



David Kaplan : Russian Jew

By Walter E. Weyl

With Drawings by Wladyslaw T. Benda

PROVIDED the poor among them do not become a burden to the community, but shall be supported by their own nation." Such was the proviso of the Dutch West India Company when, on April 20, 1655, it granted permission to the Jews to settle in New Amsterdam.

Had old Peter Stuyvesant, who was no friend to the Jews, fallen asleep and awakened, like another Rip Van Winkle, after a nap of ten generations, he would have found the Jews still coming, and he would have seen that the condition of the grant was still maintained. Though the first hundreds of Jews became thousands, then tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands, until at last there are almost two millions of them in America, still no Jew was ever buried in Potter's Field; still, even to-day, the poor among them are not a burden to the community, but are supported by their own nation. From the first the Jew has gained and main-

tained his foothold. Since the beginning the Jew has paid his way.

In the tranquil, long-ago days when the first Jews came to America it was easier to gain a foothold. The Spanish and Portuguese Jews from Portugal, Holland, Brazil, and Dutch South America—those men of one race but all nations—easily found a place in the free, expanding business, public, and cultural life of the Colonies. The Jews played their part in Colonial history, in the Revolutionary War, in the upbuilding of the thirteen States which formed a new Nation.

Then, early in the nineteenth century, came the strong, steady stream of German Jews, escaping from the narrow life of backward villages and the sullen reaction of petty, stupid despots. After the unsuccessful German Revolution of 1848 this immigration swelled to a mighty west-bound current. Still, compared to America's widening commerce, the quarter of a million of Spanish and German

Jews seemed but a handful, and by 1881 they had been easily absorbed in America's industrial life. In commerce, manufacturing, politics, science, and the professions the Jew had made his way.

The newer Jewish immigrants from Russia, Rumania, Galicia, and Hungary face a harder problem. There are more of them; in a single year more Jewish immigrants arrive than there were Jews in all America at the outbreak of the Civil War. The immigrant's progress is now harder. We are no longer at the stage of small enterprises, where the peddler's pack may contain the future department store. The transition from the bottom to the top is not so easy. There are more people at the bottom, and fewer, though more dazzling, places at the top. The newer immigrant, be he Jew or Gentile, may well be satisfied with gaining even a foothold.

The Jewish immigrant of to-day is far more heavily handicapped than was his predecessor. He arrives penniless, untrained in modern industry, with nothing but energy and a high resolve to succeed. The very persecution from which he has fled from Russia and Rumania accompanies him to America as an added obstacle. This Jew from Eastern Europe has suffered longer than have his coreligionists from the laming effects of the Dispersion of eighteen hundred years ago. From one land after another he has been expelled. The Crusades drove him from Germany to Poland, where, as his numbers increased and his industrial opportunities narrowed, his lot grew steadily worse. Then, a century and a half ago, Poland ceased to exist, and the Polish Jews came under the Russian boot. Occasionally there was an alleviation of the universal, increasing cruelty, but steadily the heel of Russia crushed and deformed when it did not utterly destroy. The vast Russian Empire was big enough for all, but Russia was not free to the despised and disinherited Jew. In his narrow pale, shut off from the land, excluded from the trades and professions, debarred from the schools and universities, burdened with excessive taxes and crippling exactions, destroyed by his own fecundity, the Jew became increasingly abject and miserable.

