faced the newcomer upon his arrival on these shores. How disillusioning it was to find here not Eden, but a teeming metropolis where new arrivals lived more wretchedly than they ever had in their humble but countrified birthplaces, how disenchanting to exchange an established though modest position in the society of the Old World for anonymity in urban America. At first, America may have appeared to be worse, not better, than the familiar homeland. It took years, even generations, until the situation reversed itself and the dream of the good life was realized, if not by the immigrant, then by his offspring.

It is no wonder that immigrants had adjustment problems. In this statement from his article "Jewish Immigration and Accommodation to America" Bernard D. Weinryb develops the Handlin theory further: "Almost every contact in the new world bears the seeds of both ad-

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1 *The Uprooted* (Boston, 1951), 6.

justment and alienation.”<sup>2</sup> Harry Jackson’s memoirs provide us with a model by which to test the Weinryb hypothesis.

I was directed to Harry Jackson by a family member from whom I was seeking names of interview prospects for a Western Pennsylvania oral history project in which I was taking part. Jackson’s age, residence, and experience indicated that he would be a valuable contributor to the project. In the course of our interview Jackson revealed to me the full-length book of memoirs that he had composed, and he permitted me to take it home to read. Impressed by both its content and its style, I passed along the manuscript for an appraisal to John Bodnar, Director of the Oral History Project for the State of Pennsylvania. Bodnar confirmed my estimate of the work’s merit and then guided me to the selection of the excerpt which formed the basis of this article.<sup>3</sup>

Jackson composed his memoirs between 1940 and 1945, thirty-odd years after he had arrived in America. Writing in Yiddish, he completed approximately five hundred pages. In order to make his work accessible to members of his family, Jackson next embarked on the laborious process of translation. For twenty years he has been engaged in this effort which still occupies him today.

The method that Jackson uses is to translate into English aloud as he reads from the Yiddish original to a secretary who records his words in shorthand. After each session the secretary transcribes and returns the material to Jackson for his approval. A secretary who is fluent with language can assist Jackson with his word choices and speed up the process. At the present time Jackson is making good progress. He has recounted the saga of his courtship and marriage to Rose Eger, and is now relating his early years in the shoe business. The fact that he has devoted such a large portion (two hundred of five hundred pages) of his work to his early years and the experience of the immigration confirms the importance of these events in his life.

Jackson arrived in America in 1913 from Karanitz, Russia. His first experiences in the new land support Weinryb’s theory of the rocky beginnings of adjustment. For good or ill, as Weinryb puts it, “The first important contact arises from the necessity of earning a living.”<sup>4</sup> This was true of Harry Jackson’s pursuit of a livelihood.

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2 “Jewish Immigration and Accommodation to America,” *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society* 46 (May-June 1957) : 378.

3 Western Pennsylvania Oral History Project, administered by the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, funded by grants from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, under the direction of John E. Bodnar, Associate Historian, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Mar.-Sept. 1975.

4 “Jewish Immigration and Accommodation,” 378.

In his first job as a peddler, Jackson felt humiliated. He contrasted his lowly activity of selling brooms with his learned background as descendant of rabbis and as participant in intellectual debate. He imagined the embarrassment of his family when they discovered his come down in the world. Exposed before society in his disgrace, he suffered: "My bundle of brooms were [*sic*] pressing hard on my shoulders; they are also pressing my heart, and choking my soul."<sup>5</sup> Although Jackson's first step in earning a living had the merit of acquainting him with his new environment, the experience was largely negative.

The name change that Jackson agreed to in this chapter of his book also illustrated the contradictory nature of adjustment. Jackson's friends, "The intelligent group of Munhall," urged him to take on the Americanized version of Yachnowitz (Jackson) that his brother Labul had already adopted, and to replace the old-fashioned surname Hillel with Harry. The results were described in this way by our writer: "Short and snappy was the transition from Hillel Tsvee Yachnowitz to Harry Jackson." Jackson, recognizing the importance of the step, termed it "the beginning of my Americanism." At the same time he described the pain that it caused him:

Inside of me in my hidden me I did not like this entire idea. It looked to me as if I had died . . . . It gave me a certain pride to be named after such a noble character [Hillel], and all of a sudden, I am not Hillel; just Harry . . . . I hated the idea of losing my identity; I mean my last name Yachnowitz, because it meant to me that I was betraying my Father.<sup>6</sup>

