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A Peace Offering.

By Halitvack.

Early in the morning following the wedding of Lazer and Blume, while preparing the synagogue for the communal service, the Shamas discovered a neat paper parcel at the foot of the Ark. He hesitated for a moment, then, concluding that it was strictly his business to open the parcel, he was surprised to find in it a most sumptuous set of silk hangings for the Ark, embroidered all over in gold and silver, with a great shield of David worked in coral beads in the centre. They were a trifle too long, the Shamas thought, but in every respect, even down to the matter of hooks and rings, they were exactly as hangings should be. The Shamas could find no clue to the giver, nor to the motive which prompted the gift; and it greatly puzzled his grey head. That was not the way one bestowed a gift on the synagogue, to slip it in by stealth, and leave it to be discovered by chance. When a Jewish lady had a mind to do a thing of the sort and a pair of hangings for the Ark moreover, there was no secret made of it, and the actual presentation was rather of a semi-public nature. Friends and neighbours were invited at the close, each being honoured with a finishing stitch or two, and finally the precious gift was borne to the synagogue amidst public rejoicings.

Who, then, could have thought of bringing in those hangings as if the donor were ashamed of the act?

When the morning service was over, the Shamas brought the parcel to Rabbi Azriel. Soon a little knot of the fine young men had gathered round the Rabbi, each with his own comments on the question, and attempts at solving it. One thing they all agreed upon, including Rabbi Azriel, that it was the gift of some non-Jewish female. But who could she be? It could not be an ordinary peasant woman. No peasant fingers could execute such fine and delicate work; no peasant purse could afford anything so costly; and, finally, no peasant head would ever think of tying it up so neatly in brown paper; it would have been brought rolled up in a handkerchief, or some square piece of homespun, and left in the corner near the door. A peasant woman would not have ventured in so far as the Ark; fear of some sort would have held her back. Clearly, the hangings must be the work of some rich, intelligent and sympathetic Paneinki. Rosa Prisgind first came to everybody's mind; but the thought was soon dismissed. That would not be Rosa Prisgind's way. She

would not be Rosa Prisgind's way. She would have brought it herself in open daylight and left it with Artzig, or she would have sent it straight to the synagogue or to Rabbi Azriel, more likely, in the family carriage with the four gray horses, two and two abreast, and the coachman in full livery, with the crack of his long whip echoing all over the town, as it did every Sunday, when the family were being driven to chapel, and, incidentally, to partake of the fish prepared for them by Zloti Artzig.

From the "coffee men" nearest the Misrach the discussion spread to the lower ranks near the door. They eagerly seized upon the news, pausing in the act of folding up their Talisim and Tephilin. They had hosts of memories to recall of beautiful peasant women watching their opportunity to steal in behind the synagogue door with little bundles of flax, or rolls of homespun or measures of rye or wheat under their shawls, as thank offerings to the Jewish God for some blessing brought about through the good offices of a neighbouring Szidele. In the course of his wanderings amongst the Goyim, in search of his daily bread, a Jew might sometimes promise to pray for a sick child, or for the cattle to be spared from the plague, or for the rain to come; or sometimes it might be only telling them of a cure for a cold or sore throat, and it was seldom those kindly little things were forgotten by the Goyim—although they were Goyim. There was the story of the two sheep and the calf that were found one morning tied in the vestibule of the synagogue. Many remembered that, though nobody ever knew who did it; but it was a Goy, that was certain. Many more stories, some not very old, were now told over again. Every child remembered the night of the burning at Mikmevitch's, when the whole town, Kind-un-Keit (kin and kith) turned out to fight the flames, and how some even risked their lives to save the horses and cattle, and how Mikmevitch swore he would never forget that, and how he had been keeping his pledge ever since. There was not a feast day in the Yiddish calendar that Mikmevitch would not send a cartload of provisions for the poor, and there was never a stick of firing bought for the ovens in the Beth Hamidrash—it was all got free from Mikmevitch's own woods. Peretz Yanke Shabsis, the oldest man in town, who knew more about the life and times of Nikolai I., than ever was or will be set down in the archives at St. Petersburg, had now a good story to tell of the grandmother of Mikmevitch. Many a fine piece of ribbon, many a case of needles she bought from his pack. Those

