

WE have pleasure in announcing to our readers that we have secured for exclusive publication in the "Zionist Record" a series of articles dealing with incidents in the life of Sholem Aleichem, the famous Yiddish humourist, who passed away 21 years ago. The articles are written by his daughter, Lala Kaufman, who lives in America. The contributions portray illuminating aspects of the great Jewish writer, whose books are still read in thousands of Jewish homes throughout the world.

so that the chandelier icicles almost fall down, almost break. When we are too bad, however, father punishes us: he takes a newspaper, folds it like a fan, and spansks us with it. This is called "fitzking." He himself seems to suffer most from this

thing in his quiet voice, or is singing something sad for us. His kind blue eyes are dreamy . . . We, the girls, worship our father and are jealous of one another. But we know he loves best the elder, Tisyah. He calls her "Tisiunka."

Recollections of Sholem Aleichem

*Specially written for the "Zionist Record," by his daughter,
Lala Kaufman*

AN ancient city — Kiev; the heart of Ukraine. Green, curly hills, and on a hill above the river Dnieper the great electric cross of St. Vladimir is reflected in the dark waters; here, on this spot, all Russia was baptised. Here we live. From our balcony we see the main street, Kreschatik, and beyond — Dnieper, Dnieper, Dnieper . . .

But a pair of child's eyes follow him, watch him:

"Strange papa! Not like the others! What is it that he has?"

A large, low room—our dining room. A big chandelier hangs over the table. It has long glass icicles which tinkle when disturbed. If you stamp hard with your feet, they tinkle even louder. We, the children, are singing. We are four daughters and one son—Mischa—a boy of extraordinary beauty. We are holding each other by the hand, walking around and around the table, and singing:

"Oh, we caught you, birdie stay—
You'll not leave the net;
We won't let you get away
While we have you yet—"

Each of us is thinking her own thoughts. I am looking at the glass icicles which are jingling, and I dream of how, when I am big, I'll be . . . I'll do . . . I'll . . .

punishment. He becomes pale and upset. His hands shake. Perhaps that is why, since our early childhood, mother has taught us to hide everything unpleasant from father.

In the same way, he often sits on the couch with his arms around mother. In the same way, he pats her cheek and kisses her. Before others he calls her Olga. Here, on the couch, he calls her "Beeb."

"Quiet — don't tell it to papa!"

In the drawing room stands a grand-piano. Father often sits down before it and plays by ear. His melodies are always sad, are always the same Jewish songs we know so well because he plays them over and over, either with one finger or with chords.

"Sh-sh—don't let papa know"

Father stands in the doorway and looks at us with a serious face. He is also thinking of something, as he watches us. Each of us wants to show him that she sings better than the others . . .

A long winter evening. Behind the windows—snow. Papa is sitting on the couch, and we are all around him. But not without a quarrel:

We are very spoilt. We are seldom reprimanded. We are noisy, and we sometimes fight with one another. Brother Mischa, when angry, has the habit of banging all the doors,

"Let me!"
"Me. Me! I came here first!"
"And I said first that I want to sit here!"
He puts his arms around two of us. His hands are always warm. He is telling us some-

"Perhaps I would have been a musician, if I weren't a writer?"

We make a noise, and he writes. We bang the piano, and he writes. We never disturb him. He enters our playroom with his pen in his hands:

"Why are you laughing so much?"

And he also begins to laugh with us. When he laughs, he clasps his belly with both hands, doubles over, and turns around the room, screaming:

"Oh, I can't bear it!"

In front of him we try to be better than we are. There is something in his kind, blue eyes that prevents us children from fighting and quarrelling in his presence; a mute reproach over the eyeglasses, which is so familiar to us. He doesn't get angry; he only says:

"No—no, children!"

