

MY LIFE AND ASPIRATIONS

by

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מרדכי קופער

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Anna Cooper

Here lies before me the pages written by he-himself- my unforgettable friend and husband Mordchi Cooper. Possibly, strangers would not find these biographical writings of Mordchi so loving and dear as it is for me. This I am sure, that others will see in these writings their own youth, and recognize themselves, consequently thinking I also lived through these events exactly as he had written about them.

When I read for myself the actual descriptions and reminisces about his childhood and youth, I am deeply moved over these happenings and his image appears before my eyes as if it were real.

Thus I see him in the small Polish village, in his poor home- a little boy. There he goes during a snowy evening returning home from Cheder. There I see him in his youth traveling from town to town visiting Yeshivas. I see him also at a stranger's table sitting and eating hungrily- I think I observe a shedding of a tear in his eyes and afterwards, later and again his longing for his long lost home- the distant America.

His great thirst was to help build something to strive for - something to achieve for the weary world - for the workers and for the wider masses of the people and for his complete devotion to the progressive movement.

His Life and Aspirations

For every organization that he represented, he burdened himself with their worries, as if it were for his own kind and family and that's the way it was for his whole short life. He had to apply great effort in his struggle to meet needs, but in the most difficult time of his life he did not limit his giving because of personal interests. All others stood higher than his own self.

His extreme illness, which was agonizing and torturing for him, by no means, inhibited him from his dedication to the needy. And until his last days his thoughts were help for the oppressed, and his ideology was a bright and happy future for all of mankind.

And for those who will read his short biography, how simply he wrote and how righteous, he will be seen alive and with a bright spirit. Everyone in his heart will regret the short, cut-off and not yet fulfilled life. One's eyes will fill with warm tears and will remember him for a long time. And for those who will read this entire biography they will say: *Honor his memory.*

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF
MORDCHI COOPER

The earliest memories of my childhood stems from the fifth or sixth year of my life. I can hardly remember what experiences were forthcoming during my first year in Cheder. However, my second year which was not associated with only the dry Hebrew but the meaning of the learning, became ingrained in my memory.

Due to my talents and eagerness to learn I was crowned in my early years as a scholar. My father died when I was 7 years old. In his bequest he required of my older brother to support me in my continuing education. My father expected a lot of me and his last wish was that I should grow up to be a "Talmud Chochem" - a Jewish scholar. The school became too elementary for me, and I had to be transferred to a higher level school. What this meant was more difficulties for my poor family and all in all it wasn't easy.

The Headmaster Throws Me Out Of School.

In relation to this I am reminded of an episode that became ingrained in my childhood soul. A new school was created. In evaluating the numbers of children I was also included, that is counted in. However, on the first day when we assembled together in school, the father of one of the boys came in and reviewed the assembled students. After this review he had a discussion with the Rabbi. When it was time to go home the Rabbi told me not to return to the school anymore. That's the way this boss wanted it. The Rabbi was not satisfied with this decision, but he had to buckle under, because this Jew was a big shot in the community.

For that semester I did not attend school anymore and I roamed

For that semester I did not attend school anymore and I roamed between the street and the Synagogue. The men at the synagogue had pity on me and taught me a little bit.

At the next semester I studied with the same Hebrew teacher and in spite of everything I studied with two sons of the big shot who did not want me to study at this particular school. I quickly became one of the best students and consequently derived some small revenge with respect to this boss.

Shortly after my father's death, my oldest sister married. The wedding was a big event for me. First it took place in a large city, ten miles from our town. For me that was to observe a whole new world. Secondly, for the first time in my life I was dressed in an attractive suit. It was hardly a brand new suit, but rather re-done from an old piece of garment. It still meant a great deal to me.

Also it meant so much for me to meet up with so many uncles and aunts who I never met before. When I was in the dance hall where one had to be careful in making one step for fear of sliding on the polished floor, I truthfully felt like an outsider.

