

MEMOIRS⁴⁴

This is the first printing of a typed copy, the only one saved, of the manuscript which was handed to me under Korczak's will a few days after his transfer to Treblinka⁴⁵ together with all residents of the Children's Home.

At that time, I did not consider my apartment at Zoliborz a sufficiently safe place for this valuable document. So I asked Maryna Falska to hide it somewhere in our Home at Bielany, and I managed to pass it to her before my arrest.

Wladyslaw Cichosz, an employee at our Home, following Falska's instructions, bricked it up in the attic of the orphanage building.

After the war, when the institution was taken over by the Workers' Society of Children's Friends, Cichosz recovered the papers and, Falska no longer being alive, handed them to the President of the Society, Stanislaw Zemis, who in turn passed them on to me when I returned from the concentration camps.

Publication of the Memoirs was no easy matter at that time. Korczak left no heirs. His legacy I finally deposited with the Board of the Polish Writers Union for inclusion among documents and papers of a Museum of Literature which the Union was then planning.

His Memoirs Korczak wrote in the ghetto mainly between May and August 1942, although for some time, from 1939, his growing sense of desolation had made him anxious to leave a final testament. *'Not so much an attempt at a synthesis as a grave of attempts, experiments, errors. Perhaps it may prove of use to somebody, some time, in fifty years ...'*

He wrote the first pages in January 1940, then put the work aside. Two years later, in the face of approaching extinction, he resumed, and carried on more or less systematically to the end.

In order to understand and properly evaluate them it is necessary to visualize the place, time and conditions of their being written.

Thus—the ghetto, a relatively small district of the capital, increasingly constricted by walls, packed with over half a million Jewish population from Warsaw and nearby towns. *'The district of the damned!*, Korczak calls *it*, and elsewhere in the Memoirs he writes: *'The*

⁴⁴ The material following Igor Newerly's introductory remarks is Korczak's last writing. It is neither a diary nor memoirs but rather a combination of reflections on the gruesome present and the distant, now almost unbelievable, but nonetheless real past. In Polish it is called "Pamiętnik" —a book to remember by. (MW)

⁴⁵ Treblinka — a town near Warsaw where at the end of 1940 a concentration camp was organized. About a million people, chiefly Jews, were put to death there.

appearance of the district changes from day to day: A prison — a plagued spot — a lunatic asylum — a casino. Monaco. The wager — a head.'

Famine and typhus were decimating the population. People dropped dead in the streets. Pinkert's Last Service could not keep pace with the removal of corpses. Cleared in the morning, they piled up again by the evening. Normal. Children played on the sidewalks, among bodies covered with newspapers — unnoticed, meaningless as the notice on the wall:

"Always keep your body clean. Dirt breeds lice, lice — typhus!"

Time — in the sense of a normal perspective of days and months — did not exist. There was an ephemeral present instant—and eternity. Lying down to sleep, nobody was sure that he would not be wakened by the sound of a prison van — or shot dead in bed. Going out, nobody knew whether he would return or be rounded up in the street and find himself in a cattle truck. In this district resembling a sprung trap, the dread of death omnipresent, there existed only the possibility of smuggling an existence from one instant to the next, or of utter resignation — the fusion of life in some extra-personal great existence. In something having eternal meaning and dignity: Struggle — truth and beauty — God....

The resistance movement was bubbling below the surface, and as Korczak was finishing his diary the ghetto witnessed the first street fighting.

In the ghetto were gathered large numbers of the intelligentsia, including many creative workers. They sought to, the very last to sustain human life on remainders of contemporary knowledge and culture. Scholars and artists were engrossed in their work. Young people flocked to clandestine colleges and courses, lectures by professors in specialized fields. Drama studios, artistic troupes, exhibitions, concerts, meetings with authors, lectures by eminent scholars attracted large audiences.

And the synagogues were full. The walls of the existing places of worship could no longer contain the wave of mysticism. The fervor of other religious concepts sought an outlet beyond Adonai and Christ. The God of martyrs, God of Golgotha strode through the ghetto dispensing baptism and solace by the devoted hands of Father Plater. The Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary was also packed with the faithful wearing armbands — the stigmata of temporal martyrdom and shame.

And hard nearby functioned Kon and Heller, the organization of Jewish Gestapomen, thousands of collaborators, traitors and henchmen. "Grand smuggle" by gangster tycoons and "little smuggle" by children. Stained with the blood of smugglers, big fortunes were made. Sinister figures intermingled with well-known personalities of the business participate. The two partners begat vested interests co-administering the ghetto — the humble servants of their executioners. Crime, fear, baseness preyed upon misery and hunger, elbowed the weaker into the death trucks. The gluttony and orgies in exclusive restaurants had about them something of the Apocalypse.

In this district of superimposed contrasts, under conditions endlessly macabre, the absolutely normal—so it seems to me and I should like to call attention to it — was nonexistent. No one

could suffer the atmosphere of a ghetto and an Auschwitz and emerge unflawed. Everyone, victim and henchman alike, received inevitably some physical taint.

When he was writing the *Memoirs*, Korczak was sixty-four, his constitution ruined, yet he retained entirely his sense of responsibility for the fate of more than two-hundred children and adolescents, from seven to seventeen, eighteen years of age, including a considerable number of former residents who turned to him for protection and shelter.

The institution was housed in a corner building — 16 Sienna St. and 9 Sliska St. — the former site of the Merchants Club.⁴⁶

The life of the Children's Home was in fact concentrated in the big hall on the first floor, with a few small back rooms tacked on. By night, it served as dormitory, by day for meals and classes. Ingeniously arranged chests and cabinets partitioned it into classrooms, linen store, reading room, and other special-purpose accommodation. All Children's Home events and performances were held on the second floor in the onetime ballroom. There, for example, Tagore's *The Post Office* was staged.

Peace, order, good management prevailed in the house as if the children had long lived there. The Korczakian child community organization — court of peers, self-government, school newspaper, fixed schedule of daily routines and occupations such as monitoring duties, school hours — all were maintained. The children learned, cleaned and tidied the house, worked in the linen room, the kitchen. Regularly, every week they were weighed and measured. Only the oldest boys went to work on building sites within the ghetto or at the Eastern Railway Station, unloading coal or laying rails. This gave them the chance to barter this or that, and bring back some food.

Food at the Children's Home was poor — but by ghetto standards luxurious. In the morning, a slice of bread, a cup of black synthetic coffee or hot water mixed with colored saccarin and called "tea." For dinner — potatoes, or groats mixed with horse blood, nourishing and so well seasoned as to be quite tasty. Occasionally, horse meat and cod liver oil appeared on the table. On holidays, even some sort of darkish rye cookies were baked.

In charge of the daily routine at the Children's Home was Stefania Wilczynska. Korczak used to go out in the morning and return late. He regularly went to the institution for destitute children at 39 Dzielna St., that "children's slaughter and charnelhouse." He took it upon himself to rehabilitate that institution and fought a hopeless, losing fight against the unscrupulous, thieving staff. He would make calls at the Jewish

Community Office, Centos, Judisches Hilfskomitee, the homes of the rich, the offices of notorious, utterly compromised collaborators. He begged, threatened, quarreled. He cared not who gave and whether enough remained for others. He was the father of two-hundred children and was compelled to provide for them.

⁴⁶ *It had been moved here from Krochmalna 92, which was outside the Ghetto walls.*

Already a different Korczak. Exhausted, irritable, suspicious, ready to raise hell over a barrel of sauerkraut, a sack of flour. Bear this in mind, too, when reading the *Memoirs*, especially Korczak' opinions on certain people, on his differences with them.

Korczak would return from his rounds in the evening completely exhausted, showing in his notebook the amount of the day's booty, and behind his eyes the image of the ghetto. He would join briefly in the life of the Children's Home and then finally withdraw to his own den.

He lived near the huge hall-dormitory, in one of the back rooms called the isolation room. Lodged there were also a few of the weaker children and the father of one of the girls, the old, dying tailor Azrylewicz. Separated by a plywood screen, Korczak wrote his *Memoirs* at night.

It seems unbelievable that he could still write.

The conditions, the situation and his health — all contributed, in the feverish, intensely experienced moment of recollection, to a disjointed diversity of material.

Strikingly varied is the form, from sections stylistically elaborated — for instance, the introductory reflections on the subject of old age — through the concise chronicle accounts right up to thoughts coded in abbreviations, jotted down for his own use to be developed later if time and life permitted. The same applies to the contents. The retrospective breaths of self-analysis are crossed by the images of macabre reality, from which vision repeatedly embraces the future, indifferent to the now worthless personal life, striving still to probe the ultimate fate of the world and man.

Even so, Korczak remains himself from the very first to the very last page. Frank — brutally so at times — in every single clause, with his evangelist's heart and keen eye for the grotesque. Faithful to the truths professed over a lifetime—he continues to defend them with the same fire of the controversialist and the practice of shocking the bourgeois conventions specific to the "Young Poland"⁴⁷ literary trend, exaggerating his visions of eugenics and euthanasia, balancing upon a razor's edge between absolute reason and absurdity.

And to the very end he preserved that passion for cognition, what his self-analysis termed the "*searching mind*" for which "*not the mechanism but the actual substance of the thing*" alone becomes compelling and worthy of probing.

In the deluge of total bestiality, he seeks frantically for some minimal scrap of sense, tries to take an impassioned view of the other side, of the alien point of view with its inhuman philosophy, and prepares a "*programmed speech by history*," a theme which, unless his specific approach and personality are comprehended, may create the gruesome impression of some defence of hitlerism.

Needless to say, the publishers would not presume to correct Korczak in certain formal

⁴⁷ A trend of artistic and literary character, developed chiefly in Cracow at the turn of 19th to 20th centuries. It was directed against the rationalistic point of view. The chief objective was to come back to romantic traditions.

blemishes resulting from the conditions under which his Memoirs were written, and certainly any dabbling with content, the very substance of the subject matter, would be unthinkable. However some of the opinions expressed by this great writer and civic leader may appear to readers — they must not be muted, far less concealed. The Memoirs are printed in full without any editorial adjustment, with such reverence as is due this document of the last days and thoughts of a man of this stature.

IGOR NEWERLY

Part One

Gruesome, depressing is memoir literature. An artist or scholar, a politician or great leader of men — these enter life hugging ambitious plans. Tenacious, offensive and smooth movements — a vital mobility of action. They climb, negotiate obstacles, extend the range of their influence, and, armed with experience and a number of friends, they press — with increasing success and ease — stage by stage, toward their objectives. This takes ten years, sometimes twice, three times that long. And then...

Then comes fatigue, but only bit by bit, still doggedly in the once chosen direction, choosing the easier road, with less zeal and with the painful conviction that it is not as it was meant to be, not enough, that it is much harder single-handed, that the only result is the graying hair, the wrinkles on the once smooth and bold forehead, and the effortful movement of the legs.

What is wrong? — old age.

This one resists, does not give in, wants to go on as usual, even faster and more forcefully, for time is short. He deceives himself, fights back, rebels and wriggles. Another in sad resignation begins not only to give up but even to regress.

"I can't any longer. I don't even want to try. Not worth it. I've lost my grip. If only I could recover the casket containing the ashes of the years, the energy squandered in gabbing, the relentless ardor of the old power...."

New men, a new generation, new wants. By now they irritate him, and he is irritating. At first some misunderstandings, later total misunderstanding. Their gestures, their walk, eyes, white teeth and smooth foreheads, though they stay dumb.

Everything and everybody around, and the earth, and you yourself, and your stars say:

"Enough ... Your sunset ... Now we ... Your end...." You say that we. ... We do not argue with you, you know better, you're experienced, but let us try to proceed our own way.

Such is the chain of life.

So it is with man and animals, so, it seems, with trees, and who knows, perhaps stones as well.

Theirs now — the will, the power, and the time.

Yours — today old age, and the day after tomorrow — senility.

While the hands of the clocks move faster and faster. The stony gaze of the sphinx is asking the eternal question:

"Who walks on all fours in the morning of life, at noon briskly on two, and in the evening of life on three?"

You — leaning on your stick, gazing into the cold dying rays of the setting sun....

I will try to approach my own life story differently. Perhaps a lucky thought, perhaps it will come off, perhaps it is just the right way.

When you make a well, you do not begin to dig at the deepest level. First you break up the upper layer, throw the earth aside, shovelful after shovelful, not knowing what is underneath, how many tangled roots, what obstacles and flaws, how many stones and other obstructions to the work, dumped by yourself and others, long forgotten.

Decision. Strength enough to start. And, generally speaking, is any work ever in fact finished? Spit on your hands. A firm grip on the shovel. Get to it!

One, two, one, two....

"For God's sake, old one! What are you driving at?"

"See! I seek subterranean springs. I cleave asunder the pure, cool element of water to drag out memories."

"May I help you?"

"No, my dear friend, each for himself. Nobody can undertake the job for you, or replace you. Anything else together so long as you trust me, do not deprecate me; but this final work — mine alone."

"God be with you!"

Now then....

I want to refute a mendacious book by a false prophet. It has done a great deal of harm.

Also sprach Zarathustra.

And I had the honor to talk to Zarathustra. His wise innovations, serious, hard and sharp, led you, poor philosopher, behind the sinister walls and close bars of a lunatic asylum — for so it was. It says in black and white:

"Nitzsche died at odds with life — insane!"

I want to prove in my book that he died painfully at odds with truth.

The very same Zarathustra taught me something different. Perhaps I had better hearing, perhaps I listened with greater care.

In this much we are together: the road of the master and the road of me, the disciple, were both hard. More defeats than successes; numerous diversions, consequently time and effort wasted, apparently wasted.

For in the hour of payment, not in a solitary cell of the saddest hospital of all, but with butterflies and grasshoppers, and glowworms and a concert by crickets and a soloist high up in the sky — the lark.

Good Lord!

Thank you, Good Lord, for having ordered all so wisely, that the flowers are fragrant, the glowworms glow upon the earth, the stars sparkle in the sky.

How joyous is old age.

What a delectable silence.

Delectable repose.

"Man who is so immeasurably blessed with Thy gifts, whom Thou hast created and saved.⁴⁸

One, two. old men are sitting in the sun.

"Tell me you old codger, how come that you are still alive?"

"Well, I've led a respectable, sensible life free of shocks and sudden turns. I don't smoke, drink, play cards, chase women. Never hungry, never overtired, no haste, no taking chances. Always at the right time and with moderation. I didn't strain my heart or exhaust my lungs or overtax my brain. Moderation, peace, and reflection: That is why I'm still alive."

"And you, friend?"

"Differently. Wherever a bruise or a bump on the head was to be found, there I was. I was a young pup when I had my first taste of revolt and shooting. Sleepless nights and enough of prison as would take the rough edges off any youngster. Then the war. I took it as it came. It had to be sought in remote places, beyond the Ural mountains, beyond Lake Baikal, through the Tatar, Khirgiz, Buryat country, right up to the Chinese. I stopped for a time in the Manchurian village of Taowayjou and — then again a revolution. Then peace of a sort for a brief while. I drank vodka, true, more than once I staked

⁴⁸ This is an allusion to F. Karpiński's church hymn "Kiedy ranne wstają zorze..." (When the morning's dawns arise...)

my life and not a crumpled scrap of paper on a single card, Only I had no time for girls, if only because they're such a greedy lot, night birds, and — aha — get pregnant. A rotten trick. I fell for it once. A nasty taste in my mouth ever since. I had enough of threats and tears. I smoked unlimited cigarettes. In the daytime, talking things over with myself, one after another, like a chimney. And there is not a bit of me left sound. Adhesions, aches, ruptures, scars. I go all to pieces, groan, am unstitched, live. And how! Anyone who has gotten in my way will tell you. I can still kick pretty hard. It happens even now that a whole gang sneaks by when they see me. I still have followers and friends, too."

"Yes, so have I. Children and grandchildren. And you?"

"Two-hundred." "You're kidding...."

The year 1942. May. A cold May this year. And this night is not the quietest of the quiet. It is five in the morning. The children are asleep. There are two hundred of them — it's a fact. In the east wing — Miss Stefa. I am in the west, in the so-called isolation room.

My bed stands in the middle of the room. Under the bed, a bottle of vodka. Black bread and a jug of water on the night table.

Good old Felek, he has sharpened the pencils on both ends. I could write with a fountain pen, Hadaska gave me the first, and the father of a difficult boy the second.

I already have a groove on my finger from that pencil. It just occurs to me that I could do it differently, make it more comfortable, that it is easier with a pen.

It was not for nothing that as a child I was called gawk and booby by my poor old dad, and when he really fell into a rage — idiot and ass. Grannie was the only one who believed in my star. For the rest — idler, moaner, crybaby (I've said it before), idiot, and good-for-nothing.

More about that later.

They were right. Equally. Half and half. Grannie and dad.

More about that later.

Idler ... right enough ... I dislike writing. Thinking — yes, definitely. No difficulty. Just like telling myself fairy tales.

I read somewhere:

"There are people who do not think just as there are some who say, 'I don't smoke'."

I do think.

One, two, one, two. I simply must gape at each shovelful of my well. Reflect ten minutes. And not because I'm weak today, or because I'm old.

It was always so.

Grannie would give me raisins and say:

"You philosopher."

