Vitebsk

The ancient city of Vitebsk strides the Western Dvina. This large stream rises in the Valdai Hills, in that watershed from which also the Volga flows east, and the Dneper south. Not far from Vitebsk the Dvina makes a bend and majestically continues to the northwest. It empties its water into the Baltic Sea in the Gulf of Riga. In Tzarist times it used to carry barges and steamboats with the produce of the region to Riga and from there to the overseas markets.

Vitebsk was the capital of the Vitebsk Gubernia, one of the districts into which Tzarist Russia was divided. The town had about sixty or seventy thousand people, a substantial part of them being Jews: Vitebsk was in the “pale”—or inside the “line of permitted settlement.” It was not famous for its learning like a few smaller localities in Western Russia, renowned for their *yeshivot* or for the great authorities in Jewish studies residing in them and thus attracting the needle of the intellectual compass. But neither was Vitebsk among the cities in the “pale” which acquired an unsavory reputation. Not far away was the town of Liubavitchi, the seat of the famous dynasty of Hassidic *zadiks* (righteous men). Yet I believe the Jewry of Vitebsk was not Hassidic in the main. Its people were plain and kind, of a

pleasant disposition, a little given to dreams and melodies. This quality is shown in the compositions of Marc Chagall, born in Vitebsk, who even in his old age, long away from his birthplace, continued to depict in many of his paintings Vitebsk and its Jews. Chagall and I never met, unless I chanced to come across him, a lad seven years older than myself, in the time we both resided in that city; but I left it much earlier than he, at the age of six and a half, never to visit it again; yet I could fill many pages with my memories of Vitebsk.

The city buildings were severe, rows of windows usually being the only ornament on their naked facades; the hamlet shacks of the neighboring villages carried heavy straw roofs over their log sidings. The hills, the little gardens, the green shutters, all had a pastel, dreamy quality; and clouds had golden rims, and cows in the countryside had bells, and birds were inquisitive and trusting, or so they appeared to me.

One thoroughfare, Smolenskaya, crossed a small confluent of the Dvina, the Viluika, and led to the main square with a *sobor* (cathedral) and court house; from the square the fashionable Zamkovaya Street turned past the city garden and crossed the bridge over the Western Dvina with a broad view in both directions. Should one pursue the route beyond the bridge, one would pass streets of single-story houses and arrive at the railroad station; and continuing farther one would come to a

large field that once or twice a year served as a parade ground. Above were forested hills with narrow paths amid pine trees—the place is called Sosoniki and it is just outside the town limits. From these hills one could count in the distance, between the town and the slopes, the number of freight cars in the train that occasionally and slowly crept along the plain.

There in Sosoniki on a late spring day, in a rented cottage, my mother gave birth to her third son. It was May 29, 1895 according to the Julian calendar; in Western Europe and the Americas it was June 10. The late spring of 1895 was unseasonably cool, and my parents-to-be contemplated a temporary return to town quarters, when the labor pains made my mother lie down. In those days birth-giving was a home affair, not a cause to go to a hospital. But there was progress in that not a midwife but a doctor would attend. I believe it was about two o'clock in the afternoon when I came into the world.

I was never shown that cottage, and on rare visits to the hills I do not remember having noticed any buildings there; neither was I, at these occasions, interested in such information. Sosoniki was for me the happy wide field, a few times filled with people and resounding with brass music; the forested hills had paths crossed by knotted roots of pine trees, to which the place owed its name *(sosna* = pine).

On the day I was born, or possibly on one of the following days, my father went on a walk in the forested hills and thought of a name for me. His first son was called Daniel, and Samuel in memory of one of his forefathers. The second son was called Alexander and Lev, the latter in memory of a great-grandfather. Daniel was two years older than Alexander and he, in his turn, was sixteen months older than myself; I, however, was not followed by a brother or sister, and remained the youngest.

My first name—I have no middle name—was chosen by my father, as he told me, on that solitary walk in the forested hills. He selected it from a verse of the seventh chapter of Isaiah; there was no Immanuel among our ancestors known to him. But he was visited by a thought, almost a wish cast before destiny, that I would be predestined to a great task in connection with the tragic history of our nation. One has to visualize the time, and also the personality of my father, a dedicated Jew with a vision of the national renaissance. It was a tragic time, of utter despair and of utter hope. When I was a child of six or seven my father would show me the chapter in the prophet Isaiah where the name Immanuel is found; more than once he spoke to me of the faith he put in me.

The events around the time of my birth were as if symbolic of the trends my life would take. In those days Theodor Herzl started his diary in a hotel room in Paris, having been assigned as a foreign correspondent to the trial of Dreyfuss. Until that

spring Herzl, like so many of the Hungarian and Austrian Jews, felt alienated from the Jewish people. Then, while covering the Dreyfuss trial, Herzl experienced in the courtroom something akin to a transfiguration. He began to feel his bonds with his ancient nation, with its judges and prophets, and with the eighty generations of exiles, unbroken by persecution. It was then that he conceived his “mighty dream” and on June 10th, the day of my birth, he wrote in his diary: “I am taking up again the torn thread of the tradition of our people. I am leading it to the Promised Land. Do not think this is a fantasy. I am not an architect of castles in the air. I am building a real house.” In Paris he also wrote the first pages of his political manifesto, *The Jewish State.*

In 1895 Freud, having two years earlier published with Breuer the first paper on psychoanalysis, began to write his *Interpretation of Dreams.*

In 1895 a new era in science was started by Roentgen with the discovery of X-rays, followed by the detection of radioactivity by Becquerel and of radium by the Curies. The old mechanistic philosophy of the world saw the daybreak of a new understanding of the universe.