I didn't have too much pleasure from my new cousins. These big city people looked down on me ,the provincial, not giving me any recognition, which I as a guest as an in-law would expect to receive. This massive environment also made a deep impression upon me.

My father was a book merchant and a book binder, therefor a large variety of religious volumes could be found in my house. Many of them were of the deeply religious assortment. As soon as I was able to read Hebrew I really got engulfed with enthusiasm in these books. Their contents influenced my inner soul as a child and I gulped down the contents with immense interest.

My religious feelings strengthened and grew. For a long time I didn't allow myself to eat breakfast to assure that I had time to complete the entire prayer portion. The desire to learn was not merely to distinguish myself as a scholar or as curiosity for knowledge. But uppermost, I was driven by religious motives. One must learn more Torah because G-d required it.

I Become Very Religious

When I became ten years old I left school, because there wasn't any more subject matter that I could study at this school.

I Am Boarded Out

My older brother brought me over to a neighboring village and obtained board for me and there I remained for educational purposes. My nature was that of a bashful person, so that it was agonizing for me to go to strange people to eat. It wasn't meant to be that way, on the contrary, I could have felt regard for my benefactors who had a part in my educational pursuits. Still I didn't feel right about it. Often I would stand behind a door of one of my benefactors because I was afraid that the dinner was not yet ready and that I arrived too early.

Personally I was very happy in the study hall of the synagogue. There were two large tables occupied by older boys and also young boys who were my age. Even though I was bashful I enjoyed participating in pranks carried on by the boys. For example, jumping over the benches and leaping behind someone, was a pastime and a sport for the boys at the school.

At the second semester, I had to leave alone for another village, obtain board and care for myself entirely. There was an occurrence which left me with a deep impression ingrained in my memory. I went to a couple of places and asked to receive board and I was accepted. I then went to a tailor's house and asked for board or at least a nights lodging. In his house were 6 worker-associates and in the kitchen which was also a workshop, there were the tailor's wife and two daughters. When I opened the door all eyes were upon me. I gathered my courage and made my request. I noticed that they looked at me with pity. One of the remarks made in a loud voice was "Such a small boy is sent out alone into A world of strangers" This remark affected me so severely that I had to restrain myself with all my strength not to burst out in tears. Despite this they promised me board. When I went outside the

house a young girl my age who was from the tailor's house gave me a kopek. For my sensitive personality this was too much. A stream of tears gushed from my eyes. I went back to the synagogue and found a corner where I cried myself to sleep on a hard bench. When I woke up the congregation were gathering together for the regular prayers.

I was so moved by this episode I obtained transportation and went back home. But no one would be allowed to know what I experienced. I had to lie to those in my house and told my comrades that I wasn't able to obtain board.

That summer I stayed at home. When winter came I didn't travel anywhere. Material conditions improved a little at home. In the evening I helped out at the work at home. In the meantime, I became a real synagogue going young man.

Life at the synagogue was full of interesting and lively moments. Personally, the learning, the tune that accompanies the learning, and those who had special ability would from time to time stay up a whole night. It would not only be associated with learning but be accompanied with a liveliness and boisterousness as boys will be. This added to the colorfulness of the synagogue-study life. About three in the morning, after taking a nap, the whole gang of boys, descended on the bakery to eat fresh rolls, which just came out of the oven. One of our boys was the baker's son and for his reward for learning Torah we obtained fresh rolls.

In My Mother's Birth Town

The second city where I traveled for my education was the place my mother was born. Two of my uncles and aunts and a lot of cousins lived in that city. There was no talk of loneliness or homesickness. My uncle provided for my board and my lodging which he undertook on his own. He was the Shames-caretaker of the village and he was a poor man. However, his house was open to anyone in the family.

