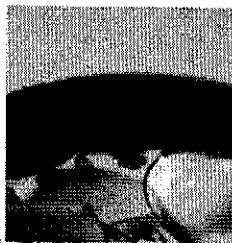
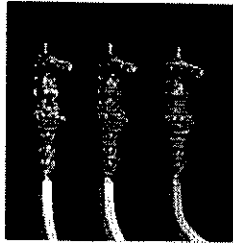


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***Shidduchim, Shandas, and Shaping the Future:
Family and Social Life in Modern Jewish History***

Early 20th Century America

Dr. Leslie Ginsparg Klein

February 19th, 2013



THIS COURSE IS DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF:

אסתר חנה ז"ל בת צבי ופרומה עלקא פייגא בת מאיר ופשא לאה ז"ל נח בן אברהם ופייגא ז"ל
MAY THEIR SOULS BE BOUND IN THE EVERLASTING BOND OF LIFE תהא נשמתם צרוורות בצרור החיים

Martha Levy at the

Spire



Abigail Levy Franks



11

Washington Post Book World

Bintel Brief



Edited and with an Introduction by

ISAAC METZGER

Foreword and Notes by

HARRY GOLDEN



"rich uncle." I live alone now, lonely and poor. My aim in life is to announce to the world who was guilty in my misfortune and to clear the name of my good teacher. Maybe I'll have the chance to fall at his feet and beg him for forgiveness. I beg you to publish my letter in the name of the innocent man.

ANSWER:

We print this letter primarily in the interests of the innocent young man. If the letter writer's uncle is really as she pictures him, he is one of the most degenerate creatures on earth. Nevertheless, the writer of the letter should never have allowed this false accusation to be made against the young man.

Sincerely,
H.P.

1906

Dear Editor,

Since I have been a *Forward* reader from the early days, I hope you will allow me to unburden my heart in the "Bintel Brief." Nineteen years ago, when I was a child, I came to America. Later I was married here. I was never rich financially, but wealthy in love. I loved my husband more than anything in the world. We had seven children, the oldest is now thirteen. But God did not want us to be happy, and after years of hard work, my husband developed consumption.

When does a working man go to Colorado? When he has one foot in the grave.

When I began to talk to my husband about his going to Colorado, he answered that he couldn't leave me alone with the children, and he kept working till he collapsed. When I was pregnant with my seventh child, I finally sent him away.

As time went on, he wrote me that he was feeling better, and no one was as happy as I. I counted the minutes till I could

be with my husband again. Meanwhile, I had a baby and had to make the baby alone. When my baby was three months old, I took my seven children and went to my husband.

My husband told me he had opened a small business in Colorado, and hoped to make a living. But I heard him cough, and when I questioned him, he answered with a bitter smile that there was no cure for this illness. I immediately saw my tragedy and wouldn't let him work. I went out peddling with a basket, and left him at home with the children. I tried to make a living. I got a little aid, but my husband became gradually weaker.

For about fourteen months my husband didn't leave his bed. I was willing to do the hardest work to keep him alive. I fought my bitter lot like a lion, to chase the angel of death from my husband, but alas, he won. I was left alone and poor, with seven little orphans. With my husband's death my spirit and courage died, and I neglected my house and children.

My friends were afraid I might go mad, and they convinced me to go back to New York. I arrived at ten o'clock of a rainy November night and stood in the street with my children, broken and tired, with no place to go, my tears mingling with the falling rain.

Imagine how I felt then—I set out with the children to seek my husband's sister. I cannot describe the scene when I came to her that night and told her of the death of her only brother. I had decided that if she would not take me in, I would throw myself into the river.

But I found comfort with his poor sister. She kept me and the children four weeks, and during this time I placed four of the children in an orphanage. I am now left with three, but I cannot earn a living. If I were to go back to Colorado with the three children, I could make a living peddling, and could possibly plan a future for the four when they got out of the orphanage. There they would have the fresh air, here I am afraid they might inherit their father's sickness. But it is hard for me to leave the four. I am brokenhearted every time I go to see them. I live here in dreary infested rooms, I can't earn a living, and my heart

draws me there, where my husband died. Of what use is the great city with its people when for me it is narrow and dark?

With tear-filled eyes I beg you, dear Editor, to advise me what to do. Maybe through you I will find solace for my broken heart.

Your constant reader,
A Young Widow

ANSWER:

We believe the writer's duty demands that she go to Colorado to work there with the hope that in a short time she will be able to have her four children from the orphanage with her. Her devotion to her children will help her overcome her troubles and give her consolation.

1906

Worthy Editor,

We are a small family who recently came to the "Golden Land." My husband, my boy and I are together, and our daughter lives in another city.

I had opened a grocery store here, but soon lost all my money. In Europe we were in business; we had people working for us and paid them well. In short, there we made a good living but here we are badly off.

My husband became a peddler. The "pleasure" of knocking on doors and ringing bells cannot be known by anyone but a peddler. If anybody does buy anything "on time," a lot of the money is lost, because there are some people who never intend to pay. In addition, my husband has trouble because he has a beard, and because of the beard he gets beaten up by the hoodlums.

