ABRAHAM CAHAN:

Socialist - Journalist - Friend of the Ghetto

by

Ernest Poole

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"*Forward*" *in Yiddish*

# Abraham Cahan

## Socialist—Journalist—Friend of the Ghetto

By Ernest Poole

With Photographs by Paul Anderson

HE is the editor of a daily Socialist paper, "Die Vorwaerts," printed in Yiddish, in the heart of the New York Ghetto. Within eight years he has forced its circulation to over 113,000. And the story of his struggle to adapt himself and his Socialism to New World conditions has significance for the future America, in which the inpouring millions of foreigners are to play so large a part.

Cahan has been in this country some twenty-eight years. One afternoon, in his office, I found him writing in Yiddish. As I came in the telephone rang, and he turned and spoke in Russian. He talked to me in English. And while he told his story I watched the life on the big open square below, crowded with men, women, and children, many of whom but a few weeks before had come from remote little Old World hamlets. Night drew on. Lights shone from the tall grimy tenements, arc lamps sputtered out over the square. And the push-cart peddlers lighted their torches, long lines of flaring torches. For from stores, sweatshops, and factories through the muddy, narrow streets poured dense, dark human masses—Americans to be.

"I was born in 1860, in Podberezie, a little village of huts and cottages in a country of forests, the province of Wilna, in Lithuania, under Russian rule. In our four-room cottage lived four families. Our family had one room, low-ceilinged, with a huge brick oven. And in this room my father, a Talmudic student, had his little Hebrew school. While he taught his twelve small

scholars he used to hold me on his knee, and by the time I was three years old I had learned to spell out the Hebrew words.

"The most intense of my first memories is of Friday, the eve of the Sabbath, when, as the twilight deepened, my father took me on his lap, telling me old legends and crooning ancient Hebrew songs. 'And now,' he would whisper, 'the week with all its evil is gone, all evil thoughts and passions departing, and from heaven the second soul comes fluttering down, to dwell within you on the Sabbath.' Scared and solemn, I would clutch my small breast to feel my second soul come in.

"My father was a dreamer, soulful, deeply emotional. He would sit for hours contented, listening to stories of life in distant lands; he would go without eating to save the few kopecks required for entrance into the synagogue on days when there was music. When I was four years old, he wrapped me in his praying-shawl, as is the Jewish custom, and took me to the *chedar* (Hebrew school) to start my education. Here a spoonful of honey was given me as a symbol of spiritual sweetness. And as the holy book was opened and I read the first letter, 'Aleph,' from above me 'the angel's kopeck' was dropped on my head as a symbol of reward for righteousness. And then suddenly my father broke into sobs. I had entered into the service of God."

The hours were long in this *chedar*. Small as he was, he studied there each morning from nine o'clock until two, then went home to dinner, came back at three, and worked on until eight o'clock each night.

In his sixth year his mother, the practical one in the family, decided to move to the city of Wilna. And there he went to a *yeshiva*, a Hebrew school more advanced than the *chedar*, where, with fifty other boys, he studied under the rabbi. But at thirteen he was hungry to learn more of the world than the rabbi could teach, and so began going in secret each afternoon to a Government school. When his parents learned of this, there was trouble.

"Look at your father!" his mother exclaimed. "He is a mirror in which you can see what you will be if this goes on! Will you spend your whole life in idle dreams and studies and keep your family always poor? Or will you earn your living like a man?"