(Continued on next page)

Father, sitting in the carriage, is singing a Ukrainian song. Oh, my neighbour had a cottage, and he had a pretty wife—"

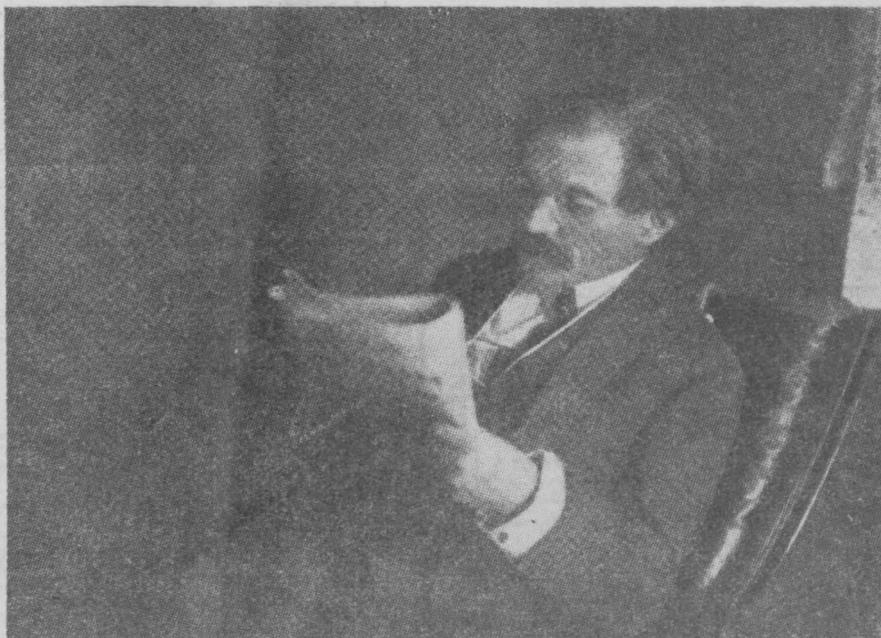
"Stop singing!" I tell him. I am ashamed that he is singing.

"Why?" he asks, and laughs. He sings even louder. The higher the ditch, the bumpier the road, the higher we jump, the louder does he sing:

"I do not have a cottage" . . .

"Stop singing!" I say indignantly, and pull at his sleeve—"You hear?" He laughs. And I am ashamed. I am ashamed to have such a father: sings in a carriage!

The Mazors' house is filled with people standing and sitting in groups. All eyes turn to my father as he enters. His slight, thin figure; his head long, curling blond hair appears here and there. Here and there, immediately, smiles and



SHOLEM ALEICHEM

—an intimate photograph of the great writer in his study in New York in 1915.

We must not in his presence say a rude word to grandmother. God help us if we are not polite to mother. This is a rule I suffer from more than the others; my reputation in the household is not very good. They call me "Cheeky one."

Father is politeness itself. He will never say to the maid: "Give me a glass of water," but only: "I should like to have a glass of water." It seems that he did not do anything to command our obedience, yet we, the children, always obeyed him. Near him, we became better, kinder . . .

No matter how early we got up, father was up even earlier, and immediately made for his desk to write. He wrote standing before a high table. He wrote, and laughed aloud to himself. Not in a dressing gown, but in a soft bath-robe, bedroom slippers over bare feet, he stands in the early morning, and writes, and bites his nails, and writes.

I come to him before leaving for school, for my kiss. He looks at me, but does not see me. His eyes are far, far away, at some place in "Kasrilovka" . . .

He loves to have everything good, happy, gay. He hates bad news. Upon my return from school I calmly lie in answer to his question, and tell him I received an "A," just to make him happy. He is the biggest optimist in the house.

"Well — notzonki" — (good-night)—and we kiss him again.

We, the children, understand that life is difficult, that there is no money; but of laughter, of gaiety, and of noise, the house is always full. Thanks to him, of course. But perhaps it was mother, taking upon her own shoulders all the burdens of a large family?

A melancholy day. Since early morning—a dull, grey rain, Father is late for dinner—now he is eating it alone. Mother is sitting near him. He tells her how he spent the whole day at the stock-market, but with no results.