Jackson's name change is an example of acculturation, the first and most superficial level of assimilation, according to Milton Gordon's model in *Assimilation in American Life*. Jackson's move, however, did not foreshadow a future, deeper assimilation into the structure of American society. In his primary relationships he remained well within the confines of his own culture. His friends were other Jewish immigrants; his wife, Rose Eger, was the product of a similar background. Throughout his lifetime his relations with Christian business associates were kept on a cordial but formal plane. A practicing Jew, Jackson has always maintained an observance of Sabbath and holiday ritual. He has taken pride in his fluency in Yiddish and Hebrew, and both enjoys and supports the cultural offerings of his people. Jackson's situation reinforces Gordon's argument that assimilation may remain

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<sup>5</sup> Harry Jackson, "History of My Life," 222.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 215, 216.

on the superficial or cultural level, and need not progress to the point at which members of the minority group lose their distinct identity. Gordon generalizes: "Cultural assimilation . . . of the minority group may take place even when none of the other types of assimilation occurs simultaneously or later, and this condition of 'acculturation only' may continue indefinitely."<sup>7</sup>

The themes expressed in Harry Jackson's memoirs were characteristic of immigrant literature as a whole. Disillusion was the keynote. In *By Myself, I'm a Book!* new arrivals to Pittsburgh expressed typical surprise and disappointment:

I felt strange. Even my brother was a stranger.

It was very dirty here, not nearly as nice as Bucharest.

We said, "what did we do to come here?"<sup>8</sup>

Also enlightening are Jackson's observations about the change in his brother Labul when the two were reunited in Labul's new home in Munhall, Pennsylvania. When Labul had left Karanitz four and a half years before, he had been "a boy in the early 20's the picture of health." Through the years of absence he had written eloquently of the good life in America and had sent home money each month as evidence of his well-being. On October 8, 1913, Harry met a different Labul, "someone that looks like Labul, very meager with fallen in cheeks." The newcomer wondered, "Gee! Labul! what happened to you? What became of your youthful youth . . . You look to me as like you had 'Yom Kipur,' for weeks and months and you look to me half of the size you used to be."<sup>9</sup>

For Jackson the reality of America was symbolized by the deteriorated condition of his brother. This optimistic mood vanished: "By seeing him as I did now on October 8, 1913, made me feel very down-hearted and I sort of felt a cooling off in my enthusiasm in my past dreams of this golden country." His faith in his goal was shaken to the core: "And for this what I see now we had to travel thousands of miles and belittle ourselves . . . and do the type of work that the very lowest of the low used to do?"<sup>10</sup>

That his brother recognized his own degeneration was apparent in his warning Harry away from factory work to a more promising

<sup>7</sup> Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York, 1964), 77, 79, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Pittsburgh Section, National Council of Jewish Women, under the direction of Ailon Shiloh, *By Myself, I'm a Book!* (Waltham, Mass., 1972), 36, 47.

<sup>9</sup> Jackson, "History," 207, 208.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 209, 211.

profession: "So therefore, Hillel . . . you must become a businessman and in time pull me out of this *Katorgy* [slavery]." To the younger brother the truth of these words was evident: "As I saw Labul now, I knew that he was right because I saw what the factory made him to be."<sup>11</sup>

Rejecting the working man's destiny, Jackson embarked on the opportunity for a better life, a career in business. After the abortive attempt at peddling described earlier, Jackson turned for a short while to teaching. For two years he tutored Hebrew to the daughters of a Jewish merchant in the mining town of Treveskyn, near Bridgeville. As a sideline he assisted in the family store and gained more fluency in English, as well as acquiring an aptitude for business. The next three years, his last as an employee, were spent at Fiman's Department Store in Woodlawn, now Aliquippa. Jackson established himself in business first as proprietor of Kaufmann's five and ten in Woodlawn, then as owner of a general store in Rosston, and later of another five and ten in Ford City. Finally, in 1925 he found his niche in the shoe business by opening in Woodlawn "Jackson's Shoe Store," which is still in existence today.

