

JEWISH LEADERS
(1750-1940)

EDITED BY
LEO JUNG

NEW YORK
BLOCH PUBLISHING COMPANY
5714-1953

SARA SCHENIERER

By JUDITH GRUNFELD-ROSENBAUM

SARA SCHENIERER—THE STORY OF A GREAT MOVEMENT

I

When Sara Schenierer, the founder of the Beth Jacob Movement, left this world, she was fifty-two years old. She died after a short illness in a Vienna Hospital in the midst of her work, having led the movement since 1923. When the news of her passing spread, thousands upon thousands of girls and women who had been praying fervently for her recovery, felt that their own life cord had been cut and that they had personally received a paralyzing blow. Tens of thousands had known her personally, had clung to her as to a personal intimate friend and had been known to her. They were her children; they knew her teaching, her manner of speech and her personal ways of life. They had her picture imprinted upon their minds—a living picture, giving stimulus together with vision. Sara Schenierer died an hour before Shabbath. She had asked for the candles to be brought to her bedside, and for the last time she had lit them. They were still burning when her soul returned to God.

Tens of thousands of women and girls knew then that to the end of their days they would feel the eye of Sara Schenierer watching them, her wishes urging fulfillment; that her questions to them would for ever demand the right answer and that they would have to live their lives in such a manner as to be able to meet the eye of Sara Schenierer again in Eternity. This was the impact of Sara Schenierer upon the women of her generation. The vibration of this encounter between a great woman and her disciples still exists and can still be felt.

When I first met Sara Schenierer, she was a woman of forty-two. She wore a plain black dress and her very lively face was framed in black silk, in a motherly, old fashioned way. You would

not think of her as a personality in her own right, but as someone's mother who had come to greet you. Liveliness, simplicity and motherliness were the first impressions.

We met on the green meadows of the Carpathian Hills in midsummer. I had come a long way by train and coach to meet her, and she was walking along the path that led from the tiniest hamlet I had ever seen. She was coming with a group of thirty girls to meet the coach that brought me. I was the young teacher from Western Europe who was willing to spend some weeks of the University vacations in the Polish mountains to help that singular woman of whom almost legendary reports had reached me. It was not really a coach, it was a cart and horse that brought me from the railway station into that remote village, never recorded on any map. There I was, travelling along fields and meadows under the blue sky on a very hot summer day, passing lonely gypsy cottages and caravans to find the forlorn village where Sara Schenierer spent the summer in primitive huts with some fifty pupils.

I had heard that Sara Schenierer was a remarkable woman who had formerly been a dressmaker, and had then studied, on her own initiative, by night, in order eventually to convey to others as a teacher by day her newly acquired knowledge; that she shared her own room and food with a group of young women while training them to be teachers for the coming generation. What would she be like and by what qualities would she rule and impress her charges?

These were the thoughts that had puzzled me ever since I had decided to travel to Poland to meet her. I knew that she had already gathered fifty girls who lived with her and were content with the very frugal meals which a dressmaker's savings could supply for them. I also had been told that they were entirely absorbed in the new life with their teacher. What was it that this woman possessed that made her such a compelling force?

I watched the black-clad round figure of a little mother walking along with a swarm of girls round her, all talking, all bustling with life. My cart stopped by the roadside; they came swarming round the cart. Friendly words of welcome and greeting were called out to me. I was lifted out of the rickety cart and the

small figure of a mother in Israel embraced me and bid me welcome. The girls lifted my luggage, paid the driver and I found myself seated on a wooden bench under a tree, in front of a little cottage, the "Mother" sitting next to me and I already under her spell. Whilst I am writing now—twenty-five years later—I can still smell the fragrance of the summer afternoon that came from the freshly cut grass around us. I can almost feel the sensation—a very strong and pleasant one—of being drawn into Sara Schenierer's circle, and my heart infused me with the very strong desire to coöperate in the great work that was being revealed to me.

Sara Schenierer told me that she was indeed a dressmaker—that she had many customers, but that when they came to her for fittings she found herself philosophising about them. She watched them as they looked critically into the mirror. As to dress, they knew what they wanted. They were very particular as to every little detail of fashion or workmanship. But, the little dressmaker mused, after the fittings were over and the ladies had departed, did they know what they really needed? She envisioned them beautifully dressed in body but spiritually in rags and tatters. If she could only help them to see where their real happiness lay!

As she went about the little town, she found no kindred spirit among the women. The older women seemed to be withdrawing into a spiritual world of their own—the younger longed to be "modern," untutored in Torah, and with a smattering of modern "science." In the Polish gymnasium they seemed to feel that Judaism was merely a useless restraint, a fetter, a shell that obfuscated and that must be burst to let in the light.

She felt that only because of ignorance were they ready to lose their priceless heritage, to exchange pure gold for mere tinsel. "I felt I must help them," she said "to see that they were ready to give up, not a shell but the very substance without which they and their dear ones would perish. But I was without education. I lacked the gift of speech to convey my convictions."

"Coming home from work, I used to meet my brother returning home from the Yeshivah. He is discussing something with a friend; the discussion gets more lively and more heated. They enter the living room and my father joins in the discussion. They

are now pitting argument against argument, knowledge against knowledge—and they understand the meaning of each other's phrases.

“My sister, who is a pupil in a Polish gymnasium, is reading a book. She seems very much interested. My mother's hands clasp the ‘Ts'enah u-R'enah' (Special Bible Lessons for Women). I go to Mrs. G. across the road. She has six daughters. Of the eldest one she never speaks. She left the house two years ago. When she had gone they found a letter from her: ‘Forgive me, Mammeshy, I cannot bear the narrow home any more. I have gone to live with my friends.’ She married without *Huppah* and *Kiddushin*. The second daughter, the fourth and the fifth, are in constant touch with her. They worship their heroic sister. They wish they could follow her. Only love for the poor, shaken, heart-broken mother makes them pretend that they belong to her.