—"Nothing?"
—"Nothing."

And on his plate—the belated dinner; a piece of overcooked meat, half of a sour pickle, and gristle, which he for some reason eats. Heavily and somehow terribly he sighs. His eyes are deep with hopelessness. In them is the same dull melancholy as on the plate . . .

A gay, happy day; A holiday in the house! Hey, children! Papa is going to read his new story to-night!

"Papa is going to read! Papa is going to read!" we jump with glee.

And he, gathering about himself his "Republic," as he calls us, reads to us, to the children—his first audience and his first critics. His face is lit up with some sort of inner glow. The more pleased he is with the story, the more it glows. And we roar with laughter, listening to the story. We are as pleased and happy as if we had written it together . . .

The stories are so many, and they come so easily. A day or two, and it is finished.—"Hey, children!"

Also happy are the musical evenings of M. M. Warshavsky, author of famous Jewish folk songs, who comes to us as soon as he composes a new song. He sits at our large piano and sings it in his pleasant baritone, accompanying himself:

"In the stove burns a cheerful fire
And the room is hot,
And the rebe teaches little children
Their A—B—C.
Repeat, little ones; repeat, dear ones,
Say once again,
And repeat once more, and then once again,
A—B—C.
When you little ones will grow up one day,
You will understand
How much sorrow, how many tears
Are hidden in

A—B—C."
reverberates in our large, low living room. And we children, stand by the piano and gaze at him. Later, this song will spread everywhere where there are Jews; now, we are its first hearers.

We are great friends with Warshavsky. He can also crow like a rooster, bleat like a sheep, and meow like a cat. Often we run to look for a cat under the couch, when he visits us. Short,

fat, gay, the kindest of men. He died in a lunatic asylum.

I think father proof-read his songs.

In father's study, on his desk, stand various "little things." A cigar-box, a fancy one, like a drawer, with a tricky lock. Only father can open it; no one else. A secret. And there is the famous little bicycle. It is famous for the fact that every single Jew who comes to see father, while talking, must without fail, take in his hands this little bicycle. And father, laughing with his eyes, silently takes it away and puts it in its old place . . .

Jews come. Father talks seriously—but his eyes laugh. We already know: it means he is making fun of someone. Now he mimics—and how he can mimic! He is a wonderful actor! If he were not a writer, he would surely have been an actor. Later, when the guest leaves, papa will impersonate him, and he will laugh, laugh . . . Yes, we like to laugh, to mock. He taught us.

It was by this very cigar-box, absently turning the secret lock, that papa, not noticing that I was also in the room, once said to a guest:

"Would it be possible for you to lend me twenty-five roubles?"

In the drawer of father's desk there are marvellous things! All kinds of little glue bottles, clips, pincers, booklets, pads—all paraphernalia for writing. And a seal depicting two hands clasped in a handshake: "Sholom Aleichem" — "Peace be with you." He stamps it at the heading of his letters.

Sometimes he "makes order" on the table. And then, when everything stands on its own place, he . . . he does not write that day. He only sits and looks at the "order"—and he cannot write.

He likes to barter and exchange things. For this marvellous watch-fob—a wonderful chain. For that amazing watch—this little doodah—an antique! But best of all he likes to make presents. He is hurt, if we do not wear at once anything that he buys for us.

He is as pleased as we, the children, with the Kiev Fair. This is our day. We run with

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him along the fair grounds, purchase various articles—green soap which makes sneeze; little devils in both honey cookies which you can bite into, no matter how strong your teeth are . . . We ride the merry-go-rounds. We come home late—suspiciously late when it gets quite dark. Then Mamma will not notice that on our foreheads are enormous bumps— from falling off merry-go-round and getting hit by a hoof of a wooden horse—that our new dresses are mercilessly torn, that we are covered with dirt and mud . . . But the way we agree beforehand that if Mamma should ask, we would say nothing at all happened.

(To be continued).



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