It appears that even then I confided to grannie in an intimate chat my scheme for remaking the world. No less, no more — simply get rid of all money. How and where to be rid of it, and what to do next, I probably had no idea. No need to be too stern a judge. I was only five then, and the problem was perplexingly difficult: what could do away with dirty, ragged and hungry children with whom one is not allowed to play in that same courtyard where under a chestnut tree in a candy box, wrapped in cotton, was buried my dear and beloved dead, for the time being only, canary? Its death brought up the mysterious question of religion.

I wanted to put a cross on the grave. The housemaid said no, because it's only a bird, something much lower than man. Even to cry over it was a sin.

So much for the housemaid. It was worse that the caretaker's son had decided that the canary was a Jew.

Me, too.

I was a Jew, and he — a Pole, a Catholic. Paradise for him. As for me, if I did not swear and submissively stole sugar for him from the house, I would end up, when I died, in a place which, though not hell, was dark. And I was scared of a dark room.

Death — Jew — hell. The black Jewish paradise. Certainly something to consider.

I am in bed. The bed is in the middle of the room. My subtenants: Monius Jr. (there are four of that name), then Albert and Jerzyk. At the other end by the wall, Felunia, Gienia and Haneczka.

The door of the boys' dormitory is open. There are sixty boys. Somewhat farther to the east, wrapped in peaceful slumber, sixty girls. The rest on the top floor. It is May, and though it is cold the older boys can, in a pinch, sleep in the top-floor hall.

Night. I have notes about it and about the sleeping children. Thirty-four small pads filed with notes. That is why it was so long before I could make up my mind to write memoirs.

I plan to write:

1. A thick volume on nighttime in an orphanage and in general about children's sleep.
2. A two-volume novel. The scene is Palestine. The first night of a newly married halutz couple at the foot of Mount Gilboa, at the place where a spring bubbles up. "A reference to the mountain and the spring is made in the Books of Moses.

(Deep will be that well of mine if I have the time.)

3, 4, 5, 6. Some years back, I wrote a piece for children on the life of Pasteur. A continuation of that series: Pestalozzi, da Vinci, Kropotkin, Pilsudski and a few dozen more including Fabre, Multatuli⁴⁹, Ruskin and Gregor Mendel, Nalkowski,^{*****} and Szczepanowski⁵⁰, Dygasinski⁵¹, David.

Never heard of Nalkowski?

The world is deaf to the names of many great Poles.

7. Years ago I wrote a novel about King Macius. Now for the king-child: King David II.
8. How can one waste five hundred children's weight and height graphs and not describe the wonderful, honest and joyous work of the growth of man? In the coming five thousand years, somewhere in the abyss of time — socialism, now anarchy. A contest of poets and musicians in the most splendid of Olympic Games. A contest for the most beautiful prayer, for a world hymn to God once a year.

I forgot to mention that now, too, there is a contest, a war is on.

9. Autobiography.

Yes. About myself, about my small and important self.

Someone once said scornfully that the earth is a speck of mud suspended in space. And a man an animal that has made a career. Have it that way. But an addendum: that drop of mud knows suffering, can love and weep and is filled with yearning.

And the career of man, if you consider it carefully, is doubtful, highly doubtful.

Half past six.

⁴⁹ Pen name of D. E. Decker, Dutch writer (1820-1887). ** An eminent Polish geographer, pedagogue and civic leader (1856-1911).

⁵⁰ Business promoter, journalist, one of the pioneers of the Polish oil and coal industries (1846-1900).

⁵¹ Polish novelist, storyteller, journalist and pedagogue. Pioneer in the field of self-education (1839-1902).

Someone in the dormitory calls out:

"Boys, bath time, get up!"

I put the pen away. *Get up or not?* It is long since I had a bath. Yesterday I caught on myself and killed without turning a hair, with one dexterous squeeze of the nail — a louse.

If I keep going, I shall write a eulogy to a louse. For our attitude to this fine insect is unfair and undignified.

An embittered Russian peasant declared:

"A louse is not a man, it doesn't suck every drop of blood."

I have written a short tale about sparrows which I have been feeding for twenty years. I set myself to exonerate the little thieves. But who will explain the injustice done to the louse?

Who, if not I?

Who will come forward, who will have the guts to go on record in its favor?

"For the callous attempt to shift the responsibility for an orphan onto the shoulders of the community, for the arrogance of the insults, abuses and threats hurled around in frenzy at the foiling of your attempt — you, madam, have to pay within five days, 500 zlotys to the 'Orphans Aid' fund.

"Taking into account the low level of your social environment, and the house where you live, the fine is set low. I expect a cooked up justification that you did not know who it was who was making the survey. When your youngest progeny, sent to escort me, had seen my identity card shown to the policeman, she shouted by way of parting: `Cattle!' I did not insist on the young person's arrest, taking into consideration her age and the fact that she was not wearing the armband."⁵²

Finally, allow me to mention that this was my second unhappy encounter with the den of thieves masquerading in the elegant house at 14 Walicow, for during the siege of Warsaw, I was refused help in carrying a dying soldier with his chest gaping open into the courtyard gateway so that he might not breathe his last like a dog in the gutter.

And a few comments:

The lady occupants of the premises from which I was thrown out with shouts of:

⁵² The armband indicating that the child was Jewish.

'Get out of here you old bastard, break your neck' — those lady occupants were the 'friends' of none other than Stefania Sempolowska.⁵³

I should like to enlarge on the theme since the matter has more general implications.

Sempolowska was a fanatical protagonist of Jews, defending alike against false and justified charges made against us by equally fanatical enemies.

The three Jewesses from Walicow St. were such types who by glib words, even baptism, would shamelessly force their way into Polish society, to homes and families, so that there they might represent the Jews.

I repeatedly made it clear though without effect to the enthusiast, Miss Stefania, that there could not be nor ought there to be any understanding or even as much as a loose contact between these Jewish rascals and the Polish intellectual, moral elite.

This was precisely the cause of the deplorable differences and estrangements occurring during the thirty years of our acquaintanceship.

Wojciechowski — Pilsudski — Norwid — Mickiewicz — Kosciuszko — Zajaczek⁵⁴, who knows, perhaps Lukasiewicz⁵⁵ as well — even Kreon and Antigone — was their remoteness one from another caused precisely by their closeness?

Formerly Nalkowski and Straszewicz,*** seeming enemies, yet filled with longing for each other.

How easy it is for two rogues to get together for a joint enterprise in treachery, crime, fraud. How utterly impossible is harmonious collaboration when two people love in the same way but apprehend differently, from a different stock of experience.

I hated and detested Jewish peddlers of ideas and phraseology. I have witnessed the dignity of those Jews who, having escaped, hid out so as not to meet friends within the walls.

Who could pass over dear old 'Wojtek,' a militant nationalist who, over a cup of coffee, asked almost with despair:

"Tell me, what is one to do? The Jews are digging our grave."

⁵³ A well-known author and liberal social worker (1870-1943).

⁵⁴ Some well-known Poles whom Korczak knew personally, others historical figures.

⁵⁵ Jan Lukasiewicz (1878-1956), philosopher, logician, professor in Lwow, Warsaw and Lublin universities.

And Godlewski:

"We are a weak lot. For a glass of vodka, we are selling ourselves into Jewish slavery."

And Moszczenska:

"Your virtues are a sentence of death on us."

The corner of Zelazna and Chlodna St. A smoked meat shop. Overflowing the chair, an enormously fat Jewess is trying on a pair of shoes. The visiting shoemaker is kneeling in front of her. His face overly spiritual. Hair gray, eyes wise and good, voice serious and deep, on his face an expression of hopeless resignation.

"But I warned you that those shoes...."

"And I'm warning you, that you can keep those shoes for your wife. If you're a shoemaker, you ought to know. What does my foot look like?"

And she keeps swinging the fat foot in front of his nose — almost touching it.

"Are you blind? Can't you see the marks?"

One of the worst scenes I have ever witnessed, but not the only one.

"Our people are no better."

"I know."

Well, what is the answer?

He who buys it has a radio. And a car. And a ticket to a premiere. And journeys, and books and paintings.

That group of Polish tourists met in Athens. No less, no more — taking snapshots of one another in front of the Pantheon [sic]. Babbling, scruffy, every pup turning in circles to catch its own tail.

Why am I writing all this?

Well. There is Satan. True. But some are more, some are less wicked.

Januszek and Ireczka made a garden in sand, with a little house, and flowers and a fence. They carried water in a matchbox, taking turns. They consulted, built a second house. They consulted: a chimney. They consulted: a well. They consulted: a dog kennel.

The dinner bell rang. Moving toward the dining room, they turned back twice to put on final

touches, to have one more look.

All along Musiek had been watching them from a distance. Then he trampled over it all, kicked the building down, and for a long time hit at it with a stick.

When they got back after dinner, Irka said:

"Of course — Musiek."

Born in Paris — returned to his homeland, and for the past three years he has been poisoning the life of thirty orphans in the kindergarten.

I wrote an article about him for "Pedagogika Specjalna," advocating penal settlements, I even hinted at the death penalty. He is still small! He is going to be at large for fully fifty years!

Dear Madam Maria with her perplexed smile: "You must be joking."

"Far from it. How much harm, how much pain, tears...."

"So you don't believe in correction?"

"I am not Adler" — I said gruffly.

No one can long be angry with Dr. Maria Grzegorzewska. A compromise: I cut out the death penalty — left only the penal settlement (and that only with difficulty).

Are decent people of the higher orders of men to be indefinitely condemned to Calvary?

Why do I write all this?

Of course, it's night. Twelve thirty.

I've had a hard day.

A conference with two gentlemen, high priests of

social welfare. Then two investigations, one involving the row referred to. Then a meeting of the Board. Tomorrow — 39 Dzielna St.

I said to that lawyer:

"If everyday things get just a trifle better, that stimulates to greater effort. If everyday worse, there will be disaster and some change. But we keep going around in circles, getting nowhere."

Note what I say — it may come in handy.

There are four ways of dealing with undesirable newcomers:

1. Bribe. Admit to the ring the chosen few, and bamboozle.
2. Agree to anything and, watching for the moment when he is off guard, go on as usual, doing as you please. I am one against the rest. I assess them, at a liberal estimate, three hours a day. They think about how to deceive for twenty-four. More about this when I come to thinking in one's sleep. Anyhow, there is nothing new in all this.
3. To wait, mark time, lie low and when the right time comes — compromise.

"Look! It was he who ordered it!"

There may be a frame-up. (They wanted me to surrender public money.)

4. To wear him out. Either he will go of his own volition or will stop spying. Anyhow, what's the use of it?

I have run out of ink.

I feel old whenever I revert to the past, to bygone years and events. I want to be young, so I make plans for the future.

What will I be doing after the war?

Maybe they will invite me to cooperate in building a new order in the world or in Poland. Highly doubtful and not my idea. I should have to be come an official, meaning the slavery of fixed working hours, contacts with men, a desk, armchair and telephone here or there. Squandering time on current petty everyday problems and contending with little men with little ambitions, friends in high places, hierarchy, and goals.

In a word — a yoke.

I prefer to be on my own.

When I was down with typhus, I had a vision:

A huge theater or concert hall. Crowds of people all dressed up.

I am giving an address about war and hunger, destitution and misery.

I speak in Polish. The interpreter summarizes into English. (It all takes place in America.) Suddenly my voice breaks down. Silence. An outcry somewhere in the hall. Running toward me is Regina. She stops in front of the dais, throws a watch on the platform and cries out: "For you — everything!" Then a shower of banknotes, gold and gems. They are throwing

rings, bracelets and necklaces. Boys from the Children's Home come running onto the stage: the Gelblat brothers, Falka, Meir Kulawski, Gluzman, Szejwacz —and they stuff it all into mattresses. The audience, deeply moved, cheer, clap, and weep.

I have no particular faith in prophesies, and yet for well over twenty years I have been waiting for the vision to come true.

I shall have something to say of Regina when I come to the strange fates of the inmates of the white house on Krochmalna St.⁵⁶ in weary Warsaw.

So I shall come into unlimited means and call for tenders for the construction of a great orphanage in the hills of Lebanon, near Kfar Giladi⁵⁷.

It will have large barrackslike dining rooms and dormitories. There will be small "hermit dens." For myself, upon the flat roof of the building, one room, not too big, with transparent walls so that I may not miss a single sunrise or sunset and that, writing at night, I may be able to look at the stars.

Young Palestine is making arduous and honest efforts to come to terms with earth. But heaven's turn will come. Otherwise all would be a misunderstanding, a mistake.

Why not Birobidjan, Uganda, California, Ethiopia, Tibet, Madagascar, India, southern Russia or Polesie? Even England, well meaning and world-wise, does not know where to plant that handful of Jewry, small as it is.

Every year I should visit for a few weeks my native town, my friends, to talk over matters, important and eternal.

I suppose that I keep on repeating my dream monotonously, unvaried. Every time some modification.

My biggest problem is with the construction of dens for hermits. Those who have earned a life of solitude, aspire to happiness through solitude, they read it and are supposed to translate it into a comprehensible language — orbi et urbi. They must, must, must have it. But what should they have? There's the rub.

Moszek has again forgotten to put enough carbide in the lamp. The flame is dying.

I must stop now.

⁵⁶ The location of Korczak's ,major institution was at number 92 of that street.

⁵⁷ A kibbutz in Northern Galilee which Korczak visited during a trip to what is now Israel.

Five o'clock in the morning

Good old Albert, he has let the daylight in.

The panes are covered with black paper shades so that light from the windows may not make the military authorities suspect lamp signaling, and they also say it may guide enemy planes. As if there were not a score of other means and landmarks. People believe in spite of everything.

So it is light again.

Naive, good-hearted people. Probably unhappy. They have not much of an idea what happiness consists in. Everyone understands it differently.

For one: a delicious tscholent or sausage with sauerkraut. For another: peace, comfort, every convenience. For a third: women, many and varied. For a fourth: music, or cards, or travelog.

And each one fights in a different way against boredom and longing.

Boredom — hunger of the spirit.

Longing — desire, desire for water and flight, freedom and man — a confidant, a confessor, an adviser — advice, confession, a friendly ear to my grievance.

The spirit feels nostalgia in the narrow cage of the body. Man ponders over death as the end but death is merely the continuation of life, another life.

You may not believe in the existence of the soul, yet you must acknowledge that your body will live on as green grass, as a cloud. For you are, after all, water and dust.

"The world is the metamorphosis of evil, everlasting" — Tetmajer⁵⁸ says.

That unbeliever, pessimist, ironist, nihilist also speaks of eternity.

Immortal is the amoeba, man is a colony of sixty trillion — says Maeterlinck, and he certainly knew his authorities. For a dozen odd years I tried unsuccessfully to find out how many times to multiply two billion.

A fellow teacher, professor Paszkiewicz said it was an astronomic figure. Until by chance, I

⁵⁸ Polish poet, novelist, playwright, representative of "Young Poland" trend (1865-1940).

found the answer in the Termites.

There are two billion men in the world, and I constitute a community many million times as great, therefore I have the right, the duty to look after my own trillions, for which I have responsibilities.

Maybe it is dangerous to announce it, although everyone senses it even though not entirely consciously. Anyhow, is my universe of life and its prosperity not dependent on the prosperity of a whole generation, from the Australian cannibal islands, right up to the study of a poet, a scientist, and up to the man looking through a telescope set on a snowbound peak on the plain of the terrestrial pole?

If little Genka coughs at night, altruistically I commiserate but egoistically I think of the disturbed night, am concerned about her health: and perhaps it is contagious? The expense of extra food, the trouble and the cost involved in sending her to the country.

I am sleepy. Before my beehive starts buzzing, I will have a nap for an hour.

Surely the dictatorship of the clock will come to an

end in the future, rational society. I sleep and eat when I feel like it.

Happily, the doctors and the police cannot prescribe how many times I should breathe per minute, how many times my heart has the right to beat.

I go to sleep at night unwillingly, because then I cannot sleep in the daytime. Bread and water taste better to me at night.

It is nonsense to put a child to bed for ten hours of uninterrupted sleep.

Man of the future will be astonished to find that we used cut flowers to decorate our apartments. And paintings on the walls. And animal skin for carpets.

Scalps, scalps of flowers, our noble brothers-in-life.

And a canvas daubed with colors to which you pay no heed after a time — dust settling on the frame and vermin on the back.

How insignificant, poor and uncouth was that primitive man of thousands of years ago.

They will learn with pity about our forms of education.

The crass ignorance of the dead language.

"Going among simple folk," I used to pick out children's talents.

Somewhere downtown by the river, in a small one-room shack of a day laborer, I was shown sketches drawn by a small boy: the horse was a horse, the tree a tree, the ship a ship.

I took a roll of them, those that seemed to me the best, to show to a well-known painter.

He looked at them and said with a grimace:

"All this is absolutely worthless. Copied. But that one is not so bad."

He said an odd thing:

"Everybody should be able to sketch in pencil whatever he wants to retain in memory. Not to be able to do that is to be illiterate."

How often I recollected this irrefutable truth. Here is a scene, a face which in a moment will be lost forever. What a shame, what pity!

Tourists have found a way: the photograph. Now even moving pictures. A generation of young people is growing up who will be able to see their first clumsy footsteps.

The unforgettable pictures of the awakening dormitory. The sleepy look, slow movements, or a sudden leap out of bed. One rubs his eyes, another wipes the corners of his mouth with the sleeve of his nightshirt, one strokes his ear, stretches holding a piece of clothing in his hand, stops dead, stares awhile somewhere ahead.