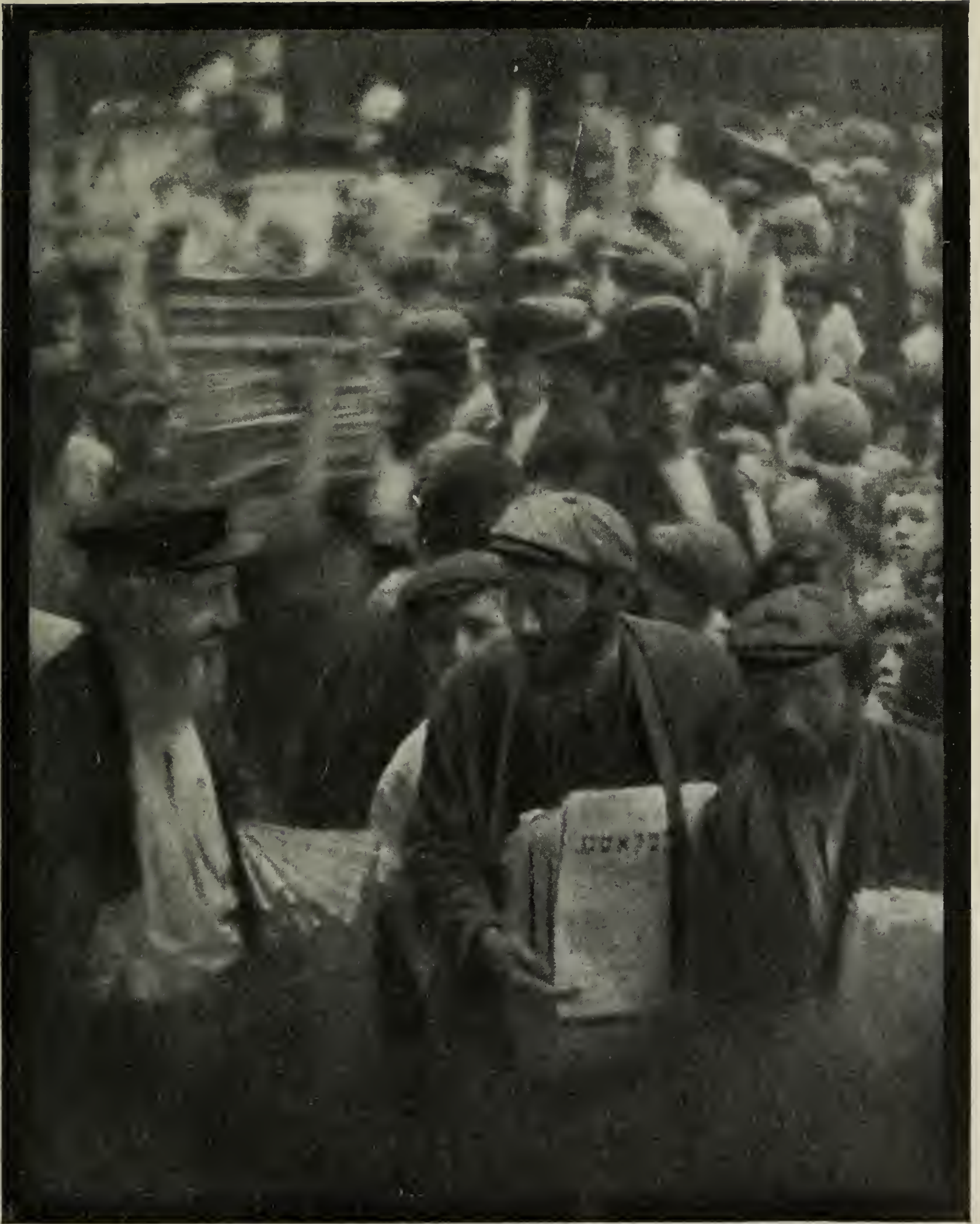
She apprenticed him to a wood-carver in Wilna. But the wood-carver, it seems, was a brute, coarse and foul-mouthed; and on the first day the boy ran home, sobbing, and threatened that he would kill himself if they made him go back. In the end his mother gave in, and he was allowed to go on with his studies. For the next two years he spent his time in Wilna's public library.

"Here I lost my religious faith, and here I became acquainted with the great Russian writers. Turgenev and Tolstoy were my favorites. With a few other youngsters I read all day in the library, and at night we discussed the books we had read. I was fond of talking, and I was forever haranguing the group. We did not read like American boys. Although only about fifteen years old, we read mature novels; not only the novel itself, but books of criticism upon it. And the life it depicted grew intensely real to us. Although these novels dealt with 'Great Russia,' a country hundreds of miles to the north, still we felt ourselves drawn to the Russians. And this made doubly bitter the persecutions and insults to which we were subjected as Jews, especially since it was on the very days of Russian rejoicing, like Easter and Christmas, that my father kept me within the house from fear of Christian violence."

At seventeen he entered a Government Jewish teachers' college, where tuition, board, and lodging were supplied free, and in return he signed a contract providing that for eight years after graduation he would teach in Jewish schools. His teachers there were Gentiles and Jew-haters, and his sufferings were keen. "For the deeper and more intense grew my love of Russia's literature and music, the more of an outlaw I was made to feel. I remember one Russian holiday when, as I walked home, my comrade and I were attacked. I remember his face all covered with blood."

But in his nineteenth year, one day on the street, a young man (who is now a public school principal in New York) silently shoved into his hand an "underground" pamphlet. Intensely excited, Cahan went to his room and there read the pamphlet many times. It was a revolutionist poem by Necrasoff; no great masterpiece, but the fact that it was something forbidden gave it a power over him such as not even Tolstoy had had.

"That night was a turning-point in my life. Until then I had been an outrageous young egotist. But now I began to broaden. I joined a small revolutionist circle made up of students and army officers. Our secret



SELLING "VORWAERTS" IN THE HEART OF THE GHETTO

meetings were held in the house of a Gentile, and here for the first time I found Jews and Gentiles together as brothers. Never until now had a Gentile called me by my first name. Here were comradeship, deep, fresh enthusiasm, and a spirit of mutual help and of strict self-denial."