Also we have problems with our boy, who throws money around. He works every day till late at night in a grocery for three dollars a week. I watch over him and give him the best because

I'm sorry that he has to work so hard. But he costs me plenty and he borrows money from everybody. He has many friends and owes them all money. I get more and more worried as he takes here and borrows there. All my talking doesn't help. I am afraid to chase him away from home because he might get worse among strangers. I want to point out that he is well versed in Russian and Hebrew and he is not a child any more, but his behavior is not that of an intelligent adult.

I don't know what to do. My husband argues that he doesn't want to continue peddling. He doesn't want to shave off his beard, and it's not fitting for such a man to do so. The boy wants to go to his sister, but that's a twenty-five-dollar fare. What can I do? I beg you for a suggestion.

Your constant reader,
F.L.

ANSWER:

Since her husband doesn't earn a living anyway, it would be advisable for all three of them to move to the city where the daughter is living. As for the beard, we feel that if the man is religious and the beard is dear to him because the Jewish law does not allow him to shave it off, it's up to him to decide. But if he is not religious, and the beard interferes with his earnings, it should be sacrificed.

1906

Dear Editor,

For a long time I worked in a shop with a Gentile girl, and we began to go out together and fell in love. We agreed that I would remain a Jew and she a Christian. But after we had been married for a year, I realized that it would not work.

I began to notice that whenever one of my Jewish friends comes to the house, she is displeased. Worse yet, when she sees

me reading a Jewish newspaper her face changes color. She says nothing, but I can see that she has changed. I feel that she is very unhappy with me, though I know she loves me. She will soon become a mother, and she is more dependent on me than ever.

She used to be quite liberal, but lately she is being drawn back to the Christian religion. She gets up early Sunday mornings, runs to church and comes home with eyes swollen from crying. When we pass a church now and then, she trembles.

Dear Editor, advise me what to do now. I could never convert, and there's no hope for me to keep her from going to church. What can we do now?

Thankfully,
A Reader

ANSWER:

Unfortunately, we often hear of such tragedies, which stem from marriages between people of different worlds. It's possible that if this couple were to move to a Jewish neighborhood, the young man might have more influence on his wife.

Mixed marriage between Gentile and Jew is a complicated affair.

According to the latest statistics, it occurs eight times oftener with a Jewish male and a Gentile female than with a Jewish female and a Gentile male. But it is complicated because it can seldom be an ordinary boy-meets-girl proposition. The Jew must almost always bring something else to the union besides himself. The girl must justify her marriage to a Jew: "I married a Jew, but he's a composer, a writer, a journalist, a physicist, a college professor," or "I married a Jew but he's rich." A Gentile girl will rarely marry a Jewish shipping clerk or the Jew who pumps gas at a filling station. She almost always enters a higher economic level than that from which she came.

Much has been written and said about the terrible scene that takes place in a Jewish home when a son marries a shiksa—the parents sit shiva in mourning for the boy. But not enough has

been said about the Gentile family. For while the parents of the Gentile girl may accept the Jewish son-in-law and tolerate the marriage, the girl loses many of her friends, former classmates and relatives.

The mixed marriage can be most successful among those who are self-sustaining by career, notably entertainers, actors, artists, sculptors and writers.

But the attempt to reflect the melting-pot culture of the society in which we live has continued to lead to increased intermarriage.

And there are many letters in the "Bintel Brief" concerning this phenomenon, and the sorrow of parents over the prospect of their son marrying a Gentile. The answer which the editor of the Forward gave to these letters was sensible. In effect he said that marriage under the best of circumstances, in which the partners to the union come from the same background, the same religion, the same economic status, presents a great problem for success. And when you add the obstacle of intermarriage to the existing problems it could, he said, lead to disaster.

1906

Honorable Editor,

I have a grievous wound in my heart and maybe through the "Bintel Brief" I will find relief.

I am a young woman. I was happily married, but a year ago death suddenly took my husband. He was handsome and I am considered attractive. When we used to walk together we often heard the comment, "What a good-looking couple." We were in love and faithful to each other in the full sense of the word.

When he died and left me with our only daughter, fifteen years of age, my world collapsed. I was in despair but not for

I have been in the country now two years, and life is not bad. I work in a jewelry store, for good wages. But my heart will not remain silent within me over the blood of my brothers being spilled in Russia. I am restless because of the pogroms that took place in Bialystok, where I left old parents and a sister with three small children. I haven't heard from them since the pogrom and don't know if they're alive. But since they lived in the vicinity of the "Plaskes" where the Jewish defense group was located, it's possible they are alive.

Now I ask your advice. I cannot make up my mind whether to fulfill my duty to my parents and sister and bring them to America, if I hear from them, or to go back to Russia and help my brothers in their struggle.