Energetically, phlegmatically, skillfully, clumsily, surely, meekly, accurately, carelessly, deliberately or automatically.

Those are real tests: you can sum him up right away, and why always like that or only for today.

A lecturer comments on a film:

"Look carefully [he indicates with a pointer, as if on a map]. The resentful exchange of glances between the two on the right shows their mutual dislike. Their beds should not be adjacent.

"The screwed up eyes of that one show definitely that he is shortsighted.

"Don't be sure of the staying power of that boy: evident effort, nervous movements, variable rhythm, intermissions in apparent determined haste. Perhaps he has taken on a wager, challenged to a race the one on the left at whom he looks nervously now and again. "For this one here, I prophesy a bad day. Something is wrong with him. While washing, making the

bed, at breakfast, in a moment, in an hour, he will get into an argument or fight, he will talk back to the teacher."

We were standing, the two of us, by the window while a new game of `two fires' was just being started.

A noble, knightly game.

A ten-year-old expert was my instructor.

"That one will soon be finished, he's tired alright. That other one will show what he can do halfway through the game. See that one, he's got eyes in the back of his head, looks to the right and passes to the left. That one will pretend to be as good so as to cut out those other two later on. This one here will get offended, or start quarreling, or crying."

Should the forecast prove wrong, the expert knows exactly why and explains. In his calculations and assessment of the situation, he has failed to take this or that into account:

"He is playing like that because yesterday he broke a windowpane. He's afraid what will happen. That one has the sun in his eyes, and this other one hasn't gotten used to the ball yet, too hard for him. A sore foot — that one. This good shot is, really, his friend's doing — always backs him up."

He reads the game like a musician reads the score, comments on the moves as if it were a game of chess.

If I have a vague idea about it all, I owe it to my devoted instructors. How patient, selfless, friendly they are. How incapable and inefficient I am.

No wonder: I was over forty when soccer came to this country, while these boys crawled on . all fours holding a ball under the arm.

Five thick volumes:

1. Ordinary ball.
2. Soccer.
4. "Two fires."
5. Psychology and philosophy of ball playing.
6. Life stories, interviews. Descriptions of outstanding shots at the goal, games, stadiums.

And a hundred kilometers of film.

If I have anticipated a reaction well in advance then nothing irritates me, makes me impatient, angry or indignant.

Today the class will be restless because it is All Fools' Day, because it is hot, because in three days there is to be an outing, because the holidays are in a week, because I have a headache.

I remember a school teacher, already experienced in the profession, who would get indignant at the boys because their hair grew so fast. And I remember a young boarding-school worker, a beginner, who used to start her routine report on the girls' bedtime with:

"The girls were absolutely unbearable this evening. There was still some bustle at nine. At ten, still whispers and laughter. And all this because the principal had me on the carpet, because I was annoyed, because I was in a hurry, because tomorrow I have an examination, because I mislaid my stockings, because I have received a disturbing letter from home."

Someone will say:

"What will a film be worth if the children know that it is being taken."

Easy:

The camera is fixed in one place. The operator turns the handle with . no film in, at different times. and angles. The children are promised they will see the film when it is ready, but .every time something seems to go wrong. Sequences are repeatedly taken of troublesome, difficult, unpopular "children, and are uninteresting. The children are never once told to be natural, to look this way and not that, or that they should `act normally.' The floodlights are switched on and off at random. Then again a game is interrupted and a tiresome repetition ordered.

After a period of initial fascination comes impatience. Finally, they cease to take any notice. After a week, a month. No need to explain it. Of course they do it like that. There's no other way.

A teacher who does not know that is an illiterate, a moron if he does not understand it.

In the future, every teacher will have to be a stenographer and cameraman.

And dictaphones, and radio?

And the epoch-making experiments of Pavlov?

And that horticulturist who by crossing or grafting grows roses without thorns and 'pears

on willow trees.⁵⁹

We already have an outline of man. Perhaps even a photograph? Perhaps we are not so far off? All that is needed is a skillful and conscientious retoucher?

Others are afraid to sleep in the daytime because they may lie awake at night. It is the reverse with me. I go to sleep at night unwillingly, prefer the daytime.

May 15, six o'clock

I already know about the girls half of what I ought to know.

More or less. The question:

"Do you know, Helcia, you are a restless person?" She:

"Am I a person?"

"Of course. You're not a puppy."

She pondered. After a long pause, surprised:

"I am a person. I am Helcia. I am a girl. I am Polish. I am mummy's little daughter, I am a Warsaw resident. What a lot I am!"

And again:

"I have mummy, daddy, grannie. Two grannies, grandpa, a dress, hands, a doll, a little table, a canary, an apron. And you, too?"

A certain nationalist told me:

"A Jew, a good patriot, is at best a good resident of Warsaw or Cracow, but not a Pole."

I was rather taken aback.

I admitted frankly that I am unmoved by Lwow, Poznan, Gdynia, the Augustów Lakes or Zaleszczyki or the Zaolzie region. I have never been to Zakopane (horrible place), I am not drawn to Polesie, the seacoast, to the Bialowieza Forest. The River Vistula near Cracow is alien to me. I do not know and don't want to know Gniezno. But, I love the Vistula at Warsaw and when away from Warsaw I am nostalgic.

Warsaw is mine, and -I am Warsaw's. I am Warsaw. Together with Warsaw I have rejoiced

⁵⁹ A Polish saying corresponding to achieving the impossible. (Trans.)

and grieved. Its weather has been my weather, its rain and mud, mine also. I grew up with it. We have drifted somewhat apart of late. New streets and districts which I no longer embrace have emerged. For many years, I felt like a foreigner at Zoliborz⁶⁰. Much closer to me is Lublin, and even Hrubieszow, though I have never seen them.

Warsaw has been my field of work, my workshop. Here are the landmarks, here are the graves.

Throughout a puppet show, I once recollected the small group at Miodowa St. and the animated crib in Freta St.

This is how it was:

Beginning at Christmas, building_ workers, unemployed at that time of the year, used to go from courtyard to courtyard in the richer quarters, and when summoned to the apartments, presented a show.

A wooden box for a stage, an accordion or barrel organ. And on the stage, puppets: king Herod on the throne, the devil with a pitchfork.

The show was usually presented in the kitchen so that mud should not be carried from the street to the living rooms. The cook would put away smaller items, because they stole. On one occasion, two silver spoons from a set had disappeared. The show was beautiful and awe-inspiring, and instructive.

At the end, an old man with a bag appeared to take up a collection.

Father always told me to drop the smallest silver coins into the old man's bag, and I for my part would change all the money I had into those smallest coins, and, shivering with excitement, drop them into the bag. The old man always looked inside, shook his long white beard and said:

"Very little, very little, young gentleman — a bit more."

At that time I went with father to a nativity play. The long hall of the home, the curtain, the air of mystery, the crowds, all jammed tight, expectation. Some odd creatures wear blue coats and white caps and stiff wings.

I was afraid. I was choking with sobs.

"Don't go away, daddy."

⁶⁰ A section of Warsaw.

"Nothing to be afraid of."

A mysterious, strange lady told me to sit in the first row.

Never do that if the child is unwilling. I preferred to sit somewhere on the side, even if others got between me and the stage, even if I was very crushed and uncomfortable.

Helplessly:

"Daddy!"

"Keep still. Don't disgrace yourself!"

On the way, I kept asking whether Herod and the devil would be there.

"You'll see for yourself."

Terrible — this adult reticence. Never prepare surprises for children if they themselves do not want them. They should be told beforehand, be warned if there is to be any shooting, if certainly, then when and how. Preparation is necessary for a long, far and dangerous journey.

Only one thing bothers the adults.

"Go to the toilet, you won't be able to there." And I happen to be busy, anyhow I don't want to. I simply can't do it `just in case'.

I was sure it would be somehow a more important mystery play and a hundred times more marvelous, and without the old man with the bag.

Better without the old man.

I have said it already. An instructive hour. Yes. That old man. Not only he, but he above all.

He was insatiable.

First, the indifferent parental coins, then my own deliberately saved coppers went into his bag. Taught by the bitter, degrading experience, I saved them up for a long time in any way I could. Frequently, a real old beggar in the street was the victim because of this. I thought:

"I'll not give to him. I'll keep it for the one at the mystery play."

My old man was insatiable, and his bag bottomless.

It was tiny, a fifth of the size of my purse, but it would swallow up, devour, squeeze out everything.

I gave, added more. I'll try again, maybe, finally he will say it's enough.

Daddy! Grannie! Katherine, I'll pay it back, please lend me! I'll give you all my year's allowance for a few coppers now.

Curiosity. Perhaps I'll be able to see how he disappears for a moment behind the stage and then comes back to insist and wheedle.

And the fear, the sad awareness that with the old man the play ends, is no more.

Worse: the wearisome rite of washing before going to bed, perhaps even cod liver oil. On red letter days, children should be spared some duties, and not irritated with all that history, learning, experience have justifiably ordained for the benefit of children. Give them a day's leave.

The whole of mental concentration, the whole of freedom, the whole of fairy world woven into the drab fabric of life.

The old Man from Miodowa St. puppet show —how dreadfully mutilated in the siege of Warsaw — taught me a great deal. The hopelessness of defense against the insistent request, against the infinity of demands that cannot be met.

At first, you give eagerly, then unenthusiastically, from a sense of duty, then, following the laws of inertia, habitually and without heart, then resentfully, angrily, despairingly.

And he wants all that is yours, including yourself.

I hold on to that old man in the mystery play as to the last thread linking me with the enchanting fable of life, with the enchanting mysteries of life, the magic of colorful and festive emotions.

Gone — never to return. Defunct — buried. That special one, that peculiar [...]. And the way he frightened. Good, evil.

Ardent desire, impotence, multiplicity, nothingness. Perhaps I shall tell how I used to feed sparrows forty years later.

You must not refuse if a child asks for a fairy tale to be repeated over and over again, and once more the same.

For some children, far more numerous than we are apt to think, a performance should consist of a single item repeated time after time.

A single spectator, he is frequently a large and grateful audience. Your time will not be wasted. Old nannies and building workers are frequently better pedagogues than a doctor of psychology. Indeed, the adults also clamor `encore.'

Encore!

The same tale endlessly repeated, like a sonata, a favorite sonnet, like a sculpture without the sight of which the day seems colorless.

Those who are crazy about a single exhibit visit the picture gallery repeatedly.

Mine is San Juan by Murillo in a Vienna museum and two sculptures in Cracow by Rygiel — Craft and Art.

Before man sticks utterly in the mud and reconciles himself to the slovenliness of his own experiences ... defends himself ... suffers ... feels ashamed of being worse than the crowd: or perhaps only painfully experiences his own loneliness and alienation in life?

A puppet show without the old man, not a puppet show, just a creche.

It was bad, very bad.

Very properly mother was reluctant to entrust the children to father, and very properly with a thrill of delight and _whoops of joy we welcomed and long remembered — my sister and I — even the most strenuous, exhausting, unfortunate and deplorably ending `pleasures' sought out with peculiar intuition by that not particularly reliable pedagogue — daddy.

He painfully pulled our ears, despite the most emphatic protests by mummy and grannie.

"If the child gets deaf, it will be your doing."

It was unbearably hot in the hall ... The preparations dragged on. The faint sounds coming from behind the curtain tensed the nerves intolerably. The lamps smoked. The children were pushing and shoving.

"Move on! Take your hand away! Keep your legs to yourself. Don't lean on me."

The bell. Eternity. The bell. Such feelings are experienced by an airman under attack, when he has run out of ammunition but has still an important assignment to fulfill. There is no going back, and no will, desire or thought of such.

I do not think the simile inept.

It started. Something unrepeatable, unique, final.

I have no recollection of the people. I do not know exactly even whether the devil was red or black. More likely black — he had a tail and horns. Not a puppet. Live. Not a child in disguise.

Child in disguise?

Only adults can believe in such childish stories. King Herod himself says to him:

"Satan!"

And such laughter, such leaps and that real tail, and that `No' and that pitchfork, and that `Come' —I have never seen, never heard before, and I have even an odd feeling, even if it is true, that there really is a hell.

Everything was authentic.

The lights go off, cigarettes, coughing — that is disturbing

Miodowa and Freta streets. And on Freta stood Szmurlo's school. The switch was used there. That's authentic, too. But absolutely no comparison.

Four o'clock

I have uncovered one window only, so as not to wake up the children.

Reginka has erythema nodozum⁶¹.

Very likely unwisely, I today administered salicylate 10.0 per 200.0, a tablespoonful every two hours, until she heard ringing in the ears and was seeing yellow. But yesterday she vomited twice. However, now the nodes on her legs are pale, small and painless.

I have a dread of anything like rheumatism in children.

Salicylate — so they said in Paris — and who: Hutinel, Marfan, and what is even more odd, Baginski in Berlin⁶².

Vomiting — a trifle. But enough to bring the unfortunate doctor back again, even though he understands that this complication comes from the medicine.

As for me, after the mystery play, I had a fever for a couple of days. It was not perhaps so high, but was treated drastically by my mother so that a determined `No!' could be administered should father dare to bring ice cream home, at least until spring.

I am not sure whether on our way back we did drop in to have ace cream or iced soda water with pineapple juice. Artificial ice was not yet known then, and it was easy to get natural ice in winter. So we were able to cool off after the devilish heat.

⁶¹ A rash associated with rheumatism.

⁶² All three named are well-known pediatricians of France and Germany. not

I remember that I lost my scarf.

And I also remember that while I was still in bed on the third day, father came up to me, but mother sternly admonished him:

"Your hands are cold. Don't come near him!" Withdrawing meekly, father threw me an understanding glance.

I replied in the code of a knowing look corresponding to something like:

"That's the best way."

I think we both felt that in the last resort not they — mother, grannie, the cook, sister, the maid, and the governess Miss Maria — that monstrous regiment of women — hold the upper hand, but we, the men.

We are the masters. We give in for the sake of peace.

Curious. During my practice as a doctor, several years long but not particularly varied, I was frequently called by the fathers. But always only once.

This time the mothers were giving in for the sake of peace.

Let me still tell about [...].

A comment, or rather a hint, for those who in some thirty years will be drawing up radio programs.

Devote one hour — half and half to the grandson and the grandfather (or father) — to a chat entitled `Yesterday.' `How I spent my yesterday.' Always open it the same way:

"I woke up yesterday at ... I got up ... dressed." Such talks will teach how to regard, how to spell out current events, how to omit and how to emphasize, how to extract the most from life, appreciate and ignore, attack and follow up — how to live.

Why in fact not women, why not a teacher and pupil, an artisan and his employer, an office worker and the business callers, a lawyer and his clients?

This needs trying out.

Conclusion.

The Polish language knows no such word as `homeland.' Fatherland is too much and too difficult.

Is he only a Jew, perhaps also a Pole? Perhaps not fatherland but a cottage with a garden?

Does not a peasant love his fatherland?

It is as well that my pen has almost run dry. I have a hard day ahead of me.

Postscript

Ugolino-Dante. They will pass at a pinch. The mystery play.... If they were alive, they would know what it is to be just.

There were years when I kept sublimate and morphia pills hidden in the far corner of a drawer. I would take them out only when I went to my mother's grave at the cemetery. Since the beginning of the war, I have kept them in my pocket, and it is interesting that they were not taken from me when I was searched in jail.

There can be nothing (no adventure) more detestable than an unsuccessful attempt at suicide. Such a plan should be fully matured so as to ensure absolute infallibility of execution.

If I kept on postponing my plan, which I had fully thought through, it was because always at

very last moment some new vision would come along, which I could not abandon without working it out in detail. These visions were like themes for a short story. I have put them under a common heading: `Strange affairs.'

So:

I invented a machine (I made a detailed design of the complicated mechanism). Something in the nature of a microscope. Scale — a hundred. If I turn the micrometer screw to ninety-nine, everything that has not one percent of humanity must die. It gave me a lot of work. I had to determine how many men (living beings) would fall out of circulation each time, who would take their place, and what would be the outcome of such a purged, tentative, new life. After a year's deliberations (at night of course) I got halfway with the distillation. Now the only people left are half-beasts, the rest have perished. Evidence of how minutely, to the last detail, I thought of everything is that my own person was completely excluded from this peculiar system. Otherwise, turning the micrometer screw of my `microscope' I could also annihilate myself. What then?

I confess with some embarrassment that I revert to this theme nowadays, too, on the more difficult nights. The nights in prison produced the most interesting chapters of my tale.

There was a choice of about a dozen of those dreams in the workshop.

Well.

I found a magic word. I am the dictator of light.

I used to fall asleep so worried that it was making me rebellious.

Why pick on me? What do you want? There are younger ones, wiser, purer, more suitable for this mission.

Leave me alone with children. I am not a sociologist. I'll make a mess of everything. I'll compromise both the project and myself.

For rest and relaxation, I went to a children's hospital. 'Miejscowka.' Just for me, the city casts out children like little sea shells, and I do nothing. I am just good to them. I ask neither where they come from, nor for how long or where they are going, for good or evil.

The 'Old Doctor' doles out candy, tells stories, answers questions. Sweet tranquil years remote from the market place of the world.