Since the early '40's the idea had been spread by the Russian writers that men of means and education owed their advantages to the peasant, the long-suffering serf on whose bent back rested the whole social structure; and that therefore, since they were supported by his privation and toil, they must repay the debt by using all their talents and powers to better his condition. It was this idea that sent hundreds of educated men and women as teachers to the peasant to show him how to better his life. And when these attempts at education were met by harsh Governmental measures, hundreds being sent to Siberia, then this same persisting idea led to the organization of two revolutionist parties which had for their purpose the complete overthrow of the autocracy. It was of this latter movement that Cahan's small circle was a part, a lonely outpost in the south.

"Poor as we were," he told me, "we felt that we, too, owed our all to the peasant, because we were students at his expense. This remote Russian peasant we idealized, and we were eager to take part in the breaking of his bonds. Our work was to increase our circle, form other circles, and spread the underground literature. But each of us aspired to get close to the mysterious 'Central Committee' in the north. I remember one night coming into our rooms to be greeted by 'Hush! Some one from close to the Center!' And I peeped into the dark back room where the exhausted messenger lay having a few hours' sleep. He talked long to us that night.

"I became a Socialist. I took it up with deep fervor; for me it became a religion. And now, more than ever before, I wanted an education. I used to get up those days at three o'clock in the morning to study."

He completed his four years' college term, and was sent to teach in a Jewish school in Velish, a town some sixty miles away. "I was still but a youngster," he said. "I remember my pride in my new teacher's uniform, a blue swallowtail coat with bright brass buttons, and also my sense of guilt in my pride." In Velish he formed a new revolutionist circle. In it were several Russian nobles, one of whom had an estate near by; and when at Christmas his peasants came in for their Christmas-tree gifts, Cahan read to them of the movement for a free Russia.

After the assassination of Alexander II wholesale arrests were made. Cahan's friends in Wilna were arrested, and a letter from him was found in their rooms. His mother learned of this; she sent him warning, and when the Velish gendarmes came to search they found nothing. But a week later they learned that this "teacher devil" had formed a revolutionist group in Velish. Cahan was again warned; he escaped that night, taking a rowboat down the river; and for some days and nights he went on in disguise, avoiding railway stations, traveling by boat and by stage. Finally, in a town to the south, a friendly Jew took him into hiding.

Here he first learned of the great emigration of Jews to America. Since the killing of the Czar the police had instigated wholesale Jewish massacres; and now the Jews were leaving by thousands, selling their household goods in the streets. There was intense excitement.

"Some young men came to me and asked me to join in the movement to America, there to set up agricultural communist colonies which should be an example to the world of what mutual help could do, and there also to raise money to aid in the Russian struggle. I decided to go. I had a false passport now, and with thousands of others I traveled to the frontier, escaped across in the night, and came to Brody, an old ruined town in Galicia, under Austrian rule.

"Brody was a great camping-ground for our emigrants. Trains were continually coming from Russia, and every few days a long, crowded emigrant train would depart. I remained three weeks in Brody, and witnessed scenes I shall never forget. In these modern days there are hundreds of Russian towns the bulk of whose mail is from America, but thirty years back the emigration had only begun; and here in this ruined town, crowded in rotten old houses, were thousands of men, women, and children to whom America was as strange and remote as a land in the moon. But they had nothing to lose and all to gain; many had come from terrible scenes of massacre, and now from the reaction they seemed almost demented with joy.

"Sudden marriages took place. I remember one warm moonlight night seeing a score

BY MEANS OF "VORWAERTS" MR. CAHAN PRESENTS, WITH A THRILL OF TRUTH, TO THE WOULD-BE AMERICANS OF THE GHETTO, A LARGER IDEA OF THE NEW WORLD FROM A SOCIALIST POINT OF VIEW

of open-air weddings. In one vacant lot I saw three wedding groups laughing, singing, and dancing around an old ruined pile on the top of which a thin Jewish boy was frantically playing the fiddle. One Friday morning a young man I knew arrived from Russia alone, penniless, and gloomy. The next night I found him dancing in one of the wedding parties. 'Whose wedding?' I asked. 'Mine!' he shouted. 'But,' I cried, 'you haven't a cent! You haven't even enough for a meal!' He laughed. 'True,' he said. 'But neither has she!' She was a young Galician girl whom he had first met on the night before!

"A spirit of prophecy was here. A man on the street would suddenly begin an impassioned speech on the world-wide brotherhood which was to grow out of our American communist colonies. Our idea, he said, would spread all over the earth; there was to be one language for all humanity, and an end to all tyranny, misery, and injustice. The whole world would be changed! . . . When I left Brody in our long, crowded train, most of the people were singing."

His idea of America was scant. "Most Americans looked like Lincoln, we thought. Somehow or other, we had the idea that they all wore tall silk hats and long frock coats and bright-colored ties. In America a 'shister' (shoemaker) could soon become a 'mister.' In New York you peddled needles and pins on the streets, and so became rich; or, better, you went West, where all the land was free."