If I had known what was going to happen there, I would not have gone to America. I myself had agitated that one should not leave for America but stay and fight in Russia till we were victorious. Now I feel like a liar and a coward. I agitated my friends, placed them in the danger of soldiers' guns and bullets. And I myself ran away.

Respectfully,
M.G.

ANSWER:

If one were to ask us the question before leaving Russia, we would not advise him to leave the revolutionary battlefields. Since the writer of the letter is already here and speaks of his two duties, we would like to tell him that the Assistance Movement in America is developing so rapidly that everyone who wants to be useful will be able to do enough here. He should bring his parents and sister here, and become active in the local movement.

The "Black Hundreds" organized by the League of Russian People threatened the Jews in Russia with bloody revenge for their participation in elections if they resulted in liberating the state.

The Black Hundreds was formed after 1881 with the introduction of the "May laws."

The laws set limitations on the employment of Christian domestics by Jews. It also limited the early marriages of Jews, the use of Yiddish and Hebrew, and restricted the Jews' entry into the universities.

Hand in hand with such restrictions went the limiting of education for Jews in general, by placing quotas on their admission to high schools.

Military service in the Czar's army was compulsory. After service, during which they had generally left their families in great misery, many Jewish soldiers of the Czar returned, broken in body and spirit. Jews therefore sought to evade the service in every possible way and many of them found their voyage to America their escape.

1906

Dear Editor,

I am a Russian revolutionist and a freethinker. Here in America I became acquainted with a girl who is also a freethinker. We decided to marry, but the problem is that she has Orthodox parents, and for their sake we must have a religious ceremony. If we refuse the ceremony we will be cut off from them forever. Her parents also want me to go to the synagogue with them before the wedding, and I don't know what to do. Therefore I ask you to advise me how to act.

Respectfully,
J.B.

ANSWER:

The advice is that there are times when it pays to give in to old parents and not grieve them. It depends on the circumstances. When one can get along with kindness it is better not to break off relations with the parents.

1906

Dear Editor,

I join all the others who marvel at your "Bintel Brief," where almost everyone who has something on his conscience, or a secret, can express himself. I, too, wish to get something off my chest, and I want your advice.

I came to America as a *shokhet*. The ship I was on sank. I was among the lucky ones who were rescued, but my valise with my possessions, including the papers that certified that I am a *shokhet*, was lost.

Since I could no longer be a *shokhet*, I became a shirt-maker. Later I worked my way up and became a clockmaker. But I was not satisfied because the physical labor and the degradation we had to endure in the shops was unbearable.

Within a few years two of my brothers came from Europe. We stayed together and we all worked in a shirt shop. Several times we tried contracting, but it didn't work out. At that time, white collars for shirts came into fashion. We had to sew on neckbands, to which the white collars were buttoned. This became a nuisance that delayed the work. Imagine having to cut out a band to fit each shirt we made. This wasn't easy, and the boss gave us the job of making the bands at home, as night work.

In short, one of us got an idea. Since the whole trade found the neckbands a problem, why not make the neckbands for all the manufacturers? Said and done! It worked out well. They snatched the bands from our hands and we were very busy. We were the only ones in the line from the start, and we prospered. Later a few more shops opened, but that didn't bother us because the trade grew even bigger.

Now we have a huge factory with our names on a big

sign on the front of the building. But the bands that gave us our start are no longer made by us alone. We have many workers but have paid little attention to them since we were so involved with making our fortune.

In time I began to read your newspaper and, out of curiosity, even the "Bintel Brief," to see what was going on in the world. As I read more and more about the troubles, my conscience awoke and I began to think: "Robber, cold-blooded robber." My conscience spoke to me: "Just look at your workers, see how pale and thin and beaten they look, and see how healthy and ruddy your face and hands are."

This conscience of mine has a strong voice. It yells at me just as I yell at my workers, and scolds me for all my offenses against them. It will be enough for me to give just a few samples of my evil deeds: The clock in our shop gets "fixed" twice a day; the hands are moved back and forth. The foreman has on his table a stick like a conductor's baton and when someone says a word during working hours he hears the tick-tock of that stick. Our wages are never under two dollars or over seven dollars a week.

My conscience bothers me and I would like to correct my mistakes, so that I will not have to be ashamed of myself in the future. But do not forget that my brothers do not feel as I do, and if I were to speak to them about all this they would consider me crazy. So what is left for me to do? I beg you, worthy Editor, give me a suggestion.

Yours sincerely,

B.

ANSWER:

We are proud and happy that through the "Forward" and the "Bintel Brief" the conscience of this letter writer was aroused. We can only say to the writer that he must not muffle the voice of his conscience. He will lose nothing, but will gain more and more true happiness.

have to be dissolved because his doctor had told him to stop working. I had to agree to it.

Now my former partner has a small business, but he is not doing well. I, on the contrary, have worked a full season with the whole "set" and earned a great deal.

My question now is whether I have any obligations to my former partner, because since he became sick and left me I am earning more than usual. I want to remark that I am a family man with young children, but I don't want to take what belongs to another. If you, Mr. Editor, will tell me I have a duty toward him, I will fulfill it.