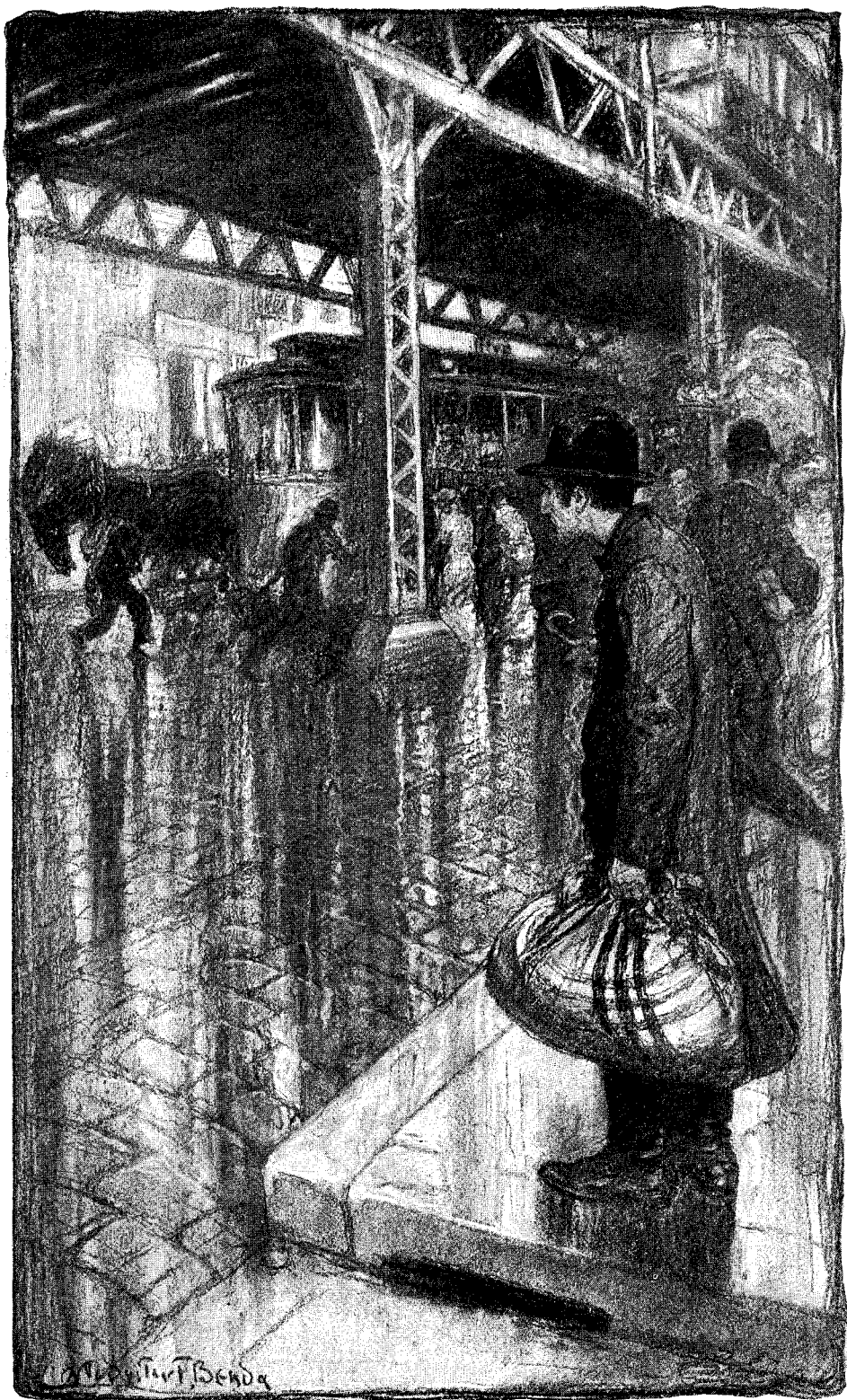
For a generation the stream of immigration has flowed from the crowded ghettos of Russia to the larger and even more crowded ghettos of America. A million and a quarter have already come; from a hundred to a hundred and fifty thousand come yearly. To the driving force of hunger the Russian Government adds the terror of persecution. The bureaucracy incites, or at least permits, brutal riots against the Jews. Men are killed, women outraged, children orphaned, and when the spring comes the immigrant ships bound for America are loaded down with thousands of stricken, fleeing emigrants.

We must remember this past of the Jewish immigrant to America if we are rightly to estimate his present. Other persecuted sects, the Puritans, the Quakers, the Huguenots, the Catholics of Maryland, came to America under a similar barbarous pressure, and these peoples in the wilds of the new land cleared for themselves a place in which to grow up and live. Still, the emigration of men who would not ordinarily emigrate, but are forced to this step by cruelty and repression, brings to the country thousands without preparation, without expectation, without money.

There was not a dollar in the deep pockets of young David Kaplan when, in December, 1894, he landed at the pier in New York. From him were no pickings for the importunate runners and truckmen, and David, with the immunity of penury, marched through their ranks. Then, by use of his few English words, he made his way to the Ghetto of the lower East Side.

It was a curious world into which the immigrant from the dull South Russian village had come. The young man closed his black eyes to shut out the sight of the dizzy, maddening rush; he put his thumbs into his ears to avert the crash of the thundering, deafening elevated railway. It all seemed titanic, grandiose, a bewildering hive of inexplicable beings, a thing different from anything ever before seen or imagined.