“But there is still the youngest, our Esciu. She is twelve. She is not yet aware of all the conflicts. And Sara Schenierer together with Mrs. G. look at the sleeping Esciu. This one we may be able to keep. Her eyes still shine with that glow when the Sabbath comes in. How can we preserve that glow? How can we open her maturing and searching mind to the truth and beauty of the Torah? Where is the magic key to open up our treasures for her and all the others of her age who are still their parents' true children, but will soon awake from childhood's sleep, will hear the trumpets that are blown in the streets and market-places?” Sara Schenierer returns home. Her thoughts are of Esciu. She knows there are thousands like her.

“And we pass through the Elul days. The trains which run to the little ‘Shtedtlach’ (towns) where the Rebbes live are crowded. Thousands of Hassidim are on their way to them to spend the Yamim Noraim (Solemn Holy Days) with the Rebbe. Every day sees new crowds of old men and young men in the hassidic garb, eager to secure a place in the train, eager to spend the holiest days in the year in the atmosphere of their Rebbe, to be able to extract from it as much holiness as possible. Fathers and sons travel and those who can afford it make this journey several times a year. Thus they are drawn to Ger, to Belz, to Alexander, to Bobo, to all these places that had been made

citadels of concentrated religious life, dominated by the leading figure of a Rebbe's personality.

"And we stay at home, the wives, the daughters with the little ones. We have an empty Yomtov. It is bare of Jewish intellectual concentration. The women have never learned anything about the spiritual content that is concentrated within a Jewish festival. The mother goes to Shul. The service rings faintly into the fenced and boarded-off women's gallery. There is much crying by the elderly women. The young girls look on them as beings of a different century. Youth and desire to live a full life shoot up violently in the strong-willed young personalities. Outside the Shul, the young girls stand chattering; they walk away from Shul where their mothers pour out their vague and heavy feelings. They leave behind them the wailing of the older generation and follow the urge for freedom and self-expression. Further and further away from Shul they go, further away to the dancing, tempting light of a fleeting joy.

"And when the father comes home from the Rebbe, he is too dazzled to see what will come out one day into the glaring light, revealing a breach that has gone beyond repair. While the men bend and sway in the rhythm that tradition has created, and their heads are held aloft into almost visionary heights, the girls go dancing, skipping, dreaming on in their own way, along the path of a world which is wide open, unfenced and pitiless. Their paths and the parents' paths may never meet."

Sara Schenierer's mind is troubled by that picture. She sees how fathers and daughters are strangers, living in different worlds; how the happiness of family life is shattered by the breaking away of the maturing girls. And the thought is conceived in her mind to collect the little girls early enough, when they are still hiding their little curly tops behind mother's apron and still sit on their father's lap, when they are still tucked in snugly in the home atmosphere. She wants to call them together and open up a new world to them. The *Alef-Beth* is the key to wonderful reading, and reading is the key to wonderful ideas, and the ideas are bright and warm and clear so that they stand out in the mind, illuminating the horizon. She wants to collect the little ones who have still a laughter fresh from their hearts, with feelings untouched by con-

flicts and unspoiled by outside influences and the adversities of life. She wants to bring them together in towns and villages and hamlets that they may learn together, that they may discover the treasures of which their parents are the trustees. She will round them up in comradeship and make them all strong in that security of companionship. There will have to be club rooms, summer camps, holiday centres, day schools. It will all have to develop into an army that links hands together, and everyone will feel proud of its strength, will feel ready for implicit obedience and will rejoice in the numbers, the swelling numbers that will have almost undreamed-of power.

This was the vision of Sara Schenierer. She unfolded it to me with all the enthusiasm of an inspired and determined mind. She made me see the thousands of girls, small, sweet, still within the sheltering folds of their homes, see them march in a big array across the span of time. They stretch, they grow, they become huge figures and each figure splits again into numerous smaller figures and the array becomes gigantic and triumphant in its march.

It is a simple woman that dreams these dreams. Yet her mind has an enormous capacity to fill itself with this vision, so that this vision becomes a force that overshadows everything else.

Her soul seems to have travelled from afar. She is a simple dressmaker in Cracow. She is known there, walking along the streets of the Cracow Ghetto, a plainly dressed motherly person, always cheerful, busy, a lively little woman. But the soul that shines out of her eyes has come from afar. It is as if her soul had emerged from contact with the holiness of the Jewish past, pointing towards a messianic future. In the night, while children sleep, while she stitches away on her customers' dresses, she seeks to find a way in hard reality to make of the slumbering children that mighty legion that her vision beheld.

II

Sara Schenierer would probably never have left her small home in the Cracow Ghetto, had not the World War forced her to seek refuge in Vienna. 1915 sees her, a woman of thirty-two, in the Jewish quarters of Vienna, together with thousands of others who

had fled from Galicia, struggling to find a temporary home until the storm had abated.

On a Shabbath morning, in one of the Shuls in the 20th district, a Rabbi ascended the pulpit to address his congregation. It happened to be a Shabbath Hanukkah and he spoke of the Maccabees, their strength, steadfastness and loyalty to the name of God. His thoughts were clear and deep, his illustrations and examples convincing and fascinating. In the women's gallery a stranger listened spellbound. She experienced a revelation. What was it that was so new, so striking in this speech that made her breathless with inner excitement? Here were the words she had been longing to find, here was the truth of Jewish teaching. The beauty and the glory of Jewish History were laid clear before the listener in a manner that could not fail to interest. Here were words like sparks that could kindle. Until now she had been groping in the dark, not knowing how to set out to accomplish the task for which she felt the burning desire. Now listening to Rabbi Flesch of the Stumpergasse, she saw her way clear before her. It would be simple, she would only have to magnify his voice, to pass on his words, so clear, so convincing, to all the women back home who were unaware of the fact that such truth existed. Like her, they would be dazzled by the light and then be guided by it. Their desire for learning, that had until now driven them away from home, would then be satisfied, the idea presented to them could not fail to impress them deeply and thus they would be led to respect Jewish life and to cling to it.