Success in business finally made it possible for Jackson to fulfill the dream of his immigration. During fifty years in the shoe business Jackson accumulated as many as eleven shoe stores at one time. His profits enabled him to live comfortably — to own nice homes, to educate his children well, to travel abroad several times. In the town of Aliquippa, where Jackson has spent most of his lifetime, he is now regarded with respect as one of its prominent citizens.

The following excerpt from Harry Jackson's memoirs gives testimony to both the achievement and the ordeal of the immigrant experience.

#### HISTORY OF MY LIFE

After being parted with my brother, Labul, for 4½ years I couldn't make up my mind that this was really him.

I kept on gazing at him and kept on asking myself inwardly is this really him?

Labul, left us in 1909 right after "Passover." He was a boy in the early 20's the picture of health. He had a round healthy face, with a pair of burning black eyes. A head with real thick curly hair, a young

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

boy full of life, regular fire, and now I met someone that looks like Labul, very meager with fallen in cheeks. His deeply set in [eyes] under heavy eyebrows and astoundedly completely baldheaded.

In the very first minute that we met I even doubted that this was him.

I was laying stretched out on his bed and kept on eyeing him.

Labul sat on the edge of the bed near me and he kept on combing my head crawling in with his fingers time and time again as if he was searching his own hair that he lost.

I understood very well that Labul sees his lost hair on my head and he is probably longing for them, by now he was just repeating and repeating to me Gee! Hillel! did you grow up. Gee! how big you got, I almost didn't know you.

I had a desire to speak up to say something to him. I wanted to say Gee! Labul! what happened to you? What became of your youthful youth. I wanted to say to him, Gee! God Almighty, what happened to your red rosy cheeks and your beautiful curly jet black hair. I wanted to say Labul! you look to me like you didn't eat for 6 months. You look to me as like you had "Yom Kipur," for weeks and months and you look to me half of the size you used to be. I wanted to speak up and I couldn't. My mouth was shut tight and I couldn't say what I wanted to, and how could I have said anything because if I did it would mean a feeling of resignation because that would mean that I would have to talk to him that we should better begin making plans to go back home to our birthplace to that little village, Rudney, and instinctively I knew that this would be wrong.

These were not the plans that I was dreaming about. Certainly, what I had in mind was to formulate with him a future for all of us a future to bring our entire family here to America and that we should all be together.

By seeing him as I did now on October 8, 1913, made me feel very down-hearted and I sort of felt a cooling off in my enthusiasm in my past dreams of this golden country.

Moreso, did I get cooled off in my fantasy that I had dreamed like when I was in the old country, about this amazing rich opportunity which I could not see now when I was already here and specially so when within an hour or so my brother, Labul, begin putting on his work clothes, ready to go to his work, even though he was a couple hours late because he was supposed to meet me.

I didn't say anything, I only watched him.

I watched him pull on a dirty pair of overalls and a torn heavy looking jacket, and then he picked up from somewhere a funny looking cap and I watched him putting a couple pieces of bread with something in between them which, of course, was a sandwich and one single apple. Then he wrapped it up in a newspaper. This meant food for him for the next 10 or 12 hours, that he was going to be at his job.

He made a very bad impression on me and I was really depressed and I even felt much worse when Labul returned from his work at about 6 o'clock in the evening. His face was all smeared, his overalls were even dirtier and my God what his shoes looked like.

I held back my impression, I didn't say nothing but once upon a time many years ago I went to Berezin with Tata [father], and I saw a man in Berezin walking on the street carrying a ladder with a broom and he looked so smeared up black that I actually got so scared that I grabbed Tata by his coattail and hollered loudly Tata! who is this? to which Tata tried to explain to me that this man is a professional chimney cleaner and this is the way he earns a living. Of course, I couldn't help and laugh at what I saw for which Tata certainly corrected me that it is not nice and now when I saw Labul coming home from the shop where he was working, the picture of that chimney cleaner in Berezin flushed in the front of me.

For the living of me I couldn't imagine that this is my brother, Labul. How could he have gotten used to this kind of a life I inwardly asked myself. How come? Where is all the intelligentsia that we were considered in our little village of Karanitz and Rudney in Russia?

And for this what I see now we had to travel thousands of miles and belittle ourselves, to besmear ourselves and do the type of work that the very lowest of the low used to do? like our peasants [hired workers], the woodsmen, Esiph and Demetri?