So he landed in America in June, 1882, a thin, sallow youth of twenty-one, with forty rubles ($20) in his pocket and the world's salvation in his soul.

They landed in Philadelphia, and were shipped by train to New York. They were docked in the evening at Castle Garden, down on the Battery, and there they talked and sang until daybreak. The next day, with two other youngsters, he walked the streets, in a chaos of new impressions. The day was hot; men passed bearing their coats on their arms, so they, too, walked in their shirt sleeves, thinking, "So this is the style in America." They heard a boy singing; they also sang, and even outdid the boy, singing at the top of their voices till met by an Irish policeman. And then, generalizing from his remarks, they said, "It is not so free in this country!" They longed to see "a real Yankee," but it was not until many days later that Cahan sagely picked a red-faced Irish peddler as the one real Yankee of his dreams.

The East Side in those days was largely Irish and German. The Ghetto had only begun to be, and was made up of German and Polish Jews. But now the Russians were coming by thousands, with Russian culture and ideals.

Cahan soon decided that their dreams of communist colonies were impractical.

"When a man has a house to sell," he argued to his friends, "he does not show *one brick* of the house, it is not enough; he must show the whole house. And so it is with our colony scheme. This country is tremendous. If we go out to the plains and establish our little colony there, suppose we succeed? What will it be? Only one small brick, and America will not even notice. No. We must stay right here in the cities. and begin to rebuild the whole house!"

And so, having been in New York but a week, he set out to rebuild America.

First he got a job in a cigar factory on the East Side. He slept in a dining-room on a lounge, for which he paid three dollars a month. Food cost him little, and he lived on about five dollars a week. His evenings he spent in night school and in café discussions, and left but a few hours for sleep. "I was fond of taking long night walks through the city."

In August he made his first public speech. The editor of the "Volkzeitung" had arranged for a Socialist meeting in Golden Rule Hall. This editor spoke in Russian. It was the first public speech young Cahan had heard—public meetings not being allowed in Russia—and so he grew intensely excited.

"When the meeting was thrown open," he told me, "hardly knowing what I did, I rose and went forward. I was small for my age, I looked barely sixteen, I was thin and partially cross-eyed; at sight of me the crowd snickered and laughed, and half of them started for the door. But I climbed up on the platform, and my voice, which was harsh and loud, made the people turn back. Soon they were crowding forward. For, crude as I was, I had something to say. I spoke on the great struggle which we had left behind us, begged them not to forget their comrades at home, and urged that money be raised for the cause. My speech was received with applause, which completely turned my young head. And from that night I was an orator!"

ONE AFTERNOON, IN HIS OFFICE, I FOUND HIM WRITING IN YIDDISH. THE TELEPHONE RANG, AND HE TURNED AND SPOKE IN RUSSIAN. HE TALKED TO ME IN ENGLISH

At the close of the meeting he asked the leaders why the speeches were all made in Russian, which so few of the Jews could understand. Why not speak in Yiddish, the familiar language of the streets? They laughed.

"What speaker," they asked, "will get up on a public platform and discuss so great a subject as Socialism in this ridiculous 'mama gab'?"

"I will," said Cahan. The next week at a meeting he discussed Karl Marx in Yiddish. It was a success. And from that time on public meetings were held more and more in Yiddish, the homely German jargon which is spoken in Ghettoes all over the world.

Meanwhile, having worked two months in the cigar factory, Cahan went to a tin-shop, where he was employed some two months more. And then he stopped work and went to school. At the night school he had found progress slow, so now he went to the principal of a public school for children and said in broken English, "I was a teacher in Russia. I want to be a pupil here." He was taken in; he worked hard in a class of boys, and in a few months he had learned enough to begin giving private lessons in English to immigrants. He was soon earning twenty dollars a week, and had won his start in America.

Six months after landing he wrote his first newspaper article. At the time of the coronation of Alexander III the New York papers were filled with accounts of how all Russia was in an ecstasy over the new Czar. "This stirred my revolutionist blood, and, mustering my meager English, I wrote to the New York 'World' a letter which I said was a translation of one just received from my cousin in Russia. This 'cousin' narrated what he had heard from his neighbors, from peasants, shopkeepers, doctors, and others, each one of whom told what he thought of the Czar." The "World" printed this letter on the front page.

Some two years later he began to write for the "Sun" and other New York papers. He was then a night school teacher; he wrote sketches depicting night school struggles for an education, and scenes from East Side factories, tenements, cafés, and streets.

He had long been a voracious reader of English and American authors. "In the early days," he told me, "when I lived in an East Side garret room, I used to get up at three in the morning, and, without dressing, I would read often until late afternoon. For food I had a huge loaf of pumpernickel, which I would munch when hungry. I read Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot. I read, too, some American history. Years later I learned of Howells and James; and their work, so wonderfully real and sincere, was to me an inspiration. Until then I had almost come to believe that there was no honest literature in this country."