Yet within an hour the great panorama had dissolved into separate little pictures, and the wonderful new began to merge into a familiar old. The tremulous ex-



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altation of the first moments declined to a moderated interest in this new-old world, which was so American and transcendental and still so Jewish. Wheresoever he looked, David perceived that he was in a land of Jews, in a new Jerusalem greater by far than the Jerusalem which a King of his name had ruled. The immigrant, transfixed at the corner of two turbulent streets, let his eyes wander to the high, frowning tenements, the snow-littered fire-escapes, the blue and brown and red and pink and green and white of the drying clothes strung out upon meshes of clothes-line across the numerous courts and quadrangles. The whole face of the street was made up of little shops, each flaunting its Hebrew-lettered sign. In front of the London Gents' Furnishing Shop David loitered, listening to scraps of his familiar Yiddish. A dark-eyed, black-bearded man of sixty, with small curls escaping from an enormous hat, with shiny ragged overcoat and low yellow shoes, spoke in a dialect of the Kieff Ghetto with a gray-shawled, bewigged, somnolent old woman. Then they both haggled over the price of an over-starched shirt with the push-cart man, who munched an apple as he talked and looked at his customers with the eagerness of a sly, greedy monkey. The synagogue at the corner emitted a file of black-clad men, some with the high-cheeked Tartar face, others broad-browed, long-nosed, with that pervasive gravity of the Jew that seems to record a millennium of persecution. Of a sudden, a crowd of laughing, red-cheeked Jewish children came rushing from the neighboring street. How new and bewilderingly strange it was, and yet how superlatively familiar!

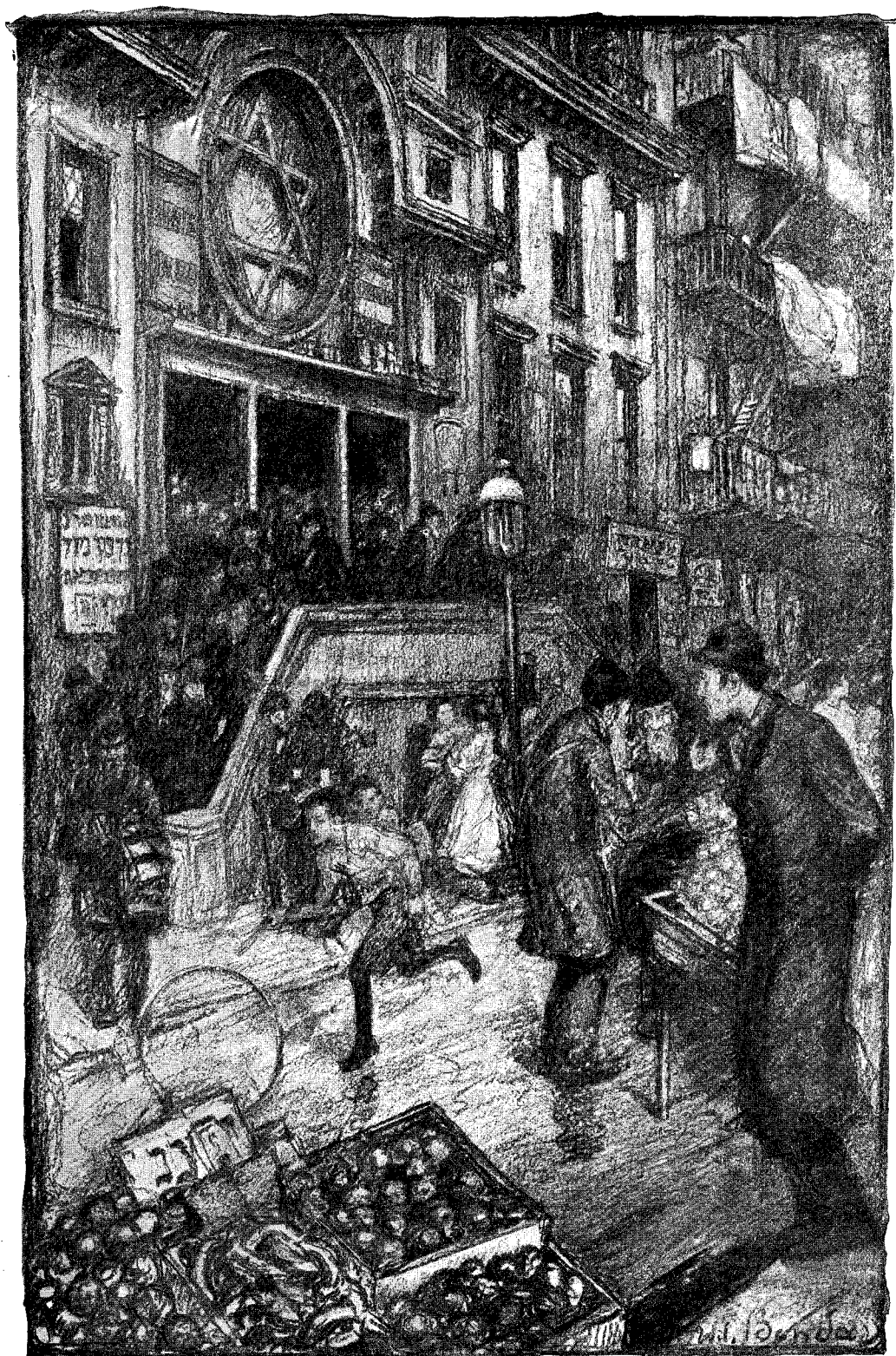
A month after David's arrival he was sleeping in stables. It had been a hard month, not alone for the immigrant, but for all the teeming millions of New York and America. The first word heard in New York—the fateful word panic—still rang in David's ears; the depression still lay heavy upon the country. The Lord had averted his face, and the whole land had slumped in a hopeless sense of impotence.