Configurations of planets at the time of birth are claimed by astrologers as being decisive for the destiny of the newborn child. In astrology I never believed (I think I can explain its

origin); I would rather assume that events on earth at the time of a person's birth may in some way direct his life. One is under the influence of the spirit of the time. The dream of Herzl, the intuitions of Freud, and the rays of Roentgen in 1895 were the earthly constellations which marked the direction in which I was to wander—ideas, like men, need time to grow and to find their place in the world.

Long before the advent of Herzl, my father dedicated himself to the idea of a national renaissance for the Jewish people. Simon-Yehiel was the elder son of Jacob Meir and Sarah Velikovsky,[1] until their end residents of Mstislav, a small ancient town south of Vitebsk, renowned among the Jews. This town must have been founded in very early, possibly pagan, times. In the first half of the 19th century there occurred in Mstislav the so-called "rebellion of the Jews." An interested reader will find details of it in the writings of Simon Dubnow, the renowned Jewish historian, himself a native of Mstislav.

My father was born in February on *shushan-Purim* of 1859. He had a sister older than himself, a brother Feivel younger by about five years, a younger sister, the mother of Moshe Halevi, and another brother, Israel. Their mother Sara, a little woman whom I remember on her visit one summer, probably in 1898, was a daughter of Jacob Hotimsker. Jacob Hotimsker was thought by the population of the region to be a holy man. He

was the Dayan (religious judge) in Mstislav. He was all prayer and all humility. In the time when my father was a child the children of Mstislav believed that this holy man could make himself invisible, and other similar stories were told about him. I possess his portrait: a kind face, inquisitive eyes, light brown curly locks. On his deathbed this Rabbi Jacob blessed all his progeny that none of them would ever need to serve in the Tzarist army—and his blessing held good for almost forty years, until the Nazi invasion of Russia when a cousin of mine—a daughter of my elder brother—fell on the battlefield, and probably many more of the descendants of Rabbi Jacob served and fell. My great-grandfather, who died in about 1903 or 1904, must have been born about 1820, and the terror of military service in the army of Nicholas I incited Rabbi Jacob to select this theme for his benediction. Jewish boys were abducted into the service by "catchers" at the age of 13 or 14 to stay in the service for 25 years and then on military settlements for the rest of their lives, without being able to study rabbinical law or give their children such an education, a main purpose in the life of traditional Jewry. I was about eight years old when Rabbi Jacob died; by then we were already living in Moscow. For days my father did not open the letter informing him of his grandfather's death, and he wept when he read the news; never had I heard my father weep so bitterly. The whole town closed the stores and joined in the funeral procession. I also possess pictures of my paternal grandparents. My grandfather Jacob Velikovsky looks

handsome with an open face and regular features and a black beard into which the first silver strands had started to spin themselves. I never visited Mstislav, and do not know whether I ever saw him, unless he was one of the elderly men—all of whom could claim to be called "grandfather"—who visited us in Vitebsk, and who played with my hair, lovingly pulling it.

Of my grandfather, Jacob Velikovsky, my father told me that he never tore off a flower or a blade of grass, and never killed a fly. My cousin Moshe Halevi, who grew up in Mstislav, knew him well.[2]

He told me that our grandfather would go alone with his horse-driven cart to the forest, and there would sound the *shofar*, the ram's horn, in different intonations and rhythms. I would not know whether he was practicing there the art of blowing the horn for the High Holidays, or whether he was spending his solitude in the forest in communion with God, as my cousin would insist. From my father I know that on the Sabbath Jacob Velikovsky would speak only in Hebrew; and since in those days Hebrew was not yet a spoken language, he experienced difficulties, but would not give up.

Jacob was a small merchant like his ancestors, many generations back. From the time of the Crusades, from the time of the Roman Empire many of the Jews were artisans,

merchants, and rabbis; and often the rabbinical profession was exercised simultaneously with the manual or mercantile.

Jacob Velikovsky was also eager to do something for the poor of the town. In winter the needy used to suffer from the cold, being unable to buy firewood by the cart. He would buy several carts of wood and let the needy have the small quantities they could afford. My grandmother Sara would go outside in the dark of the pre-dawn winter mornings, on the knock of the "customers" at the door, to dispense the bundles of wood. She was small in stature, very tidy, and a kind person like her father, Jacob Hotimsker. But unselfish acts call for retribution—and to the great heartache of my grandparents, rumors reached them of allegations that they were profiting from this endeavor.

I never saw my maternal grandparents. They lived in Lodz. My mother was the eldest of ten children—four daughters and six sons. Nahum Grodenski came to Lodz from Grodno where my mother was born. A merchant with a Western European outlook, he traveled abroad and was highly respected. It was the pride of my mother that she was a daughter of Nahum Grodenski. I heard also from others that his word in business transactions was valued more than any written document. He liked my father as his own son and helped him in the beginning of his career.

As a boy my father studied in the *kheder* (preparatory school) together with Simon Dubnow, the future renowned historian of the Jewish people. Like the children of the generation before him and after him, my father found candies fallen "from heaven" on the table in front of him the first day at the *kheder* and he, like other children, believed that an angel had tossed them down.

