

# From the Notebook of a Wandering Jew

## I

How could you think, dear N., that your letter would still find me within my four walls? "The winter is over, the blossoms are showing, the time for singing has come;" could your friend stay in the house? No, my dear. Even as a child I envied our forefathers when, on the Seder night, my father presented them to me with their feet sandalled, their loins girded, the wanderer's staff in their hands, the bread-bundles on their shoulders; I would have given the sweetest *charoses* for a drink of bitter water if I could have wandered thus for forty years with them in the desert. I almost believe that all you homebodies would one day have to atone for your staying indoors, and when you would desire entrance to see the marvels of heaven, they would ask you, "Did you see the marvels of God on earth?" Then, ashamed, you would mumble, "We missed that opportunity."

How different were our Rabbis in this respect. How they breathed and felt, thought and lived in God's marvellous Nature. How they wanted to awaken our senses for all that is sublime and beautiful in Creation. How they wanted to teach us to fashion a wreath of adoration for God out of the morning's rays and the evening blush, out of the daylight and the night shadows, out of the star's glimmer and the flower's scent, out of the roar of the sea and the rumble of the thunder, the flash of the lightning. How they wanted to demonstrate to us that every creature was a preacher of His power, a monitor of our duties; what a Divine revelation they made of the book of Nature.

Did you ever complete the "Hymn of the Light" with the *חִי וְקַיִן*, bathed in the sea of light of the awakening day, and with the rising of the sun-globe did you turn towards the sun of your life, your God, dedicating your whole being and existence, your actions and your will, on His altar? Did you ever pray to Him "Whose power and omnipotence fills the worlds" when you were exposed to the roar of the ocean's waves or to the roll of thunder on a mountain's summit? In the stillness of a

star-studded night on a lonely hill did you ever pray to Him “Who brings on the evenings and assigns the stars in their celestial watch?” How different is the *שכחו וגברתו מלא עולם*, *אשר בדברו מעריב ערבים*, *היוצר* if spoken in God’s free nature than in the narrow confines of our street-prisons. How you can sense then the whole splendor of our marvellous language. Could you think of more majestic words of greetings for the thunder than *שכחו וגברתו מלא עולם*, the whole lovely eventide song *אשר בדברו מעריב ערבים*, or a friendlier greeting of the morning than the soul-awakening *שך ובורא חשך*?

Come out into the open if you want to appreciate the whole depth, the fullness of things and beings as depicted by our language roots. Nature speaks with its gentle transitions: *ערב*, the disappearance of outlines, its mixing of forms, its peaceful melting together when evening comes, and *בקר*, when all objects are disentangled from the night’s embrace and separately present themselves for recognition and testing. *הרים* are the progenitors of earthly life, and *אחו* is the meadow, the site for the mutual coexistence of the multitude of the united families of plants on the motherly lap of the earth.

But not only nature, not only *ברכות הראיה*, the blessings of seeing, attract me to the outdoors. More than that I am attracted to man, I am impelled to meet our brothers in all their manifold entanglements and endeavors. I wish to see the Divine reflected in the circle of mortal beings on earth, *שחלק מחכמתו ליראיו, שנתן מחכמתו לבשר ודם*, the reflection of His glory, of His Wisdom among His devotees, among the children of His creation. I desire *הטוב והמטיב* not only in the blessings of the individual life but also in the blessings of communal life, even if the *דין האמת* is evident—even with the somber, serious experiences decreed by the true, faithful Judge of the world Who will bring salvation.

You see, the appreciation of *ברכות הראיה והשמיעה*, the blessings of seeing and hearing, is the goal of my journey. Pray for me that I may successfully return home.

## II

I had a strange feeling yesterday when our ship went upstream and passed mountains and hills, valleys and ravines, all in the bright spirit of spring. Clean villages and friendly little towns passed in review before our enchanted sight. Towering above it all, the ruins of