My former partner is a very decent man, and when I go into his house and see his need, my heart aches. I imagine that he would deal better with me in such a situation. I even loaned him three hundred dollars for his business, which he'll surely repay, but that's a separate matter.

I thank you in advance for your good advice.

Respectfully,
A Reader

ANSWER:

It is comforting to see that there is still compassion in the world. According to the official rule of "mine" and "thine," the writer of the letter, after the partnership was dissolved, owes his partner nothing at all. But according to a rule of human kindness, he should give any and all help with an open hand to this faithful and honorable friend.

1907

Worthy Editor,

I was born in America and my parents gave me a good education. I studied Yiddish and Hebrew, finished high school,

completed a course in bookkeeping and got a good job. I have many friends, and several boys have already proposed to me.

Recently I went to visit my parents' home town in Russian Poland. My mother's family in Europe had invited my parents to a wedding, but instead of going themselves, they sent me. I stayed at my grandmother's with an aunt and uncle and had a good time. Our European family, like my parents, are quite well off and they treated me well. They indulged me in everything and I stayed with them six months.

It was lively in the town. There were many organizations and clubs and they all accepted me warmly, looked up to me—after all, I was a citizen of the free land, America. Among the social leaders of the community was an intelligent young man, a friend of my uncle's, who took me to various gatherings and affairs.

He was very attentive, and after a short while he declared his love for me in a long letter. I had noticed that he was not indifferent to me, and I liked him as well. I looked up to him and respected him, as did all the townsfolk. My family became aware of it, and when they spoke to me about him, I could see they thought it was a good match.

He was handsome, clever, educated, a good talker and charmed me, but I didn't give him a definite answer. As my love for him grew, however, I wrote to my parents about him, and then we became officially engaged.

A few months later we both went to my parents in the States and they received him like their own son. My bridegroom immediately began to learn English and tried to adjust to the new life. Yet when I introduced him to my friends they looked at him with disappointment. "This 'greenhorn' is your fiancé?" they asked. I told them what a big role he played in his town, how everyone respected him, but they looked at me as if I were crazy and scoffed at my words.

At first I thought, Let them laugh, when they get better acquainted with him they'll talk differently. In time, though,

I was affected by their talk and began to think, like them, that he really was a "greenhorn" and acted like one.

In short, my love for him is cooling off gradually. I'm suffering terribly because my feelings for him are changing. In Europe, where everyone admired him and all the girls envied me, he looked different. But, here, I see before me another person.

I haven't the courage to tell him, and I can't even talk about it to my parents. He still loves me with all his heart, and I don't know what to do. I choke it all up inside myself, and I beg you to help me with advice in my desperate situation.

Respectfully,
A Worried Reader

ANSWER:

The writer would make a grave mistake if she were to separate from her bridegroom now. She must not lose her common sense and be influenced by the foolish opinions of her friends who divided the world into "greenhorns" and real Americans.

We can assure the writer that her bridegroom will learn English quickly. He will know American history and literature as well as her friends do, and be a better American than they. She should be proud of his love and laugh at those who call him "greenhorn."

1907

Worthy Editor,

Allow me a little space in your newspaper and, I beg you, give me some advice as to what to do.

There are seven people in our family—parents and five children. I am the oldest child, a fourteen-year-old girl. We have been in the country two years and my father, who is a frail man, is the only one working to support the whole family.

I go to school, where I do very well. But since times are hard now and my father earned only five dollars this week, I began to talk about giving up my studies and going to work in order to help my father as much as possible. But my mother didn't even want to hear of it. She wants me to continue my education. She even went out and spent ten dollars on winter clothes for me. But I didn't enjoy the clothes, because I think I am doing the wrong thing. Instead of bringing something into the house, my parents have to spend money on me.

I have a lot of compassion for my parents. My mother is now pregnant, but she still has to take care of the three boarders we have in the house. Mother and Father work very hard and they want to keep me in school.

I am writing to you without their knowledge, and I beg you to tell me how to act. Hoping you can advise me, I remain,

Your reader,
S.

ANSWER:

The advice to the girl is that she should obey her parents and further her education, because in that way she will be able to give them greater satisfaction than if she went out to work.

The hunger for education was very great among the East Side Jews from Eastern Europe. Immigrant mothers who couldn't speak English went to the library and held up the fingers of their hand to indicate the number of children they had. They then would get a card, give it to each of their children, and say, "Go, learn, read."

I graduated from P.S. 20 with George Gershinwin, Edward G. Robinson, Paul Muni and Sender Jacobowitz, all sons of immigrants.

blow, and hopefully, goodhearted people could raise at least part of the money for her. Possibly this letter will reach people who are in a position to bring back the will to live to this unfortunate girl. The writer of this letter and his wife must try everything possible to keep this girl with them. Hopefully, time will bring her peace of mind.

1908

Dear Editor,

We are two brothers who live together and have worked together. We earned a living for ourselves and were able to send money to our parents in Europe. But now unfortunately we've been out of work for three months, and we cannot send anything to our parents.