When my father reached the age of fourteen or fifteen, he heard the unseen horizon's call, and felt an urge to seek greater goals. The small business of his parents, probably a little shop, deteriorated; and it happened once that a creditor slapped the face of my father's elder sister. This episode made a fierce impression on the young man, and he decided to strike out on his own and achieve a position in life through study. Study meant Hebrew study of the Law. In Mstislav there were great talmudists, but no *yeshiva* or academy of learning. My father conceived a plan to go away secretly to the famous center of Jewish learning—the *yeshiva* of Volojin. Very possibly his father would not have opposed his going to a *yeshiva* had he asked; but the reading of a book, I believe by Mendel Moher Seforim, made him emulate the way of leaving the paternal home, and even the letter of parting he wrote partly copying it from that book.

With a friend whom he persuaded to join him Simon departed secretly from Mstislav, leaving a note for his parents in

the hands of his younger brother Feivel. Cooking their food in the woods, the two friends caused a forest fire. After one or two days' march afoot they slept in the house of a woman who knew and revered Jacob Hotimsker. Awakening the next morning, Simon heard the voice of his father: travelers who had seen two boys running out of a burning forest probably directed him. But before starting the pursuit Jacob had asked the advice of the rabbi of the town, who advised him to let Simon study and even wrote a letter of introduction to the leader of the Yeshiva of Mir.

In Mir my father was the *matmid* (the most studious) of the Yeshiva: he spent sixteeen hours daily in learning, sometimes pouring water into his shoes to keep himself from falling asleep. He would not see the sun rise or set, for he would be indoors studying; and alone, late at his folios, he would implore the Creator to redeem His people. At the words of the prayer "keeper of Israel, keep the remnant of Israel" tears would well up in his eyes.

The time came and he was called to Mstislav to present himself to the conscription board, and he remained there, occasionally studying the Gemarrah at the feet of a local merchant-talmudist. He improved his knowledge of the Russian language word by word with the help of a Hebrew-Russian dictionary. The spirit of Haskala, the Jewish movement of literary renaissance and interest in secular subjects, was awakened in him. Simon Dubnow guided him in this, and he,

in turn, kindled in Dubnow the national idea, as Dubnow himself wrote, more than fifty years later, in the Hebrew daily, *Haaretz*. The issue carried several other articles dedicated to my father, and Dubnow narrated among other reminiscences, how some Friday afternoon he was reading *The Love of Zion* by the poet Mapu on the steps of my grandfather's home.

My father felt that his world of ideas was too liberal for traditional rabbinical teachings, and he looked for a chance to find a way in life. His first tries were unsuccessful, and he began to accompany his father on his trips to Smolensk from where Jacob Velikovsky brought goods for the merchants of Mstislav on wagons or sleighs. Once my father remained in Smolensk and took a job in a store doing manual work. Then he arranged with his employer to work selling in the town. During his hours of rest he would try to study at the railway station, but was often asked to leave; when late at night he studied by the light of a candle, the employer in whose house he had a small room would call to him to extinguish the light, which cost money. But on Saturdays my father used to sit on the square in front of the synagogue and read, and he greatly enjoyed the freedom of the Sabbath; he promised himself that he would uphold the holiness of the day of rest—the great social institution established thousands of years ago by the Hebrew lawgiver—in the days when he would no longer be dependent on an employer.

Then he started his own business with the blessing and advice of one Peter Rifkin. This man happened to come to the store and, entering into conversation with my father, was surprised to find a learned youth at manual work. As soon as his business allowed, my father called his brother Feivel to Smolensk and made him a partner; and soon many relatives ate at his table.

One day my father conceived the idea to obtain the agency for Smolensk from the huge concern of Vogan, which traded in tea and many other kinds of merchandise. He wrote to Moscow. Rifkin advised him not to be so ambitious, but soon an invitation came from Moscow to present himself. He waited together with several men of obviously greater wealth. When his turn came and he made a good impression the Director asked him to come the next day and sign the papers. He answered that he was a Jew and would not sign on a Saturday. Here the story could easily have ended, because Vogan's firm did not as a rule employ Jews. But my father's straightforwardness gained him even more sympathy: the Director told him to return on Monday. He spent three nights in a hotel near the Kremlin, listening to the quarter hour melancholy beat of the clock on Spassky Gate. Would somebody come to Vogan from Smolensk and ask for the same business in the meantime? He was uncertain until the hour on Monday when he was given the papers to sign. Later he found out that the mother of the Director was Jewish and was buried in a Jewish cemetery. He

became the favorite of this man. The Director would call an assistant and tell him to go with my father and open credit for him in one bank or another, and the man would throw his overcoat over his shoulders and go. Many years later, when this assistant became the Director and also the President of the Moscow stock exchange he would stop his *cabriolet* (carriage) driven by a coachman in top hat, when seeing my father on his early walk, and exchange reminiscences.

I have here gone into some sentimental details of my father's life and career. My father once wrote his autobiography in Hebrew, during our wandering in the Ukraine, in the years of the civil war in Russia. This version having been left in Russia, he wrote it for a second time in Tel Aviv, this time describing also his work for the revival of the Jewish people in its ancient land and other efforts for the sake of this homeless nation.