His Socialist activities, meanwhile, had gone on. Socialism had come to America through the old "International" of the early '70's. This party had died, but Socialism continued to grow, first under German domination, then German and Jewish, and finally native-born Americans began to come in. They were but a few thousand in all, their main centers in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. In the Ghetto their headquarters were in a library on Eighth Street. "Here," said Cahan, "we arranged for the printing and distribution of pamphlets and for night meetings. These meetings, in halls as a rule, continued till midnight, and later in cafés our discussions would often last until dawn."

By 1886 he began to meet the Americans then coming into the Socialist movement. He made frequent speeches uptown, and entered into debates with American critics. He also spoke in Boston, Cleveland, Buffalo, Chicago, and St. Louis. And this was naturally broadening. In the New York revolutionist groups there were still a few who believed in immediate revolution by force. But Cahan laughed at their talk.

"Start your revolution on Orchard Street here," he said. "And what then? Are there not millions of *other* streets in America? Violence is what we must all avoid. Education is slow; it will take many years. But only so will Socialism come at last in America."

With this idea, he made speeches, wrote pamphlets, and became a frequent contributor to the "Workingman's Advocate." Later, when the "Arbeiter Zeitung" was started, he went on its staff. The paper he found they were planning was to be a dry, theoretical sheet. He protested.

"Look here," he argued. "This thing won't do! We live in New York, not in Berlin or St. Petersburg. It is our duty as Socialists to keep in intimate touch with the life around us, and put our Socialism into

terms of this real life. When you are on the platform, you don't speak to yourself—at least, I hope not—you speak to your audience. Why not do the same here, why not write stuff that *others* will read?"

To initiate this policy he began "The Sermons of a Proletarian Preacher." Among orthodox Jews each week has a name, the first word or phrase from the weekly Bible "lesson." Cahan used this name each week as his title and gave the "lesson" a Socialist turn. His sermons were soon widely read. He also wrote short articles on natural history; he translated into Yiddish many of the best Russian, German, and English novels, among them Howells's "Traveler from Altruria;" he wrote sketches and stories of East Side life. And this policy had swift success, the circulation rising to about eight thousand.

Socialism, meanwhile, was spreading fast all over Europe. In 1891 and 1893 Cahan went as an American delegate to the International Congresses, the first at Brussels, the second at Zurich, there meeting "comrades" from many countries and hearing their personal accounts of the swift growth of the movement.

His first story in English was printed in a New York magazine early in the '90's. This was read by Howells; he became interested in the author, and it was mainly through his urging that Cahan wrote, some two years later, "Yekl" (Jake), a novel of Ghetto life. This, too, won the admiration of Howells, and he even went with it himself to the publishers. When "Yekl" appeared it aroused a storm of criticism, mainly from the Jews uptown. For Cahan, with his Russian ideals of realism, had described Yekl *as he was*, with all the bad as well as the good that was in him. And the pictures he drew of East Side life were considered too revolting. There was prejudice enough against the Jews. One irate Jewish lady uptown wrote in this vein:

"If you want to describe the Jews to Americans," she asked, "why not describe *the best of us*, instead of choosing this low, coarse, immoral tenement fellow?"

"My dear madam," he replied, "I chose Yekl because he and his tenements seem to me more interesting than even the best Jews uptown." The book was soon translated and published in Russia, and there it attracted wide notice.

In the meantime the Socialist party in New York had been split by dissensions. Daniel De Leon had quickly forced his way to a leading position, bringing back extreme revolutionist doctrines; and in 1897 a group of his opponents started a daily paper, "Die Vorwaerts," which has since become commonly known as the "Jewish Daily Forward." They raised the money at a ball, where Cahan passed the hat, and men and women threw in, not only cash, but rings and watches. The sale of these brought about $800, and with this the paper was started. Cahan was chosen editor. For a few weeks all went well, but then he found that even here the De Leon spirit had crept in, and a few months later he resigned.

He had been writing English sketches for the New York "Evening Post," and there he had met Lincoln Steffens. Steffens had been interested in "Yekl," and soon he and Cahan became well acquainted.

"What you need," said Steffens, "is the life of a reporter on an American paper." And in 1897, when Steffens became city editor of the "Commercial Advertiser," he took Cahan on his staff.

The training was invaluable. For the idea Steffens had was unique in American journalism. He exacted no uniform, impersonal style of reporting; he rather encouraged each man to see the life of the city with his own eyes. Cahan's work was mainly descriptive. He covered the famous Molineux trial and scores of others in the courts; he interviewed distinguished foreigners as they came off ocean liners and undistinguished immigrants down at Castle Garden; he described three successive charity balls and the Easter parade on Fifth Avenue; he talked to the wounded soldiers returned from the Cuban war, asked how the bullets had sounded to each, and entitled his story "The Song of the Bullets." He interviewed President McKinley and General Miles, and talked with Joe Wheeler till late one night. "My work gave me intimate views of men of all kinds. It opened up a new world, a larger American world, which I had never closely seen before."