needles she bought from his pack. Those were something like packs in those days. But Peretz was not going to make his story long; he was coming to the point at once. As he was saying, many the fair piece of goods she took from his pack, and many the fine bundle of bristles she gave him in exchange. She was a good creature, a diamond, a brilliant, and she had "holt a Yid mi yodea wie." It was well remembered by all the old people in town, and if not, Peretz could tell them now, how nearly the whole town ran after her funeral, though they would not pass the gates of the Goyishe cemetery, but they stood outside, and many were weeping. But what Peretz wanted to tell them now was how when she was alive she often slipped a lump of butter the size of a Kiddush Chalah into his bag without asking any return for it. It was in the days before Rabbi Azriel—soll er gesund sein—and the Rav before him—secher tzadik l'brochoh, was lenient with people and allowed them to eat Goyishe butter—but Peretz was just coming to the point—one little moment. It was during the last Polish insurrection, and Peretz could tell them all something about it, if any man could. It would make their hair stand on end if he were to tell a hundredth part of what he had seen with his own eyes. But he would only tell them now of what happened with old Madam Mikmevitch's husband. It was long before the present Mikmevitch was born, and he was no young fellow; so let them all make it out how long ago that must have been. Old Mikmevitch, that is, the grandfather of the present one, would not join the mateszniks (insurgents), for he had been a loyal Colonel in the Dragoons, and had his oath made to Nikolai to remain loyal all his life. Besides, he was a German on the mother side, and a great-grand-aunt of his had been a genuine eight-fold Russatchka, from somewhere deep, deep in Rossei. Just ask Peretz, and he would trace for you the family tree down to the earliest root, of all the nobility. Now it happened one early morning when a band of mateszniks came and took hold of old Mikmevitch, and, without making a fuss at all about it, they began pulling out chunks of flax from a finished bundle that lay in the court-yard, and twisting them into a long, stout rope. That was the way the Pollaken did things, without a second thought, and not a word spoken at all. It just happened that Peretz had been staying the night with one of the estate labourers, and before he was yet out of bed he heard a terrified voice screaming: "Peretz! Peretz!" He jumped up, and there he saw old Madam Mikmevitch throwing herself

etz! He jumped up, and there he saw old Madam Mikmevitch throwing herself on her knees before him and begging him to pray to his God, the God of the Yidden, to work some miracle to save her poor dushinka from the hands of the murderers. Peretz at once lifted up his arms to heaven, and began saying Psalms aloud, and then he ran out to the courtyard where he saw poor Mikmevitch already with the rope round his neck. So Peretz shouted at the top of his voice—such a voice!—like a thousand thunders—it was God gave him that voice for the moment —"Kosaki!—Kosaki!—run!—quick!" he shouted. Nu wos heist? In less than a moment there was not a trace left on the spot of a single matesznik. What was there more to say? Mikmevitch and his lady did not afterwards know what to do with Peretz, and carried him on their hands all their life. But Madam Mikmevitch was not likely to forget either the Yiddish God, and what do you think she did? She sent out a man to go and ring up all the female serfs and make them hasten to the Heif (Hall) with their spinning-wheels. In a moment they were all there, and all at once they started spinning out the bundle of flax from which the rope had been twisted. As soon as there was enough of the thread ready to go on with, half the spinners were sent back to their homes to their weaving stools, where they started at once weaving towels and tablecloths. Nu, to make the story short, a good bit before sunset that day a great roll of towels, and another great roll of tablecloths were sent up to the Beth Hamidrash. It was only after the work was finished and delivered that Peretz could see through Madame's tact and delicacy, who would not allow the spinners to lift their voices in their Goyim hymns while at work. Peretz did not care what others said, but he would stake anything that there was a corner in Gan Eden for the souls of good Goyim. He did not care how it went with other Goyim, but he would eat up his beard and peahs if he thought old Madam Mikmevitch was not at that moment in heaven, if only for letting her do the dusting beneath the golden stairs of the Tsadikim.