So Sara Schenierer wrote down with painful loyalty every speech, every lesson she heard from Rabbi Flesch during the years in Vienna, when she became his constant and most regular and conscientious pupil. And the thicker the volume of her writings, the more impatient she grew to go back to Cracow to share the treasures she had gathered.

In 1917 she returned home; and for five years she struggled in vain to find a way of attracting the young ladies of Cracow permanently. She assembled them, it is true, but she failed to hold them. Her words seemed to come back to her empty, and in spite of the growing determination to acquire a circle of listeners and pupils, she found herself alone for a very long time.

But with every failure her determination increased. She kept her treasure close to her heart and her vision clearly before her eyes; she was certain that just as she had been granted the language to speak so she would find the hearts to speak to.

And she found those hearts, willing to listen and to learn, when finally she turned to the children of the town.

Now we have come to the part of her story that sounds rather like an old-fashioned fairy tale, when the dressmaker turns overnight into a teacher and the workshop into a schoolroom, and the customers, instead of sending in their orders, send their children to be pupils of this school. A curious school indeed, without blackboard, bell, utensils, or books; with a teacher whose main qualification is her single-minded aim, and her love of the Torah. Who called that teacher to her place? No one ever bothered to ask. The children were all eager to come and to stay as long as they were allowed to; the older ones begged to be allowed to help the younger ones. They all loved Sara Schenierer and quite forgot that she was their teacher; they spoke to her as to a mother who had always time and patience to listen.

In spite of the primitive setup of the school, the number of children grew rapidly, and soon there were so many in the small room that it was impossible to carry on. Sara Schenierer saw herself forced to refuse admission to any more children.

Of course here was something wrong. How can one person teach hundreds of pupils? The solution would be the training of teachers who would each be able to teach a group.

So in the year 1923 Sara Schenierer started on her own initiative with her own meager means and in her own magic way to train teachers.

There is a small side street in the Cracow Ghetto. We walk into one of the large tenement houses and go up the narrow stone steps that lead into the various flats inhabited by numerous families with numerous children. We stop at one of the doors in the hallway of the first floor. We are at "Catachina No. 1." in front of Frau Schenierer's door. We shall soon see her "College." The door opens and we first enter a very small kitchen; a curtain separates this kitchen from a large room which looks bright and pleasant in spite of its bareness. Here, in Sara Schenierer's own room,

twenty girls sit by the table and study; some are seated on boxes in the middle of the room and write with their books on their laps, as there is no more space at the table. They are all intent, they all seem lively and eager. Frau Schenierer sits at the table; when she starts speaking they all turn to her, fasten their attention on every word she says. While they look at her, their faces seem lit from within. There seems no fatigue in this room, no slow creeping of hours. Time in this room seems to be unmeasured and the atmosphere is bright and vibrant with intellectual activity. They seem to be confederates; you can almost detect a triumphant look when they share the scanty frugal meals in the ascetically furnished room. All these girls have responded to Frau Schenierer's call and have come forward when she asked for volunteers, to be trained as teachers.

Not many have seen "Catachina No. 1." It was a place hidden from the eyes of the world; and of those who have seen it not many are left to tell the story, to recall the heroic hours that were spent in study and happy privation. Here, a real pioneer was at work. She allowed nothing and no one to discourage her or belittle her plans; she marched on, and the harder she had to fight, the brighter became the sparks that flew from her eyes when she came to grips with the realities of life and made them bend to her will. Twenty-five young girls, none older than sixteen, were the first willing disciples who lived with Sara Schenierer in her two-room flat, sharing every hour of the day under her guidance for several months. They all copied from the exercise books which their teacher had filled in Vienna and they felt rich in the possession of the thoughts gathered from there. They all copied out a guidebook for teachers that she had compiled. Though it was simple, primitive and old-fashioned in its style, it seemed to them a panacea of teaching problems. Here is a dialogue between teacher and pupil as it appeared in her book:

Teacher—Wus bist du? (What are you?)

Pupil—Yach bin a Yiddish kind. (I am a Jewish child.)

Teacher—Mit wus bist du a Yiddish kind? (What makes you a Jewish child?)

Pupil—Yach bin a Yiddish kind, weil ich hob die heilige Toire wus hot gegeben der heiliger Bescheffer. (I am a Jewish child, because I have the holy Torah, given by the Holy Creator.)

Teacher—Wus steit geschrieben in der heiliger Toire? (What is written in the Holy Torah?)

Pupil—In der heiliger Toire steit geschrieben az der heiliger Bescheffer hot beschaffen die Himlen un die Erd. (It is written in the Holy Torah that the Holy Creator created the heavens and earth.)

And so it goes on for pages and pages. It is enough material to keep curly tops gathered around you, and it can serve as a key to the first gates of knowledge, love and loyalty. Then, after a few months of this kind of training are over, Frau Schenierer herself charges into the arena and leads her students.

I recall one of these events. It was Gittel's turn. Gittel was fifteen years of age. She had a pair of bright black eyes that were set like jewels in her firm, round, and childish face. She had a melodious voice and a clear way of pronouncing her words. Every sentence she spoke had a ring that carried it about the room. Her movements were graceful and assured. All this when she was only fifteen years of age! But she had learned the use of hairpins. With hairpins you can put your plaits up in a grown-up fashion and if you also wear a longer skirt than usual, you can look older than yourself. Gittel is sitting in the train next to Frau Schenierer, travelling to a town some hours away from home; on her lap, from sheets of paper, she is memorizing a speech that she wrote or rather that they both worked out together. It is all about the Jewish woman, her part in our great history, her mission in our own days, her duties as the mother of the coming generations. And when they alight in the town of their destination, big posters on the walls of the Jewish quarters invite all women of the town into the large Town Hall to a mass meeting to hear the two speakers.