That first month in America had been for David thirty ages of progressive disillusionment. It seemed to him that the land of

promise had been blighted by a curse; that his own history and the history of his people were to end in this hopeless, ruthless struggle for bread. He heard vaguely of riots and bloody clashes, of failing doles to the poor, of women starving in cold tenements and men terminating their despair at a rope's end. From every one he asked in his budding English for a job, any job, anything to buy a loaf of bread from the tenement baker. He began to fear this relentless land, where the voice of kindness was drowned in the roar of rasping machines and the outraged shrieks of hungry men. He feared the sullen line of famished men waiting at the factory door; he feared the police, who drove him from his sleeping-places; he feared even more a sudden, surly something in himself that might lead him he knew not whither. He was a hunted, famished beast in an alien jungle.

Then his chance came. It was a small job—to watch the books of a cellar book-dealer. Still, it was enough to keep body and soul together; and with food in your stomach and a coat on your back, a great new world is a very absorbing pantomime to a very young man. The bookseller, a stooping, bespectacled intellectual, had an attenuated business, enough only to support himself until his consumption should kill him. He was a Socialist—as who is not who deals in books in an ill-lighted cellar?—and he had much to tell of the evil of to-day and the good of to-morrow. David gasped as he heard the man's doctrines, and his naïve ignorance crumbled before the careless blows of this formidable disputant. Still, though David became a quasi-Socialist through mere intellectual pressure, he was only half convinced by arguments that he could not answer. As the bookseller tersely epitomized it, "You will never be a Socialist, Kaplan. You have not the brains."

David hadn't. Even later, when he had gained his foothold and learned something of Western knowledge, he did not have the acumen or the preternatural quickness of those who spend tumultuous evenings in the intellectual lists of the East Side cafés. Still, he gained something. There was born in him a vague, undefined longing for a something better—better for the Children of Israel,



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better for the Children of Men. At night, in his small, dark room, he pondered dully on the cloud that hung over America, and in the end he worked out a plan. He enrolled himself in a night school.

All Jews go to the night school; all Jews spend the last remnants of the day's strength in learning and learning. At least it seemed so to David. The Jews whom he met in the book-store, on the street, in his tenement home, in the ice-cream parlor, in the synagogue which he perfunctorily visited, in the social club of which he was an unhonored member, even the casual acquaintances picked up on a Coney Island boat, one and all, sweat-shop hand, cigar-roller, baker, butcher, bricklayer, clerk, peddler, and errand-boy, without exception, all had gone, were going, or were about to go to the night school. The great white building, about which even the Yiddish newspapers wrote, seemed to David the repository of an inexhaustible knowledge without money and without price. The curse on America seemed to lift; America at least was the land of the night school.

