

Blume's Wedding.—A Sketch.

By Halitvaack.

At last the great day had arrived; and with it came the three musicians from Trilock. They were the famous three. Itzig the Fiddler could play any tune on earth upon one string; and it melted one's heart to hear him in the Good-Bye dance on the morning after the wedding. Moshe the Piper could make his silver-bound reed talk, or chirp like a bird, or howl like a wolf—whichever he liked. He had served in the regimental band, and the great ladies used to faint whenever Moshe happened to be amongst the musicians at a court ball. Then there was the heavy whiskered, deep-voiced David the Jester, though nobody could tell why he was called the Jester, for he mostly made people weep. But perhaps the world knows best what to expect of its paid humorists. David had nothing but a tambourine for instrument, but there was magic in his fist, and especially in his middle finger, when he wetted it with his tongue and rubbed it across the parchment. But that was only in the melancholy pieces, in which the Jester was in his element, and then when the tambourine said Whoo—whoo— whooff! It made the windows rattle, and one felt the house getting crowded with the spirits of the dead.

It was in the early afternoon. The musicians were now returning from their official rounds, where they had been sent to play good-morning in the houses of relatives and distinguished neighbors. The time had come to begin with the bride.

The principal room in Simon's house, the Saal, as Hannah loved to call it, was stripped of all superfluous furnishings, to make room for the dancing. Blume sat on a chair, neatly but plainly dressed, so that nobody could have singled her out from the rest of the young ladies, who were surging around her, chatting and giggling. All the girls of the town were there, the rich and the poor, the fully grown, the overgrown, and those that were merest sprouts. They were all there on equal strength. There was no need to send invitations to anybody. A wedding had only to take place in Pavonda, and there was a standing invitation, from times immemorial, for every young girl to come.

Now that the musicians had returned, the foremost young ladies began pairing themselves off for a Francaise. It was difficult enough to draw limitations as to numbers, out of so many; but the greater difficulty was assigning to each her respective function in the dance—which was to be the lady and which the gentleman. They all preferred to be the gentleman. That, too, was settled at last; and then they began to collect amongst themselves for coppers, to make up the musicians' fee.

"Little sisters and little daughters," presently sounded the voice of David the Jester, and immediately all eyes turned

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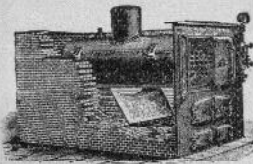
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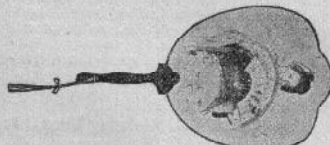
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upon him in wonder, as the time had not yet arrived for David to start. However, having their attention properly secured, David continued in rhyme. David would speak only in rhyme; and so mighty a rhymester was he that he cared little for rhyme. As a master of diction, he could not in reason be bound to any rules of syntax. And so thus spoke David the renowned Badchan:—

Little sisters and little daughters,
List unto what I you shall tell;
Simon, live he, has squared all matters;
And that was for us Klismorim a sell;
For he's paid for all the dances,
And has robbed us of all chances.
Therefore, ye good girls all,
Let your steps merrily fall;
For there's not a coopek to pay,
And not one a word to say.

The fiddle and clarinet answered in chorus, David joining them with his voice, his fist at the same time working wonders upon the tambourine.

Ti-ri-bom-bom-bom! Di-reindel-deindel-dandel—dingle-dangle-dong!

It was a surprise, and a very pleasant one. People could dance as much as they liked without a fraction to pay! The like had never been heard of before. But then this wedding was to surpass every other wedding in so many points besides that it was little to be wondered at, after all. Before, however, the dance could begin, Zundel the Shamash had stepped in and planting down his heavy staff with a bang, he addressed the players:—

"Be it known to you, Klismorim, in the name of the Rabbi, Reb Nehemiah, and all the Baalebathim and honest Yidden of Pavonda, that you are not to play for any promiscuous dancing of men and women. And in virtue thereof may we all live to see the deliverance of Israel. Amen!"