My brother had an idea that we should go to Panama. He heard that workers were being sent there and paid good wages (sixty-five cents an hour). I must say that we love our parents very much, and we would like to be able to save enough money to go home to our poor old mother and father. But I am afraid it's not true that such high wages are paid there.

We are lonely here and we don't know whom to ask and what to do. So we beg you to advise us and answer soon. We thank you in advance.

Your constant readers,
I. Brothers

ANSWER:

There are no honeypots in Panama. The climate is unhealthy, the work is hard, and one lives among all kinds of people, some of them half savage. It's hard to get away from there if one has no money.

But if you cannot help yourself here, and if you are strong and capable of endurance, you can make a few dollars at that work. You can find out how much is being paid there at the office at 74 Lafayette Street, New York.

1908

Worthy Editor,

I have been in America almost three years. I came from Russia where I studied at a *yeshiva*. My parents were proud and happy at the thought that I would become a rabbi. But at the age of twenty I had to go to America. Before I left I gave my father my word that I would walk the righteous path and be good and pious. But America makes one forget everything.

Here I became an operator, and at night I went to school. In a few months I entered a preparatory school, where for two subjects I had a *Gentile* girl as teacher. I began to notice that the teacher paid more attention to me than to the others in the class and in time she told me I would be better off taking private lessons from her for the same price I paid to the school.

I agreed, and soon realized that her lessons with me were not ordinary. For example, I was to pay five dollars a month for two hours a week, but she gave me three lessons a week, each lasting two and sometimes three hours. Then I had to stop the lessons because I had no money to pay her. However, she wanted to teach me without pay, explaining that she taught not only for money but also because teaching gave her pleasure.

In short, I began to feel at home in her house and not only she but also her parents welcomed me warmly. I ate there often and they also lent me money when I was in need. I used to ask myself, "What am I doing? but I couldn't help myself.

There was a depression at the time, I had no job and had to accept their aid.

I don't know what I would have done without her help. I began to love her, but with mixed feelings of respect and anguish. I was afraid to look her in the eyes. I looked at her like a Russian soldier looks at his superior officer, and I never imagined she thought of marrying me.

A few weeks ago I took the Regents examinations for entering college. After the exams, my teacher told me not to look for work for a few weeks, but to eat and drink at their home. I didn't want to but she insisted and I couldn't refuse.

Many times upon leaving her house, I would decide not to return, but my heart drew me to her, and I spent three weeks in her house. Meanwhile I received the report on my examinations which showed that I had passed with the highest grades. I went directly to her to show her the report and she asked me what I planned to do. I answered that I didn't know as yet, because I had no money for college. "That's a minor problem," she said, and asked if I didn't know that she was not indifferent toward me. Then she spoke frankly of her love for me and her hope that I would love her.

"If you are not against it, my parents and I will support you while you study. The fact that I am a Gentle and you a Jew should not bother us. We are both, first of all, human beings and we will live as such." She told me she believed that all men and all nations were equal.

I was confused and I couldn't answer her immediately. In Europe I had been absorbed in the *yeshiva*, here with my studies, and I knew little of practical life. I do agree with her that we are first of all human beings, and she is a human being in the fullest sense of the word. She is pretty, intelligent, educated, and has a good character. But I am in despair when I think of my parents. What headaches they will have when they learn of this!

I asked her to give me a few days to think it over. I go around confused and yet I am drawn to her. I must see her

every day, but when I am there I think of my parents and I am torn by doubt.

I wait impatiently for your answer.

Respectfully,
Skeptic from Philadelphia

ANSWER:

We can only say that some mixed marriages are happy, others unhappy. But then many marriages between Jew and Jew, Christian and Christian, are not successful either. It is true, however, that in some mixed marriages the differences between man and wife create unhappiness. Therefore we cannot take it upon ourselves to advise the young man regarding this marriage. This he must decide for himself.

1908

Worthy Editor,

Have pity on me and my two small children and print my letter in the *Forward*.

Max! The children and I now say farewell to you. You left us in such a terrible state. You had no compassion for us. For six years I loved you faithfully, took care of you like a loyal servant, never had a happy day with you. Yet I forgive you for everything.

Have you ever asked yourself why you left us? Max, where is your conscience: you used to have sympathy for the forsaken women and used to say their terrible plight was due to the men who left them in dire need. And how did you act? I was a young, educated, decent girl when you took me. You lived with me for six years, during which time I bore you four children. And then you left me.

Of the four children, only two remain, but you have made

them living orphans. Who will bring them up? Who will support us? Have you no pity for your own flesh and blood? Consider what you are doing. My tears choke me and I cannot write any more.

Be advised that in several days I am leaving with my two living orphans for Russia. We say farewell to you and beg you to take pity on us and send us enough to live on. My address in Russia will be — [Full name and address were given].