On the staff were Norman Hapgood, Hutchins Hapgood, Edwin Lefevre, and other writers since become well known. And after the paper had gone to press they used to have long discussions. At first Cahan tried to talk Socialism, but he got scant attention.

"I remember a walk I had with one of these Americans. I began on Socialism. 'Drop Socialism,' he said, impatiently.

'Let's talk literature.' Since then times have changed. Not long ago, on a walk with the same writer, I began on literature. 'Drop literature,' he said. 'Let's talk Socialism.'"

These men were, for the most part, young, and their literary ideals were as yet little molded; they had followed along conventional lines, admiring Shakespeare, Dickens, Thackeray, Balzac. Cahan was the iconoclast.

"Those writers were all very good in their day," he said. "But among the writers of *our* day, who are the vital men? Who are the men who have deep, real convictions and are not afraid to tell the whole truth about modern life?" He used to walk the office, his voice harsh and loud; he was older, he was insistent, and largely through his insistence they came to read Tolstoy, Turgenev, Howells, and Hardy, and so formed new literary ideals. On Cahan's side, from the every-day contact with these Americans he learned more of American ways of thinking and feeling. And through his stories, then appearing in "Scribner's," the "Century," and other magazines, he made the acquaintance of scores of other writers.

After about five years of this intensely American life he came back to the "Vorwaerts." It was still a small, struggling Socialist paper, adhering blindly to old German models, its columns filled mainly with long theoretical articles which made the dullest reading. Though typed in Yiddish, the language was pompous German. Cahan took the editorship again, on condition that for one year he be given complete control.

"We must broaden out at once," he said. "You have lived shut up in your own little house. Let's try to get out into the world—the *American* world."

To begin with, he told his little staff that they must write plain Yiddish. This they found so hard at first that he had to dictate most of the "copy." But when the first edition came out, it created tremendous excitement. For here, right out in print, was the homely "mama gab" of the streets.

"It has no dignity!" cried one. "It doesn't smell like a Socialist paper!" commented another. Still greater surprises came thick and fast. On the editorial page, in place of an essay on Karl Marx, he described the crowds of Jewish boys outside the New York City College, contrasting their dress, speech, and habits with those of their tenement fathers. He told of the sacrifices these old fathers were making to give their sons an education, and then he asked these young "Americans" what they were going to do. Would they forget the tenements and struggle each for his own advance, or would they remember their parents and give support all their lives to the struggle of the great mass of the people for a fair share in the good things of life? There was Socialism in every line, and yet it might well have been printed in a non-Socialist paper.

"If as a Socialist," he wrote in another editorial, "you want to influence real live men, you must first become a live man yourself."

He increased the amount of American news, gave it real headlines, put it into plain Yiddish, and tried to present it without bias. "There is no need," he told me, "for Socialists to distort news. The case against capitalism is quite strong enough as it is." He added all kinds of articles interpreting American institutions and life. He translated Howells, Mary Wilkins, and others. He ran "The Jungle" in full. He gave criticisms of uptown plays.

"But, more than all else," he said, "we have tried on the 'Vorwaerts' to depict the struggles of the immigrant masses to adapt themselves to America. A strike, truthfully described, is better propaganda than scores of Socialist articles, especially so when by an active support of the strike we have won the ears of the strikers. And this we have always done. The bakers' strike here was practically lost, when we came out with a front-page editorial to all Ghetto housewives urging them to use none but union label bread. This turned the tide, and inside of two weeks the strike was won. We started from this office the strike against a rise in rents; it became Ghetto-wide, and in the end the landlords gave in. And again, in the cloakmakers' strike, which involved some seventy thousand, one of our staff was the leading spirit of the strike committee; we raised thousands of dollars, and by our daily bulletins we kept the mass in line until the final victory, by which conditions were vastly improved, hours shortened, and wages raised. It is by practical work of this kind that the eyes of the people are opened and Socialists are made."

Not only these mass struggles, but all kinds of personal problems come into this paper's columns. They run a "Deserters' Gallery," in which they print the photographs of husbands who have deserted their wives. And the pressure of this publicity is great. It

does the deserters little good to go out of town, for the "Vorwaerts" is read all over the country, and so the photograph follows the fugitive. A telegram, for example, comes from a Chicago reader saying that the man of the photograph is there at such and such an address. And this address they give to the wife. The "Vorwaerts" is popular with wives.