For all this type of performance did we have to spend years in our seminaries sitting on hard benches and studying the Talmud?

For all that I saw now in front of me, with my brother Labul being an ordinary laborer, we were being chased into the Hebrew schools and we were not allowed to do any kind of manual work? And for this that I discovered now Tata had to bring speech teachers from the little town of Berezin even though it was way above his means?

Thousands and thousands of questions like this puzzled me. I had no way of solving them and they remained unanswered.

I wanted to bring all this into the open. I wanted to have a discussion with my brother Labul, and I had an awful lot to ask.

I wanted to know why he used to write us such beautiful letters with so much humor in them. Humor that took us all apart, and no matter how many times we repeated reading them, we held our sides from laughter. I wanted to ask my brother Labul how could he have written such masterpieces of letters that Tata would carry them in his pocket at all times.

We would receive letters from America that Labul wrote. Even though Tata was mostly of a serious type and hated bragging, he would nevertheless take these types of letters and go to the little town of Berezin. There in Mandul the Shokett's house, he would read Labul's antics; in front of many others that were anxious to hear this beauty that would pour out from New York, U. S. A.

In the four years that my brother Labul was away, his name became famous in the little town of Berezin. It was talked about in the synagogues and on the streets and wherever there was any kind of gathering of people they could not help discussing the letters that Labul, the son of Moshie from Karanitz, wrote from America.

Many times I overheard Tata remarking, "I never knew that Labul possessed a talent for writing."

Now as I was here with him and faced the reality of life itself, I wanted to ask a lot of questions. I wanted to ask, "Labul, why did you write such letters to us? With your letters you made us believe that you lived like a poritz without any kind of worry. You made us believe that you are bathing yourself in luxury; bedecked with gold and silver; not a worry in the world. Labul, how could you have written such beautiful letters and yet suffered terrible headaches as you do now?" (When I came to America, Labul was troubled with pain under his chest and awful headaches.)

How can one write such jolly letters and yet go through hell working so hard for \$12.00 pay every two weeks in exchange for 120 hours of sweat? All that Labul was able to save from this kind of job was a bad stomach and bad migraine headaches and have the color on his face of a Chinaman. I wanted to ask him so many questions but there was one question that bothered me immensely that I wanted to ask him. I wanted to say to him, "Labul, how did you manage to send 20 rubles to us every month? How could you when you don't have a penny saved for a rainy day? How could you make us believe that you were so wealthy? How did you manage to do this?"

Many, many questions I wanted to ask Labul, but I didn't ask. Inside of me I was full of questions that didn't let me have peace of

mind and bothered me an awful lot.

As a few days passed by and I began getting acquainted to the environment, I soon found out that Labul was really a sick man. He needed two operations at one time. One, there was something wrong with his nose. The doctors told him that he may be getting his headaches from it. Second, he was told that he needed an appendectomy performed. Labul kept on postponing it for a time when he would have saved enough money and would be able to go to the hospital.

The very first couple of weeks that I spent with my brother Labul at 510 8th avenue, Munhall, Pennsylvania, I did nothing but kept on looking over the neighborhood and began to think about something to do. But Labul would not let me go to work nor look for a job. Every time I brought up the subject to him, he had one answer, "Don't hurry, have a good time, but do enroll in a night school and learn English."

Labul took me over to a tailor on 8th Avenue, and ordered a suit for me with full pack trousers, as the style was in those days. Then he took me to downtown Pittsburgh and purchased a pair of shoes for me with bulldog toes which buttoned all the way above my ankles, as the style was in those days. While we were there, he got me some shirts, neck ties, a new hat, and many other items that go with a man's outfit. After we returned from that buying trip, he took me to Charlie, the barber, on Dixon Street and there for the first time, I found out that in America they shaved you lying down stretched out on a collapsible chair. I felt awkward because I wasn't used to such luxury, but I asked no questions because, if I did, I would have shown how green I was. So, the less I talked and the less I asked, the less chance everyone had to find out how long I was in the country.