The hall is filled to capacity. This is an event in a "*Klein Stedtel*." They all come, those that are interested and those that are only curious to see, all those that welcome a break in the everyday monotony and all those that hope to be able to sneer at the old-fashioned talk of two unknown woman-speakers. The

child on the platform hears her heart beat as loud as a drum. She sees hundreds of faces staring up at her and she hears herself delivering the speech she had memorized in the morning, and she faintly realizes that the multitude and the situation she has to master make her speak in a voice that is not her own, with a confidence and a fire that seem to have suddenly come to her from the unknown. Her eyes roam over the crowd, she seems to master them all, and when Frau Schenierer, after she has finished, asks the audience whether they are willing to start a school with this girl as a teacher, there is an enthusiastic response. They enroll their children, and contribute to the setting up of the school. Gittel remains behind to be the one and only teacher, while Frau Schenierer takes the next train to make her second and third trips to establish further schools.

And Gittel and Sure Leie and Esther, they all teach, each in her own school, each from the same source and guide book, each in the same style and manner. And after some months they have come to the guide-book's last page and all their knowledge has been exhausted. There is nothing left, they have no books to draw from and they have never been instructed to go to the sources themselves.

But the pupils are not aware of any spiritual famine threatening them; the schools are at work and they are set on a very sound foundation. Gittel and her colleagues have built on that foundation with all the young, fresh, unbroken strength that flows when pioneers go into action.

By the year 1939 there were in Poland hundreds of Beth Jacob Schools. The training of the teachers had become more methodical and thorough; more modern and, altogether, educationally sounder. Meanwhile Dr. Leo Deutschlander had set up in the place of Sara Schenierer's first College a "Teacher's Training Seminary" of which we shall write later. But the aim of the schools did not change.

A BETH JACOB SCHOOL

A Beth Jacob school was a school but it was also an organization and a club, brightened up by the constant power of love and

romance, a hero worship and a discipline that was almost like the discipline of a secret cult. All these things wove an original pattern into the quiet regular routine of school life. The teachers were all young. They all lived away from their own homes, away from their parents, and were devoting themselves to one purpose only, consumed by a fire which had been kindled by Sara Schenierer. They fulfilled their task even beyond their abilities, they planned and schemed, spending that youthful and radiant vitality which seemed to be so particularly strong in Polish Jewish girls. Skillfully they would weave a web capable of attracting and holding all those young ones entrusted to them. No other interests would interfere with their work. They were dedicated to their mission, like high adventurers or great artists. Their school became the horizon against which they set up their Beth Jacob dream, compounded of vision and reality. To the children and young girls who flocked in numbers to these schools, the young teachers became friends as well as instructors. They were important personalities in the Polish town, vested with directing power over the young souls. Slowly it became obvious how the almost lost ground of Jewishness was being regained and gradually redeemed.

Every one who has seen Beth Jacob magazines knows the typical photo of a large group of girls round a teacher not very much older than themselves. In the very way of grouping is revealed a kind of fellowship. Thousands of such photos existed. Hundreds stood in frames on small mantelpieces, on little shelves, by the girls' beds, in homes all over the country. And hundreds were carried about in the handbags of Beth Jacob girls as their dearest possession, carried even to journey's end. They were recollections of radiant days and promises. When, on fine summer days, teachers and pupils went across the meadows, talking and singing, they did not know whether it was just the summer that made them feel so happy, or whether it was their own youth or the secure feeling that they were guided by one they could admire and at the same time identify with their own parental home. The link to parents and traditions grew stronger, and the schools stood like citadels fortified by the pupils and under the High Command of Gittel and her colleagues.

Here among the girls, the inspiration of the Hassidic life had found its way into the woman's world. It had formed its own style, softened and differently moulded, but it was of the same fibre that made the Hassidim crowd round their Rebbe, made them stand for hours to catch a glimpse of him, made them unfold all their latent powers in the elevated atmosphere of hassidic devotion. No longer was the life of the Jewish daughter empty at home. She too had her community life, her school, centre and club, where there were comradeship and studies and well-organized activities—an outlet and a spur for her eager ambitions.

III

The centre of the whole school organization and the pattern according to which the ever-increasing number of schools formed themselves was the

Beth Jacob Seminary in Cracow

There it was in Cracow, a huge building on the bank of the Vistula, a five-story house overlooking the river. This house was a world of activity; there 120 young women, aged between sixteen and eighteen, concentrated on their intensive studies, filling the day between early morning reveille and bedtime at night. These girls had come from all parts of Poland and Lithuania and had been selected from hundreds of applicants. They attended the Cracow Seminary in order to train under Frau Schenierer as future teachers and to share life with her for a period of two years.

The studying and training went on all day long and was rounded off in the evening and on Shabbath by activities leisurely and recreative in character. Teachers and students formed one large family. They all seemed to be closely linked to each other, welded into one great circle. There was a fire of youthful enthusiasm and a purity of purpose, a satisfaction of duty fulfilled. Hours of study stretch into one another without any fatigue, the elasticity of mind seems unlimited, understanding bursts open, the intellectual spark ignites the emotions, releases new energies that seem to give unending drive to pupils and teachers.

I was a teacher in the Beth Jacob Seminary for many years. Here I wish to set a memorial to all those shining lights most of whom now illumine the eternal path; a memorial to those shining

eyes that questioned you, that searched for deeper and clearer truth, that claimed and acknowledged and showed their receptivity to understanding in a flash of the eye that was unmistakable. Here is a tribute to all those voices that were heard in the classrooms, saying words which were like shrines containing treasures, which they had gathered and wanted to preserve. Never since have I heard such young voices, caressing the contents of their words, voices so warm and so keen and so anxious to express thoughts adequately. I want to pay tribute to those Beth Jacob Girls of Cracow who gathered for years round Frau Schenierer, to their unflinching loyalty in face of the high demands that were made upon them, asking them to keep pace with the very exacting self-discipline that Sara Schenierer expected from all her followers.