My father met my mother in the town of Starodub in the northern Ukraine. My father apparently came there for business. My mother was sent there by her father to open a branch of his trading house and with her was her eldest brother Ephim. As I mentioned earlier, my mother was the first of ten children; her mother, Basha, took her out of the gymnasium at an early age in order to help at home with the ever increasing number of brothers and sisters. My mother regretted not having had a good schooling, and made it a goal in her life to give us, her children, the best schooling possible. Yet she could speak

several languages fluently and at the age of sixty, on arriving in the land of Israel, took herself a teacher and soon spoke Hebrew and also wrote letters to me in perfect Hebrew.

After two years of engagement my parents were married. For seven or eight years they lived in Smolensk. Their first child was a girl, stillborn, and my mother was rather sick. In the seventh year my elder brother Daniel was born in Smolensk. After that they moved to Vitebsk, where Alexander was born.

My father was a dreamer, chained to his business; but he also had a grasp of economic problems on an international scale. My mother had a practical mind with a very strongly developed feeling of justice; my father told me how my mother once went back to the market to find the vendor who had given her one single kopek (half-cent) too much in change.

I have read that Leo Tolstoy believed that he remembered himself from the age of half a year. I certainly remember myself long before I was three years old, and some of my memories may refer to my being one year old. My earliest memory is dreamlike: in a small orchard or garden I am carried on the arm, I believe, of my father; there was a group of grown-ups, my mother among them, and the group was slowly walking in the orchard, it seems toward the house. How old I could have been I would not know; but many memories before I reached the age

of three are very vivid, not dreamlike, and could be described in many details, as if they had taken place only recently.

The house in which we lived was situated at the riverside: the street, one of the main thoroughfares, is here cut by the confluent of the West Dvina, Viluika, spanned by a bridge. A tiny garden was next to our house towards the stream, and a backyard. The house was three stories high, but the first had a low ceiling and was not occupied, but was used for storage and the like; we occupied the second story. The parents' bedroom had its windows to the Viluika, and in the spring rafts of beams and unattached tree trunks would move from morning till evening toward the Western Dvina and down toward Dvinsk and Riga on the Baltic Sea. The stream was small in the summer but in the spring it overflowed and once our yard was under water and a boat floated in it. Our beds were at the other corner of the house; a picture with horsemen on a mountain path was above my bed. In the winter snow was outside and the sun was bright in the windows; at night I listened to a monotonous sound, and I do not know whether it was a clock or a drip in the sink or the pulse in my arteries. A small and narrow valley lay between the windows and the next house. It led to a road with a mill, and farther to a field; the river made there a bend. In winter on walks there with our uncle Israel, the youngest brother of my father, we would throw stones that would skip along the ice, and in spring along the water's surface.

The only picture of us three brothers I know is a photograph showing me sitting in a girl's dress, with black curls, my brother Alexander-Lev, called Lelia, with blond curls, standing in a pose of little Lord Fauntleroy, and Daniel with a short haircut. I remember vividly the hour when my mother took me into the bedroom and changed my girl's dress to a boy's outfit; my brothers met me with great joy when I emerged from the parents' bedroom. I remember also when the hairdresser came to us, placed his bag of instruments on the couch, and clipped my hair, promising that it would be stronger if cut; thus my curls were gone. I was a strong and healthy boy, the only one of us three who was fed on mother's milk; my brothers were, as the custom then was, fed by wetnurses. I remember playing under the table when parents and guests dined, at the age when such things are done.

Growing up somewhat, I would stand in the drawing room, which had a balcony, and watch the passing clouds, and pray, probably to the glory of God, in my own words. Early I started to learn Hebrew: a *melamed* (teacher) used to come to us; he would put the book before me—sometimes it was upside down—and I would read the syllables. On High Holidays we used to visit the synagogue; my father had his seat at the East Wall, next to the holy enclosure with the rolls of the Torah. The synagogue was situated in a large garden on the quay of the South Dvina.

Standing on the mountain pathway, I liked to watch the steamboats with turning waterwheels moving towards the sea on the broad stream; and in the winter I remember walking on the ice of this great river, accompanied by an employee of my father.

During the summers we used to live in a cottage on a hill some distance from Vitebsk. Beyond was a field with rye, farther a forest, in which there were heaps built by ants; we would watch the ants become agitated when a broken treebranch was stuck into a heap. In the forest we collected berries. We tried to persuade a squirrel to come down to eat nuts placed on a kerchief. We played in the grass when it was harvested, behind a nearby mill on a lawn surrounded by bushes and trees. Next to the mill there was a road and on the other side of it a pond dammed by the mill; reeds grew there, and we brought home shells with their occupants still inside. A narrow rivulet ran down from the dam, and once my brother Lelia, who was my permanent playmate, and I were caught by the sudden swelling of this rivulet. The road led to a larger road and there I loved to follow the carriages uphill and down. Farther there was a hill with a church on top and many ravens flying around and making noise.

Once my brother Alexander and I, probably age 5 and 4, went to a large Christmas tree party, arranged by some institution. I would not know how I made the causative conclusion, being yet more than twenty years ahead of my medical degree, but I

thought that the very sweet and tasty almond milk which both of us enjoyed and of which second helpings were offered from unwashed glasses, brought measles to my brother—he became ill soon after that evening. The apartment was divided by a locked door, my brother being transferred to the half where also my parents' bedroom was, my mother taking care of him, and I was placed under the surveillance of a governess in the other part of the house. But recovering from measles—then a quite undesirable sickness to contract in view of the many complications that the doctors of that time were unable to cope with—my brother contracted scarlet fever. Again, entirely on my own, I arrived at the conclusion that the doctor visiting him daily brought to him the germs of the new disease. My mother, afraid of letting me live in the same apartment divided by a locked door, had me move to an apartment a floor higher. But at last Alexander recovered.