Of late it had been found necessary to issue such warnings to the players at every wedding. Times were getting lax, and indiscretion, the Merciful guard us, was threatening to become rampant with so many young men returning now and then from America and England, and with so many others who had seen life in the cities of the Russian interior during military service, cases were growing frequent in which spinster and bachelors joined together in dances at weddings, even in towns every bit as truly Yiddish as Pavonda. Now, regarding Itzig the Fiddler, he was a genuine old-world Jew, and so far from lending himself to such practices as against which he had now been cautioned for the hundredth time, he always played with his eyes closed, so as not to look upon the dancing of the females and he knew when to stop or change the music only from the clapping of hands by the mistress of ceremonies. But perhaps that was where Itzig defeated the ends of a pious cause; for there was always a young man or two ready to slip in quietly amongst the dancers without Itzig ever knowing a word of it. Moshe the Pipor was no good. A young man still, an ex-soldier, with

an eye for a pretty face and a fine figure, it mattered little to him whether the gentlemen in the quadrille were ladies or gentlemen, so long as the ladies in it were ladies. David the Jester was old enough to know better, but nobody could expect a humorist to take things seriously, excepting his own humor.

At length the quadrille was in full swing. Many more quadrilles followed. Then came some odd polkas, Kasatshkas, and several other sorts of dances with names too long to remember. Then suddenly the music ceased, and the ladies all fell back, to make room for a new-comer. It was Zloti, the bridegroom's mother, who came carrying on her arms a beautiful cashmere shawl, folded into a square, on which lay a great oval honey-cake, of rich dark brown, and elaborately covered with frostings and Hebrew letterings in white and yellow and pink. She walked straight up to Blume, made a queenly courtesy, and delivered up both shawl and cake—the gift of the bridegroom's mother to the bride. Whereupon the elder lady threw open her arms, in formal reception of the younger one, as child of her bosom. Now David's voice rang out clear and strong:—

A kinswoman beloved and dear,

The bridegroom's own mother,

For a hundred and twenty to live and thrive,

It to go the first dance with the bride.

And now, ye Klismorim all, up alive

The players obeyed and struck up their liveliest note, David accompanying them with both voice and tambourine. He had many ways of working either, to suit all turns; and when David just kept jerking the back of his outspread hand across the parchment, while his voice was going in an undertone, noyi-dimmim, noyi-dimmim, tummim-trum, all was happy and smooth. It betokened that the function of the women was of even temperament.

Zloti carried Blume round in a circle once or twice, gently, very gently; then she set her down again on the chair, with a warm kiss on the forehead.

Blume looked pale and exhausted. Nothing had passed her lips since the night before, and the heat in the room was oppressive. There was a long, long day of fasting yet before her. A Yiddish daughter is not permitted to play at bride lightly.

David continued to sing out one by one all the female relatives on the groom's side, calling upon each one in turn to take out the bride for a dance. When there was not a second nor a third cousin left on the one side, David started anew with the other side, beginning with Hannah, and so Blume was being dragged around and round a great many times, till her head swam, and she was finally put back in her chair half-dead and half-alive.

Now came the time for seating the bride. A hush fell over the gathering as a soft, deep armchair was wheeled into

the middle of the room, and Blume was made to sink down in it.

A bevy of the foremost matrons gathered round her and began to undo her hair. They did it slowly, gently, and very carefully; but there were many fingers at it, and soon there was a thick, long, silky mass, of light brown, falling all over the back and sides of the chair. An odd finger here and there was still feeling for some fugitive hairpin; but there was none left. Deborah, wife of the Rabbi, stood right at Blume's back, a lump of sugar in one hand, a saucer with a little water in the other. She dipped the sugar in the water and rubbed it down along the falling hair, leaving a glossy streak studded with minute particles of white. Then Deborah handed the sugar and water to the next lady, who did the same, leaving a fresh streak on Blume's hair. More lumps of sugar were brought in, to afford due turn to each one of the good matrons, till the last one had had hers.

David had not been idle in the meantime. While the ladies around Blume were busy pulling, brushing, and smearing, David stood in front, his voice coming thick and heavy, his tone the tone of a prophet of woe:—

Bride, O Bride, give unto me your ear:
Know you, O Bride, before whom you sit here?

Know you, O Bride beloved, what is this day?