I was a bit lost in this entire procedure of hiding my identity as to whom I really was. I kept on asking myself, What is wrong in being a fresh newcomer from the old country? What is wrong in disclosing to people and showing that I do not understand a word of English? I sort of resented this entire idea of being called a greenhorn and being ashamed to open my mouth to express whatever opinion I had formed about anything, right or wrong. But I was very much a minority and had to give ground to all those around me with a thought that surely they must know all the answers to these problems.

I did find out later that they all were wrong because how could one learn and know things if one was muzzled? This later date that I am mentioning is when I began to mingle on my own.

In these few weeks that I was doing nothing, I did accomplish this much. I met people, made acquaintances, and automatically from these meetings, I began to become Americanized.

The very first ones that came to meet me and get acquainted was Dave Sobelman and his sister, the Klappers a brother and a sister whose name was Matilda. Matilda was Belle and Blanches girlfriend. There were also a couple more girls and boys, but I lost track of them and can't remember their names. Belle and Blanche, who were twins, and their cousin Becky Magazanik, Matilda and Able Klapper, Dave Sobelman, and of course my brother Labul, they sort of formed a little group of their own. They were considered the intelligent group of Munhall, Pennsylvania in those days.

Very soon the group had a meeting, and of course I was there at that time with them, and at that meeting they took care of the beginning of my Americanism. First and foremost, without asking me if I agreed or not, they changed my name from Hillel to Harry. How in the name of God did they decide that Harry is a nicer name than Hillel? Maybe they went into the Carnegie Library and dug into one of the encyclopedias, or maybe they consulted one of the spiritual leaders of those days. I don't think they did this. I do believe that this name changing was decided in Belle, Blanche, and Becky's bedroom at the Averbachs home; that Harry is a much prettier name than Hillel. And Presto! A new human being was born with a new name and the previous 20 years of this man by the name of Hillel was wiped off the face of the earth. Down with Hillel or Hilkey, or in reality Hillel Tsvee which were my rightly two names. And of course an end to Yachnowitz. Short and snappy was the transition from Hillel Tsvee Yachnowitz to Harry Jackson.

Inside of me in my hidden me I did not like this entire idea. It looked to me as if I had died, but of course not for real, because I momentarily came back to life; that is I have resurrected. The name Harry by itself was hard and strange to me, and I did not like him very much. I felt that this here fellow Harry is sort of a stranger to me; one that invaded my private life without getting my heart and my head to agree to him, and I really tried to revolt against it. Imagine me named after one of the greatest Rabbis that ever lived. One that was known for kindness and leniency. One that I met in my studies in the Gomorrah and Talmud. That Rabbi Hillel that every Passover at Sader we recited what he said. Thus said Rabbi Hillel, thus did Rabbi Hillel. Hillel was an institution, and world with millions of followers,

and I humbly say, I was his namesake. It gave me a certain pride to be named after such a noble character, and all of a sudden, I am not Hillel ; just Harry. Who was Harry? To me he was a nobody. To me he is a nobody now 50 years later.

I was worried, I was really unhappy ; but again I was one and they were all. I hated the idea of losing my identity ; I mean my last name Yachnowitz, because it meant to me that I was betraying my Father. It meant that I was hiding myself or running away from somebody or something because why would I adopt a new name?

I was therefore very unhappy. There for a short time I tried to call myself Yanin, and a little later, when I joined the Franklin night school on Logan Street in Pittsburgh, I registered myself as Yachnin. It was with the intention and the thought in my mind to be a little bit closer to Yachnowitz and again I found opposition and the problem that very few people were able to pronounce my name, even though I tried to shorten it. The problem all came from the fact that in the English alphabet there wasn't the sound that helped pronounce my original name, that is Yachnowitz.

At Labul's home, that is in the little group that he found himself, I was called by the name of Harry Jackson and that is that. I wasn't asked. It was just accepted for a definite fact that since I was Labul's brother, and since Labul's second name is Jackson, then it is a written historic happening that I am also to be called with the same name. So, really there was no question about my second name. The only thing that came up for a bit of discussion was my first name, and to this the girls, with Becky Magazanik included, took care of it.

It is possible that if I would have protested real strong, maybe I would have been heard although I doubt if it would have helped me. But truly I was a bit shy and was kind of reluctant to have my voice heard. So, it looked as though I did not care much, but of course this was only outwardly. Inwardly I was very much opposed to what was happening to me, and I did not have much of an opinion of this group that was deciding my destiny. I did not care much about my new name, but I did not care much about the entire approach that I was talked into ; namely that this is the style of the American life.