She demanded much of them. Wrapped up in a happiness of perfect harmony with herself and drawing continuous strength from her ideals, she demanded, with the vigor of a general, implicit obedience from all her students. But she was loved like a mother, with a love that increased with the span of time and growing maturity of her pupils. As they all would feel the security of belonging to her family of children when crowding round her, they would submit and give in. Some would do it with a little sigh, some with a slight revolutionary "murmur" in their heart, others with subdued longing or good-humored resignation—but they all gave in, gave in as you give in to a mother whom you love too much to have her serenity clouded.

This was the greatest mystery, something almost magic, and quite inexplicable; something that will probably evade forever any attempt at psychological or analytical explanation. All the young girls, those from Poland and those from Lithuania, those with a revolutionary rebel spirit and those who were by nature inclined to accept dictatorial leadership, those who had a searching mind, and those who found all answers ready in their own piety, those that came from wealthy homes, and those who had always lived in the squalid basement-dwellings of the Ghetto, the vivacious and progressive as well as the humble types, they all loved Frau Schenierer.

When that love was expressed, quite an uproar could be created. I remember those summer afternoons. All the girls

were bent over their studies in the large common room. Frau Schenierer had been absent for a week on a mission to the provinces. Suddenly you would hear a clattering of hooves on the pavement below, a carriage jolting along, and then stopping in front of the house. One girl who had run to the window would call out "Frau Schenierer, Frau Schenierer" and fifty, sixty, seventy others would echo this call. Then all pens are flung down, all books are pushed aside and all girls rush down the stairs, they all crowd round the carriage and Frau Schenierer is triumphantly led, almost carried upstairs, and everything else has stopped in a breathless, excited mood. And although Frau Schenierer had been travelling and lecturing through the night, perhaps through two or more nights, she would, following this reception, unpack the experiences of her journey. She would give a report in a way that was a mixture of seriousness and amusement. Later, only much later, every girl would find her place back in the interrupted work, happy for having had the privilege of listening to Sara Schenierer's report of her travels.

This was the spell of Frau Schenierer's personality. She was able to produce in every one of her thousands of disciples a unique feeling that was a composition of love and respect and childlike devotion.

She had a good sense of humor. She liked stories, jokes and riddles. To her, nature was an illustration of Tehillim (The Book of Psalms), psychology and science an application of God's wisdom. Nothing had a meaning for her unless it could be connected with the supreme purpose. Even the new coat we persuaded her to buy would mean the enhancing of her prestige for the purpose of being able better to disseminate her ideals among those who stood yet aside or afar. Never would she start the delicious Shabbath meal without exclaiming in a merry, almost chuckling voice *li-Kh'vod ha-Shabbath* (For the glory of the Shabbath), while dipping her spoon into the hot, golden soup.

Yom Kippur Katan (a day of penance on the eve of the new moon) was always a special day in the Cracow Seminary. Whatever Sara Schenierer's idea behind it was, whether it was her natural piety that clung to this custom or whether she was following a Kabbalistic line, it always became the occasion for a memorable unfolding of Jewish History to the young girls under her banner.

Followed by one hundred and twenty girls she walked on Yom Kippur Katan to "Remo's Shool" (named after the co-author of the Shulhan Arukh, Rabbi Moses Iserlis) in the Ghetto. After they had all said their prayers inside the small old Shool, they walked to the graves of the Remo, the "Bach" (the great R. Joel Sirkis), the author of "Tosefot Yomtov" (Rabbi Yomtov Heller) and other giants of the Jewish past. With the book of Tehillim in their hands, they felt included in the circle that connects every loyal Jew with those great and holy luminaries of the Torah. And thus the names of these great men and all they stood for, became imprinted on the minds of the girls while they stood in front of the tombstones. They felt eternity and mortality at peace with each other. The tranquility around the graves of these immortals inspired the girls to make their own contributions towards a lasting effort. Sara Schenierer probably could sense that those walls drew the young generation into the living circle of pulsating Jewish history. And on Lag B'eomer which is the "*Jahrzeitsag*" of the "Remo," when thousands of Hasidim thronged the Beth Olam, making the place tremble with the vibration of their presence and creating an atmosphere aglow with religious fervor, then Jewish History became overwhelming to those very young and impressionable girls round Frau Schenierer. It is good to lean back against these ancient walls. They are pillars in a world to which we add our own bricks. And when the girls went home, they felt that their footsteps on the cobbled street of the Cracow Ghetto echoed the footsteps of those great and holy men that had walked there in the past. They resolved to make sure that their echo would still resound in the future.

IV

Thus "Stanislawa 10" was the citadel of the Beth Jacob Movement. This large building was set up to bring the Beth Jacob students into pleasant, adequate surroundings.* The girls would no longer have to share one large room that served as a

*The funds were provided by the American Beth Jacob Committee, composed of Cyrus Adler, Sue Golding, Leo Jung, Rebekah Kohut, and Frieda Warburg; the ultra-violet ray equipment was the gift of Jacob Michael of Frankfurt a.M.