Then listen, O Bride, to what I unto you will say.

The fiddle and clarinet made fitting answer to that. David moistened his middle finger and rubbed it hard once or twice across the back of the tambourine. David said nothing himself; but the tambourine said Whoo. Whoo, whooff! and that was enough. All the ladies at once burst into tears. Blume had her head buried in her two hands, and her crumpled-up figure was seen writhing with sobs.

The heat in the room was getting insupportable; for now there were many tallow candles kept lighting, to add to the solemnity of the moment. David mopped his broad brow with a speckled cotton handkerchief, and resumed his address:—

Think, O think, Bride, and it will make you shiver.

Think again, and let your tears flow as the river.

Pray to God for yourself and your allotted one, too,

For this day your face and his will be written anew.

This day is for both you the judgment day.

Weep, therefore, weep, O Bride, and cease not.

Pray to God to grant you a happy lot.

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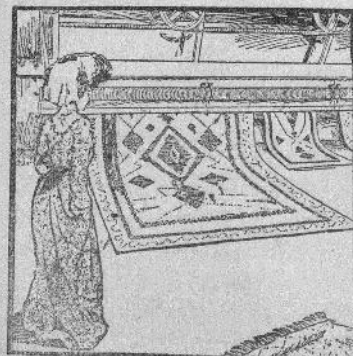
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The fiddle and clarionet tuned up, and
the tambourine again said whoo whoo-
whooff! The tears came trickling through
Blume's white fingers, and all the rest
of the ladies wept aloud. They could
not, perhaps, tell what made them, but
they meant it for Blume's personal bene-
fit, to let their tears mingle with hers,
and flow in one united murmuring stream
up to the foot of the judgment seat.

The day was wearing on, and it was
time to see to the groom. So David and
the other two betook themselves to the
groom's quarters.

Pale and nervous, with eyes downcast,
Lazer sat at the head of the table, sur-
rounded by the finest Baalebathim and
young men, who sought to entertain him
with their choice conversation. Towards
the lower end of the long table, as well
as at the one or two side-tables given
over to the general public, men kept con-
tinually going and coming. It was the
bridegroom's levee, and everybody was
eager to pay him due respects. A Mitz-
vah such as that, nobody would willingly
miss.

The Klismorim struck up a lively
piece, the brass in David's tambourine
jingling merrily. But that did not last
long. Only too soon the music ceased;
David fell back into his most solemn at-
titude, and opened his mouth once
more:—

Bridegroom, O Bridegroom, of a king the
equal,

Forget not Him, the giver and with-
holder of all.

This, O Bridegroom, is the greatest day
in your life;

For this day you are taking unto your-
self a wife.

Cry out aloud to the Creator, blessed be
He,

For 'tis prayers and tears will avert the
evil decree.

Your fate and future are now trembling
in the scale,

All to be settled this day for woe or
for weal.

Therefore, O Bridegroom, let your heart
be low and sad,

Come to Him now with soul steeped in
repentance,

And you will be sure to carry off a happy
sentence.

There was due response from fiddle and
clarionet, and the tambourine's whoo-
who-whooff! was this time accompanied
with a rumbling ti-ri-ban-bam from the
depths of David's own throat.

The moment was now ripe to take the
groom down to the bride's quarters, for
the office of the bevelling, and a general
move was made. The musicians, in full
orchestra, led the processioin through
the street. Arrived at the house, Lazer,
with the Rabbi at his side, walked up to
Blume, between two rows of bridesmaids,
who stood with lighted tapers in their

hands, Hannah, stationed by the side of Blume, held out a brightly-colored silk square lying on a plate, which latter contained besides hops mixed with ground sugar, a quantity of white threads, of even length. Lazer and the Rabbi took hold of the cloth, each by a corner, and threw it lightly over Blume's face; and then the bride was duly veiled. Immediately a thick shower of hops descended upon Lazer's head and shoulders, not sparing the Rabbi nor any of the other gentlemen that had come in, all of whom were now beating a hurried retreat.