At seven-thirty the next evening David was seated at a small boy's desk in a crowded class. On his right hand was a dull-eyed graybeard with horn spectacles at the end of a long nose, whose stiff old fingers were now writing English letters, though a month ago he had known no word of that tongue. On David's left was an undersized, ferret-faced, old-looking boy of sixteen, who in three months had learned as much in his two-hour sessions at the night school as in his ten hours' daily work in the little East Side printing office. In front of David sat a dignified man with high, intellectual forehead, straight, sharp-cut nose, wide, frank eyes, and a well-trimmed beard, who, though two days before he had never beheld America, now followed the teacher with a painful, intent absorption. In all this crowded room of Jews, young and old, there was nothing to break the perfect unison of devout attention shown by all.

Within a quarter of an hour David was avidly absorbing a new knowledge, which included the duties of citizens and of city officials, a schedule of weights and measures and directions, an epitome of local

geography, and a series of proverbs of unimpeachable patriotism. The words which David had heard in the book-store acquired an esoteric significance when appearing in the round, current handwriting of the inspired young teacher. When at last the evening closed with the singing in chorus of "My country, 'tis of thee," the tears rose to David's eyes. Not one evening during all his two-year course did David miss his lesson, though what he then learned was as nothing compared to the wider knowledge which in after years his relative mastery of English enabled him to acquire.

On the day that David left the night school he embarked on a new venture. During his three years in America he had saved four hundred dollars, and no less than 1,095 times, or once for each day, had he asked himself the momentous question, "What shall I do with my money when I get it?" In the early days his ambitions had scaled no higher than the push-cart business, in which at least you were your own boss. As he watched the long files of peripatetic merchants he thought, "If I can but find something that is not yet sold!" But he soon discovered that on push-carts, those department stores on wheels, everything vendible created by the Almighty was for sale. Some push-carts sold only suspenders. "There are not shoulders enough in all America," thought David, "even though the women and babies were to wear trousers." Other push-carts sold shoes; others household furnishings, cups, plates, forks, spoons, nutmeg-graters. Others offered straw hats, and underwear, and socks, and shirts, and ties, and handkerchiefs, and sponges, and apples, and birthday cards, and prayer-books, and *mazuzahs*, and books, and plated jewelry, and slices of sweating pineapple, and, in fact, everything. There was nothing new under the sun; the push-cart possibilities of America were exhausted. Besides, so his potential competitors told him, the life of the push-cart man was unworthy and sub-human. The policeman grafted, the storekeeper charged you for the street he did not own, the rowdies swore at you and upset your cart, and the thieving children of all the world stole your wares and spat in your face. "Better a slave with



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a ball and chain than a peddler," thought David. "I will look higher."

No longer a "greener," but an "American" of three years' standing, no longer an unequivocal foreigner, but a man with his first papers, no longer ignorant and indigent, but equipped with English, a hundred-book library, and four hundred dollars in money, David possessed at last some range of choice. He need not close in with any offer, but might stand where he stood and wait for the knock of opportunity. He saw others who had first gained their foothold and later prospered. The great depression had passed, and as America breathed again the new hope which spread over the country from ocean to ocean found its prompt echo in the unwall'd ghettos. There was no blight upon the promised land; for Jew and Gentile there was opportunity to gain a foothold and live a life.

It was Julius Cæsar—not the ancient Roman whom the envious Casca slew, but Julius Caesar, a modern, ultra-modern Rumanian Jew—who finally rescued David from an embarrassment of business alternatives. From his boyhood Cæsar had roamed. The Zionist fever had carried the young Rumanian Jew to Jerusalem, but when he found that "to buy land in Palestine one must cover the ground with gold pieces" he left the promised land for the ancestral land of bondage. In Alexandria he prospered, married, and begot children, but here there was no learning or morality, and so with his family he journeyed to the lands of schools. One year his children ran the streets of Naples, the next year they hobnobbed with the youngsters of Marseilles and Paris, while Julius with his Rumanian and his Yiddish and his Arabic and his Italian and his French starved on

a succession of redundant trades. Then in the night a voice came to him, and on the morrow he sold a petty stock of Hebrew prayer-books, and with wife and three children shipped for America on a venture as desperate as that of the Genoese mariner.

The moment David saw Julius Cæsar he recognized in the Rumanian a born and foreordained restaurant-keeper. The very stout, very white, scrupulously bald little man, with his broad, flat nose and his twinkling gray eyes, seemed a human incarnation of a dinner-bell. You wanted to eat when you saw Julius Cæsar; you wanted to quote Omar Khayyám and reflect that, after all, to-morrow you must die. David staked his four hundred dollars against Cæsar's appearance and culinary antecedents, and soon the Divan, a subterranean restaurant owned by Julius Cæsar and David Kaplan, began an active bid for business among the denizens of the East Side.

