

### *If I Were Rothschild*

IF I WERE ROTHSCHILD, ah, if I were only Rothschild—a Kasrilevka *melamed* let himself go once upon a Thursday while his wife was demanding money for the Sabbath and he had none to give her. If I were only Rothschild, guess what I would do. First of all I would pass a law that a wife must always have a three-ruble piece on her so that she wouldn't have to start nagging me when the good Thursday comes and there is nothing in the house for the Sabbath. In the second place I would take my Sabbath gabardine out of pawn—or better still, my wife's squirrel-skin coat. Let her stop whining that she's cold. Then I would buy the whole house outright, from foundation to chimney, all three rooms, with the alcove and the pantry, the cellar and the attic. Let her stop grumbling that she hasn't enough room. "Here," I would say to her, "take two whole rooms for yourself—cook, bake, wash, chop, make, and leave me in peace so that I can teach my pupils with a free mind."

This is the life! No more worries about making a living. No more headaches about where the money for the Sabbath is coming from. My daughters are all married off—a load is gone from my shoulders. What more do I need for myself? Now I can begin to look around the town a little. First of all I am going to provide a new roof for the old Synagogue so the rain won't drip on the heads of the men who come to pray. After that I shall build a new bathhouse, for if not today, then tomorrow—but surely soon—there is bound to be a catastrophe—the roof is going to cave in while the women are inside

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bathing. And while we are putting up a new bathhouse we might as well throw down the old poorhouse too and put up a hospital in its place, a real hospital such as they have in big towns, with beds and bedding, with a doctor and attendants, with hot broths for the sick every day. . . . And I shall build a home for the aged so that old men, scholars who have fallen upon hard times, shouldn't have to spend their last days on the hearth in the Synagogue. And I shall establish a Society for Clothing the Poor so that poor children won't have to run around in rags with—I beg your pardon for mentioning it—their navels showing. Then I shall institute a Loan Society so that anyone at all—whether he be a teacher or a workman, or even a merchant—could get money without having to pay interest and without pawning the shirt off his back. And a Society for Outfitting Brides so that any girl old enough to marry and without means should be outfitted properly and married off as befits a Jewish girl. I would organize all these and many other such societies in Kasrilevka.

But why only here in Kasrilevka? I would organize such societies everywhere, all over the world, wherever our brethren the Sons of Israel are to be found. And in order that they should all be run properly, with a system, guess what I would do. I would appoint a Society to head them all, a Board of Charity that would watch over all the societies under it. This Board of Charity would keep watch over all of Israel and see to it that Jews everywhere had enough to live on, and that they lived together in unity. It would see to it that all Jews sit in *yeshivas* and study the Bible, the *Talmud*, the *Gamora*, and the various Commentaries and learn all the seven wisdoms and the seventy-seven languages. And over all these *yeshivas* there would be one great *yeshiva* or Jewish Academy which would naturally be located in Vilno. And from there would come the greatest scholars and wise men in the world. And all of this education would be free to everyone, all paid for out of my pocket. And I would see to it that it was all run in orderly fashion, according to plan, so that there should be none of this grab-and-run, hit-and-miss, catch-as-catch-can business. Instead, everything would be run with a view to the common welfare.

## TEVYE'S DAUGHTERS

But in order to have everyone think only of the common welfare, you have to provide one thing. And what is that? Naturally, security. For, take it from me, security from want is the most important thing in the world. Without it there can be no harmony anywhere. For alas, one man will impoverish another over a piece of bread, he will kill, poison, hang his fellow-man. Even the enemies of Israel, the Hamans of the world—what do you think they have against us? Nothing at all. They don't persecute us out of plain meanness, but because of their lack of security. It's lack of money, I tell you, that brings envy and envy brings hatred, and out of hatred come all the troubles in the world, all the sorrows, persecutions, killings, all the horrors and all the wars. . . .

Ah, the wars, the wars. The terrible slaughters. If I were Rothschild I would do away with war altogether. I would wipe it off completely from the face of the earth.

You will ask how? With money, of course. Let me explain it to you. For instance, two countries are having a disagreement over some foolishness, a piece of land that's worth a pinch of snuff. "Territory" they call it. One country says this "territory" is hers and the other one says, "No, this territory is mine." You might think that on the First Day, God created this piece of land in her honor. . . . Then a third country enters and says, "You are both asses. This is everybody's 'territory,' in other words, it's a public domain." Meanwhile the argument goes on. "Territory" here, "territory" there. They "territory" each other so long that they begin shooting with guns and cannon and people start dying like sheep and blood runs everywhere like water. . . .

But if I come to them at the very beginning and say, "Listen to me, little brothers. Actually, what is your whole argument about? Do you think that I don't understand? I understand perfectly. At this feast you are concerned less with the ceremonial than with the dump-lings. 'Territory' is only a pretext. What you are after is something else—something you can get your hands on—money, levies. And while we are on the subject of money, to whom does one come for a loan if not to me, that is, to Rothschild? I'll tell you what. Here, you Englishmen with the long legs and checkered trousers, take a

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billion. Here, you stupid Turks with the scarlet caps, take a billion also. And you, Aunt Reisel, that is Russia, take another billion. With God's help you will pay me back with interest, not a large rate of interest, God forbid, four or five percent at the most—I don't want to get rich off you."

Do you understand what I've done? I have not only put over a business deal, but people have stopped killing each other in vain, like oxen. And since there will be no more war, what do we need weapons for? What do we need armies and cannons and military bands for, and all the other trappings of war? The answer is that we don't. And if there are no more weapons and armies and bands and other trappings of war, there will be no more envy, no more hatred, no Turks, no Englishmen, no Frenchmen, no Gypsies and no Jews. The face of the earth will be changed. As it is written: "Deliverance will come—" The Messiah will have arrived.

And perhaps, even—if I were Rothschild—I might do away with money altogether. For let us not deceive ourselves, what is money anyway? It is nothing but a delusion, a made-up thing. Men have taken a piece of paper, decorated it with a pretty picture and written on it, *Three Silver Rubles*. Money, I tell you, is nothing but a temptation, a piece of lust, one of the greatest lusts. It is something that everyone wants and nobody has. But if there were no more money in the world there would be no more temptation, no more lust. Do you understand me or not? But then the problem is, without money how would we Jews be able to provide for the Sabbath? The answer to that is—How will I provide for the Sabbath now?