study during the day, no longer would they have to climb narrow staircases which at the same time were used as a day-nursery for the many children of the overcrowded tenement houses, no longer would they have to study in rooms over backyards which resounded with the chatter of neighboring women. They saw a house being built on a broad fundament that would be their Residential College. There was quite a ceremony on the occasion of the setting of the foundation stone on a large site in the Stanislawa. On a decorated platform, erected for the occasion on the muddy, empty site, speeches were made by various notables, promising that one day, in the near future, a new building would stand on this site, complete and spacious; that the pioneer students would then be rewarded for all their present privations and move into beautiful rooms well arranged and equipped. The crowd assembled on the side (thousands had come in honor of the occasion), applauding the words; the eyes of the Beth Jacob students widened in this cheering vision of the forthcoming improvements. And Frau Schenierer, who stood with her disciples amongst the audience—shunning, as a pious woman of her type would do, glaring platform publicity—sent up a prayer to God. It was in joyful anticipation of her dreams fulfilled, as well as in trembling fear, lest comforts and the luxury of normal standards might stifle the heroic efforts that had brought this movement into being. The mother's heart desired the best for her children. But the founder of the movement, who had seen Beth Jacob pushing itself through with an elementary force of defiance against odds, was somewhat afraid of the debilitating influence of easy conditions. Although she loved and appreciated beauty, she was always alert against beauty's possible dangers. And so the wishes of a mother mingled with the fervent prayer of one who felt herself responsible to history and posterity, and prayed for strength to ward off slackness in a movement that had to continue in defiance of a world of opposition.

While Sara Schenierer stood amongst the crowd on the 16th of Elul, 1921, her mind wandered back to the days when they had all shared a morsel of bread, back to the days when they slept crowded in the dressmaker's workroom, back to the endless hours of study and spiritual delight they had enjoyed together like a taste of transcendent pleasures. She felt the surge of

loyalty and devotion that had made those hours blessed in the midst of squalor, and she prepared herself to be the keeper of this new and modern home so that its soul should not depart from it, but dwell in this frame in the same way as it had in the old one.

And then came the day in June, 1931. The ground floor and the first floor of the house were finished, while the four other floors stood still raw and unfinished. One hundred and twenty pupils moved into this building, which was more of a builder's workplace than a place fit for habitation. Cement, dust, tools of the workmen all over the place, floors that were not boarded and entrances that were without doors; yet they moved in; and from the inside they watched the gradual completion that spread over years. The guiding hand of Frau Schenierer was strong over them and the spirit of the school prevailed. Those who visited the Seminary in the years between 1933 and 1939 saw a fine building, well equipped, large dormitories and study rooms and a beautiful dining hall, sunlit and well furnished. But the building was never fully completed. The outside decorations, which were the last thing on the plan, were never actually made. When the hostile wind of destruction howled over the Jewish quarters of Cracow, the Beth Jacob Seminary in Stanislawa 10 still displayed an unfinished facade, bare against the sky. The powers that wove a pattern of Jewish history inside never made themselves evident to the passer-by. Deep down in the earth, below the foundation stone, there rests a document. It tells of the lofty ideals this house stood for and embodies the record of valiant men who sponsored and supported Sara Schenierer's Beth Jacob throughout the years. It contains also a prayer for the success of this holy work. High up in heaven there is the record of the martyrdom, heroism, agony and incredible suffering of which the walls of this house will forever be silent witnesses. The name of Yehudah Leib Orlean, who was the trustee of Sara Schenierer's spiritual legacy after she left this world, dominates the last phase of the history of this building, the details of which we shall never know.

But let me go back to those brilliant, sunlit days when crisp Bagels were sold at every streetcorner in Cracow by busy little women who earned their pennies in restless toil so that their men-

folk should have time to study the Torah; when the smell of pickled herrings and onions coming up from the basement shops scented the air of the narrow cobbled street; when the Yeshivoth were resounding with the vigorous young voices of learning, when Beth Jacob was budding and bringing forth blooms, when six hundred letters were filed in the secretary's office in Stanislawa 10 asking for teachers to be sent hurriedly to hundreds of towns for the thousands of children whose parents impatiently clamoured for their children's instruction in the Beth Jacob way. Let us talk of those bright days when the girls' life was unclouded, when the School changed face several times a day, from College to Club and residential home; when the pendulum of their activities swung between the gaiety of youth and thoughtful search for the true essence of Jewish teaching.

July and August were unbearably hot days in the Cracow Ghetto. The heat and stench of the factories and tanneries, right next to the residential apartment houses, made the air exceedingly dense. We left Cracow for two months every summer. We had rented a number of lightly built houses in the country. Huge wagons drew up in front of Stanislaw 10; hundreds of suitcases were stored in them, bedding, kitchen and household goods, and for the next two months our schoolrooms would be meadows and woods and the fields of lonely country places. We marched out, at 6 A. M., in the cool morning air for physical training, we learned *Tehillim* in the rays of the rising sun, by the slope of the hill, we learned Hebrew grammar while the bells of the cows grazing by tingled to the conjugations of the verbs. We read *Messilath Yesharim*, S. R. Hirsch's "19 Letters" and "Horev," as well as Isaac Breuer's "*Messiaspuren*" (Traces of the Messiah) and "*Judenproblem*", whilst the scent of the Carpathian vegetation filled the air. We listened to lectures of learned men who came to us after they had become used to the fact that there was a colony of girls who were themselves already young scholars and intelligent listeners. We would sit in the meadows and have debates on education and there the students would discuss improvements in their own school units.

At the same time, these summer courses were attended by the majority of those Beth Jacob teachers who had already found

teaching positions in various schools. They flocked to these camps, formed themselves into groups and thus, during their summer vacation, they became once more disciples of Frau Schenierer and her teaching staff, in order to increase their knowledge and to keep abreast of educational developments. Thus the spirit of Beth Jacob never grew stale in them and the personal bond that linked them with their tutors and comrades never weakened.

The summer continuation courses of Beth Jacob were the backbone of the movement, which gave strength and support to an ever-increasing number of girls. It stimulated the emotions while it strengthened the intellect.