The second uncle was a rich man, who I did not take to heart and I visited his house only on holiday occasions. My poor uncle, the Shames, was especially gentle with me. As a pious person he wanted to be proud of his sister's son. He was not tolerant of his

wanted to be proud of his sister's son. He was not tolerant of his own children with regard to learning.

In this particular city, the Rabbi was head of the Yeshiva and tutored boys who lived in the town and outsiders. He was innovative and actually authored his own prayer book. I wasn't fully accepted at the Yeshiva, because my ideas about learning were not conventional. However, the Rabbi's Torah did influence me as in the first place the Torah was repeated in the synagogue among the older boys, where I had an opportunity to listen in. Secondly, I was especially a free thinker and listener.

Anyway, when I came home on Rosh Hashonah, I carried on disputes with friends and students in our town. Surprisingly I made a name for myself during these disputes. These students literally looked me over from top to bottom. I paid a sum of money to one of the students who instructed me. I also decided to study in the other city during the coming winter.

When summer came I decided to study in a nearby large city, where hundreds of students gathered together to study. The city was K. and on the way to this city something happened to me, which pushed me in another direction. On the highway where I waited for a ride, I ran up against a Jew, who wanted to know where I was traveling to. And when I told him of my goals, he started to strongly talk me out of them. He told me that the city K. is overcrowded with students and it would be impossible for me to obtain board. He advised me that I should settle down in a nearby smaller city where the Rabbi himself studies with the students.

I followed his advice and when I arrived in the small town, went to the synagogue-study center where I had a happy experience that morning. There were only a few people at the Synagogue because it was before services. They questioned me on where I came from and who my relatives are. I told them who I was, and it turned out that one of them knew my entire family. He once studied with my grandfather in Cheder and remembered my mother well. This particular Jew interested himself in me, gave me a place to sleep in his house and helped me to obtain board.

The Prodigy from the City

I really liked the environment of the Synagogue. There were a limited number of students. Beside me there were three other students from out of town. Two of them didn't distinguish themselves with anything. The third one, though, was a genius and was well learned. This boy had a lot of interesting things to say about his background. What he related was a story one in a thousand.

He said that until the age of 13 he was raised in a Gentile's house where there wasn't a crumb of Jewish upbringing that he could have received. At his thirteenth birthday he tore himself away from there and now at the age of 17, he is absorbed with Torah like a pomegranate with kernel. The town was buzzing about him.

Whether his tales were truthful or just his imagination, I really don't know to this day. However, he was an interesting character and had a deep influence on my future life. There was another young man in my town who was a Yeshivah student half the time and the rest of the time he was a merchant. The Prodigy student received lodging from this boy's parents and consequently a close bond developed among the three of us.

The mystery of romance which up to this time was unknown to me began to unfold. A small partition separated the beds where the prodigy, his friend and the friend's sister slept. The basis for romanticism was prepared. The Prodigal friend fell in love with this cousin, who was a very romantic girl, even though she came from a Chasid family. And a noteworthy thing, even though I was a few years younger than him (which meant a lot in those years) he selected me as a trustworthy friend and showed me a letter he wrote to the girl and also the answer he received from her.

He also sought my advice in all matters, even though I was deficient in matters of love. The beautiful phrases in his letters to the girl, written in different languages, such as German, Polish, and French placed him in even higher esteem in my eyes.

The romance of this young man influenced my very being and little by little romantic feelings became ingrained in my heart. I fell in love with the Rabbi's daughter, who was about my age. Naturally, she knew nothing of this. I expressed my strong

Naturally, she knew nothing of this. I expressed my strong feelings while reciting the "Song of songs" with great emotion in the synagogue Friday afternoon. During the whole time of my reciting, the Rabbi's daughter was on my mind, just the sound of her name enchanted me.

All the other students and I studied with the Rabbi who was an interesting personality. He couldn't control himself and would sing out loud at times. The Rabbi had five daughters. I was in love with one of them and poured out my heart to her.