Sometimes a book or a visit from a friend, and always a patient who needs the greatest of care for several years.

The children recover, die — as it is in a hospital.

I do not extend myself. I do not try to go deeper into a subject which I have fathomed to the bottom. Indeed, for the first seven years, I am precisely a sort of unassuming resident doctor in a hospital. After that I am bothered by a nasty feeling of having deserted. I betray the sick child, medicine and the hospital. I am carried away by a false ambition: physician and sculptor of the soul of the child. Soul. No more no less.

Oh, you old fool, you have made a mess of your life, and your cause! You got what you deserve! A woman, a hysterical flounder, an idler with the mentality of a hospital cleaner now represents this important sphere of life, a maitre d'hotel dabbling in hygiene.

For that I went around hungry, down-at-heels, in the clinics of three European capitals. Better to keep quiet about it.

I don't know how much of this autobiographical stuff I have already scribbled. I cannot bring myself to read back over such piffle. And I am increasingly in danger of repeating myself. What is even worse, the facts and experiences may, must, and will be differently told as regards the details.

Never mind. It is only evidence that these moments, to which I constantly revert, were

so profoundly experienced.

It shows that reminiscences hinge on our immediate experience. Recollecting, we unconsciously prevaricate. That is obvious, and I say it only for the benefit of the most primitive reader.

A frequent daydream and plan was a trip to China. It might even materialize quite easily.

My poor four-year-old Iuo-Ya from the times of the Japanese war. I wrote a dedication for her in Polish.

She was extraordinarily patient in teaching Chinese to a certain dumb pupil.

Of course, there should be institutes of oriental languages. Of course, lecturers and lectures.

But everyone must spend a year in such a village in the Orient and pursue a preliminary course of study under a four-year-old.

I was taught German by Erna. Walter and Frieda were already too old for that, already grammatical, influenced by novels, handbooks, the school.

Dostoevski says that with time all our dreams come true, only in so denatured a form that we don't recognize them. I can now understand my dreams of prewar years.

Not that I went to China. China came to me. Chinese famine, Chinese orphan misery, Chinese mass child mortality.

I do not want to pursue that subject. To describe someone else's pain is like thieving, preying upon misfortune, as if there were not enough of it as things are.

The first newsmen and officials from America did not hide their disappointment: not so terrible. They were seeking corpses, and in orphanages — skeletons.

When they visited the Children's Home, the boys were playing soldier. Paper caps and sticks.

"Obviously the war hasn't upset them too much," said one, ironically.

"They've got used to it. Appetites have increased and the nerves have become numbed, things are getting better at last. Here and there even toys to be seen in shops, and plenty of candy from ten groszy up to a Zloty."

"I saw it with my own eyes: a tiny tot scrounged ten groszy and promptly spent it on candy."

"Don't put that in your paper."

I read: nothing is easier to get used to than others' misfortune.

When we marched to East Prussia through Ostroleka⁶³, a woman, a small shopkeeper, asked us: "What will happen to us civilians? Why should we suffer? As for you officers, you're going to certain death."

Only once did I ride in a rickshaw in Kharbin. Now in Warsaw, I recoiled from it for a long time⁶⁴.

A rickshaw runner does not live more than three years, a strong one — five.

I did not want to have any hand in it.

Now I say:

"One must help them earn a living. Better I than two heavy-weight profiteers with packages in the bargain."

It is unpleasant when I have to pick one of the healthier and stronger (if I am in a hurry). I always give fifty groszy more than what they ask.

Noble — then and now.

Whenever I shared a room with healthy children and lit a cigarette, I told myself:

"Smoke is a good expectorant. I do them good."

Five glasses of raw alcohol mixed half and half with hot water gives me inspiration.

Then comes a luxurious feeling of weariness, painless since the scar does not really count, neither does the stiffness in the legs, nor even the aching eyes and the burning in the scrotum.

Inspiration I draw from the awareness that I am in bed, and so I will remain until the next morning. So for twelve hours the lungs, heart and mind will work normally.

After a hard day.

The taste of sauerkraut and garlic, and of the caramel I put in the glass with the spirits to make it more palatable. An epicurean.

What's more, two teaspoons of real coffee grounds with ersatz honey.

⁶³ During World War I.

⁶⁴ Korczak refers to the use of vehicles drawn by humans in Warsaw.

Odors: ammonia (urine decomposes quickly now, and I don't rinse the bucket every day), the smell of garlic, of carbide and from time to time, my seven bed fellows.

I feel content, calm and safe. Of course, the tranquility may be disturbed by Miss Stefa coming in with some piece of news, a problem, a desperate decision.

And perhaps Miss Esterka to say that one is crying and can't fall asleep because of a toothache. Or Felek about the letter to go to that dignitary first thing in the morning.

Now a moth has flown by, and at once — anger, inner ferment. Bed bugs — new, once infrequent visitors — and now moths, the last enemies, let's say number five. Damn it, that's a subject for tomorrow. Now, in the silence of the night (ten o'clock), I want to go over the day. A hard day, as I said.

Apropos vodka: the last half-liter bottle from the old lot. I did not intend to open it. Kept it for a rainy day. But the devil never sleeps — sauerkraut, garlic, the need to calm and five decagrams of sausage.

So peaceful and safe. Yes, even safe. I do not expect any visit from the outside. Of course, there may chance such a visitor as a fire, air raid, plaster falling on your head. But the very definition 's e n s e o f s a f e t y' shows that subjectively I take myself as living far behind the front line. Those unfamiliar with the front will not grasp this.

I feel at ease, and I want to write for a long time, until the pen runs dry. Say till one, and then six full hours of rest.

Even want to joke.

"Everything is fine" — said a not quite sober cabinet minister not quite at the right time because here and there famine and typhus were ravaging the villages, and the graph of fatal tuberculosis cases was rising steeply.

Afterward, political opponents picked on him in papers which call themselves independent (God forgive them!).

"Everything is fine" — I say and I want to make merry.

An amusing reminiscence.

Five decagrams of so-called sausage now costs 1 zloty 20. Formerly 80 groszy (bread is a little more expensive).

I said to the saleslady:

"Tell me, miss, don't they by any chance make these sausages from human flesh? They are rather cheap to be horse."

She answered:

"How should I know. I wasn't there when they made them."

No sign of annoyance, no friendly smile for a jocular witty customer, no shrug to denounce the joke as nightmarish, macabre. Nothing. She just stopped cutting, waiting for me to make up my mind. A sorry customer, a sorry joke or suspicion, not worth talking about.

The day began with weighing the children. May showed a marked decline. The earlier months of this year were not too bad and even May isn't yet alarming. But we still have two months or more before the harvest. No getting away from that. And the restrictions imposed by official regulations, new interpretations, and overcrowding are expected to make the situation still worse.

The children's weighing hour on Saturday is one of big excitement.

After breakfast, the school meeting.

Breakfast itself also amounts to work. Now, following my nasty letter to the dignitary, we have received a fairly good supply of sausage, even ham, even a hundred buns. Never enough, but although it doesn't amount to much 'per head' it has an effect.

Then even a surprise in the form of two-hundred kilograms of potatoes.

An echo of the letters. But there is a rub to it. A passing diplomatic victory, an easily won concession should not give rise to exaggerated hopes and lull vigilance.

They will try one way or another to get their own back — how to stop them? From where will the clouds roll in? What invisible ohms, volts, neons will add up into a thunderclap, into a khamsin, and when?

The gnawing: 'Have I done right or wrong?' A gloomy accompaniment to the children's carefree breakfast.

After breakfast, on the run, a la fourchette — the toilet (just in case, therefore a bit of a struggle), and a meeting to discuss the school's summer program of leaves and substitutes.

It would be convenient if it could be arranged the same way as last year. But a lot has changed since, different situation in the dormitories, many newcomers and departures, new promotions, things are — why keep on about it — different. And we would like things to be better.

After the meeting, the school newspaper and court decisions. Thefts have appeared. Not everyone is willing to listen carefully for a good hour to the subject of who has managed well and who badly, what has been received and what is missing, what to expect, what to do. The

school newspaper will be a revelation to the new children.

But the old ones know: that neither this way nor that will they find out what is important and most important to them. In fact, no one is interested, no one listens, so if it is possible to save trouble — why not?

Immediately after the newspaper, tiring for me who can reasonably acquiesce in and cunningly turn a blind eye to what it is more convenient not to see, when one will not use violence if persuasion is impossible — immediately after the newspaper, a longish conversation with a lady using her influence to get a child admitted. This is an intricate business, calling for caution, pleasantness and firmness. You can go absolutely crazy. But about that some other time. The gong has sounded for dinner.

Whether this Saturday's dinner differs in any way from others I'm not sure, so I prefer to put that off, too.

I am planning for today only three addresses and three calls. Looks easy.

1. To call on a supporter after his illness.
2. A talk on yeast for children in a house almost next door.
3. Close by, a welcome to returnees from the east, kind, friendly people whom I wish well.

Well ... well.

The first call was to amount to a continuation of the morning discussions on the school.

He wasn't at home.

"Please, convey my belated congratulations. I intended to come sooner but simply couldn't make it."

Thoughts are wearying — so many of them.

But that elderly man, odd and atypical as a primary school teacher. What do I know about him? Never a longer talk, perhaps none at all, for a whole year.

There was no time? I'm lying. (I can't keep my eyes open any longer.) Honestly. I'll wake up and finish later.

... Welcome — lovely silence of the night.

I didn't wake up, and in the morning some letters had to be written.

Continued on the next night

My blessing on peace and quiet.

N.B. Last night, only seven Jews were shot, so called Jewish gestapomen. What can it mean? Better leave it at that.

An hour's lecture on yeast. Brewers' or bakers', active or inactive? How long should it lie? How many times a week and how much?

Vitamin B.

Five liters a week required. How? Through whom? From whom?

During the third call a lecture on the national cuisine. How kugel and tscholent were made in his childhood.

An explosion of old men's memories. They have come from hell to the Warsaw paradise. So it was, so it is.

"You are still a youngster in age and experience. You don't know a thing."

And this tscholent as well.

While in Kiev I thought many a time of tripe as it is prepared in Warsaw, and eating it I cried out for my .country.

He listened — nodded.

I was stopped by the caretaker at the front entrance. "Almighty, save us! Let them not question, not ask for anything, say anything."

The body of a boy lies on the sidewalk. Nearby three boys playing horses and drivers. Suddenly they notice the body, move away` a few yards, go on playing. Anyone who is better off must help the family.

The family — own and wife's brothers and sisters, their brothers, sisters, old parents, children. Help them with from five to fifty zlotys — and so from dawn to dark.

If someone is starving and happens to find relatives willing to acknowledge kinship and ensure two meals a day, he will be happy for two or three days, not more than a week, he will then ask for a shirt, shoes, a human place to live, some coal. Then medical treatment for himself, his wife and children. Finally, he does not want to be a beggar, demands employment, a steady job.

It cannot be otherwise, yet it makes one so angry, discouraged, apprehensive, and disgusted

that even a decent and sensitive man turns against the family, all men and himself.

I wish I had nothing, so that they might see it for themselves, and that would be that.

I returned utterly shattered from the `round.' Seven calls, conversations, staircases, questions. The result: fifty zlotys and a promise of five zlotys a month. I can provide for two-hundred people!

I stretched myself on the bed with my clothes on. The first hot day. I cannot sleep, and at nine what is called an educational session. Occasionally someone will break out for a moment, then withdraw (not worthwhile). Occasionally a meek comment (just for the sake of appearances). The ceremony lasts for an hour. The formality has been preserved: from nine to ten. Of course, I exaggerate.

I have various thoughts stored up to put me to sleep. This time: what could I eat without having to force myself, even without abhorrence?

Astonishing. I who only six months ago didn't know exactly what I liked (occasionally that which had reminiscent associations.)

Raspberries (aunt Magdzia's garden), tripe (Kiev), buckwheat groats (father), kidneys (Paris).

In Palestine, I used to soak every dish in vinegar. And for now, as a soothing subject, what should I have?

Answer:

Champagne with dry biscuits and ice cream with red wine.

A harking back to the time of my throat troubles and no ice cream for twenty years. Champagne I drank perhaps three times in my life. Dry biscuits I probably ate as a child when ill.

I question myself:

Perhaps fish with Tartar sauce?

A Viennese schnitzel?

Pate, rabbit marinated in Malaga with red cabbage.

No! A thousand times no!

Why?

Odd: eating is work, and I am tired.

Sometimes, on waking up in the morning, I think:

"Have to get up, sit on the bed, reach for my underpants, button up, if not all the buttons at least one. Struggle into my shirt. Must bend to put on my socks. Suspenders...."

I can sympathize with Krilov who spent all his adult years on a couch, with all his books under it. He would reach for and read the first thing that came to his hand.

I can understand the mistress of P., a friend of mine. She never lit the lamp in the evening but used to read by the light of wad matches which he bought her specially for the purpose.

I'm coughing. Hard work. To get off the sidewalk into the street and to climb back again. I am pushed inadvertently by a passer-by: I stagger to one side and lean against a wall.

It is not feebleness. I could easily lift a schoolboy, thirty kilograms of resistant weight. Not short of strength but of will. Like a cocaine addict. I have been wondering even if there is not something in the tobacco, raw vegetables, in the air we inhale. For I am not the only one. Sleepwalkers — morphinists.

The same with memory.

It happens that I am on my way to see somebody on important business. I stop on the staircase:

"Well, what I -am going to see him about?" I ponder deeply for some time, and then with relief: "Of course — I remember. (Kobryner — sickness allowances, Herszaft — extra food rations, Kramsztyk — poor quality of coal and his wrong attitude on wood allocation.)"

Likewise at meetings. The thread of any discussion is easily severed. Someone will make a remark and we go off at a tangent for a long time.

What was it we were talking about? Occasionally, somebody starts off with: "Firstly...."

You wait in vain for: `Secondly.'

Of course, garrulity, too.

A motion:

"The child should be admitted."

Recorded: `Admit.' We ought to pass to the next application. No. Not one but three speakers support the motion. At times, it is necessary to intervene more than once.

The discussions keep on `skidding' like a badly driven car.

Wearying, irritating.

Enough!

That's just it: enough! There's no such feeling at the front. The front means orders.

"Ten miles forward, five back — a halt — countermarch, bivouac here."

On horseback or motorcycle — day or night — a brief order penciled on a scrap of paper. Must be carried out, no argument.

Only five undamaged houses left in a village. Prepare to receive two-hundred wounded. Already on the road. Get on with it your own way.

It is not like that here:

"If I may request. If you will kindly agree."

You are free to do nothing, do it some other way, argue.

In the army the commanding officer may be objectionable. He may deceive stupidly, humiliate, make senseless demands and, at a critical moment, disappear having given no orders. And without an order nothing can be done.

Men talk, think, dream about him. But in civilian life it is different: one can argue, discuss, quarrel, threaten.

The effect is the same.

Boredom.

Boredom at the front is temporary. Somebody has knocked at the door of the hut, a horse has snorted on the road. News. Perhaps moving into town, tonight in a fine palace maybe, or sent to another front, and perhaps the worst — captivity.

And now, here, we Jews do not know what tomorrow holds. In spite of that, there is a sense of security. Consequently boredom.

Wouldn't you rather be in the battle of Kharkov?

I scornfully brush aside the newspaper trash and answer:

"I would."

Worse, perhaps, but different.

That is why some escape to industry, others to black marketeering, to social work, to [...]

It's day again. I yawn. One more.

That tooth which makes my tongue sore — maddening. I filed it down, to no purpose. Perhaps it's cancer, perhaps my time has come?

May 29, 1942, six in the morning in bed

If you want to check your resistance to hydrophobia try to help a moron.

You put the paper right into her hand. You're to deliver it tomorrow only to him personally. Here is the address and hour. And she lost the paper or forgot to take it with her, or had no time, or the porter advised her to do something else. She will go tomorrow. It's all the same. Anyhow, she is not sure whether it will be alright. No one to leave the child with, she has some washing to do, just the child's dress.

"Couldn't you leave the washing till tomorrow?"

"It's hot. I promised."

She is upset. Perhaps nothing will come of it? Before the war such things were her husband's affair.

"Perhaps I'm no good, but please don't be angry with me."

I check on the material situation of a family. She has applied for admission of her boy.

"He can sleep here. It is quite clean."

"You call that clean? You should have seen our place before the war...."

"He could be here with us all day."

"And if it rains?"

"It's not for me to decide. I have recorded my opinion, it is up to the ladies to say what is to be done."

"Doctor! You have no idea what a child! You'll see for yourself. You'll be sorry to have only one like him. I had five doctors with me at my confinement."

I do not say: "You are being silly."

I did say that once thirty years back to a mother in the hospital.

She answered: "If I were rich, I would be smart right away."

I say to another woman:

"Even Rothschild doesn't give his child more than five meals a day."

"His child will have enough to eat all his life." I say:

"If your child needed tea to drink, God would give you milk in one breast and tea in the other."

"If God would only give children what He might give, and what they need...."

I say:

"If you don't believe me, you may call another doctor whom you trust."

"Please, doctor, I don't mean any offense, but how can I trust men if sometimes I don't trust even God?" Speech turned upside down:

"When I had spanked his behind so hard that it seemed to be burning, I was so sorry for him that, pardon my saying so, I began to cry."

Sami just brought me a letter to bed: will this do?