Your Deserted Wife and Children

The most dreaded word in the Yiddish language is agunah a deserted wife. The Jewish Daily Forward at one time ran a regular feature seeking husbands who had deserted their wives, and the Jewish Information Agency of New York also had a bureau seeking deserting husbands. It was a very sad thing, especially when the wife had been left with two or three children and no income.

1908

Esteemed Editor,

We were sitting in the shop and working when the boss came over to one of us and said, "You ruined the work: you'll have to pay for it." The worker answered that it wasn't his fault, that he had given out the work in perfect condition. "You're trying to tell me!" The boss got mad and began to shout. "I pay your wages and you answer back, you dog! I should have thrown you out of my shop long ago."

The worker trembled, his face got whiter. When the boss noticed how his face paled, he gestured, spat and walked away. The worker said no more. Tired, and overcome with shame, he turned back to his work and later he exclaimed, "For six years I've been working here like a slave, and he tells me, 'You dog, I'll throw you out!' I wanted to pick up an iron and smash his

head in, but I saw before me my wife and five children who want to eat!"

Obviously, the offended man felt he had done wrong in not standing up for his honor as a worker and human being. In the shop, the machines hummed, the irons thumped, and we could see the tears running down his cheeks.

Did this unfortunate man act correctly in remaining silent under the insults of the boss? Is the fact that he has a wife and children the reason for his slavery and refusal to defend himself? I hope you will answer my questions in the "Bintel Brief."

Respectfully,
A.P.

ANSWER:

The worker cannot help himself alone. There is no limit to what must be done for a piece of bread. One must bite his lips till they bleed, and keep silent when he is alone. But he must not remain alone. He must not remain silent. He must unite with his fellow workers and fight. To defend their honor as men, the workers must be well organized.

1908

Dear Mr. Editor,

I am an unhappy lonely orphan, fifteen years of age, and I appeal to you in my helplessness.

My story is a tragic one. Fifteen years ago when there was a depression in the country, my parents lived in Boston, and there I was born. My father was an operator, and at that time he was out of a job for a long time. At home we were starving for a piece of bread, but my mother wouldn't go to strangers to beg because she was ashamed. She had come from a rich family in Europe.

On a certain morning, when my mother went out into the

their dreary lives, attempt to withstand these temptations and guard themselves from going astray.

This letter writer, who comes to us with her bitter and earnest tears, asking advice, has sufficient reason to fear that if the man finds out about her past he will send her away. But it is hard to conceal something that many people know. Such a thing cannot be kept secret forever. When the man finds out about it from someone else, he would feel that she had betrayed him and it would be worse.

Therefore, "Honesty is the best policy." She should tell him the truth, and whatever will be, will be.

1910

Worthy Editor,

I have been here in America several years, with my father and three sisters. We left Mother and two younger sisters back home. We kept sending money to them and hoped for the time when Mother and our two sisters could come here too.

Finally they started out. Suddenly we got a letter from Mother telling us that on the way one of our sisters, eighteen years of age, was detained because she had trachoma in her eyes, and they all turned back home.

Now we want to write our mother that she should leave our sister at home for a time and come here with our other sister. Though we all feel guilty at the thought of leaving our sister alone, we question whether it is right for the whole family to suffer because of one.

We beg you to give your advice on how to act. Five people wait impatiently for your answer.

Respectfully,

H.C.

Detroit, Michigan

ANSWER:

If the eighteen-year-old girl has to remain alone, it is not fair to leave her. If, however, she can stay there with family or friends, there is nothing to worry about. The point is that she must see to it that her eyes are cured as soon as possible, so that she can be brought to America more quickly, and the family can be together.

1910

Worthy Editor,

When we came to America ten years ago we struggled and went through a lot. My husband didn't have a trade and couldn't find any kind of job. We suffered from hunger and cold. Our two little children stretched their bony little hands out to us, begging for food, and I had none to give them. I shudder when I think of those terrible times.

At that time we lived in a basement, and because we owed the landlord six dollars for rent, he put us out on the street. I huddled with the two children near our few belongings and my husband ran to his *landsleit* to beg their help.

The neighbors and passers-by threw a few cents into a plate that was placed on our broken-down table, looking at us, seeing the tragic picture, everyone was moved. But the clang of the coins falling into the plate tore at my heart and I wept bitter tears. I want to mention here that I came from a respectable family and my parents had given me a dowry of six hundred rubles.

Toward evening my husband came back, disheartened and defeated, and told me that his *landsleit* were poverty-stricken too, and he couldn't get more than two dollars from them.

Just then a well-dressed young woman came by, stopped to talk to us and told us to come home with her and she would

give us money for the rent. My husband went with her and soon came back overjoyed. He told me the woman had given him twenty-five dollars and asked us to come to her home for supper.

When I came into the house with my children, I immediately felt at home, because the woman, the good angel, couldn't do enough for us. After supper she went out shopping for clothing for the children, whom she constantly hugged and kissed. Her husband was no less fine and goodhearted to us. He promised to find a job for my husband and he did.