Peretz's main point was to show that if anybody assumed that it was Rosa Prisgind who was the secret donor of the hangings it would be only fair. Nothing could be too good of young Rosa Prisgind, who was niece and ward of the present Mikmevitch.

Now while amongst the coffee men further up it was generally agreed that it could not have been Rosa Prisgind, for reasons already mentioned, the common porridge men lower down were divided in

porridge men lower down were divided in their views. Some held it could not have been Rosa, because she was a Mikmevitch only on the mother's side, and mothers counted for next to nothing in matters of heredity. Rosa was a Prisgind, and the Prisginds were all noted cast-iron bigots, who ran to chapel twice a day, year in year out: would drink their tea without sugar, and never change their linen all through Lent; and Peretz could tell them how several of the old Prisginds used to travel once a year to the Calvaria on the Baltic shore near Palonga, crawling on their knees all the way. Peretz could tell them something of the anti-Jewish prejudices of the Prisginds, and it all arose through Reuben the tailor, grandfather of Abraham Mazzik. But Peretz had rather not talk against the dead; he knew what he knew; and that was enough. However, the other party agreed that sometimes it may happen that there is more in breeding than in birth; and as Rosa had been left an orphan when she was quite a baby, and had been brought up by her aunt and uncle, the Mikmevitchs, she was thoroughbred, if not a full-blooded, Mikmevitch.

The coffee men at the Misrach, having dropped all speculation as to the identity of the giver, but satisfied in the main that it was not a Yiddishkind, were now worried as to what to do with the gift. Anything of a less sacred nature would have been, as it often was, gratefully accepted in the spirit in which it was given: but hangings for the Ark were quite a different affair. It was not alone that the presentation had been made by a Goy, but on a closer examination it was morally clear, by a hundred small, indefinable points, that it was also the handiwork of a Goy from beginning to end; and it was not possible that a Goyishe female could have brought to it the desired feeling of reverence. In short, the coffee men had their own uneasy feelings on the question.

In the end, Rabbi Azriel's decision was hailed with general satisfaction. It was to the effect that some respectable Jewish woman should be got to go over the hangings with her own needle, just a stitch here and a stitch there, if she was not clever enough to make any practical improvements, and then the hangings could be used without the least compunction.

"The bride—the bride—it is her due," nearly everybody suggested at once.

It was some days before Blume could take the work in hand. The wedding festivities were not over till the Sabbath following, the day of the Seven Benedictions, when the feasting was wound up with

when the feasting was wound up with Kwas and broad beans. Towards the end of the following week things had fully settled down to their ordinary humdrum order. Lazer had resumed his place in the Beth Hamidrash, and Blume sat with her work in the window, from which she could see her husband come for his meals.

"Seh nor aher!—Wos sogt a Mensch derzu!"—Blume exclaimed to herself, shaking her head and biting her lip.

She had been pressing between her fingers something that felt like a squarely-folded piece of paper stowed away inside the yellow silk lining of the hangings, towards the left-hand bottom corner. Carefully undoing the stitches, she was more than surprised to pull out a sealed letter addressed to herself in German.

It took Blume some time to recover her breath sufficiently to trust herself with breaking the seal; and then it took her infinitely more time to collect her wits so as to realise the situation in full. The writer earnestly begged to be forgiven for having, in a moment of madness, occasioned by an unaccountable feeling of jealousy, being unwillingly enamoured of the good looks of Lazer, sought to destroy Blume's happiness by setting the Pristav on Lazer. The writer hoped to purchase her own peace by this confession, prior to shutting herself up in a convent in Warsaw for the remainder of her life.

The letter was written in the third person; the writer referring to herself as "Rosa Prisgind."—

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