"To the Reverend Father, Vicar of All Saints:

"We kindly request the Rev. Father to grant us permission to come a few times to the church garden on Saturdays, in the morning hours, early if possible (6.30-10 a.m.).

"We long for a little air and greenery. It is stuffy and crowded where we are. We want to get acquainted and friendly with nature.

"We shall not damage the plants.

"Please don't refuse us.

Zygmus

Sami

Abrasza

Hanka

Aronek."

How many jewels man loses because he has no longer the patience to talk to people with whom he has no business, merely for the sake of getting to know them better.

This application with which we began the day is a good omen. Maybe I'll collect more than

fifty zlotys.

They sleep in the isolation room. Seven of them. Old Azrylewicz tops the list (angina pectoris), Genia (probably lung trouble), Haneczka (asthma). On the other side, Monius, Reginka, Maryla.

Hanka to Genia:

"He has sacrificed so much for her. He would give his life for her and everything, everything in the world. And she didn't love him, the pig."

"Why pig? Must one love when one is loved?"

"That depends how he loves. If he loves just a little, it doesn't matter, but if he is ready to give his life and everything, everything?"

"And did she ask him for anything?"

"That was all he needed!"

"Well, you see."

"That's what I say, too."

"No, you said she's a pig."

"Because she is."

"I don't want to talk to you."

They got angry.

I am content and discontent. Angry, pleased, anxious, indignant, eager to experience and to evade, live and let live while calling down the punishment of God and man. I qualify: this good, that bad.

But everything is so theoretical. Made to order. Flatly, drably, habitually, professionally as through a mist, blotched emotions, dimensionless. They are beside not inside me. Without effort I can renounce, postpone, cancel, suspend, substitute.

The sharp tooth cuts into my tongue. I am witness to a revolting scene: I hear words that ought to shock me. I can't cough it up, my throat is blocked, I suffocate.

A shrug, it's all the same to me.

Indolence. Poverty of feeling, that limitless Jewish resignation: What? And what next?

"What if my tongue is sore, what if some have been shot?" "He already knows he must die. And what next?" "Surely you cannot die more than once...?"

Occasionally, something will rouse me, and I am surprised, seem to realize or recollect that it is so, can be, was once. I see the same thing in others.

A chance meeting with someone we have not seen for many years. In his changed features, we read how different we ourselves look from how we looked formerly, from what we were.

And in spite of all, from time to time....

A scene in the street:

A youngster lies by the sidewalk, still alive or perhaps already dead. Just there, three boys playing horses and drivers try to `disentangle the reins. They consider, try one way then another, grow impatient, stumble over the one on the ground. Finally one of them says:

"Let's move on, he gets in the way."

They move a few steps away and continue to struggle with the reins.

Or: I check out an application for a boy to be admitted to the institution. 57 Smocza Street, apartment 57. Two decent families, dying out.

"I don't know if he will be willing to go to the institution right now. He's a good boy. Until his mother dies, too, he will be sorry to leave. The boy is out: he has gone scrounging for food."

The mother lying on a divan bed:

"I can't die before he is settled somewhere. Such a good child: he tells me not to sleep in the daytime so as to be able to sleep at night. And at night he says: what are you moaning for, that won't help? You'd better go to sleep."

Just as the cabmen are quarrelsome, noisy and spiteful, the rickshaw men are gentle and quiet. Like horses or oxen.

On the corner of Solna St. and Leszno St., I notice a group of people including an excited rickshaw man, an enraged peroxide blonde with crinkly hair, a policeman looking somewhat surprised, disappointed. Standing to one side, a smart woman looks on, evidently shocked. She waits to see how it will all end.

The policeman says gloomily:

"Better give the hooligan what he asks."

And he shuffles off.

The rickshaw man asks rhetorically:

"If the lady doesn't want to pay, then I am a hooligan?"

She: "I'll pay you two zlotys but you must take me to that house over there."

"You agreed to three zlotys to the corner of Ciepla St."

He turns around and rides away, parks the rickshaw in a row.

I ask the shocked woman:

"Do you know what happened?"

"Yes, I was riding with her."

"Who was right?"

"He. But why does he give up two zlotys rather than take her that extra hundred feet?"

"He wants his own way."

"Evidently."

I go up to the rickshaw man.

"What was the trouble?"

"Nothing. I lost two zlotys. So what? I wouldn't be any poorer, and a hooligan I am either way."

I went to three places and I related the incident to three sets of listeners.

I couldn't do otherwise. I simply had to.

One or two fellow workers from Dzielna St., not without encouragement from another one, a woman, not from Dzielna St., have denounced me to the Chamber of Health for failing to report cases of typhoid fever. Failure to report a single case may carry a death sentence.

I went to the Health Office and managed to calm them down somewhat and fix things for the future. I wrote two letters to two offices. To one, that I promise and don't keep my promise. To the other I addressed a question: What do they plan to do with me and my new center at Dzielna St',

The letters were not courteous. By no means. But do they justify lightheartedly calling me a blackguard?

Now I know: that woman's name is [...].

But if she is annoyed at me and a damn nuisance to the hospital system, and I wrote only

that about her, then why am I a blackguard?

What am I expected to do?

A small shopkeeper said to a customer with a complaint:

"My good woman -- these are not goods and this is not a store, you are not a customer nor I a vendor, I don't sell to you nor do you pay me because these scraps of paper are not money. You don't lose, and I don't profit. Who would bother to cheat nowadays — for what? Only one must do something. Well, am I not right?"

If I were given a missal, I might in a pinch celebrate a mass.

But j should not be able to preach a sermon to the flock in armbands. I should swallow the sentences, read a question in their eyes:

"What now? And what next?"

The words would stick in my throat.

Sliska, Panska, Marianska, Komitetowa streets. Memories, memories, memories.

Every house, every courtyard. Here were my half-rouble calls, usually at night.

For medical advice in the daytime for the rich and in rich streets, I asked three or five roubles. Brazen as much as Anders, more than Kramsztyk, Bączkiewicz — professorial fees. I, resident doctor, general hack at the Berson Hospital.

A thick volume of reminiscences.

Doctors, Jews, did not practice among Christians, except the well placed living in well-to-do streets. And about these — proudly:

"I was called to the district police chief, the restaurant proprietor, the bank commissioner, the schoolmaster in the high school at Nowolipki Street, the postmaster."

That was already something.

And I had phone calls, not every day, of course.

"Countess Tarnowski would like to speak to you, Doctor. The Prosecutor General of the Judicial Chamber. Madam Tygajlo, wife of a big shot director. The lawyers Makowski, Szyszkowski."

I write the address on any scrap of paper at hand, asking:

"Would it be alright tomorrow? After the hospital, say, at one. GIs there a temperature? Yes, he may have a soft-boiled egg."

Even once:

"General Gilchenko's wife."

And by unimportant contrast: Captain Hopper, a phone call, sometimes two, each time the child had his bowel movement.

Such were the calls to the author of *Drawing-Room Child*⁶⁵, while Goldszmit used to go at night to the basement at 52 Sliska St., up to the attic at 17 Panska St.

I was once called to the Poznanski residence⁶⁶ at Aleje Ujazdowskie.

It must be today. The patients are restless. "Three roubles," said Dr. Julek, who knew everybody in Warsaw. "Stingy."

So I go.

"Will you wait a moment, doctor? I'll send for the boys."

"Are they out?"

"Not far. They are playing in the park. Meanwhile — a cup of tea."

"I can't spare the time to wait."

"And Doctor Julian always.... Have you been writing anything lately?"

"Unfortunately only prescriptions."

The next day:

"For God's sake, my friend! — They're furious. Enemies!"

"I don't give a damn."

"Well, well."

As resident doctor, I had accommodation, an annual salary of 200 roubles, paid quarterly. The house was run by a good old soul to whom I paid fifteen roubles a month. From private practice — a hundred roubles a month, and odd sums from articles, too.

I used to spend a lot on cabs.

"A cab to go to Zlota St.? Twenty kopecks? Spendthrift!"

⁶⁵ One of Korczak's early books.

⁶⁶ Well-known family of textile manufacturers in Poland. (Trans.)

I treated free the children of socialists, teachers, newspaper men, young lawyers, even doctors — all progressive men.

Sometimes I phoned:

"I'll come in the evening. I must bathe and change — quite a few scarlet fever cases. I'd hate to infect the youngster."

The youngster!

This was the bright side.

And the shadows ...

I declared:

"Since the older doctors don't want to turn out at night, especially to the poor, I, being young, must hasten at night on errands of mercy."

You understand. Immediate help. How else? What if the child does not last till the morning?

Assistant surgeons declared war and acquired drug wholesalers and two hostile pharmacies as allies.

Unanimous opinion — cracked. A dangerous lunatic. They differed only in prognosis: curable?

Once, at night, a woman in a head scarf. Pouring rain.

"My mother."

"But I only treat children."

"She's gone all childish. I know you can't help, so why do I bother? But the doctors don't want to write a death certificate. But it's my mother. And like this without a doctor?"

I went.

"I didn't know, I beg your pardon, that you are only for children. Assistant Surgeon Blucharski sent me. A Jew but a decent man. He said: `My good woman, you'd have to pay me a rouble because it's a night call. But there's a doctor in the hospital — he'll come for nothing, and still leave some money for medicine'."

Out of spite, I had been signing prescriptions without the d-r — doctor.

They would say:

"We don't know any doctor by that name, probably an assistant surgeon."

"But ... a doctor in the hospital."

So:

"The medicine was prescribed by Dr. NK (not known, improper medicine)."

I used to take twenty kopecks because "it is written in the Talmud that an unpaid doctor is no help to a sick man."

For the most part I found the patients amusing. Queer people. Occasionally disturbing.

The night bell. The ambulance brings a child suffering from burns.

"What do you think?"

"I don't think. Nothing can be done."

"This is no ordinary child. I am a merchant. I have a house. I can pay."

"Please don't shout. Please leave, you'll wake the patients."

"What's that to me?"

The assistant surgeon and I took him under the arms, and out onto the stairs. The bed with the child in it was rolled into the surgery on the ground floor.

"You've got a telephone so you can summon as many Warsaw professors as you like!"

"I'll write to the papers about you. You'll be struck off the roll."

A spoiled night.

Or: six o'clock in the morning. A woman enters my room.

"To a child."

I am drowsy after a bad night.

"What's wrong with him?"

"Inflammation after scarlet fever."

"Who has been treating him?"

"Various."

"Then you'd better call those various."

"And if I prefer you? I can pay."

"I don't go out at night."

"Is six in the morning night?"

"Night."

"So you're not coming?"

"No."

Banging the door, she threw a final:

"Aristocrat! Just lost three roubles."

Without bargaining, she would have given me 25 kopecks, and three 'for the caretaker.' She wanted to punish me: now he won't be able to sleep, will bite his fingers, feeling sorry for himself.

He lost three roubles.

These are my native districts. Panska St., Sliska St. I abandoned the hospital for the Children's Home. I have a guilt complex.

Once I had to leave (the war).

The second time — a year in Berlin.

The third time — less than six months in Paris. Toward the light, toward knowledge.

Now that I know that I do not know and why I do not know, now that I can act in accordance with the supreme rule 'don't harm the sick,' I set out for unknown waters.

The hospital has given me a great deal, and I, ungrateful, so little to it. An ugly desertion. Life has taken revenge.

Yesterday I went to Grzybow No. 1 to collect a donation. The last building before the ghetto wall. A Jewish policeman was killed here yesterday. They say he was signaling to smugglers.

"That's not the place for wholesale business," a neighbor explains.

The store is closed.

People are scared.

Yesterday, in front of the house, the caretaker's assistant:

"Doctor, you don't remember me?"

"Wait ... of course, Szulc!"

"You do remember ...?"

"Well! I remember you well. Come, tell me." We sat down on the church steps.

Good God, Grzybów: here in 1905 Sobótka was wounded.

Two recollections intermingled. Bula is forty by now. Not so long ago, he was ten.

"I have a child. Perhaps you would come and have cabbage soup. You'll see him."

"I'm tired, I'm on my way home."

We've been talking for fifteen minutes, perhaps half an hour.

Shocked Catholics in armbands⁶⁷ have been stealing discreet glances. They know me.

In broad daylight on the church doorstep Korczak sitting with a smuggler. The children must be in a bad way over there. But why so openly, demonstratively, and, however you look at it, shamelessly.

A provocation. What would the Germans think if they saw this? Well, what is one to say: the Jews are brazen and irritating.

And Szulc confides in me:

"In the morning, he has half a pint of milk, a roll and butter. That mounts up."

"What for?"

"He must now he's got a father."

"A rascal?"

"Not he. My son."

"Your wife?"

"A fine woman."

"Do you quarrel?"

"Been together for five years, never raised my voice once."

"You remember?"

A suspicion of a smile.

"I often think of the Children's Home. Sometimes I dream about you and Madam Stefa."

"Why didn't you ever come up during all these years?"

⁶⁷ Nazi regulations designated many practicing Catholics as Jewish by virtue of their ancestry. They had to wear Star of David armbands like all others. (MW).

"When I was well off, I had no time. When I was down and out, how could I come — ragged and dirty?" "Do you ever meet Lejbus?"

"No."

He helped me up. We kissed warmly, heartily.

Too honest for a crook. And perhaps the Children's Home sowed something in him, and mowed something down? All the time I had believed that he had either gotten rich or was no more.

"My partner is rich."

"He helps you a bit?"

"Not he."

How quickly the hours go by. Just now it was midnight — and already three in the morning. I had a visitor in my bed.

Mendelek had a bad dream. I carried him to my bed. He stroked my lace (!) and went to sleep.

He is moaning. Feeling uncomfortable.

"Are you asleep?"

"I thought I was in the dormitory."

He stares surprised with black monkeylike beads of eyes.

"You were in the dormitory. Do you want to go back to your own bed?"

"Am I in your way?"

"You lie at the other end. I'll bring you the pillow." "Fine."

"I'll be writing. If you're frightened, go back." "O. K."

Also a grandson. The youngest Nadanowski.

Jakub has written some sort of a poem about Moses. If I don't read it today, he may feel hurt.

With satisfaction and melancholy, I am reading his and Monius's diary. Differing in age, so distinct in intellect, style of life — emotionally alike.

Men of a clear plateau, of the same level.

There was a strong wind and dust yesterday. Passers-by squinted and covered up their eyes.

I remember a scene observed during a sea voyage. A little girl on the deck. The sapphire sea in the background. Suddenly a gust of wind. She closed her eyes and covered them with her hands. However, curious, she looked up and — amazing! — Clean wind, for the first time in her life.

Nothing to get into the eyes. She tried it twice before she felt reassured, and she rested her elbows on the rail. And the wind caressed and combed her hair. She boldly opened her eyes as wide as possible. Embarrassed, she smiled.

"There is such a thing as wind without dirty dust but I didn't know about it. I didn't know there was pure air anywhere in the world. Now I know."

A boy on leaving the Children's Home said to me:

"If not for the home I wouldn't know that there are honest people in the world who never steal. I wouldn't know that one can speak the truth. I wouldn't know that there are just laws in the world."

Program for this Sunday.

In the morning, 39 Dzielna St. On the way see Kohn.

I received a notice to pay a fine following the case I had in court. Five hundred zlotys a month. So including today (June 1) I ought to pay fifteen hundred zlotys. Should I default, the whole amount, three or five thousand — I don't remember exactly — would be payable at once.

The point is that I want them to accept my savings book with 3000 zlotys. I suggested this when they asked me at Aleja Szucha⁶⁸ whether the community office⁶⁹ would not pay bail for my release.

"Don't you want the community office to pay for you?"

"No."

It was then they wrote down that I had 3000 zlotys in a savings book.

Several weeks rich in developments have gone by. I stopped writing because Heniek was sick, and I thought there was nobody to type my nightly revelations.

Curiously enough, I believed that to be true, although I knew that several other boys

⁶⁸ Gestapo headquarters in Warsaw. (Trans.)

⁶⁹ Jewish Community Office.

could do it equally well.

It would have been a different matter if I had decided to make writing a daily duty. Like during the war. *How To Love a Child* was typed even during halts of a few hours. At Jeziorna, even Walenty rebelled⁷⁰.

"Is it worthwhile for half an hour?"

And then in Kiev, too, absolutely every day.

And now I am finishing the pad. Another excuse to write no more tonight, though I feel perfectly rested. I had four cups of strong coffee, prepared from dregs it's true, but I suspect reinforced with fresh-ground coffee.

We deceive ourselves: I have no paper. I shall read Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*.

Probably for the first time I have forgotten that I am living through my tenth seven-year life-stage, 7X9.

Tensely, I waited for 2X7. Perhaps it was precisely then that I had heard of this for the first time.

The Gypsy's seven, seven days of the week. Why not the victorious ten of olden days (number of fingers)?

I remember the tense feeling experienced when I waited for the clock to strike midnight. The change was supposed to take place just at that instant.

There was some scandal with a hermaphrodite. I am not sure whether it was exactly at that time. I don't quite know whether I was afraid that I might wake up to find myself a girl. I made up my mind that if that happened I would keep it secret at all costs.

Gepner⁷¹ 7X10, I — 7X9. If I go over my life, the seventh year of age brought a sense of own value. I exist. I have weight. I have meaning. They see me. I can. I will.