In 1900 or the beginning of 1901 my father left Vitebsk for Moscow. My mother soon followed with Daniel; we were left with a "bonne" (Freulein) and partly with uncle Israel. He was a bachelor, liked horses, and kept them when my parents were in Vitebsk. The very move to Vitebsk was preparatory to establishing a home in Moscow: only after paying for a number of years the dues of the first guild merchant, could my father as a Jew make his domicile in Moscow, generally out of bounds for Jews.

That summer (1901) part of Vitebsk burned and we watched the reddened sky from our summer home. From Daniel came letters telling us of the capital and the many gates in its walls. Meanwhile we, Lelia and I, began to learn to read Russian and German; our teacher was the "Freulein," Meta Redlich, the daughter of a miller in Nevel, not far from Vitebsk. We had had governesses previously, but her we called our "beloved Freulein." Meta Redlich was seventeen years old when she came to us and we became very attached to her.

In the fall of 1901, on a walk in the hills of Sosoniki, we saw from afar a horseless carriage, the first automobile any one of us had ever seen.

Notes

1. Since in many cases the place of origin of a person was used to form his surname, Velikovsky—so one of my reader-correspondents, also from Russia, suggested—could mean the origin of an ancestor from one of the geographical places that contain *veliky,* as Veliky Volochek or Veliky Luki, not far from Mstislav.

2. Moshe Halevi was a member of the Hebrew Theater Habima in Moscow and later founded the Ohel Theater in Israel.

Moscow

One day in October or November, 1901, Alexander and I were dressed in our warm clothes, and winter boots were put on our feet for our travel to Moscow. We were driven, accompanied by the "beloved Freulein," in a horse-drawn carriage over the bridge on the Western Dvina to the railway station. We took our places in the second class compartment in the train that left in the early afternoon that October or November day. There was an exchange of harsh words between our Freulein and two gentlemen who insisted on occupying the same compartment; but then the gentlemen became more agreeable, and entered into an animated conversation with our Freulein. In the evening we reached Smolensk, but all I could see was a pool of water from rain outside our windows. Only many years later, passing through the station in daytime, I saw that, like a fortress, the town nests on an elevation.

In the grey morning I awoke and looked out of the window of the train. In a snowy landscape of fields and forests trees moved and ran swiftly, the swifter of them, those closer to the tracks, overrunning the trees away from the tracks. In my solitary watch it appeared to me that the train was circling for hours as

if going up a hill on which Moscow stood.

In Moscow we were met at the station by our mother and our brother Daniel, who was excited to show us the capital. We traveled through to Tverskaya Street, and came to a residential hotel in the business section of the town, the Kitai Gorod, where our parents and Daniel lived. There the Freulein and we occupied a room. In the hotel I spent time looking at the incandescent electrical bulbs with spiral filaments—this was new to me. In our room Freulein read to us *The Prince and the Pauper* and the story of *Little Lord Fauntleroy.* I could already read them myself; I also liked to copy geographical maps, especially of Europe, and color them.

We lived in that hotel for a few months. The summer we spent on a *dacha* in Sokolniki. I became seven, and I remember well that day. My father, sitting in a hammock in the garden, asked me how many days, in my estimate, I had lived. Having in my memory an inexhaustible store of events, I made a guess—"a million days"; but then, when my father bode me to calculate, I found to my great surprise that all my memories came to me from the experiences of some two thousand days only. For that birthday my father gave me half a ruble, the price of admission to the children's festival, a big affair that happened to be on that day. This entitled me to participate in track running—and I remember how I ran, the first of the group, probably admired; I was, however, overtaken by one or two

other boys, but still felt happy. In the evening there was a lantern festival.

One day boys from the other side of the fence threw stones at us and we three brothers fought valiantly against a "superior" force, and returned stones. One stone hit me in the temple. My mother saw me through the window, my head covered with blood; but I did not cry, and stood my ground. She ran down the steps and brought me in to wash my head.

That summer, thinking of the little pool not far away from our *dacha*, I made the following invention, which I explained to my brothers—though, it seems to me, I expressed it as though it were an event that had actually happened. By going very swiftly over the pool, so that before my foot could sink I would move it into a new position on the surface of the water, I would be able to walk on water. This sounded good in principle, but my performance was just wishful thinking, and a bit of a fantasy.

It was the time of the Boer War. My father's interest in world affairs and even more his preoccupation with the problem of the Jewish people—which must have been already then manifest to me—made me, when once asked, "Whom do you love more, father or mother?" answer "father." His idealism, in my

consideration, gave him the right to preference.

My father in his unusually pleasant voice sang Hebrew songs at the evening meal with the children on his lap; these were songs of longing for Israel, songs describing Rachel, who cries for her children, or telling of a rose, symbolizing the Jewish people, torn and trodden by the passers by. He had beautiful melodies for his songs.

One day my father called me into his bedroom. There was a steel safe; he opened it and showed me a book by Dr. Joseph Sapir, *Zionism,* in Russian, and on the introduction page it was written that the book owed its appearance to the munificence of Simon Velikovsky.