After I got myself settled down, a bit rested, and ready to go, I began asking Labul to take me with him to the place where he was working. I wanted to get a job, so I would be able to earn money because I thought that that would be the easiest place to be placed since my brother Labul was in the capacity of a small size foreman.

Labul refused to listen to my suggestion. He kept on emphasizing to me that once I would get started in factories, I would remain in the laboring class for the rest of my life. He would quote from the saying of the Fathers, "In the factories you will be buried forever."

Labul began influencing me to break through into the world of business. He would say, "This is a capitalistic world." In this country business is the key to be successful. "So therefore, Hillel," he would say, "you must become a businessman and in time pull me out of this *Katorgy* [slavery]."

As I saw Labul now, I knew that he was right because I saw what the factory made him to be.

This was 1913, with 12 hours a day of labor, and only a half an hour for lunch, and with the poorest pay possible, something like \$4.00 a week to start with or even less. At the time that I am describing this, Labul was earning the big sum of \$7.00 to \$8.00 a week. That is because he was already considered a foreman. So, I really knew that Labul was right. Yet I hated to be idle because I was young and strong and very ambitious. Therefore I wanted to start doing something. So after a few days of deliberating with Labul, who influenced me to become a businessman, I decided to go out peddling for myself.

My brother Labul introduced me to Charlie Glick. Charlie began teaching me the art of the business world. Charlie started to teach me the A B C's right from the beginning. Charlie took me to the city hall in Munhall, Pennsylvania, and showed me where to purchase a license that would give me the privilege to peddle. Thereafter he showed me where to get credit because really I had no money.

I started on my venture on the first week of November in 1913. It was a very cloudy morning with a thick fog, mixed with a bit of Homestead smoke from the Carnegie works. I tiptoed from Mr. Averbach's store on 8th Avenue with a bundle of brooms on my shoulder. I used the word tiptoed because I was ashamed of carrying brooms because, besides the fact that they pressed on my shoulders and I kept on changing from one shoulder to another, I was also very much depressed with the idea of being a broom peddler.

Back in the old country in the nearest little town of *Berezin*, this would have been positively impossible. I could not show myself on the street with a bundle of brooms in that little progressive community, where everyone knew Moshie from *Karanitz*, who was my Father. It would have been a disgrace to my Mother whose roots had their beginning in *Berezin*, where her Father was the head of the seminary

holding the title of a Rabbi, who was titled *Rosh-Hysheevo*. This would have been impossible because the people were used to finding us boys from the village sitting in the house of learning studying the *Gomorrhah*, or finding any or all of us somewhere amongst groups discussing the works of Tolstoi, Andreav, Dostoevski, Shakespeare, Sholem Aleichem, and Paratz, and many notable others of those days. We, the boys from *Karanitz* and *Rudney*, were even represented fairly well in the movements of the early 20th century; like belonging to the revolutionary groups, who were planning the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty or in the very new movements of Zionism. But certainly not in this ridiculous condition that I have found myself, "Peddling with brooms."

Perhaps somewhere at a conspirative place we would participate at a meeting in a hot debate about the future revolution in Russia, about the freedom of the entire world; but goodness with a bundle of brooms on my shoulders. Or at a Zionist get together in the synagogue Theodor Herzl, Paulestein, and the entire Jewish question but brooms phooey! Why this is even worse than to taste *Hazir* [pork] or riding on a very old *Klutshie* [mare], who can hardly drag her legs on the finest street in the beloved little town *Berezin* in the street of all the streets where my people were so well known.

I got off of 8th Avenue, Munhall, Pennsylvania, and I walked uphill towards the little park. Instinctively I did not want to be seen by someone that already knew me. The towns of Munhall and Homestead, Pennsylvania, are so united that if it wasn't for the markers on the street no one would know the starting points of Munhall or Homestead. These two communities started up near the Monongahela River with steel factories flourishing right along the banks, the railroads, and right nearby the railroad, 8th Avenue. On 8th Avenue the streets and businesses were filled most of the time with shoppers and visitors. On the other side of 8th Avenue the leveling stops. From there on everything becomes uphill. This uphill is a good mile, where the residential settlement of the millworkers as well as the businessmen can be found. On this uphill that I was climbing the bundle of brooms that I was carrying seemed to be getting heavier and heavier; because of the feeling that I had for them. My head was full of sceneries, or I could almost say realities. Someone kept on pointing to me. If my Tata would see me with the brooms on my shoulder.