The oldest daughter was at the age of marriage and the Rabbi had his eye on the prodigal, but this boy was in love with the Chasid's daughter and didn't get along with the Rabbi.

The Rabbi began to spy on this young man and was helped by his daughters. One Saturday morning after lunch, they found all the love letters located in a box.

The Rabbi at the close of the Sabbath called together the elders of the town and the father of the girl and very loudly read the contents of the love letters. He read the letters as he himself would have written them. The resolution of the matter was that this young man had to leave the town.

We the remaining students were now looked upon suspiciously and along with this started up another incident. A new student arrived in town and he showed signs of abnormality. We students started to ridicule him. It didn't take long and this young man really became crazy. The people of the town accused the Yeshivah students of being responsible for his condition.

Friday night when the people were in the Synagogue, there was talk of this incident. I expected to be taken home by one of the elders, a Chasid, but as long as the atmosphere remained stressful on account of this incident, I hid behind the stove and cried. One of the Chasids noticed me and took me home. He exhibited a great deal of tactfulness and kindness that he didn't bring up the matter of this incident. It became uncomfortable for outsiders to come to this town to study. I had to think about moving to another town the following semester.

The City of Judinsky Walia

The next episode in my boyhood Yeshiva life was in the city of Judinsky Walia. This particular city opened up a new life for me and I was drawn into a different environment.

The Jewish life of the city was divided into two extremes. One were common workers at the low stratum and the others Chasidim and teachers. There was a sharp division between the two classes that reached a degree of hate and contempt between the two. The teachers looked down on the working class as if they were the step children of G-d and were not honored to understand G-d's Torah. On the other hand the working people scorned the fanatical teachers, who were not skilled to do real work, but only to pray....

This class division which was characteristic of the Jewish-Polish towns, reached a level of extreme in Judinsky-Walia. Even among the Chasidim there were separations. Chasidim from different Rabbis hated those from other Rabbis and were always ready to attack one another.

The synagogue-study center where I was attending was also divided into two quarrelsome groups. These groups almost never mixed and never spoke to each other. If there was a dispute between one boy from one group and a boy from another group then the whole school would be divided into two hateful camps and a word battle erupted.

My own economic life was a difficult one in this city. It turned out that I was hungry at times, but in this city I was given a push to do some thinking. The life in the city gave me practical experience. On the one hand I was strongly devoted to learning and could be considered a learned person. On the other hand doubts about religion started to activate my mind. My dedication to religion started to become shaky. The commandments of the religion as I understood it as Torah, love of mankind and good deeds were put forward by the Chasidim, the closest followers of G-d's Torah. But in reality their life styles exhibited resentment and disgust and this undermined my strong faith.

At that time something occurred which prepared me for the basis of other ideas and thinking. Once while strolling along the

street late at night, I heard a familiar voice. I went closer and recognized the young man that attended the Yeshivah with me in the other city. This is the one who experienced that interesting romance. This young man was attired in a lengthy type of clothing was in deep discussion with a group of working people. I was a little shocked at this. I wasn't accustomed to the likes of this. I even thought of the danger if I was seen with this group. I understood that there was a parting of the ways between this young man and myself. Still I was drawn to become acquainted with a different life style. I promised to meet with him the next day at a designated spot.

The next day I came to the designated location, which was a small hut with an ordinary table and a bench around the table. Sitting there were a group of workers with my friend sitting between them. When I entered the house I interrupted the conversation and I was invited to have lunch with them. I didn't wait long to be coaxed, because I was hungry. After eating, my friend honored me to lead the group in prayer. When I accepted the invitation and started the "And now let us pray", the others answered in a chorus, "Now let us eat". I was embarrassed by this joke, even though I ended the prayer alone.

After prayers, we went outside and debated. My friend started to compare Moses with Jesus Christ and their roles as law givers and leaders. My arguments countered against his turned out to be very weak. Although I thought that this young man's arguments didn't influence me, still this discussion made a deep impression on me and it was the beginning of shaking my beliefs. This debate gave me the first push to do some more thinking and more reading.