Fourteen years. I look around. Perceive. See.... My eyes were due to open. They did. The first ideas concerning educational reforms. I used to read a dot. First anxieties and frustrations. Now, imagined voyages and stormy adventures, then again quiet family life, friendship, love for Stach. The primary dream among many, among many dozens: he a priest, I a doctor in that small town. I thought of love, formerly I only felt it, I

⁷⁰ It appears that during World War I Korczak's orderly objected to his notes, which deprived him of rest.

⁷¹ A well-to-do philanthropist supporting the Children's Home.

loved. From seven to fourteen I was permanently in love, always with a different girl. Odd, but I remember many of them. The two sisters from the skating rink, Stach's cousin (grandfather an Italian), the one in mourning, Zosia Kahorn, Anielka, Irenka from Naleczów. Stefcia for whom I used to pick flowers from the beds by the fountain in Saski Park. Then that little rope skipper, I grieved bitterly over her. I loved for a week, a month, occasionally two at once, three. One I wanted to have or a sister, another for a wife, for a sister-in-law.... My love for Mania from my fourteenth year (at Wawer in summer) was an integral part of that [...] feelings that alternately gently rocked or violently shook me. The exciting world was not already behind me. Now it is within me. I exist not to be loved and admired, but myself to act and love. It is not the duty of those around to help me but I am duty-bound to look after the world, after man.

3X7. In the seventh year, school, in the fourteenth, religious maturity, in the twenty-first, military service. For long the feeling of being cooped up. Once I was imprisoned by the school. Now I am generally shut in. I want to prevail, fight for new space.

(Probably these thoughts were suggested to me by the 22nd of June when, after the longest day in the year, the sun sets three minutes earlier day by day. Sneakingly, imperceptibly but inexorably there is less of the day by three minutes and again by three, and again. I used to commiserate with old age and death; now, less sure myself, I begin to fear for my own self. One must fight for and achieve a great balance in order to have enough to write off for losses. Perhaps it was precisely then that the dentist pulled out my first adult tooth which would not grow again. My rebellion against the law of nature, not the social conditions, came to a head. Get ready, aim, fire.)

4X7. The need for efficient functioning over the limited area of one's own 'workshop.' I am anxious to be able, to know, not to idle, not to stray. I need to be a good doctor. 'I shape a model of my own. I do not wish to model myself upon acknowledged authorities. (Things used to be otherwise once. Even today there are moments when I feel like a young man with a long road ahead. I find it worthwhile to plan and venture. In the second, and certainly in the third seven years, I felt old at times, constant repetition, already too late, not worthwhile. Indeed, life is like a flame. Dies down though there is ample fuel. Suddenly, when it is about to die down, flares up sending out sparks and shooting up brightly. And dies down. A hot day in the fall and awareness that this is the last, exceptional, cold morning in July.)

5X7. I got my money back in the lottery of life. My number is already drawn. My money back. So I will not lose in this drawing unless I stake again. Might have been worse: I might have lost. But no more chance of the big prize — a pity. Fair enough — I have gotten back what I paid in. Safe. But drab — and regrettable.

Loneliness does not hurt. I appreciate memories. A schoolmate — a friendly chat over a cup of coffee in a quiet corner where no one will disturb. I seek no friend because I know I will not find one. I do not strive to know more than may be. I have signed a pact with life: we will not get in each other's way. It is unbecoming to fly at each other — no use anyway. In politics, I believe, they call it a demarcation of spheres of influence. So far and no farther, nor higher. You and I.

6 X 7. Perhaps? Already, or not yet? That depends. Let us strike a balance. Assets, liabilities. If one knew how many years more, when the end. I do not feel the inner rumblings of death, but already I think about it. If a tailor makes me a new suit, I do not say: that'll be the last. But the office desk and the chest of drawers will surely outlive me. Barring freaks and the unexpected. There will be more severe and milder winters, rainy and scorching summers. And gratifying coolness, and gales, and dust storms. So I will say: for ten, fifteen years we have not had such hail, such floods. I remember a fire. I was young then, let me think — already a university student or still a schoolboy?

7X7. What really is life, what is happiness? So long as it is not worse, just like it is now. Two sevens have met and exchanged polite greetings, glad that things are as they are, and precisely here, and under such specific conditions. A newspaper — seemingly only mindless reading. Perhaps it is. Yet you cannot do without it. There are the leaders, and a novel in installments, obituaries and theatrical reviews, reports from the courts. The movies — a new film. A new novel. Small accidents. Classified advertisements. Not so much interesting as offering a choice. Someone under the streetcar, somebody has invented something or other, someone's fur coat stolen, and here a five-year prison sentence. Somebody wants to buy a sewing machine or a typewriter, or has a piano for sale or is looking for a three-room apartment with all modern conveniences. A broad river bed, I should say, of the majestically flowing Vistula as it is near Warsaw.

My city, my street, my store where I regularly shop, my tailor, and most important of all — my workshop.

As long as it is no worse. For if one could order the sun: stop, probably it should be at this time of life. (There is a small dissertation *On the Happiest Period of Life* — and, believe it or not, by Karamzin⁷². His stuff sure bothered us in the Russian school.)

7 X 8 = 56. How these years have flown. Literally flown. It seems but yesterday it was

⁷² N. N. Karamzin (1766-1826) Russian writer and historian.

7X7. Nothing added, nothing subtracted. What a vast difference in those ages: seven and fourteen, fourteen and twenty-one. And for me, at 7 X 7 and at 7 X 8 — absolutely the same.

Please do not get me wrong. Obviously there are no two leaves identical, nor drops, nor grains of sand. This fellow has a balder head, that one more gray hair. This one has false teeth, that one only crowns. This one eyeglasses, that one hard of hearing. This one more bony, that one fatter. But what I am concerned with are the seven-year stages.

I know: life could be divided into five-year periods, and that way, too, it could be made to fit. I know: the conditions. Wealth, poverty. Success, worries. I know: war, wars, disasters. And this is relative, too. A certain lady told me: "The first war spoiled me completely, and it was very difficult then to settle down." Even the present one has spoiled many. Yet surely there is not a man who does not believe that the failures of strength, health and energy spring not from the war but from that 7 X 8 and 7X9.

What ghastly dreams! Last night: the Germans, I without the armband during the curfew at Praga⁷³. I woke up. Again a dream. On a train, I am moved, a meter at a time, into a compartment where there are already several Jews. Some died again tonight. The bodies of children. A dead child in the bucket. Another skinned, lying on boards in the mortuary, clearly still breathing. Another dream: I am standing high up on a wobbly ladder, and my father keeps on pushing a piece of cake into any mouth, a big lump with sugar candy and currants, and anything that falls from my mouth he puts crumbed into his pocket.

I woke up in a sweat at the most dangerous point. Is not death such an awakening at a point when there is no apparent way out?

"Every man can surely find five minutes in which to die" — I have read somewhere.

Summer. 39 Dzielna St. Abstracts.

When the tenth in turn pesters me about a decision regarding candy and honey cakes it makes me wild. Are there no other problems to solve except those of honey cakes!

Yesterday, a little boy came back from the hospital after having had a leg amputated following frostbite. Everybody thinks it his duty to tell me about it. An annoying thoughtlessness. I'll put up with it. But that boy — hero of the day?

One sees too few hysterics around here.

⁷³ The section of Warsaw east of the Vistula.

Two sensible, level-headed, unbiased informants and advisers have let me down. The weighing machine and the thermometer.

I have ceased to believe them. They tell lies, too.

We say:

Group one, group two — area A, area B, area C. We say: the wing. (The wing has not yet gotten breakfast.) We say: area U, area I. Group A boys and girls for the shift....

Incidental, sort of historical rodomontades, or a desire to intimidate and flabbergast a newcomer.

Hard to say.

There are `men' here — a barrow man once, an errand boy once, porter or caretaker once. There are women manual workers, house servants, charwomen, governesses — today a hygienist has emerged. There are sectional or floor or landing monitors, probably guards as well. It did not bother me in jail, but here it is upsetting.

Hard to say.

There are women workers for the morning, afternoon, ill, convalescent, feverish, here today and gone tomorrow, group leaders, half-and-halves, outside workers, the dismissed.

Hard to 'say who, what.

She looks at me with scared eyes and answers: I don't know.

As if she came yesterday, hasn't worked here for ten years but ,came yesterday. As if what I am asking about related to the North Pole or the equator.

She doesn't know. Just does her job.

The only way: not to interfere and not to know what the hundred-headed roll of employees do.

Children?

Not only children but cattle, and carrion, and dung.

I have caught myself in a transgression. I do not give a full teaspoon of cod liver oil. I think that on their graves will grow nettle, burdock and madwort, not nutritious vegetables

and flowers.

I have the impression that they send here the refuse of children and staff from allied institutions. An imbecile, a spiteful predator expelled from the

Children's Home has landed here, too. When finally a German soldier intervened in his behalf, I told the policeman that if Fula were to come back I would take his gun and stand guard, and let him, the policeman, take charge of the Home.

So the mother placed him here.

The staff.

The chimney sweep must be smeared with soot. The butcher must be stained with blood (the surgeon, too).

The cesspool cleaner stinks.

The waiter must be crafty. If he is not, woe be unto him.

I feel all smeared, blood-stained, stinking.

Crafty, since I am alive — I sleep, eat and, occasionally even joke.

I have invited for consultations:

Brokman

Hallerowa

Przedborski

Gantz-Kohn

Lifszyc

Mayzner

Zandowa⁷⁴

Advise me: limewater: alright. What else?

Long after the war, men will not be able to look each other in the eyes without reading

⁷⁴ An attorney and several physicians working in the Ghetto.

the question: you are alive, you survived? What were you doing?

My dear Anka....

1. I don't make social calls. I go to beg for money, foodstuffs, an item of information, a hint. If you call that social calls ... it is arduous degrading work. Must play the clown, too. People don't like gloomy faces.

I often call on the Chmielarz family. They always find some food for me. That's not a social call, either. I see it as a good deed, they — as an exchange of services. In spite of the kind, gentle and soothing atmosphere, it is frequently tiring, too.

Reading as a relaxation begins to fail. A dangerous symptom. I am distracted and that itself worries me. I don't want to sink into idiocy.

2. I have sent the 500 zlotys. If I am in any danger, the least from that side, in that case. A reliable and stalwart friend — an excellent lawyer — looks after the matter. I take no step without his approval.

3. I am going to see the head of the Staff Section. I could not have failed to consider the case since there was none. Whatever Madam Stefa said, promised and undertook, I did not know since no one told me. I have kept the secret.

4. In my humble opinion, I discharge my duties to the best of my ability. I never refuse if I can help it. I have never undertaken to look after politicians, so the charge is unjust.

June 26, 1942

END OF PART ONE

I have read it over. I could hardly understand it. And the reader?

No wonder, memoirs are incomprehensible to the reader. Is it possible to understand strange reminiscences, a strange life?

It seems that ;I ought to be able to know without an effort what I write about.

Well! Is it possible to understand one's own reminiscences?

Slowacki left behind his letters to his mother. They give a vivid picture of his experiences over several years. Because of those letters, a document has survived attesting to his

transformations under the influence of Towianski⁷⁵.

It crossed my mind:

"Perhaps I should write these memoirs in the form of letters to my sister?"

Cold, strange, detached was my first letter to her. A reply to her letter.

Here:

"My dear ..."

... ..

What a great and painful misunderstanding.

Proust is scattered and petty?

Far from it:

Every hour — that thick copybook, that's an hour's reading.

So be it.

You have to read all day to understand my day more or less. Week after week, year after year.

And we, during a few hours, at the expense of a few hours of our time, want to relive a whole lifetime.

Not so easy. You will grasp something from a vague abstract, a careless sketch — a single episode in a thousand, in a hundred thousand.

I am writing this in the classroom during the Hebrew lesson.

Zamenhof⁷⁶ comes to my mind. Naive, audacious, he wanted to rectify God's error or God's punishment. He wanted to fuse the confused languages into one again.

Stop!

To divide, divide, divide. Not to join.

What would men have?

⁷⁵ Creator of a religious sect among Polish emigrants in France. His ideas of Messianism had a great influence on Polish poets and writers of that time.

⁷⁶ A Warsaw physician, the inventor of Esperanto (1859-1917).

Time must be filled, men given activity, life must have a goal.

"He knows three languages. He is studying a language. He knows five languages."

Here two groups of children have given up amusement, easy books, chats with friends.
Voluntary study of Hebrew.

When the younger group finished their hour, one exclaimed with surprise:

`What, an hour has passed already?"

So. `Da' in Russian, `ja' in German, 'oui' in French, `yes' in English, `ken' in Hebrew. One can fill not one but three lives.

Part Two

Today is Monday. From eight to nine a dormitory chat. Whoever wants to may attend.
Provided he does not interrupt.

Suggested themes:

1. Emancipation of women
2. Heredity
3. Loneliness
4. Napoleon
5. What is duty?
6. On the medical profession
7. Amiel's memoirs⁷⁷
8. From the doctor's reminiscences
9. On London
10. On Mendel
11. Leonardo da Vinci
12. On Fabre
13. The senses and the mind
14. The genius and his surroundings (mutual impact)

⁷⁷ French poet who became known when his memoirs were posthumously published (1821-1881).

15. The Encyclopedists
16. How different writers did their creative work differently
17. Nationality. Nation., Cosmopolitanism.
18. Symbiosis
19. Evil and malice
20. Freedom. Destiny and free will.

When I was the editor of `Maly Przegadd,'⁷⁸ only two themes attracted young people: Communism (politics) and sexual problems. Wicked, shameful years — rotten, base. Prewar, lying, falseness. Cursed.

Life was not worth living.

Filth. Stinking filth.

The storm came. Cleared the air. Easier to breathe. More oxygen.

FROM THE SERIES "STRANGE HAPPENINGS"

**I devote this tale
to Szymonek Jakubowicz**

Let the planet be called Ro, and he be named Professor, Astronomer or whatever you like. And we shall call the place on planet Ro where Professor Zi was making his observations, Laboratory.

The name of the instrument in our imperfect speech will be a bit too long: 'astropsycho-micrometer,' a micrometer in the medium of astral psychical vibrations.

In terms of our terrestrial observatories, the Professor used a telescope which, by buzzing, communicated what was going on here and there in the universe, and possibly the intricate instrument projected pictures onto a screen or recorded vibrations in the same way as a seismograph.

Anyhow, this is unimportant.

What is important is that the scientist from Planet Ro could control psychic energy and could change heat radiation into spiritual, to be more precise, moral power.

⁷⁸ A weekly supplement to the prewar Warsaw daily 'Nasz Przegadd.'

Alright. So long as we take morality to be the harmony of impressions and the equilibrium of feelings.

One more comparison comes to mind: a radio that transmits not songs and music or war communiques but rays of a spiritual order. In the life of stars, and not merely in our solar system.

Of order and tranquility.

And so Professor Zi sits troubled in his workroom and thinks:

"That restless spark which is Earth is again in ferment. Disorder, disquiet, negative emotions predominate, reign. Miserable, impure is their life over there. Its disorders upset the run of time and impressions.

A pointer has stirred again. The line of suffering has gone up violently."

One, two, three, four, five.

Astronomer Zi frowns.

"Put an end to this senseless game? That bloody game? The beings inhabiting earth have blood. And tears.. And they moan when hurt. Don't they want to be happy? Are they wandering, unable to find the way? It is dark over there, a gale and a dust storm blinds them."

The pointer records more and more new impacts.

Improperly used iron imposes a penalty. But at the same time guides and trains, prepares the spirit for new conquests and initiations.

"There are bodies of water upon that distant spark. From slaughtered trees, you have built floating houses, braced them with iron. What a stupendous effort. Unruly, foolish but capable. They have no wings yet. How vast to them appear the altitudes of flight and the expanse of oceans."

Bzzzz... Bzzzz.

instead of rejoicing in their hearts, in song, intensified collective effort, instead of tying the threads, they tangle and tug.

"So what am I to do? To check them would mean to press them onto a road for which they are not yet sufficiently matured, an effort beyond their strength and a goal transcending their present comprehension. Slavery, coercion, violence. All that foments, festers and hurts."

Professor Zi sighs. Closes his eyes. Applies the sensor of the astropsychomicrometer to his chest and listens.

And there is a war proceeding on the earth. Fires, shambles, battlefields. Man, responsible for Earth and its products, does not know, or knows but understands for himself alone.

Space over Planet Ro (perhaps Lo) is filled with blue, with the fragrance of the lily of the valley and the sweetness of wine. Winged feelings flicker like snowflakes, raising the song of songs, gentle and pure.

Our earth is still young. Its beginnings painful labor.

From the diaries they bring to be read.

Marceli writes: "I have found a penknife. I will give 15 groszy for the poor. I promised myself."

Szlama: "A widow sits at home and weeps. Perhaps the older son will bring something from his smuggling. She does not know that the gendarme shot her son dead. ... And do you know that soon everything will be alright again?"

Szymonek: "My father was a battler for a piece of bread. Although father was busy all day, yet he loved me." (And two shocking memories):

Natek: "Chess was invented by a Persian wizard or king."

Mietek: "That siddur⁷⁹ that I want to have bound is a souvenir since it belonged to his brother who died, his brother in Palestine sent it to him for the day of confirmation."