Another page is headed "A Bunch of Letters." This was started long ago. "The book of life," Cahan said in an editorial, "cannot be written by us. It must be written by you. Let us have the real thing. Let us hear what has made you laugh the most or what has wrung from you the bitterest tears. So, reading together as in a big family, we shall learn of life as it is." The response has been tremendous. Here on this page in the last seven years have been printed thousands of these real stories, representing in endless variety the comedy and the tragedy of the Ghetto life. Here is one of the early letters, from an old orthodox mother:

"My husband has been dead for months, and still my son will not go to the synagogue to say Kaddish"—the prayer which the Jewish son makes for the peace of his father's soul. "I beg him; for weeks I cannot sleep. But still he refuses. He says he would be a hypocrite if he said Kaddish, because he does not believe in God. What can I do? He reads your paper. He is a Socialist. Can you make him? Can you help me?"

Cahan printed this letter, and with it an editorial to the son.

"This letter is heartbreaking," he wrote. "Please go at once and do as she begs. You have refused to say Kaddish because you don't believe it would do your father any good, and so you think it would be hypocritical. But you are wrong. For you *know* it will do your *mother* good, and so, when you go to the synagogue, you will not be a hypocrite, but only a kind son who is comforting a broken old mother. If her religion is sincere, we should all of us respect it."

This great gap between the old and the young causes endless tragedies. And to help bridge it, the "Vorwaerts" has added a new department, a page entitled "At Home and at School," where letters are printed from parents to teachers about their children, and also the public school teachers' replies.

The paper steadily broadens. At the start, their "Foreign Correspondent" was the office-boy, who would go down to Newspaper Row and telephone up the latest news from Europe. Now they have salaried men in Paris, Berlin, London, Galicia, and Russia, and from all over the world comes volunteer correspondence. Year by year the staff has grown, until now they have twenty-five writers, of whom nine work in the office, the others doing their writing at home. Among these outside workers one is a grocer, another a barber.

"I'm proud of these boys I have trained," said Cahan, "for their stories and sketches are real as life. Born artists, these youngsters, with a deep passion for artistic truth. And they write vital stuff, of the kind that Tolstoy, Turgenev, or Hardy would have delighted in reading."

The paper's circulation has risen in eight years from seventy-five hundred to over one hundred and thirteen thousand, and is still increasing. Their debts are paid off, and to their plant they have constantly added improvements—linotype machines, presses, delivery wagons; they have a book-printing department. They own, not only their old building, but also the one next door, with the land on which each stands, and they are now about to tear them down and put up a ten-story building. Their physical property, all told, is worth about two hundred thousand dollars. This despite the large amounts given away to advance the Socialist movement.

"We take no profits here," Cahan told me. "From the start, when I passed the hat and the people threw in their watches and rings, we have been a co-operative company, organized not for profits but for the spreading of Socialism. Our salaries are comparatively low, and there have been no dividends. But when Debs spoke here in the last campaign, the square below was black with thousands of listeners. And so it is all over America. Socialism is spreading fast."

To give to the Jewish people a larger idea of the New World, Cahan has long been working on an eight-volume history of America written in Yiddish, from the Socialist point of view. The first volume has appeared, and already some eighteen thousand copies have been sold.

"Of course it is plain," he said in one of our talks, "that America has entered upon a tremendous era of change. Doubtless in the next few years we shall see radical measures of reform, and these will be ably carried out, for Americans are strong in

action. But I believe that this country needs something far deeper than all such practical measures. For in such an era, when such change is in process, not only in your political and your industrial life, but in your views on religion and in the very life of your homes, is it not a time for sincerity in your literature, for the Russian ideal of artistic truth?

"What have you in your theaters? This Nation is spending more money on plays than all Continental nations combined. But, although I go often to your theaters, I seldom hear the ring of a real human voice upon your stage. Not even your star actors seem to have any sense of the *reality* of a conversation. They don't talk; they declaim. And the dialogue moves as though by machine.

"And so it is with your enormous yearly output of novels. Most of them smell of rouge and powder, of manufacture in every line. They're a literature of stunts and phrasemongery. Little wonder that the Continent, which imports your American automobiles, doesn't even think of translating your modern American novels.

"The trouble is that you take your amusements like children. By day in your busy offices you're the shrewdest men on earth, with a deep, keen understanding of human nature *as it is;* but at night you're a nation of kids. Your evening clothes are your swaddling clothes. You delight in plays and novels whose authors apparently have not the slightest idea of real human nature. They give you cant and cheap sentimentality, burlesque and the most ridiculous plots. This is not fiction; it is mere fake!