There won't be a complete picture of the influence of this city on the structuring of my later life, if I didn't describe my lodging situation. I lived at the home of a bookbinder, where my brother worked at an earlier period of time for a period of time, and thankfully that's why I obtained lodging at this place.

The bookbinder's family, with whom I got along favorably, consisted of three sons and two daughters who worked in the business of the father at the factory. One of the girls at the factory

which was a strong restraint and didn't allow her to even look at a boy. Little by little all of the fenced in restraints started to break, if not openly then certainly in a concealed way.

Rendezvous with boys ensued along with love affairs. I, a boy of 14 had strange feelings when one of the girls placed a bare hand on mine. I found pleasure in this, but at the same time I was ashamed of the sin I was committing.

It turned out that I studied in a class with girls in which we learned how to write in Yiddish. One of them, already grown up demanded of me that I should bring her a copy of a new letter every day. And the letter must be between a groom and a bride. I wasn't too adept in these matters, but I found a middle of the road approach. I found a book of letters and made copies of the prepared letters.

I am Distinguished as a Talented Person

In my own city I was distinguished (crowned) as a talented person. When I came home my glory started to dissipate. I came home to my brother's wedding. After the wedding I left for another town which was in all respects different than the one before. The town was close to the German border. The separation between boys and girls was not practiced there. Both sexes came together even at the Rabbi's house, where I was given board and where I was treated as a learned student. My economic condition wasn't bad. I tutored two boys and they paid me 5 rubles a month. At the end of the first month, when I received the first two gold pieces, I had a feeling that only people can feel who live constantly in strife and in need and suddenly they find themselves a treasure. My life which was radiating with shining hope didn't last long. A few months later, a severe crisis took place in my life which knocked me over.

I started to suffer from a nasal problem and that interfered with my further development. I tried going to doctors, but they only succeeded to relieve me a little of my suffering. I lived through two years of this spiritual hardship and in the final analysis I had to get used to this new way of life.

I left this town and went to the second one. The new town was

still different than the former one. There blew new fresh winds. The ideas of Zionism and Socialism influenced the youth. The striving to learn languages and science was so intense that the whole town was divided into self learning groups. The environment gave me an opportunity to read books. First I read enlightened books (Haskala) and this was followed by socialistic books. My one and highest aspiration was to free myself of the synagogue and accept the life of a worker. However, to carry this out was not easy. My family was opposed to this and I didn't have the strength to carry this out.

I left this town and went to "Konin". There I had to officially maintain the status of a Yeshivah-Bocher. This was distasteful to me, but I had a strong desire to completely separate myself from the life of a Yeshiva-Bocher (Talmudic student). For the time being I had to make use of this as a means of reaching my goals, which involved studying undercover, but officially I was a Talmudic student.

In the town of "Konin" I had an acquaintance who owned a bookbinder business, and received the opportunity to learn this particular trade. It was my luck that in the house of the bookbinder was also the center of Socialist meetings and I had the opportunity to become acquainted with new ideas. I began to learn and study the Marxist literature and the Socialistic ideas so captured my very soul that they became part of my very self. I couldn't stay long in "Konin" because it was difficult to maintain a double life and to live an independent life. I couldn't make a living from talk alone, so I returned back home with the hope of a new possibility, which will lead me to reach my goals for which I had a powerful desire for. And this type of opportunity fell right into my hands.

A Jewish Landlord

A Jewish Landlord lived not far from our town. He was also known as a Talmudic expert. In his old age he became half blind. He needed a young man to study with and to serve him. He paid a ruble a week for this job, not counting room and board. I saw in this a golden opportunity to earn during this

time of ten weeks a tender to cover the cost of travel to a large city, where I, once and for all, could begin to be independent.