From its beginning the business prospered. There were no frills about the Divan, no waiters with little white shirts and dress suits, no "electrics" or mirrors, but very good food, prepared by Mrs. Julius Cæsar herself. Everybody worked, and worked all the time. "You can't keep trade unless you hustle," was Cæsar's comment; "you can't run a restaurant on prayer." And thereby hung Cæsar's favorite story.

"When I was a 'greener' in America," he told David, "I opened a restaurant like this on Division Street. I did not succeed, and at the end of the year I was poorer than I was at the beginning of that year.

"Well, as you know, I am not religious, and I don't believe in all this praying business. So when one day a friend came to me and said, 'Cæsar, the Rumanians are going to build a synagogue, and we want you to buy a few tickets,' I laughed in his face. 'For why should I buy tickets?' I asked. 'Two tickets will cost me a dollar, and on a dollar we can live two days.'

"But when I got home I saw that my wife thought different. 'How much do the tickets cost?' she asked me. So I thought to myself, 'If my wife asks me how much the tickets cost, then perhaps

it is that she wants me to go.' So I answered, 'Fifty cents apiece.'

"'Julius,' she said, 'we have had a very bad year. Perhaps it will be wise for you to take a ticket and go to the synagogue this Day of Atonement.'

"That was ten years ago, and even to-day they speak of me as Julius Cæsar, the man who prayed so hard on the Day of Atonement. I bought my ticket and went to the synagogue, and for three days I prayed standing up all day with my face against the wall and my arms raised. The most pious man in the world was an atheist compared to me during those three days. I prayed and I prayed and I prayed, but that was the last. May God above have such a year as the year I had after that!"

From the moment that Cæsar formed his alliance with Kaplan he did not have to pray for success. Business came. Even poor people must eat, and you can make profit on a twenty-cent *table d'hôte* if you are a foreordained restaurateur. In a year there was a second "Divan," as inviting and as profitable as the first, and in a short time Cæsar and Kaplan, now respectively father- and son-in-law, were men of substance and standing, and the "Divan" was a recognized and widely imitated institution.

Thus it was that David Kaplan, by appealing to the patrons of the twenty-cent *table d'hôte*, won success. Other Jews have come to this country as poor and have become in even fewer years as rich. Peddlers have become merchants, bookkeepers have become manufacturers, and tenement dwellers tenement owners and "real-estateniks." Jews who a generation ago were without a month's insurance against hunger now own restaurants, cigar-stores, drug-stores, shops of all kinds, factories, tenements, and the land upon which New York crowds. Where the Russian Jew once paid rent to the native landlord, he now pays to the Russian Jew—and he pays more.

Not only through trade and ownership does the Jew succeed. The German Jew was a middleman, rising to affluence through his knowledge of the market; the Jew from Eastern Europe is perforce a workman. In few city trades is the Jew unrepresented. There are Jewish

carpenters, masons, painters, plasterers, plumbers, bakers, butchers, blacksmiths, machinists, coopers, and brass-workers, to say nothing of Jewish bookbinders, box-makers, engravers, printers, cap-makers, cigar-makers, photographers, upholsterers, and Jewish workmen in dozens of other trades.

The principal occupation is undoubtedly tailoring, and the working-place of tens of thousands of Jews is still the sweat-shop. But in and out of the sweated trades, from the rag-sorter to the high-priced designer, the Jew and the Jewess are making their way in American industry and gaining their foothold.

The Jew is also moving up geographically. The contemporaries of Julius Cæsar, the Rumanian, who were intolerably crowded on the lower East Side, have now gone north to the Bronx. The deserted tenements are to-day even more congested with newer immigrants, but in another dozen years their present residents will also have moved away.

It is the increase in earning capacity that has permitted this exodus from the old Ghetto. The man who twenty years ago received only twelve dollars a week may still be earning only twelve, or he may be earning two hundred, but his daughters are stenographers and school-teachers, and his sons are whatever they have the brains and luck to be. The twelve-dollar-a-week man may still be unused to American ways. He may remain a bewildered stranger in the fierce, fast life about him, and find his peace only in the quiet of the somber synagogue, where, in praying-shawl, he worships God as did his ancestors thousands of years ago. But the son, for better or worse, is an American; the daughter, though she observes the dietary laws, is not averse to people who do not, and son and daughter conspire to tear their parents from their roots in the lower East Side and carry them to Harlem, to the Bronx, to Brownsville, to the uttermost parts of the city.