We rented rooms and started life anew. In time my husband bought a business and the two good people helped us a great deal. We became very friendly with them and not a day passed that we didn't see each other. For the last four years we have been living in the same house where they live.

I am now the mother of five children and we live quite happily. But lately something happened that upset us a great deal. The couple who helped us so much have no children. They are well off, they love each other, but they long for a child. And they are very attached to our children.

Recently, with tears in her eyes, the woman poured out her heart to me and complained that she enjoyed nothing and was very lonely. When I tried to comfort her, she said that I could help her. I told her I would gladly do anything in the world for her. Then she told me she wanted me to give her my youngest child, who is almost two years old. Her words shocked me and I told her I had to talk it over with my husband.

Well, my husband is ready to give her the child, but I can't do it. I would give her my life, but how can a mother give away her own child? She cries and begs for the child, whom she loves very much. Her husband pleads with her to put it out of her mind, but it doesn't help. I am afraid that it might end in a tragedy.

I wait in despair for your advice.

With thanks,
A Perplexed Mother

ANSWER:

In the answer this couple, who helped the family in their dire need, are praised highly for their charitable deeds. But it is explained to the childless woman that she dare not and must not demand of these people, who are so grateful to her, that they give away one of their five children. Also, the father of the children is told that he has no right to try to convince his wife to give their child to the benefactress.

1910

Worthy Editor,

My husband, — [here the name was given], deserted me and our three small children, leaving us in desperate need. I was left without a bit of bread for the children, with debts in the grocery store and the butcher's, and last month's rent unpaid.

I am not complaining so much about his abandoning me as about the grief and suffering of our little children, who beg for food, which I cannot give them. I am young and healthy, I am able and willing to work in order to support my children, but unfortunately I am tied down because my baby is only six months old. I looked for an institution which would take care of my baby, but my friends advise against it.

The local Jewish Welfare Agencies are allowing me and my children to die of hunger, and this is because my "faithful" husband brought me over from Canada just four months ago and therefore I do not yet deserve to eat their bread.

It breaks my heart but I have come to the conclusion that in order to save my innocent children from hunger and cold I have to give them away.

I will sell my beautiful children to people who will give them a home. I will sell them, not for money, but for bread, for a secure home where they will have enough food and warm clothing for the winter.



J. Slovák woman, Ellis Island, 1905.

I, the unhappy young mother, am willing to sign a contract, with my heart's blood, stating that the children belong to the good people who will treat them tenderly. Those who are willing and able to give my children a good home can apply to me.

Respectfully,

Mrs. P.*

Chicago

ANSWER:

What kind of society are we living in that forces a mother to such desperate straits that there is no other way out than to sell her three children for a piece of bread? Isn't this enough to kindle a hellish fire of hatred in every human heart for such a system?

The first to be damned is the heartless father, but who knows what's wrong with him? Perhaps he, too, is unhappy. We hope, though, that this letter will reach him and he will return to aid them.

We also ask our friends and readers to take an interest in this unfortunate woman and to help her so that she herself can be a mother to her children.

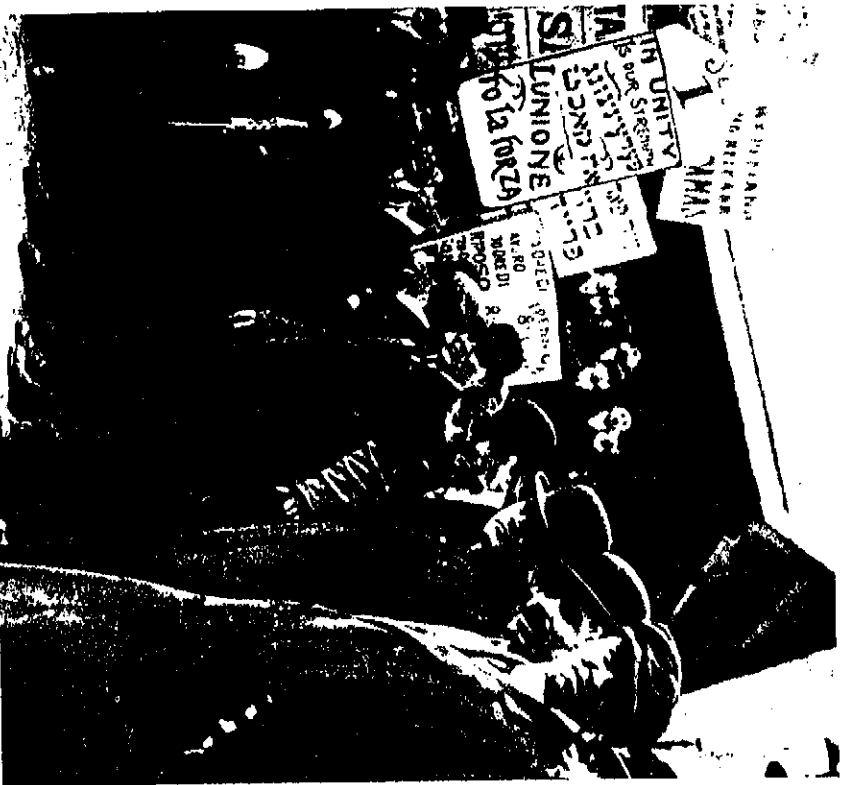
1910

Dear Editor,

Since I do not want my conscience to bother me, I ask you to decide whether a married woman has the right to go to school two evenings a week. My husband thinks I have no right to do this.