My father had been one of the leading members of the Jewish community of Vitebsk. He went to the Second Zionist Congress in Basel as a delegate, and there met Herzl who, impressed by my father's appearance, approached him to press his hand. My father returned enthusiastic about the new National Bank. He spent many efforts to persuade his friends to participate in purchasing the foundation's shares, but found ignorance and apathy among the people he approached. Then he made an offer to the Vilno Zionist Committee, which was the central organ in Russia, to contribute 300 rubles for a literary prize, which was then a large sum. More than twenty manuscripts were sent in; the manuscript of Sapir won the prize.

But the committee needed money to print it, and my father supplied an additional five hundred rubles, a matter nowhere mentioned. It was not known that my father gave his last money to make this possible; in his autobiography written many years later he commented, "I thought that if everything is fallen, at least this should remain from all my efforts." On this book a generation of Jewry was educated to the national idea. Its preface was written by Moses L. Lilienblum, a noted Jewish figure. The book was also translated into other languages.

In Moscow we rented an apartment on Milutenski Pereulok, off Miasnitzkaya Street. It was one of the most modern houses, six stories high, with an elevator. It had a front staircase with the fashionable embellishments characteristic of French architecture of the turn of the century. There was also a back staircase for the servants—a family would in those days usually have two female servants, a cook and a chambermaid. The older of them were born still in slavery, abolished in Russia one year before it was abolished in the United States. One day crowds filled the streets and the windows, and waited long. First a dog ran by, frightened by the crowds; then Tzar Nicholas II drove by in an open carriage on one of his rare visits to Moscow. I saw that his face was white with fear, since from any place a bomb could be thrown at him, as it had been at his father.

The business of my father was on Nikolskaya in Kitai-Gorod, housed in large flats with numerous workers; one flat was used

as a storage-place for fabrics, visited by sales people who traveled to sell the merchandise; another flat was a tea dispensary—imported tea was divided by a dozen or more workers into packages wrapped with lead paper and stamped with the name of my father's firm. My mother assisted my father, who was always above the details, and easily cheated; but even the careful and exact nature of my mother did not spare the business from a collapse in a few years. No doubt the sales people took advantage of the freedom they had in giving credits; and with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War many merchants did not pay their debts, and probably also the import of tea from China was hampered. Thus my parents saw their business deteriorating and apparently heading toward an abyss.

Soon after we moved to Moscow, Meta Redlich, who used to tell us stories before we fell asleep, left for her home and sent us her picture; in her stead came Mr. Messerer, a Hebrew teacher from Vilno. He was middle-aged, with a black beard and bald head; he left his family at home, and possessing a diploma, but no knowledge, in dentistry, could live in Moscow, otherwise restricted to the Jews. Since the time the Jews were expelled from Moscow and then selectively readmitted, he was the first and only teacher of Hebrew in the city; he was to act as our educator. He lived with us a few years. When in the summer of 1904 Herzl died, Messerer cried bitterly. On one occasion I remember him explaining to me the creation of the soul by

God: a lighted candle kindles more candles without losing its own light.

My lessons in German were displaced by lessons in French. By moving the family to Moscow my mother intended to provide for her children the best possible education; the best gymnasium was considered to be the new Medvednikov, or 9th Government Gymnasium, founded from the bequest capital left by a rich and liberal merchant. There were three "preparatoires" followed by eight grades. Already in the first preparatoire the knowledge of French was required. I went to exams at the age of seven for entrance to the first preparatoire; I was asked questions, both oral and in writing. I made a favorable impression, and my mother had to decide whether to let me or my elder brother, Daniel, who also presented himself for examinations to the third preparatoire, be accepted: there was only one "Jewish vacancy," the governmental rule being that Jews could compose but three percent of the students. She preferred, and justly so, that the elder brother be accepted.

Daniel traveled to the school, rather far away, and I was sent several times a week to a French lady, Madame Chaulet, who lived in the Dolgi Pereulok in the Devitchie Pole on the outskirts of town. She had taught in the Medvednikov Gymnasium in former years, and apparently was recommended to us to be my tutor. She was an elderly noble lady, of the Russian Orthodox faith, as I judged by the many icons in her

bedroom. She was very kind to me. Each time I came she would greet me, inviting me to have a cup of sweet tea or chocolate with cookies. She was a good soul.

The way to Mme. Chaulet's house was long. In Moscow there were no electric tramways as there were already in Vitebsk—only horse-drawn trolleys. I would walk to the Liubianskaya Square, where stood the building occupied by an insurance company, which fifteen years later became the headquarters of the secret police, a horrible place. On the square along the outside wall of the Kitai Gorod were little wooden stores with all kinds of merchandise; I would stop at stationery displays, at bookstores, and loaf. Sometimes I would buy a ball of chocolate with a "surprise" ring inside; the ring had a "stone," and all was for three kopeks.