V

These courses were the work of Dr. Leo Deutschlander. They were the manifestation of his educational genius that had lifted the Beth Jacob from the dream of a dressmaker, from the vision of an untrained enthusiast, to the level of a systematic, well-planned organization. Frau Schenierer's fervent desire to bring thousands of daughters lovingly back to their parents' tradition could only have found small ways and means and a limited response among a narrow circle of more or less simple-minded people. Sara Schenierer kindled the spark; the flame of enthusiasm came from her; but the first years, when she was on her own, meant no more than a romantic picture in a small frame; her voice could not reach wider circles and her schools could not stand the scrutinizing criticism of the modern expert who demanded more thoroughness, more scholarship and a well-graded system.

What would have become of Sara Schenierer's visionary fervour had it not been joined by Providence with Leo Deutschlander's genius of organization and education, we do not try to imagine. It might have been a fire doomed to extinction for want of fuel to sustain it.

But in 1924 he did come along. He saw the tender beginnings, he recognized the latent forces and he set himself to work. He reared the child he had found in its promising infancy. And he found scope for his foresight and educational talents. Leo Deutschlander made of Beth Jacob a well-organized movement. The syllabus, curriculum, examinations, continuation courses, as well

as the financial foundation of the whole work, the building of the beautiful Seminary—all these were the result of his wisdom and effort.

The spark that was kindled by a daughter of the hassidic tradition was fanned by the methodical manner of a man who had been educated in the best schools of modern European training, who had picked up what was best in European culture, and had blended it with the Jewish stores of his mind. He was deliberate in his plans, there was nothing abrupt or impulsive about him. He was by nature a reconciler of contrasts and his guidebook was *Tehillim*. There was no harshness in his disposition. Wherever there was beauty or goodness, he discovered it and held it up to be admired. In the valuable achievements of modern culture he saw the reflection of the Torah's eternal truth and as such he acknowledged it and borrowed from it. Thus he could speak to youth. Thus he could rouse and satisfy all those who felt the Ghetto too confining. Thus he could fascinate thousands of intelligent Jewish girls in Poland, whose desire for intellectual freedom had grown to formidable dimensions, and who were in danger of being lured away from Judaism by the phantom of philosophical negations. He could understand their questions and difficulties, spoken or unspoken. He eased their problems by his blessed smile, he analyzed them in his academic manner, he threw a new light on them in his generous artistic vein. He solved riddles by the blend of his wisdom and his harmonious personality. There were many eager girls who had loved Sara Schenierer, but needed him to help clear their minds. They would never have found their way without him. He linked them to the intellectual world at large and made them stronger on their own ground. He himself radiated harmony. Discipline and order, system and method, were introduced by him. He enforced them in his own entirely undictatorial way. And while examinations were held in the Seminary in an atmosphere of awe and respect, he would leisurely walk along the corridor to the examination room and address pertinent questions to the candidates in a sociable, almost soothing, way.

Leo Deutschlander spent two or three months of every year in the Seminary. All of a sudden he would appear and walk into the study room like one who had never been away. He smiled his own smile, seemed to know everyone, everyone's troubles, came

with ideas, suggestions, new ways, help, support, progress. He was always the same. Kindness came from deep within him. With the "Tanakh" in his hand, he went into the classroom. He unfolded his thoughts and appeared to grow while he spoke. He seemed to exchange the plane on which we live for a more worthy one. When he had finished, the spell endured. Jewish law had become one with the law of beauty and freedom for which these girls longed so much; there was no more conflict, there was harmony in the Universe. The "Thou shalt" that some had felt as a burden had become transformed into a triumphant "I will."

Thus he stayed for weeks and then he left again, to come back when weariness threatened to hamper everyday life in the Seminary. None of the students could have realized how hard he worked, how he had spent the months in between his visits; that he had been through the countries of Europe and had spoken before many organizations, visited fashionable drawing-rooms in order to make friends for the growing work in Poland and Lithuania. I often watched him in this field work. In his gait and deportment he was always the scholar, modest, yet sovereign, without pretense or disguise, with the slight touch of a Bohemian, copying no one, being himself. For years he had given up rest and repose and the comfort of his pleasant home, had written and dictated letters in strange hotel rooms in all the capitals of the world, telephoned and wired across the ocean—all to keep Beth Jacob and the Yeshivoh alive.

The banker whom he faced in his comfortable office, and approached for financial support, had perhaps not heard anything about Jews and Judaism for years, his ambitions being of quite a different nature. Yet he could not help feeling that the cause for which his visitor pleaded so warmly and eloquently and without any obvious effort, must be a worthy one. Leo Deutschlander's cultured and noble personality with the mischievous spark of humor, was guarantee for the cause. He felt that here truth was represented and to this truth he had to pay his tribute. Sometimes the work was hard. But never was Leo Deutschlander bitter or out of gear. Perhaps he felt a little weary or had a pang of grief. But then the cheerfulness of his blessed nature helped him to fight any discouragement.

VI

In Erets Yisrael, where the remnants of Israel found a home on holy ground, the Beth Jacob movement struck fresh roots and is now bringing forth fresh blossoms. From Cracow through the hell of Europe into the haven of our homeland, Beth Jacob has remained unimpaired in its strength and undiluted in its program.

In the new developing land of Israel, the Beth Jacob Schools are on duty to see that Jewish girls are taught the sanctity of Jewish home and family life, so that they will be, like the mothers of old, the guarantors that the Torah will continue to rule the life of our people. "*Thus shalt thou speak to the house of Jacob*" . . . The house of Jacob, our sages explain, are the women who in all nations and at all times have the greatest influence in the making of the coming generation.

There are two teachers' training colleges in Tel-Aviv and a larger one in Jerusalem; there are many schools and kindergartens too. Eva Landsberg, who worked for many years with Sara Schenierer and Leo Deutschlander in Cracow and in Vienna, accompanied Beth Jacob on its route from Europe to Israel and helped to transplant the Beth Jacob ideal to the Holy Land. She died in 1947. Also in other countries, wherever orthodox Jewish congregations are found, Beth Jacob Schools have been set up, and although the local coloring may bring variations, the fundamental principles are everywhere the same. The Beth Jacob movement is woven into the fabric of the great history of the Jewish people.