"And the longer I live, the more deeply convinced I become that truth is more interesting than fake. Is it not a time for sincerity here? Will it not be well for this Nation if strong, new, American writers arise who will dare to give us life—*real life,* with its comedy and its tragedy mingled—giving us what in my Russian day we called *the thrill of truth?*"

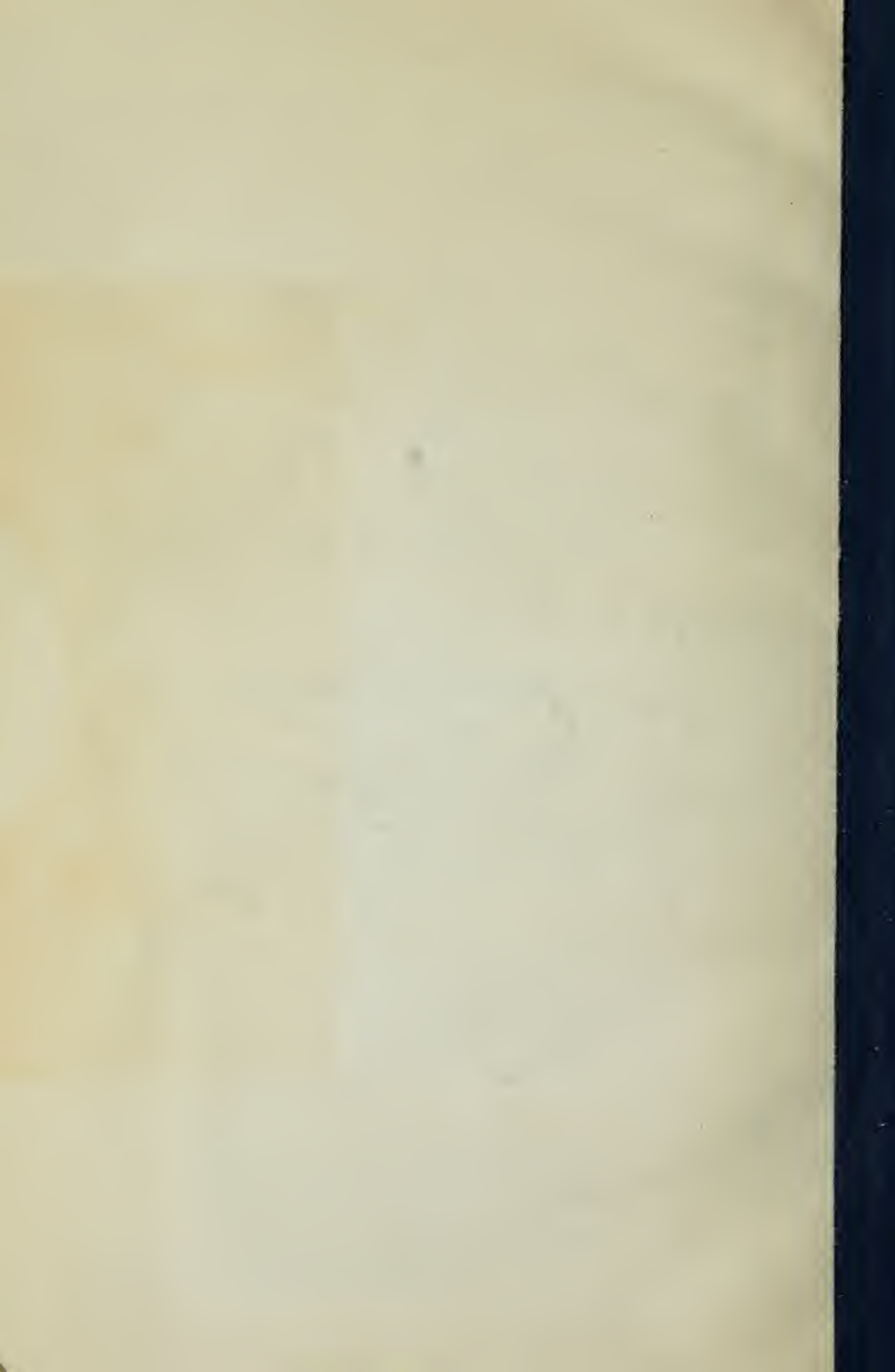
# BEYOND THE HILLS

BY JOHN E. DOLSEN

Beyond the hills, where I have never strayed,
I know a green and beauteous valley lies,
Dotted with sunny nook and forest glade,
Where clear, calm lakes reflect the sapphire skies;
And through the vale's deep heart a river grand
Draws toward its home, fed by ten thousand rills
From fresh, pure springs; it blesses all the land—
Beyond the hills.

Beyond the hills, while here I faint from strife,
Are quiet homes that soothe men's minds to rest;
And peace and justice and the simple life,
With love pervading all, with knowledge blessed.
Life's purest joys and dearest hopes are there,
Unknown are sleepless cares and needless ills;
And men are leal, and women true and fair—
Beyond the hills.

Beyond the hills I yet shall surely go—
Some day I'll cross the farthest barren height,
And rest in dreamy forest glades, and know
Those placid lakes, and see the morning light
Silver the mighty river; and, to me,
The sweetest hope that now my senses thrills
Is of that land a denizen to be—
Beyond the hills.



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