I admit that I cannot be satisfied to be just a wife and mother. I am still young and I want to learn and enjoy life. My children and my house are not neglected, but I go to evening high school twice a week. My husband is not pleased and when I come home at night and ring the bell, he lets me stand outside a long time intentionally, and doesn't hurry to open the door.

* The full name and address here given.



19. Clothing workers' strike, 1910. Most laborers in the garment trade were either Jewish or Italian.

Now he has announced a new decision. Because I send out the laundry to be done, it seems to him that I have too much time for myself, even enough to go to school. So from now on he will count out every penny for anything I have to buy for the house, so I will not be able to send out the laundry any more. And when I have to do the work myself there won't be any time left for such "foolishness" as going to school. I told him that I'm willing to do my own washing but that I would still be able to find time for study.

When I am alone with my thoughts, I feel I may not be right. Perhaps I should not go to school. I want to say that my husband is an intelligent man and he wanted to marry a woman who was educated. The fact that he is intelligent makes me more annoyed with him. He is in favor of the emancipation of women, yet in real life he acts contrary to his beliefs.

Awaiting your opinion on this, I remain,

Your reader,
The Discontented Wife

ANSWER:

Since this man is intelligent and an adherent of the women's emancipation movement, he is scolded severely in the answer for wanting to keep his wife so enslaved. Also the opinion is expressed that the wife absolutely has the right to go to school two evenings a week.

1910

Dear Editor,

This is the voice of thirty-seven miserable men who are buried but not covered over by earth, tied down but not in chains, silent but not mute, whose hearts beat like humans, yet are not like other human beings.

When we look at our striped clothes, at our dirty narrow

cots, at our fellow companions in the cells, the beaten, lowest members of society, who long ago lost their human dignity, the blood freezes in our veins. We feel degraded and miserable here. And why are we confined here? For the horrible crime of being poor, not being able to satisfy the mad whims of our wives. That's why we pine away here, stamped with the name "convict." That's why we are despised, robbed of our freedom, and treated like dogs.

We ask you, worthy Editor, to publish our letter so your readers, especially the women, will know how we live here. This letter is written not with ink but with our hearts' blood. We are coughing from the polluted air that we breathe in the cells. Our bones ache from lying on the hard cots and we get stomach-aches from the food they give us.

The non-support "plague" is the worst plague of all. For the merest nonsense, a man is caught and committed to the work-house. He doesn't even get a chance to defend himself. Even during the worst times of the Russian reaction people didn't suffer as the men suffer here in America because of their wives. For a Jewish wife it's as easy here to condemn her husband to imprisonment as it is for her to try on a pair of gloves. In all the world there isn't such legal injustice as here in the alimony courts.

What do they think, these women! If they believe that the imprisoned husbands, after the six months, will become purified and come out good, sweet and loving, they're making a big mistake.

The worst offense is committed by the Jewish charity organizations. They sympathize with the wife when her husband is in jail. They forget, however, that they "manufacture" the grass widows and living orphans when they help the woman. As soon as the wife tastes an easy and a free dollar, as soon as she discovers that the "charities" won't let her starve, she doesn't care that her husband is condemned. She lives a gay life, enjoys herself, and doesn't think of her husband.

Therefore it is your duty as editor of the *Forward*, the news-

paper that is read mainly by the working class, the class that furnishes more than all others the candidates for the workhouse and for grass widowhood, to warn all the Jewish women not to take such revenge on their husbands. They do more harm to themselves than to their men. They drive away their husbands for life that way, and make themselves and their children miserable. The women must learn that sending their husbands to prison is a poor method of improving them. It is a double-edged sword that slashes one side as deeply as the other.

Finally, I appeal to all the women whose husbands are imprisoned for non-support in the workhouse on Blackwell's Island Prison, and I write to them as follows: Their husbands have sworn here that if they, the women, do not have them released in time for *Pesach*, they will never again return and the women will remain grass widows forever.

We ask you to publish this letter immediately.

Respectfully,

[The letter is signed by thirty-seven men]

ANSWER:

The answer emphasizes the fact that the great number of men who avoid supporting their wives and children commit a serious crime. True, sending them to prison doesn't have the desired effect, but they deserve to be punished for not doing their duty. It certainly doesn't pay for the women to have their husbands arrested for the little bit of "charity" they get. It's ridiculous to think they can live a gay life on that pittance.

It is also remarked that among these thirty-seven men there must also be some who weren't in a position to support their families, but it's nothing new to find innocent men suffering along with the guilty.

Finally, the women are advised to see to it that their husbands are released for *Pesach*.