I tried real hard to right myself. I am in America, am I not? Here it is surely a different life than I left in the old country. I took

Labul as an example. Labul works harder here than Eleazer the blacksmith in our little town *Lishkovitz*. Again this someone that attached himself in the back of my mind argued with me. Yes, Labul does get himself smeared up; his face, his hands, and he looks like Eleazer the blacksmith, but at least he is hidden away from the vision of the people; no one sees him. When he comes home from his work, he cleans himself, he puts on his *Shabos* [Sabbath] clothes, and no one knows what is happening to him. But me! Wow! The whole world watches me as I am carrying these brooms on my shoulders. Everyone is pointing at me with his fingers. Really all I needed is for someone that knows Tata well to write to him and tell him what I am doing here. Or who knows maybe this someone will take a trip back to Russia in that little town *Berezin* on the market place where all the businesses were surrounding it. There right in the midst of this, someone is standing with a large crowd of friends and is telling them about the wonders of America. My Tata happens to be in the little town *Berezin*. At this moment, after he is told that someone returned from America, he walks right up to that crowded place and inquires about what is going on. As if by magic, everyone steps aside when they recognize that this is Reb Moshie from *Karanitz*. Tata shakes hands with this someone and without any preliminaries, he asks him, "Noo! Can you tell me what my Hillel is doing there?" For a moment this someone holds back, afraid of hurting Tata's feeling. Then all of a sudden, "Your Hillel? Reb Moshie, you could not believe it. I am really ashamed to tell you that, but knowing you as I do, I must tell you the truth. Your Hillel walks around from house to house and knocks at every door and begs of the occupants of those homes to buy a broom."

Tata gets red in the face. His eyes are gazing at the ground. Without a word he walks away. In his ears ring the laughter and the uncomplimentary remarks. Maybe they just could not believe such a thing and could not hold back from laughing.

My heart was very heavy. I am filled with self pity, but I am more worried about my Tata.

I continue walking up, almost to the top of the hill, in back of Munhall. I am almost nearing Homestead Park. I continue my business of carrying the brooms; I know I must become a businessman. I am calculating. "I suppose this hard road must be the road to success and happiness."

My bundle of brooms were pressing hard on my shoulders; they

are also pressing my heart, and choking my soul.

This whole thing is very hard on me. I stop for awhile, take off the bundle of brooms ; just to take a little bit of rest.

Tonight when I go home and see Labul, I will certainly have to show him some progress.

This great hope and confidence that Labul is putting in me is giving me courage. I remember his warning to me. "Hillel, you must pull me out of this *Katorgy*."

This sentence of Labul's didn't let go of me. It continuously repeats and repeats to me. "You must become a businessman. The road is hard but this is the only road that will lead you and me to a better life."

I knock on a door. I am scared! Funny I wasn't scared to cross thousands of miles, to cross a border, to be caught and dragged back. I tried again and succeeded. Here I am standing in front of a door. My heart beats boom, boom! I am almost thrown into a panic.

Before I had a chance to say the few words that I was taught, which were, please buy a broom, the door was shut right in my face. I stand there with my brooms and I really feel forlorn.

My heart gets even heavier. I am carrying this forsaken bundle of brooms and I am trying to get away from people. I am crossing an empty field. I left most of the homes and I find myself near a very old tree. I set my bundle down and I lean against the tree. As I looked around I saw that I was in the country, with the usual decoration of green fields and beautiful orchards. Even though it is late in the fall, and the vegetables and fruits have already been taken off, I can still see beauty in the scenery. All of a sudden the beauty of the scenery made me feel much better.

As I kept on looking, I came across many things that were similar to the little settlements in my own corner of the world. The only differences were that the little forest and the big lake with the bridge thrown across near the mill weren't here.