This movement out of the old Ghettos of America is more than a mere change in place. It is a progress towards Occidentalism, as was the movement from Europe to America. It is a new immi-

gration, another step towards America. It takes the immigrant from the Yiddish tongue to the English language; it brings him into touch with newer and better phases of American life. It is a token of past success and an earnest of future success.

This success is not only material. From the beginning the Jews have sought every avenue that led to education. The night schools, the public schools, the colleges and universities have received a constantly increasing quota of Jews. In all American cities the Jew, impelled by his racial love of learning, has sought the printed page.

For a time the evils of this Klondike rush for learning were almost as apparent as the good. Thousands of unprepared Jews, temperamentally unfitted for the professions, yet becoming lawyers or doctors because of the accompanying social prestige, failed in the despairing struggle for professional success, and became disappointed and unscrupulous practitioners. With the years, however, a better-trained body of Jews have entered school and university, and every year these men in increasing numbers are graduated and begin lucrative and honorable careers.

At first law and medicine alone attracted the Jew. To-day he goes into dentistry, pharmacy, mechanical, civil, and electrical engineering, art, literature, and pedagogy. In the day and night schools of New York and other cities the Jews are making their mark. Hundreds of Jewish scientists are working in chemical and physical laboratories, and many Jewish graduates from agricultural colleges are finding occupation in the management of large farms, or in the study of agricultural and forestry problems in the service of State and Nation.

The intellectuals are by no means always the professionals. The sweated presser may have read books which would test the attainments of an erudite Orientalist. There are peddlers, unable to find their way on any street outside the Ghetto, who can unerringly pick a path through the overgrown labyrinth of the Babylonian Talmud, and quote the opinions of a century of rabbis upon a disputed point in casuistry. People who cannot read English know Herbert Spencer by heart, and

men who are ignorant of any language but Yiddish and Hebrew keep in touch with the latest developments of science, art, literature, and the drama. The Yiddish newspapers, an essentially American product, bring a daily library of new learning to their tens of thousands of readers, and the Yiddish drama and the Yiddish books reproduce the new thoughts of the Jews and the new and old thoughts of the world. The intense intellectual life of the East Side is not confined to any one class of people. Nor is it a simple or a uniform group, but a curious medley of susceptible men and women discussing ardently what elsewhere is ignored. In many East Side cafés, away from the chess tables where old men and beardless youths are immersed in their intricate game, you may hear little groups of people discussing idealism and realism, and Zionism and Socialism, and art, music, history, philosophy, and the future of the race. It is all humanitarian. There is underlying this wandering discussion a deep, persistent, fundamental sense of the coming of the Messiah; not a Messiah of flesh and blood, but a new good world in

which human beings can live a human life.

In one of these little cafés, so runs the story, two Russian Jews recently met.

"Where have you been last night, Isaac?" asked Hyman.

"In the Cooper Union celebrating the new Constitution of the Turks."

"Were there any Turks there, Isaac?"

"No, just Jews."

A week later the same two Jews met in the same café.

"Where have you been last night?" again asked Hyman.

"In the Cooper Union, celebrating the birthday of the Russian—of Tolstoy."

"Were there any Russians there?"

"Russians? No, just Jews."

It is always "just Jews." The new Jewish immigrant from Russia, Rumania, Galicia, Poland, brings with him little money, few clothes, only a few books, but much idealism. It is this idealism as much as acumen and pertinacity which maintains high the hope of this little old nation in this big new country, and enables the Jew against adverse circumstances to gain and maintain his foothold.

This is the second article in the series "Getting a Foothold." The third article will be called "Pericles of Smyrna and New York."



THIS GOLD MEDAL WAS RECENTLY PRESENTED TO MRS. SAINT-GAUDENS. IT IS THE FIRST AWARDED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND LETTERS FOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF MEN OF GENIUS IN THE ARTS. THE SCULPTURE OF AUGUSTUS SAINT-GAUDENS WAS FITLY CHOSEN AS THE SUBJECT OF THE FIRST AWARD. DR. HENRY VAN DYKE, THE PRESIDENT OF THE INSTITUTE, MADE THE PRESENTATION ADDRESS. THE MEDAL WAS MODELED BY A. A. WEINMAN