Daniel impressed on us early that the business of our parents was declining, and that they were having difficult times. Therefore, he told us, we had to save some of the travel money. My way to Devitchie Pole would cost five kopeks—half of the way in a two-story horse-drawn trolley and the second half in a one-story small trolley—to which I had to transfer at the quay of the Moscow River. But traveling only the first half on the open upper deck of the trolley, one paid three kopeks, but had to go afoot the second half. Thus to save two kopeks I would walk for an hour, but often I would save the whole amount by walking the entire distance both ways, which at my slow, loafing

pace, took a full two hours. Sometimes I would go by the long park along the high wall of the Kremlin, sometimes through the Kremlin, by the long rows of cannons displayed there since the Napoleonic war. There was one particular cannon, not very big, that I could lift by one end, and I would not miss doing it each time I passed there. The Tzar bell, broken, the size of a house, and the Tzar cannon, with four immense cannon balls, were my permanent interest. But most of all I loafed, going by Volchovka and Mochovaya, with their many bookstores. I would look attentively at the postcards, and sometimes buy a few, with romantic content, such as a nymph at a well; but soon I was more and more interested in the books, and became familiar with many titles and authors. Daniel collected books, and all of us participated in this hobby; the books were mainly works of Russian authors or of foreign authors in translation, as given to subscribers of certain periodicals, usually in covers with gilded imprints.

When one year passed and I again had to present myself for examinations, I was not accepted—my French was but "satisfactory," and not "very satisfactory." I went another year to Mme. Chaulet; at the same time I had at home a tutor for Russian and mathematics. He was a medical student named Bialo, and sometimes he used the lessons to practice on me the art of making bandages, a study that I recognized twelve years

later when myself a student of medicine.

After another year, at the third try, I had again only "satisfactory" for French—this was a strategem to keep me out of the quota, promised to somebody else. Madame Chaulet, very indignant, since she knew my knowledge in French was not the reason for my non-acceptance, went to the Gymnasium, where she earlier had taught, to talk to the director. I did not have any feeling of degradation in that as a Jew I repeatedly met rejection, while the Gentile boys found acceptance with no difficulty. But my mother suffered. Once she went to see the director, Vasili Pavlovich Nedatchin, who posed as a liberal yet was of a dictatorial nature with aristocratic aspirations, though a commoner by birth. Suddenly my mother burst into tears. A proud woman, she could never pardon herself this display of human weakness; but she so much wanted me to enter this school, thought to be the best.

Two years we lived in our apartment in Milutinski Pereulok, and then we moved into a more modest place in Obidinski Pereulok. Yet the two years in our first apartment—from my age of seven to nine—left many imprints. Our apartment was on the top floor. An attic was over the adjacent part of the building, and there the chambermaids or cooks would hang the washed linen to dry—there was no such thing as sending linen to a laundry. One day Alexander, or Lolya as we would call him, and I went to investigate the place. It smelled of pigeon habitats;

heavy beams supported the roof, with one or two dormers opening onto the steep metal roof. The domestics who happened to be there, an uneducated folk unable to read or write, thought it a good joke to bolt the door and frighten us by denying us a means of returning. Only with children could the female servants, actually still living in semi-slavery (half-day off every second Sunday) permit themselves such a practical joke; and they laughed behind the door. Without much hesitation, Alexander climbed out of the attic through one of the dormer windows. The opening was close to the edge of the roof and Alexander, holding on with his fingers to the tin of the roof, was moving with his feet towards another dormer—six or seven stories above the street. The women seeing him there shouted in fear and opened the locked door and called to me. I, however, was already one leg out of the dormer about to follow my brother and possibly was already crawling along the roof's edge. I climbed back and made my way out through the door.

In 1905 I went for the fourth time for the examinations of entrance. This time Mme. Chaulet went with me to the examinations; I was accepted, at the age of ten, to the first class.

Now that I was enrolled as a student in the Gymnasium, my mother took me to a store of uniforms, and soon I was, like all the others, dressed in the school uniform. It was made of black cloth, and included a black belt with an emblem on the metal buckle, and a military cap, with another large emblem in front

identifying our gymnasium. There was also an overcoat in blue-grey, very similar to the one worn by officers in the army in peacetime. For festive occasions we had a short tailless jacket, in a dark color.

Ours was an unusally large class—fifty nine pupils; in the following years the number diminished to a little over forty. I still remember most of the names: Adelgeim, Aleksejev, Arkadjev, Armand, Bleklov, Vaganov, Vargaftig, Vasilief, Velikovsky... (In the Russian alphabet the letter V follows the letter B.)

The first, third and fourth, in a year or two, were no longer in the class. Yet very many of those with whom I started at the age of ten in the first class went with me through eight grades and finished, like myself, in 1913, at the age of 18—or some at the age of 19; I was one of the youngest in the class, by several months to a year younger than the others. The system required that a student be satisfactory in all subjects—and there was no free choice of subjects, with the exception of Greek, which was not obligatory and was offered in upper classes and taken only by a few students. If a student's marks were unsatisfactory in one subject, he had to pass an examination in the fall before the start of the new class; if he did not pass the examination, he would be required to repeat the entire grade in all subjects, joining the younger class. This was a great humiliation, not so much for the loss of a year as for being compelled to part with one's classmates

and join the younger boys, for whom there was always some feeling of contempt just because they were younger. With more than two unsatisfactory subjects a boy would automatically "remain" in the class, without a chance to rehabilitate himself in the fall. Often such a boy would prefer to quit the gymnasium entirely; but some "remained" and even more than once, so that a few students who studied with Daniel became my comrades.

The year that I entered the class, two more students were *novitchki* or "green ones": Golunsky and Gorbov, both very talented boys; all the others had already spent three years in this group, having started at the first preparatoire. In my class there was one other Jew—Eugene Luntz, the son of a doctor. We were free to abstain from the class of "God"s law," or religion, given by a priest.