Leon: "I needed a box to keep all sorts of souvenirs. Hersz wanted to sell me a French polished box for 3 1/2 zlotys." (An involved account of the deal.)

Szmulek: "I have bought tags for 20 groszy. Tomorrow I will have big expenses."

Abu: "If I sit a bit longer in the toilet, they right away say that I am selfish. And I want to be liked by others." (I know this problem from jail.)

I have fixed a toilet fee scale:

1. For urinating — catch five flies.
2. For a bowel movement — second class (a bucketstool-with-a-hole combination) — ten flies.
3. First class — toilet seat — fifteen flies.

One of the boys asks:

⁷⁹ Prayer book.

"May I pay the flies later? I can't wait."

Another:

"You go and do it, go on.... I'll catch them for you."

Every fly caught in the isolation room counts as two.

"And does it count if a fly is hit and gets away?" Whatever else, there are certainly very few flies. Using the same system, a dozen or so years ago, kindergarten children caught all the bugs at Goclawek.

Community good will — a mighty force.

EUTHANASIA

The church has shrouded in ritual the functions of birth, marriage and death.

The ritual of the mass has taken possession of man's entire spiritual life, controlling even the accessory economic life of the flock.

When men cast away (why so abruptly?) the childish cloth, already tight and too short — artless and repeatedly patched up — the flock — the church expanded into a number of institutions.

Now construction is not only in the service of places of worship. The first, you understand, France and Paris, erected the contemporary Babel. The name of it is the Eiffel Tower.

The buildings of schools and secular universities, theaters, museums, concert halls, crematoria, hotels, stadiums — great, magnificent, hygienic, modern.

There is now talk over the radio and not only a sermon and the priest's address.

Libraries, printing shops, bookstores and not only a holy book or a scroll on the altar and a street stand with amulets.

The physician — the mighty structure of medicine.

Now it is no longer the priest's prayer which protects against contagion.

Against hail, fire and death — health insurance schemes and insurance companies now.

Social care replaces the one-time penny for the blind.

Sculpture and painting on canvas in art galleries, not only on holy ceilings and walls.

Meteorological institutes instead of prayer services. The hospital stemmed from the church.

All was contained within it and took its beginnings from it.

The stock exchange controls prices, not the square in front of the church.

International meetings of learned specialists and countless periodicals, not exchange of private letters and mutual social calls, discussions and feasts of the Levites.

Diplomacy, no less effective than prayers, protects against the outbreak of war.

The penal, civil, and commercial codes are the equivalent of the old decalogue and commentaries.

Prisons are the former cloisters. Judgments — excommunications.

Man of today has matured, but he has not become wiser and gentler.

Once upon a time, everything was in the church, whatever was lofty, solemn, rational, beautiful, humanitarian, humane. Outside was nothing but a beast of burden, numbed, exploited, helpless.

And even today, even upon the snowy peaks of development and knowledge, men have founded their most important affairs upon baptism, the sacraments of marriage, and rites linked with the hour of death for some and inheritance for the quick.

Not so long ago, yes, almost yesterday, there appeared at conferences: population or birth control, discussion on the perfect marriage and — euthanasia.

The right to kill as an act of mercy belongs to him who loves, and suffers — if he himself also does not want to remain alive. It will be this way in a few years.

An odd saying has come into use:

"To be sociable, a Gypsy has gone to the gallows."

When on my sister's return from Paris I suggested to her that we should commit suicide together, there was no idea or program of bankruptcy in it. On the contrary. I could find no place for myself in the world and life.

Qui Bono that dozen odd years more? Perhaps it was my fault, who knows; that I did not revert to my offer. The deal did not materialize because of certain differences of opinion.

When during the dark hours I pondered over the killing (putting to sleep) of infants and old people of the Jewish ghetto, I saw it as murder of the sick and feeble, as assassination of the simple.

A nurse from the cancer home told me that she used to put a lethal dose of medicine by the bedside of her patients, instructing them:

"Not more than one spoonful, because it's poison. One spoonful will alleviate the pain like a medicine."

And over many, years, not a single patient reached for the fatal dose.

How will this problem look to the future?

An official board, what else? A well-developed organization. One big office, small rooms. Office desks. Lawyers, doctors, philosophers, business advisers, of different ages and specialties.

The one concerned submits an application. Everybody is eligible. Perhaps ample restrictions so that applications are not made without proper consideration or not in earnest, deceitfully for the purpose of taking advantage of the board or to trick one's own family.

An application for death might serve to exert pressure upon the family:

"Come back to me, dear wife, or else — see, a receipt for my application.... Daddy, I need money to have a good time.

"If you don't give me a passing grade in my matriculation, you will suffer pangs of conscience, I'll poison your peace of mind."

So:

The application must be on a specified kind of paper only. Say, in Greek or Latin. A list of witnesses to the application to be enclosed. Perhaps stamps. Perhaps the fee payable in four quarterly installments or three monthly ones, or seven weekly.

The application must be well grounded:

"I do not want to live because of a disease, a financial crash, a disappointment, a surfeit, because father, son, friend has failed me.

"I request that the operation be performed within one week, without delay."

Has anyone collected incidents and experiences, confidences, letters, memoirs from concentration camps, prisons, from condemned men or those threatened with a death sentence, on the eve of a big battle, on the stock exchange, in gambling houses?

Application accepted. Formalities complied with. Now the examination, conducted along the same lines as a trial in court.

Medical examination. Consultation with a psychologist. Perhaps confession, maybe psychoanalysis. Additional interviews with the witnesses.

Fixing the dates, any possible changes. Specialists and experts.

Refusal or postponing of the implementation of a favorable decision. Or a trial euthanasia. For it happens that man, having once tried the delights and joys of committing suicide, lives to an advanced age, never trying again.

One of the initiation processes for freemasons is said to be such a test consisting of an unsuccessful leap into the unknown.

Place of execution. This is my personal invention — after a cut-off date.

Or:

Proceed to this or that place. There you will receive the death applied for. Your request will be granted in ten day's time, at a morning, evening hour. The authorities are asked to assist on land, at sea and in the air.

It looks as if I am joking. No.

There are problems that like bloodstained rags lie right across the sidewalk. People cross to the other side of the street or turn their eyes away in order not to see.

I do the same.

However, where a whole problem, and not just a beggar dying of starvation, is involved, this is not allowed. It is not one or a hundred miserable wretches in a hard year of war but millions through the centuries.

This you must look straight in the face.

My life has been difficult but interesting. In my younger days I asked God for precisely that.

"God, give me a hard life but let it be beautiful, rich and aspiring."

On discovering that Slowacki had done the same, I felt rather pained that it was not my invention, that I had a precursor.

When I was seventeen, I even started writing a novel entitled *Suicide*. The main character hated life out of fear of insanity.

I used to be desperately afraid of the lunatic asylum. My father was sent there several times.

So I am the son of a madman. A hereditary affliction.

More than two score years, and to this day this thought is at times a torment to me.

I am too fond of my madness not to be afraid that someone may try to treat me against my will.

At this point, I should write down: part two. No. All this taken together is but talkativeness. But I can't be more concise.

July 15, 1942

A week's break in writing which, it seems, was absolutely unnecessary. I had the same feeling when writing *How To Love A Child*. I used to write at stops, on a meadow, under a pine tree, sitting on a stump. Everything is important and if I do not note it down I will forget. An irretrievable loss to humanity, At times, a pause for a month. Why make a fool of myself? Whatever is wise is known by a hundred men. When the proper time comes, they will tell you, realize whatever is of major importance. It was not Edison who made the inventions. They were hanging as if on a line, like wash drying in the sun. All he did was to gather them.

The same goes for Pasteur, the same for Pestalozzi. It is there. Only spell it out.

So it is with every problem.

If not one, then another, will launch himself into space.

For a long time I could not understand in what way the present-day orphanage differs from earlier ones, from our own as it once was.

Orphanage — barracks. I know.

Orphanage — prison. Yes.

Orphanage — beehive, anthill. No.

The Children's Home is now a home for the aged. I have seven occupants in the isolation room, three of whom are new. The age of the patients ranges from seven right up to Azryl, sixty, who moans sitting on his bed with his legs dangling, and elbows resting on the back of a chair.

The morning discussions of the children are the product of temperature measurement. My temperature, and yours. Which one is feeling worse? How did each pass the night?

A sanatorium for rich patients, capricious, affectionately attached to their ailments.

Leon has fainted for the first time in his life. Now he is trying to find the cause.

The children are dreamy. Only the outer skin normal. Underneath lurks weariness, discouragement, anger, mutiny, mistrust, resentment, longing.

The seriousness of their diaries hurts. In response to their confidences I share with them as an equal. Our common experiences — theirs and mine. Mine more diluted,

watered down, otherwise the same.

Yesterday, while counting the votes of the staff at

Dzielna St., I understood the essence of their solidarity. They hate one another but none of them will allow

another to come to harm.

"Don't meddle in our affairs. You are a stranger, an enemy. Even if you offer something useful it is only an illusion and will ultimately do harm."

The most devoted nurse, Miss Wittlin, died — tuberculosis.

Too bad — Wittlin. Two: school and the isolation room. `The salt of the earth' dissolves — the manure remains.

What will be the upshot?

"It is harder to pass a day well than to write a book."

Every day, not merely yesterday, is a book — a thick exercise book, a chapter, nourishment for years. How improbably long a man lives.

There's nothing absurd about the calculations of the Holy Scriptures: Methuselah did live about a thousand years.

Night, July 18

During the first week of our last stay at the Goclawek summer home, the result of the consumption of bread of unknown composition and make was a mass poisoning which affected the children and some of the staff.

Diarrhea. The excrements boiled in the chamber pots. Bubbles formed upon the surface of the pitchlike matter. Bursting they exuded a sweetish-putrid odor, which not only attacked the sense of smell but invaded the throat, eyes, ears, the brain.

Just now we have something similar, it consists of vomiting and watery stools.

During the night, the boys lost 80 kg among them - average a kilogram per head. The girls — 60 kg (somewhat less).

The children's digestive tracts were struggling under heavy strain. Not much needed to precipitate a disaster. Perhaps it was the inoculation against dysentery (five days ago) or the ground pepper added pursuant to a French recipe to the stale eggs used for Friday's

`pate.'

The next day, not so much as a single kilogram of the losses in weight was made up.

Help for those vomiting, moaning with pain, was administered in near darkness — limewater. (Unlimited dental chalk for whoever wanted it, jug after jug. In addition, a drug for some suffering from headaches.) Finally, for the staff, sparingly — morphine. An injection of caffeine for a hysterical new inmate following a collapse.

His mother, wasting away of ulcerated intestines, was unwilling to die until the child had been placed in the Home. The boy was unwilling to go until the mother had died. He finally yielded. The mother died alright, now the child has pangs of conscience. In his illness, he mimics his mother: moans (screams), complains of pain, then gasps, then feels hot, finally is dying of thirst.

"Water!"

I pace the dormitory to and fro. Will there be an outbreak of mass hysteria? Might be! Victory for the children's confidence in the leadership. They believed that as long as the doctor was calm there was no danger.

Actually I was not so calm. But the fact that I shouted at the troublesome patient and threatened to throw him out onto the staircase was evidence that the man at the helm had everything under control. Decisive: he shouts, so he knows all about it.

The next day, that is yesterday — the performance. *The Post Office* by Tagore. Applause, handshakes, smiles, efforts at cordial conversation. (The chairwoman looked over the house after the performance and pronounced that though we are cramped, the genius Korczak had demonstrated that he could work miracles even in a rat hole.)

So others are allotted palaces.

(This reminded me of the pompous opening ceremony of a new kindergarten in the workers' house at Górczewska St. with the participation of Mrs. Moscicka⁸⁰ — the second.)

How ridiculous they are.

What would have happened if the actors of yesterday were to continue in their roles

⁸⁰ Wife of the prewar President of Poland.

today?

Jerzyk fancied himself a fakir.

Chaimek — a real doctor.

Adek — the lord mayor.

(Perhaps illusions would be a good subject for the Wednesday dormitory talk. Illusions, their role in the life of mankind....)

And so to Dzielna St.

The same day. Midnight

If I were to say that I have never unwillingly written a single line, that would be the truth. But it would also be true to say that I have written everything under compulsion.

I was a child `able to play for hours on his own,' concerning whom `you wouldn't know there was a child in the house.'

I got building blocks (bricks) when I was six. I stopped playing with them when I was fourteen.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Such a big boy.

You ought to be doing something. Reading. Blocks — what next...."

When I was fifteen I acquired the madness, the frenzy of reading. The world vanished, only the book existed.

I used to talk to people a lot: to peers and to much older ones, adults. In Saski Park I had some really aged friends. 'They were amazed at me.' A philosopher.

I conversed only with myself.

For to talk and to converse are not the same. To change one's clothes and to undress — two different things.

I undress when alone, and converse when alone. A quarter of an hour ago I finished my monologue in the presence of Heniek Azrylewicz. Probably for the first time in my life I told myself positively: "I have an investigating mind, not inventive." Investigating in order to know?

No.

Investigating in order to ascertain, to plumb? Not that either.

Rather investigating in order to ask further and further questions.

I put questions to men (to infants, to the aged), facts, events, fates. I am not so pressed for answers, I go on to other questions — not necessarily on the same subject.

My mother used to say:

"That boy has no ambition. It's all the same to him what he wears, whether he plays with children of his own kind or with the caretaker's. He is not ashamed to play with toddlers."

I used to ask my building blocks, children, grownups, what they were. I did not break toys, it did not interest me why the doll's eyes closed when it was laid down. Not the mechanism but the essence of a thing, thing all for itself, in itself.

Writing memoirs or a life story I am obliged to talk, not to converse. Now back to euthanasia.

The family of a suicide.

Euthanasia to order.

Insane, certified, incapable of independent decision.

A code comprising a thousand articles is needed. Life itself will dictate them. What is important is the principle: permissible, desirable.

On a beautiful remote island, serene, as in a fairy tale, a fine hotel, boarding house, a suicide casts the die. Is living worth while?

How many days or weeks necessary to decide? Life following patterns of contemporary magnates. Perhaps work?

Hotel service. Duties in shifts. Work in the garden. Length of stay?

"Where is he?"

"He has left."

To a neighboring island or to the bottom of the sea. Should there be a rule:

"The decree of death will be realized in one month, even against your will. For you have signed an agreement, a contract with an organization, a deal with temporal life. So much the worse for you if you recant too late."

Or death — liberation comes in sleep, in a glass of wine, while dancing, to the accompaniment of music, sudden and unexpected.

"I want to die because I'm in love."

"I long for death because I hate."

"Take my life because I'm capable of neither love nor hate."

All that exists, but in crazy confusion, festering, filthy.

Death for profit, for a fixed payment, for convenience, to oblige.

The most intimately bound up with death are sterilization, prevention and interruption of pregnancy.

"In Warsaw, you are free to have one child, in a small town, two, in a village, three, in a frontier village, four. In Siberia, ten. Take your choice."

"Free to live but childless."

"Free to live but unmarried."

"Manage by yourself, pay the taxes exclusively for yourself."

"Here is a mate for you. Pick one out of ten, out of a hundred girls."

"You may have two husbands. We allow three wives."

Hurrah! lots of jobs, files, agencies, offices!

(A steel machine does the work, provides accommodation, furniture, food, clothing. You are concerned only with organizing.)

A new method of land cultivation or livestock breeding, or new synthetic products, or colonization of regions today inaccessible — the equator and the poles. The total population of the earth can be increased to five billion.

Communication has been established with a new planet. Colonization. Mars, perhaps Moon will accept new immigrants. Perhaps even more efficient means of communication with a distant neighbor. As a result, ten billion men like you and me.

Earth has the last word, who, where to, how many.

Contemporary war is a naive, though insincere, shooting off. What is important is the great migration of peoples.

Russia's program is to mix and crossbreed. Germany's is to gather those having the same color of skin, hair, shape of nose, dimensions of skull or pelvis.

Today, specialists feel the stranglehold of unemployment. A tragic quest for a *dish* of work for physicians and dentists.

Not enough tonsils waiting to be cut, vermiform appendixes to be taken out, teeth for filling.

"What next? What is to be done?"

There is: *acetonemia, pylorospasmus*. There is: *angina pectoris*.

What will happen if we find that tuberculosis is not only curable but with a single injection, intravenous, intramuscular or subcutaneous?

Syphilis — test 606. Consumption, 2500. What will be left for doctors and nurses to do?

What will happen if alcohol is replaced by a whiff of gas? Machine No. 3. Price, ten zlotys. Fifty-year guarantee. Dose as prescribed on the label. Pay in installments.

Sufficient daily nourishment is contained in two x-bion pills. What about the chefs and restaurants?

Esperanto? One daily paper for all peoples and tongues. What will linguists do, and above all, translators and teachers of foreign languages?

Radio — perfected. Even the most sensitive ear will detect no difference between live music and a "canned, conserved" melody.

What will be then, when even today we need disasters to provide work and goals for only one generation?

We cannot go on like that, my dear friends. For unprecedented stagnation will set in, a stench such as no one has ever experienced, and unique frustration.

A theme for a short story:

Tomorrow begins a radio contest for the master violinist of the year, playing this or that symphony or dissonance.

The whole world at the loudspeakers. Unprecedented Olympic Game.

Fans of the violinist from the Isle of Parrots experience moments of terrible suspense.