This new scenery that I just witnessed gave me ambition. Before long I was knocking on little houses once again. This time I came across a friendly Slavish woman. I was very surprised that she not only asked me to go inside the house, but she also began talking to me in such a language that I could understand her. And wonder upon wonder she understood my Russian as well.

Before long I felt very much at home in her kitchen. I witnessed a transformation that in such a short time, actually in minutes, I al-

ready felt different. My feeling of depressment left me, and I really made my first sale to this noble peasant woman.

Encouraged I grabbed my bundle and I began doing business. One by one the brooms slide off my shoulders, and as the bundle got smaller, the weight got lighter, and I began feeling much better.

Encouraged I began doing business, and before long, I sold my last broom. The day almost came to an end, and since I had \$1.75 profit from this transaction, I let myself go in a happy mood to the Averbachs and to Labul.

That particular night, after my first venture in the new world as a businessman, my sleep left me. Wherever I laid on my back, on my sides; my shoulders would not let me forget the bundle of brooms. When I finally began feeling myself in the darkness of the night, I found that the top of my shoulders were swollen and at that time I compared the swelling to the loaves of bread that my Mother would bake for *Shabos*. We children used to call them *Bookies*. I had enough time to be awake and to think matters over. The first thing that came to my mind was that I wasn't made for this kind of hard work; that after all I was *A-yashevo-bokur* [a boy from the seminary].

Oh! I did not like the idea of quitting. For a fact in later years I kept to the line of not backing down from whatever I started, good or bad. So during that first night I accused myself of being a coward, of not being able to meet life when needed.

Sure it is hard to become a businessman, but then this is the way the road to success is in reality; and whoever backs down is a coward. Yes, a coward. This is the right word that I found to my depressed feeling that night. So without telling Labul about my painful shoulders, I got up real early, and I went down to the Munhall police station and I bought myself a license. I went back to Charlie Glick and again I had my bundle ready for business.

This time I did not stop anywhere near the town. This time I kept on walking further away into the mountains because I already experienced the cool reception that the city people gave me. I very soon found out that where the houses are scattered further apart from one another the people that lived in them were very friendly. If they did not buy a broom, they did not shut the door in my face either. Instead they spoke to me and made me feel at home. I naturally found out that there were a lot of Russians, Hungarians, Germans, and Czecho-Slovaks, living in those hills; so before long I began to understand that this type of people were just as anxious to meet someone

they could talk to because they too did not understand English very well. Most of them were newcomers into this country and they also were going through the process of getting themselves Americanized. The little village that I finally landed in is called Whitaker. Of course I did not know and did not care to know names because I thought that Munhall stretched itself miles away into the hills. Of course I was wrong.

My shoulders would not let me forget that they were hurting. I got to such a point that I could not carry my bundle of brooms. So instead I carried them in my hands, changing from left to right and right to left. But it did not work because my bundle became bigger and heavier. That is the way that I felt inwardly, heavy.

This condition kept up with me on that second morning that I was out to become a businessman.

I kept on losing courage. To make things worse, the guy that was from *Karanitz* and called himself intelligent would not give me any peace of mind either. I put up a real fight. I became quarrelsome. "Why did you bring me here? Dragged me 3,000 miles to smear me in the mouth? Why did I have to go with you to Hader? [Hebrew school] in the seminary? Why did I let you take free Russian lessons and go hungry most of the time? and sleep on hard benches in the house of learning? What did you bring me here for? To make a cheap peddler of me? With brooms, with swollen shoulders, and with a broken spirit. To what will all these things lead?"

This is the way that the intellectual in me kept up at me. For a fact it got so strong, so abusive, he ran ahead of me and would not let me knock on the doors. He would not let me get friendly with the customers. Of course I could sell my brooms.

I was thrown between two strong feelings. From one side there was Labul urging me to become a businessman, in America and to pull him out of the Siberian katorgy. And from the other side my intelligent partner with a big squawk that I wasn't made for that; that this was a job for a blacksmith, for a shoemaker, for a cabdriver, and whatnot.

I lost my oomph and I got very tired. At the days end, or rather in the early afternoon, the intelligent in me triumphed because he made me quit. With a bit of shame in myself I asked Charlie Glick to take the brooms back to his warehouse. This was the end of my very first venture to become a businessman in the new land.