The figure of Sara Schenierer will become more and more legendary. The story of her life will not lose its spell and will grow more touching as the movement grows wider and branches out. As time passes on, the personal touch that is still lingering round her name will fade and she will become a historical personality, known as the founder of Beth Jacob. But no one will know of the many who worked with her and gave of their strength and devotion to breathe life and vigor into the movement. Alas, for those girls who passed untimely into the realm "beyond", for those "*who were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in death were not parted,*" alas, for those sweet young teachers, so wholehearted in their efforts, so generous in their love for the school children, so

loyal unto death to Sara Schenierer and to their own mission. Will Beth Jacob ever again bring forth girls like Hanka Grossfeld-Biegun, the brainy, gay-spirited young person who, schooled in the Beth Jacob since the age of 15, had passed through all the stages of self-discipline and had become Sara Schenierer's first assistant in the Seminary and the central figure for all the girls after Sara Schenierer's death? The blessing of God had rested upon her to find grace in the sight of all. And Lacia Szarainka Wasziac, who in those difficult years, when the Beth Jacob had to squeeze itself into the poor Ghetto of Cracow, saw to it that the young enthusiasts should not suffer for lack of health and care; and when in those first days fanatic concentration on studies found them all forgetful of essential needs, she went quietly about setting up kitchens, healthy dormitories and sickbeds providing for all needs. There were Esther Goldstoft, Gittel Teitelbaum-Pass, Bela Gross, Betty Rothschild-Baumgarten, Ida Bauminger, Ester Heitner, Rosa Heitner, those brilliant teachers, firstlings of the Beth Jacob movement, trained in the movement and later on becoming lecturers in the Seminary. There were Yehudah Leib Orlean, Alexander Sische Friedman, Gerson Friedenзон, Senator Moshe Deutscher, Reb Ascher Spira, Freilich and Meier Heitner. Their names are recorded here as they have no graves or tombstones. But their souls are woven in the loom of life because they contributed their lives to the success of the Beth Jacob long before any one could realize that by their work history was being made. They belong to the champions of the Beth Jacob movement together with the precious thousands whose names cannot be recorded in these fragmentary annals. The continuation of the Beth Jacob movement is their Kaddish.

I have tried in this sketch to describe the personality of Sara Schenierer and the movement created by her. But as her personality is a mystery and eludes description, I shall conclude by letting Sara Schenierer speak for herself, by reproducing in English translation the words of her last will, written on her death bed, to her thousands of pupils all over the country:

"What shall we say, what shall we speak, how shall we justify ourselves? *There are many thoughts in the heart of man, but only the counsel of the Lord prevaieth.* Whatever the Merciful doeth,

He doeth for our good. May His great Name be blessed for his manifold kindnesses.

All my life I complained about my inability to cry at the time of prayer. But now it is hard for me to keep back my tears. Only now do I feel how strong is the inner bond that ties me to my children. But spiritual ties are very strong. They last forever. Just as I cry as I am writing to you now, so will your tears flow as you read these my words. May it be the will of our Father in heaven that your tears and mine reach the throne of glory to pray for Israel's complete redemption.

I am turning to you, my dear daughters, going out into the great world to guide and train the daughters of Israel and to establish homes in Israel.

I am convinced that you understand well your great task. We have a good God in heaven and he aids every person to walk in the way that he desires. Throughout the years of my work, men were sent to me who were genuine helpers.

I should like to single out two grave dangers which threaten you, my daughters.

Beware of the feeling of pride, arrogance or cocksureness, that persuades one to think that he is great in achievements and deserving of honor. Secondly, keep away from the other extreme, the feeling of inferiority which whispers to man: 'you are nothing, without any value.' This exaggerated humility causes sadness to abide in man, introduces doubt into his heart as to whether his work will succeed.

If the feeling of sadness should overcome you, if doubt should arise in your heart whether you are worthy of the mission entrusted to you, whether you are fulfilling your tasks properly—then examine yourself whether you have done your duty or not. If your answer is positive, then remember what I told you every day after prayer, quoting the passage in Deuteronomy. *'And now, oh, Israel, what does the Lord thy God ask of you, except to revere the Lord, thy God, to walk in all His ways, to love him and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul.'*

And now my dear daughters, you are standing before the severest test, that of life itself. For some time life is hard, but in your hands, by the blessing of the Lord, are strong weapons of defense. They are fear of God, reverence, love and service.

Your sainted teacher, Yehudah Leib Orlean, once said, at the time of a formal examination: 'The tests have shown that you know how to learn and to teach. The problem which troubles us is whether you will also understand how to *train* Jewish souls.'

Before the High Priest entered on the service in the Holy of Holies, he would be asked 'Is there any whisper of evil intention in your heart, have you forgotten or perhaps not even learned? One can remedy ignorance or forgetfulness, but if your intention has become impure you would desecrate the Holy of Holies.'

My dear girls, you are going out into the great world. Your task is to plant the holy seed in the souls of pure children. In a sense, the destiny of Israel of old is in your hands.

Be strong and of good courage. Don't tire. Don't slacken your efforts. You have heard of a Hassid who came to his rabbi and said joyfully, 'Rabbi, I have finished the whole Talmud.' 'What has the Talmud taught you?' asked the rabbi. 'Your learning is fine, but your practical task is the main thing.'

Let me complete these words with the verses you all know so well.

Serve the Lord with joy.

I keep the Lord before me continuously.

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

Teach us to number our days.

The Lord's Torah is perfect, it restoreth the soul.

May the Lord guard your going out and your coming in from now and forever more.

May He listen to our prayers and send us the true redeemer and true redemption.

Yours forever,

Sarah Schenierer

My beloved daughters, may God grant you long life."

Cracow, 1935.