On my way home from the gymnasium I was often joined by Golunski, whom his mother brought and came to pick up, whereas other students came and went by themselves. His father was a military staff doctor, whom I never saw. His mother was a large woman. The boy was pampered, always warmly dressed, with warm heavy boots long before the winter set in. He was very studious, never participated in any pranks, always knew his lessons excellently, was respectful toward authorities, and showed little imagination. Forty-five years later he was a prominent Bolshevik, a professor of international law, designated by the Soviet Union as Justice at the Hague tribunal.

At his visit to the United States I could still recognize him by his picture in the press; but there was no one among the fifty nine students who fitted less the role of a revolutionary or member of the Bolshevik elite.

Gorbov was the son of a Jewish mother, with whom he lived; she was divorced or separated from her husband, a justice in a minor court in Moscow. Gorbov later became a poet, then a Bolshevik; at the height of his career he was denounced and purged.

Vargaftig, who grew into a very strong boy, was a baptized Jew; not a few Jews baptized their children to open them a road in life. Being baptized, they were never again discriminated against. Being strong and big and jolly, he soon dominated the class, and around him several other boys of some distinction grouped themselves. But he did not grow up to what could be expected of him: he later became a tennis player, a boxer, a trainer in sport, but nothing outstanding.

Another group in the upper classes centered around Zavadski, a very tall and lean boy; he was talented in drawing and liked to participate in school plays. In adolescence he was not interested in girls, and in later years became a noted stage director of one of the famous studios of the Moscow Art Theater.

It seems that I hurry to tell of these boys as they grouped

themselves in later grades and as they grew up; the fall of 1905 neither showed yet their talents as clearly, nor presaged their future.

I was placed at one desk with a boy of Polish extraction: Sedlezki. He tried by various means to frighten me, but was unsuccessful. Pupils sat two to a desk of good oak. They were placed at the desks according to their height: smaller boys at lower desks in front.

For eight years I would walk in the morning some four or five blocks of Moscow's side streets to the Medvednikov Gymnasium and in the afternoon retrace my steps homeward. My way passed a *kazienka* or a government monopoly store that sold exclusively vodka in bottles of various sizes. Occasionally I would see a man of the labor class come out of the store (it was not permitted to drink inside), slap the bottle on the bottom, thus uncorking it, and drink it on the spot, and stagger on his way, or return to the monopoly for another bottle. Sometimes I would see a drunk lying in the gutter, his broken bottle next to him.

The name *kazienka* was derived from *kazna* or State Treasury. Under Tzar Nicholas II every village in Russia had a *kazienka*, but by no means did every village have a primary or any other school. Russia was held in ignorance and illiteracy but was kept thoroughly drunk, and the government of the Tzar obtained its

revenue from a monopoly that kept the peasant and labor classes in dissolution and mental decay. When drafted into the army, some of the men called to the colors had, during the training, straw tied to one boot and hay to the other, marching under the corporal's barking, "straw, hay, straw, hay!" since many of the inducted could not distinguish right from left.

The Russian-Japanese war was started for the protection of the possessions and concessions of the members of the House of Romanov on the River Yalu and in Manchuria. It is true that upon mounting the throne in 1894, Nikolas had an idealistic plan for an international court (the Hague Tribunal), but this idealism did not last. In 1903 a pogrom in Kinishev, in southern Russia, was staged at the directives of the Tzar to frighten the Jewish population of the country and as punishment for their liberal tendencies and spirit of westernization. When the Japanese war was lost in the naval battle off Tzusima, the hero of the prolonged defence of Port Arthur, General Stessel, was sentenced to the Schluesselburg prison, a measure calculated to find a scapegoat outside of the inefficient and corrupt palace.

Workers who went to the palace to ask the Tzar's ("Little Father's") protection were shot by artillery, and kossaks with their sabers were let loose into the crowd. In Moscow gendarmes occupied a place across the street from the university and shot at students, but the population of Moscow, undeterred by the "black hundreds," the butchers, and similar "patriots" of

Moscow's lower places, staged huge marching demonstrations and won concessions from the Tzar: this was the 1905 revolution.

The Tzar was compelled to promise land to the landless peasantry and to grant a "constitution" and a representative Duma (Parliament), which he disbanded as soon as he felt safe. The members of the Duma, headed by the president, Professor Mouremtzev, gathered in Vyborg, Finland, and wrote the Vyborg declaration, inviting the population to refuse paying taxes; Muromtzev and other signers of the document were sentenced to prison terms.

From one Duma to the next (there were four), the franchise was ever more limited: a rich person voted in a different curia than a poor person and his vote weighed a score of times the vote of the latter. Stolypin, the Prime Minister, gave his name to the "Stolypin tie" which meant a noose at the gallows. Many revolutionaries spent their lives in Siberia; some great men and women, like Nikolas Morozov and Vera Figner, spent years and decades in solitary confinement.

Nor would the Tzar tolerate the illustrious efforts of some of the nobility, most notably of Leo Tolstoy, to bring about reforms. Tolstoy did not advocate the overthrow of the regime, but he was persecuted by the government for his call to return to the ideals of early Christianity. While he lay dying in the

station master's house at Ostapovo, a refugee from his own house and estate, the Holy Synod, dominated by the Tzar, forbade prayers for the octogenarian in any of the Orthodox churches of Russia, and when he died, he was refused a Christian burial. So also was the evil Tzar, who was to meet an evil end.