The last night.

Their favorite flops.

They commit suicide, unable to reconcile themselves to the fall of their idol.

There is a Chekhov story: A ten-year-old nanny is so desperate for sleep that she strangles the screaming baby.

Poor nanny — she could not do otherwise. I have found a way. I don't hear the irritating

coughing, I heartlessly ignore the aggressive and provoking behavior of the old tailor.

I don't hear it. Two o'clock in the morning. Silence. I settle down to sleep — for five hours. The rest I will make up in the daytime.

I would like to tidy up what I have written. A tough assignment.

July 21, 1942

Tomorrow I shall be sixty-three or sixty-four. For some years, my father failed to obtain my birth certificate. I suffered a few difficult moments over that. Mother called it gross negligence: being a lawyer, father should not have delayed in the matter of the birth certificate.

I was named after my grandfather, his name was Hersz (Hirsz). Father had every right to call me Henryk: he himself was given the name Józef. And to the rest of his children grandfather gave Christian names, too: Maria, Magdalena, Ludwik, Jakub, Karol. Yet he hesitated and procrastinated.

I ought to say a good deal about my father: I pursue in life what he strove for, for what my grandfather tortured himself for many years.

And my mother. Later perhaps. I am both mother and father. That helps me to know and understand a great deal.

My great-grandfather was a glazier. Splendid: glass gives warmth and light.

It is very hard to be born and learn to live. Ahead of me is a much easier matter: to die. After death, it may be hard again, but I am not bothering about that. The last year, month or hour.

I should like to die consciously, in possession of my faculties. I do not know what I should say to the children by way of farewell. I should want to make clear to them only this — that the road is theirs to choose, freely.

Ten o'clock. Shots: two, several, two, one, several. Perhaps it is my own badly blacked out window. But I do not stop writing.

By contrast: thought (a single shot) soars even higher.

July 22, 1942

Everything else has its limits, only brazen shamelessness is limitless.

The authorities have ordered the hospital in Stawki St. to be cleared. And the head doctor, a woman, was told to admit all the bad cases to Zelazna St.

What do we do? Prompt decision, efficient action.

X and Z have 175 convalescent children. They have decided to place a third of them with me. There are more than fifteen institutions, but ours is nearby.-

And the fact that over a period of six months the lady in question stooped to every conceivable outrage against the patients for the sake of convenience, through obstinacy or stupidity, that she fought with devilish cunning against my humane and simple plan — that goes for nothing [...].

While I was out, Mrs. K. agreed, and Mrs. S. proceeded to put in operation the shameless demand, detrimental in the highest degree, harmful to their children and ours [...].

Spit on the floor and clear out. I have long been contemplating it. More — a noose — lead on the feet.

(It has come out incomprehensibly again. But I am too tired to write more.)

Azrylewicz died this morning. Oh, how hard to live, how easy to die!

July 27, 1942. Yesterday's rainbow.

Yesterday's rainbow.

A marvelous big moon over the fugitives' camp. Why can't I calm this unfortunate, insane quarter. Only one brief communiqué.

The authorities might allow it.

At the worst, will refuse.

Such a lucid plan:

Declare yourself, make your choice. We do not offer a choice of easy roads. No playing bridge for the time being, no sunbathing, delicious dinners paid for with smugglers' blood.

Choose: either get out, or work here on the spot. If you stay, you must do whatever may be necessary for the resettlers.

The autumn is near. They will need clothes, footwear, underwear, tools.

Anyone trying to get out by a trick will be caught, anyone wanting to buy himself out — we shall gladly take his jewelry, foreign currency, anything of value. When he has already surrendered his all — hurry up — then we shall ask him again:

"Here or there? What — have you decided?"

So long as there's no sunbathing on the beach, no bridge and no pleasant nap after reading

the newspaper.

A social worker? Alright. You can even pretend that for a time, we will pretend to believe you. In general, we believe for as long as it is convenient and in what is convenient. Pardon: not convenient. What is in the plan.

We are running a gigantic enterprise. The name of it: war. We work in a planned, disciplined manner, methodically. Your petty interests, ambitions, sentiments, whims, claims, resentments, cravings do not concern us.

Of course — mother, husband, child, old lady — a family heirloom, a favorite dish — all very nice, pleasant, affecting. But for the present, there are more important things. When there is time to spare, we shall return to such things, too.

Meanwhile, in order not to prolong the matter. things must get to be a bit rough and painful, and without any particular, if I may put it that way, precision, elegance and even scrupulousness. Just roughly cut for the current, temporary purpose.

You yourself are longing to see it over. So are we. Therefore, don't obstruct.

The Jews to the East. No bargaining. It is not a question of your Jewish grandmother but of where you are needed most — your hands, brain, time, life. Grandmother is only a

grandmother. It was necessary only to find something to hang it on, a key, a catch word.

You say you cannot go east — you will die there. So choose something else. You are on your own, you must take the risk. For clearly we, to keep up appearances, are obliged to bar the way, threaten, prosecute and reluctantly punish.

And you muscle in with a fresh wad of notes. We have neither time nor desire for that sort of thing. We are not playing at war, we were told to wage it with the greatest possible expedition, efficiently, as honestly as possible.

The job is not clean, or pleasant, or sweet smelling. So for the present we must be indulgent to the workers we need.

One likes vodka, another women, a third to boss about, while yet another, by contrast, is meek and lacks self-confidence.

We know: vices, shortcomings. But they put their names down in good time while you were scratching your head too much, procrastinating. I beg your pardon — the train must run on schedule, according to a timetable prepared in advance.

Here is a siding.

Italians, French, Roumanians, Czechs, Hungarians this way. Japanese, Chinese, even Solomon Islanders, even cannibals that way. Farmers, highlanders, the middle class and intelligentsia.

We are Germans. It is not a question of the trademark but of the cost, the destination of the products.

We are a steel roller or a plow or a cutter. So long as there is bread from that flour. And there will be, provided you don't obstruct. And you will not obstruct. Whine. Get all upset. Pester. We may feel sorry for you at times, but we must use the whip, the big stick or the pencil, because there must be order.

A poster.

"Whoever does this or that — shot."

"Whoever does not do this or that — shot." One asks for it. A suicide? Too bad.

Another is not afraid. Hail! A hero?

Let his name shine in letters of gold but — now, out of the way, there is no alternative.

A third is afraid — livid with fear, constantly runs to the toilet, dulls himself with tobacco, liquor, women, and obstinately wants his own way. What would you do with him?

The Jews have their merits. Capabilities, and Moses, and Christ, and hard working, and Heine, and an ancient race, and progress, and Spinoza, and yeast and the first and selfless. All true. But over and above Jews, there are others, and still something.

The Jews are important, but later — you will understand some day. Yes, we know and remember. Important issue, but not the only one.

We do not blame. It was the same with the Pole and it is the same even now with Poland and Palestine, and Malta, and Martinique, and with the respectable proletarian, and the fair sex and the orphan, with militarism and capitalism. But not all at once. There must be some order of doing things, only certain items on the agenda.

Hard for you. It's not easy for us, either. The more so since there is no buffet handy where formerly one could escape from a wearisome discussion.

Brother you must listen" to History's programmed speech on the new character.

WHY DO I COLLECT THE DISHES?

I know that many are dissatisfied at my collecting the dishes after meals. Even the monitors seem to dislike it. Surely they can manage. There are enough of them. •If there

were not, one or two would be added. Then why that ostentation, that obstinacy, and maybe ugly pretense of not shirking work and being democratic.

Even worse, if anyone comes to see me on important business, I tell him to wait, saying:

"I am occupied now."

What an occupation: picking up soup bowls, spoons and plates.

But the worst of it is that I do it clumsily, get in the way while the second helping is being passed. I bump against those sitting tightly packed at the tables. Because of me he cannot wipe clean his soup plate or the tureen. Someone may even lose his second helping. Several times something fell from plates carried clumsily. If anyone else had done it, he would be told off and be charged in court. Through this ostentation, some have a sort of feeling of guilt for letting me do it, others feel guilty because it seems to them they exploit me.

How is that I myself do not understand or do not see it? How can anyone understand why I do it when right now I am writing that I know, see, understand that instead of being helpful I make a nuisance of myself?

Odd. I sense that everybody thinks I should not pick up the dishes, but nobody has ever asked why I do it. Nobody has approached me: Why do you do it? Why do you get in the way?

But here is my explanation:

When I collect the dishes myself, I can see the cracked plates, the bent spoons, the scratches on the bowls. I clear the tables and the table used for the little shop so that the monitors can tidy up sooner. I can see how careless tables throw about, partly in a quasi-aristocratic and partly in a churlish manner, the spoons, knives, the saltshaker and cups, instead of putting them in the right place. Sometimes I watch how the extras are distributed or who sits next to whom. And I get some ideas. For if I do something, I never do it thoughtlessly. This waiter's job is of great use to me, it's pleasant and interesting.

But it is not precisely that which is important. Something quite different. Something that I have spoken and written about many times, that I have been fighting against for the past thirty years, since the inception of Children's Home. I am fighting without a hope of victory, without visible effect, but I do not want to and cannot halt that fight.

In the Children's Home I have fought that there should be no elite work and crude work,

no clever and stupid, no clean and dirty. Work for nice young ladies and for the mob. In the Children's Home, there should be no exclusively manual and no exclusively mental workers.

In the institution at Dzielna St. run by the City Council, they look at me shocked and disgusted when I shake hands with the charwoman even though she just happens to be scrubbing the stairs and her hands are wet. But frequently I forget to shake hands with Dr. K., and I have not been responding to the bows of Drs. M and B.

I respect honest workers. To me their hands are clean and I hold their opinions in high esteem.

The washerwoman and the caretaker at Krochmalna St. used to be asked to sessions, not just to please them but in order to take their advice and benefit by their assistance as specialists in a matter which would otherwise be left unresolved, i.e. be placed under paragraph 3.

There was a joke in our weekly newspaper of twenty years back. Actually not a joke but a witty comment.

Some Josek — I don't remember which one, there were many of them — could not solve an arithmetic problem. He tried hard and long and finally said:

"I don't know how to do it. I award it paragraph three."

No one is better or wiser for working in the storeroom or pushing the wheelbarrow. No one is better or wiser for wielding power. I am not better or wiser for signing the passes, or receipts for donations. This brainless work could be done conscientiously and better by a youngster from the third or even second grade.

A rude woman, a collector of money, is a boor and a nobody to me. Mr. Lejzor is a fine fellow though he dabbles in the filth of sewage pipes and canals. Miss Nacia deserves as much respect when she peels potatoes as now when she types. And it is not my fault that Miss Irka, the nurse, shifts the worse jobs onto Mira and Mrs. Róza Sztokman, whom I also respect even though once in a while she may not scrub the toilet or the kitchen floor just to have a rest.

In farming, this is called crop rotation. In hygiene and medicine — change of climate. In church — an act of humility. The Pope is called Holy Father, big men kneel down before him and kiss his slipper. And, once a year, the Pope washes the feet of twelve beggars in the church.

The Jews are conceited and that is why they are despised. I believe this will change,

perhaps soon. Meanwhile, please don't get cross with me for collecting the dishes or emptying the buckets in the toilet.

Whoever says, 'Dirty work, physical work,' is lying. Worse still the hypocrite who says, 'No one should be afraid of any work,' but picks for himself only white work, avoids what is described as black work, and thinks that he should keep out of the way of black work.

August 1, 1942

Whenever the stems of potatoes grew excessively, a heavy roller used to be dragged over them to crush them so that the fruit in the ground could ripen better.

Did Marcus Aurelius read the wisdom of Solomon? How soothing is the effect of his memoirs.

I hate, and perhaps I even try to fight single individuals. Such as H, or G. I do not indict the Germans: they work, or rather plan, reasonably and efficiently. They are bound to be angry because people get in their way. Foolishly get in their way.

And I get in their way, too. They are even indulgent. Just grab, and order to stand in one place, not to walk about the streets, not to get in the way.

They do me a favor, since roaming about I might be hit by a stray bullet. And so I am safe standing by the wall, and can calmly and carefully observe and think -- spin the web of thoughts.

So I spin.

A blind old Jew remained at Myszyniec. Leaning on a stick, he walked among the carts, horses, Cossacks and field guns. What a cruel thing to leave a blind old man behind⁸¹.

"They wanted to take him along" — Nastka says. "But he put his foot down and said that he would not go because somebody must stay behind to look after the synagogue."

I struck up an acquaintance with Nastka while trying to help her find a bucket taken by a soldier who had promised to bring it back but didn't.

I am the blind Jew and Nastka.

⁸¹ Again recollection of World War I.

It is so soft and warm in my bed. It will be very hard to get up. But today is Saturday, and on Saturday I weigh the children in the morning before breakfast. Probably for the first time, I am not interested in the result of the week. They ought to have put on a bit of weight. (I don't know why raw carrot was given for supper yesterday.)

In place of old Azrylewicz, I have now young Julek. Liquid in his side. Certain difficulties with breathing, but for a different reason.

The very same manner of groaning, gestures, resentment against me, selfish and theatrical desire to attract attention. Perhaps even take revenge on me for not thinking about him.

Today Julek had the first quiet night for a week. So did I.

So did I. Now that every day brings so many hostile and sinister impressions and sensations I have completely ceased to dream. The law of equilibrium.

Tormented day, soothing night. Gratifying day, tormented night.

I could write a monograph on the quilt.

The peasant and the quilt.

The proletarian and the quilt.

It is a long time since I have blessed the world. I tried tonight. Didn't work.

I do not even know what went wrong. The purifying respirations worked more or less. But the fingers remained feeble, no energy in them.

Do I believe in the effect? I believe but not in my India! Holy India!

The look of the quarter is changing from day to day.

1. A prison
2. The plagued spot
3. Mating ground
4. Lunatic asylum
5. Casino. Monaco. The wager — a head.

The most important is that it all was.

Poor wretches suspended between prison and hospital. Slave work: not only the effort of the muscles but the honor and virtue of a girl.

Debased faith, family, motherhood.

Commerce in all spiritual commodities. A stock exchange quoting the weight of conscience. The market unsteady — like onions and life today.

Children live in constant uncertainty, in fear. "A Jew will take you." "I'll give you away to a wicked old man." "You will be put in a bag."

Orphanhood.

Old age. Its degradation and moral decrepitude.

(Once upon a time one earned one's old age, it was good to work for it. The same with health. Now the vital forces and years of life are purchased. A scoundrel has a good chance of achieving gray hair.)

Miss Esterka.

Miss Esterka is not anxious to live either gaily or easily. She wants to live nicely. She dreams of a beautiful life.

She gave its *The Post Office* as farewell for the time being.

If she does not come back here now we shall meet later somewhere else. I am absolutely sure that she will serve others in the meantime in the same way as she used to distribute good and make herself useful.

1

August 4, 1942

I have been watering the flowers, poor orphanage plants, Jewish orphanage plants.

A guard has watched me as I worked. Does that peaceful work of mine at six o'clock in the morning annoy or move him?

He is standing and looking on, his legs apart.

2

All the efforts to get Esterka released have come to nothing. I was not quite sure whether in the event of success I should be doing her a favor or harm and wrong her.

"Where did she get caught?" -- somebody is asking. Perhaps it is not she but we who have gotten caught (having stayed).

3

I have written to the police to send Adzio away: mentally underdeveloped and maliciously undisciplined. We cannot afford to expose the house to the danger involved in his outbursts. (Collective responsibility.)

4

For Dzielna St. a ton of coal, for the present to Rózia Abramowitz. Someone asks whether the coal will be safe there.

In reply — a smile.

5

A cloudy morning. Five thirty.

Apparently an ordinary beginning to the day. I say to Hanna:

"Good morning!"

In response, a look of surprise.

I plead:

"Smile."

They are ill, pale, lung-sick smiles.

6

You gentlemen, officers, liked your drink and plenty of it, that's for the blood. Dancing, you jingled the medals honoring the infamy which you were too blind to see, or rather pretended not to see.

7

My share in the Japanese war. Defeat — disaster. In the European war — defeat — disaster.

In the world war.

I do not know how and what a soldier of a victorious army feels....

8

The papers I contributed to were usually closed down — went bankrupt.

My publisher, ruined, committed suicide.

And all that not because I am a Jew but because I was born in the East.

It might be a sad consolation that the haughty West also is not well off.

It might be but is not. I never wish ill to anyone. I cannot. I don't know how it's done.

9

Our Father who art in heaven....

This prayer was carved in hunger and misery. Our daily bread.

Bread.

Why, what I experience, was. Was.

They were selling furniture, clothing — for a liter of lamp oil, a kilogram of groats, for a glass of vodka.

When a brave young Pole kindly asked me at the police station how I managed to run the blockade, I asked him whether he could not possibly do 'something' for Esterka.

"You know very well I can't.

I said hastily:

"Thanks for the kind word."

This expression of gratitude is the bloodless child of poverty and degradation.

10

I am watering the flowers. My bald head in the window. What a splendid target.

He has a rifle. Why is he standing and looking on calmly?

No orders.

And perhaps he was a village teacher in civilian life, perhaps a notary, a street sweeper in Leipzig, a waiter in Cologne?

What would he do if I nodded to him? Waved my hand?

Perhaps he does not even know that things are as they are?

He may have arrived only yesterday, from far away....