Lazer was now taken straight to the synagogue courtyard, where the canopy was already planted to receive him. The musicians again led the way, Lazer walking slowly between his own father and mother, each holding a lighted taper; a great crowd following in the rear, with heads bowed, in dumb respect. While this was in progress abroad, the matrons around Blume were again busy with her hair. Deborah had tied the silk square in a knot at the back of the neck, leaving the cloth in front to fall deep over Blume's chin; and now the rest of the ladies took a white thread each from Hannah's plate, to tie up the bride's hair in as many thin curls. Finally a white silk net was drawn over the curls, glossy and sparkling with minute pieces of sugar in all stages of solution; and then the bride, too, was ready for the canopy. They were only waiting for the Klismorim to come back to fetch her.

Lazer was in the meantime passing through the severest ordeal of the day. In the midst of a great sympathetic crowd, he had never in his life been so isolated as when he stood now all by himself beneath the canopy. He felt he was the object of a thousand critical eyes, and once or twice he thought he had heard certain unpleasant personal remarks fall from the lips of the light-headed boys holding the canopy poles. He was expected neither to look nor speak, but only to stand there as a study for all the rest. There he remained rooted to the ground, his shoulders all in a hump, his face buried in the collar of his overcoat, which was thrown loosely over the white Kittel.

Presently the rumbling echo of a distant whoo-who-whooff came through the dusky evening air. All eyes immediately turned towards the direction from which the sounds came. Before many moments the head of the solemn procession was in view. Blume came hanging helplessly upon the arms of her father and mother, the eyes of the latter red and swollen. The three figures were surrounded by many young ladies, friends and companions of the bride, each with a lighted taper. It was a slow, slow procession, and every now and then the musicians had to turn round and wait playing all the while.

At last the bride was landed beneath the canopy and while her father and mother were circling her round and round the groom, the Chazan, with his

full choir, opened the ceremony. More benedictions followed, from the Rabbi, Reb Nehemiah, Artzig, and several others, and the quietest and simplest part of all was the actual tying of the nuptials, when Lazer slipped the ring upon Blume's finger, and said nervously, "harei eth," etc. Then, after a short while, a mighty jubilant shout of "Moz-zeltov!" rent the air. The canopy was hastily whisked away; the Klismorim tuned up their brightest and merriest, David laboring his tambourine with clenched fist. Old ladies dandled aloft great twisted loaves, while they danced and capered before the happy couple, who were now walking side by side. Many others clasped their hand in time to the music, and the whole throng seemed to follow all the way to the bride's quarters in one light footed, light-hearted dance. There was something good awaiting them all, the rich and the poor alike. They may have been made to sit at different tables, but the fare was the same for everybody. One banquet, one Chuppa-Vetzera for all.

When the feasting was over, and when the young couple had quite recuperated themselves with their "golden" soup, Blume was summoned before the Baalebathim for the Kosher Dance. She came in with her face still covered. The first to take her out for the Kosher Dance was the Rabbi. He took hold of the other end of the handkerchief which Blume kept in her hand, and led her around in a narrow circle once or twice, his step slow and expressive of majestic dignity. Next came Reb Nehemiah, the Dayan, and the dance was in every respect worthy of the dancer. Reb Nehemiah did nothing half interpreted. He carried out all his actions according to both spirit and letter, and with a heave-and-a-half at that. The origin of the Kosher Dance was to rejoice with the bride, so as to add to her happiness, and little Reb Nehemiah meant to do it. He took the corner of the handkerchief and then went off whirling and spinning around Blume, hopping and skipping and frisking, now and then turning around to lift a corner of Blume's veil, to look up her face. But not he. He was only looking up with the lobe of his left ear, while his eyes were directed to his own boots. "Lazarko," he cried out with animation, "Lazerke, I say, you Shegatz, you swarty-looking plough-boy, you, what have you done to deserve such a bride! Look, you peasanthead, see what a beautiful bride you have! She would dazzle your eyes—she is fit for a king"—hop-hop-hopsa! Away he was off again gambolling and cutting capers, till in the end he wound up with turning a somersault.

"Nu," he challenged them all, as he stood up, "can any of you make a Kunz like mine?"

Assuredly nobody could. Nobody had so large a heart, so sweet and innocent a soul as the dear old little Rebbele—Reb Nehemiah the Dayan.—The Jewish Chronicle.



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