Happily I accepted the position. However, when I arrived in the village I noticed the capriciousness of this old landlord. I became very gloomy. The old one was full of madness and was a perfect stereotype of an exploiter. Especially, I couldn't tolerate the traditions of slavery in the village. I was disgusted to see an old farmer kiss the hand of a young lord, who was the nephew of the old man. I barely lasted 7 weeks and returned home.

I planned to stay overnight at the house and travel to the city early in the morning. But when I arose in the morning my seven rubles were missing. There was no way I could travel anywhere. My family suggested that I stay at home and to take my brother's place as he was planning to travel to America and needed a provider for our mother. I accepted this proposal.

After I worked for a period of a year with my brother, he actually left for America and I became the breadwinner and the boss of the household. Three of us remained, my mother, my sister and myself.

Our house became a regular meeting place for the radical youth of the town. It was really joyous at home, however, I had to keep up appearances, go to Shule and pray, and in any case not espouse anti-religious views.

My trade as a bookbinder forced me to accept work from Goyim. Being that I also had work involving Gemorah, Chumash, and Sidders, word got out to the religious Jews of my indiscretion and they started to attack me. I started to think at this time to leave for America.

I Travel to America

I couldn't rest with the thought that one could live the way you want to in America, and this was a strong attraction for me to go to this free country. I endured much hardship before I reached my goals.

Finally I obtained an entry card from a relative of mine and prepared myself for the trip. It took me only a short time to liquidate my holdings. Some of the items were packed in boxes

liquidate my holdings. Some of the items were packed in boxes others in newspapers, which were in all colors. One could say that my departure was very colorful.

Everything would have been just fine, had it not been for my nasal illness, I also developed a stomach ailment. My physical condition was not at its best and I already knew that in the golden land of America it took a lot of strength to rake in the Gold.

In the meantime I crossed the ocean and after 11 days of stormy winter days my ship reached the borders of Boston. Getting off the ship and riding on an elevator for the first time made a deep impression on me. I understood that I set foot on a new world and a new life, but I doubted if I could adjust to the new world.

My first stop over was in a missionary-home where I received a good meal. There I waited for a countryman, who was to pick me up. He in fact did show up timely and took me to his home.

According to my recollections It was really splendid in this house. The environment was cozy and friendly. It was Friday night and I rested through the Sabbath and Sunday. Monday they put me to work.

They selected this work for me when I was still on the ship. The work was too difficult for me, but what could I do, since my boss was the one who was my countryman who greeted and treated me so well. The conditions of the work was 4 weeks with no pay and following that 4 dollars a week until I could work myself up to better wages.

The first World War broke out 6 months later. All contacts with my old home were broken for a few years, - difficult years. I wanted so much to hear from home and to have contact with my old friends, but it was impossible.

My first years in America were very difficult, and the way it happens among people, who come to America, they sober up from their golden dreams that they dreamed of and start longing for their past.

My life consisted of a hard day's work and after work, tired and spent (dragged out) I would fall down sleeping. Once in a while, when sleepiness did not win out, I played a little Pinochle. All in all I didn't lead a spiritual or productive life. Some time later I discovered that not far from me was a Jewish library and a center

became acquainted with the two movements, I decided to become a member of the Polish Zionist organization, not that the ideology appealed to me, but the atmosphere attracted me. Deep in my heart Nationalism did not play a big role for me. When I found out that the stress was placed on Nationalism and not on Socialism I carried on a battle through my varied discussions. In any event through this circle of people I found a little spiritual freedom.

At this time the first bloody world war erupted, which created such catastrophes, that it was out of the question for me to return home. I endeavored with all my strength to fit into the American life style.

MY TOWN

My city was situated between "Kohl" and "Kutna", on the way to the large Polish Merchant centers: Lodz and Warsaw. Considering that it was a small town, life was not that difficult. On the contrary the pulsations of the outside world seeped into the town and a portion of it remained with us.

The town consisted of two main streets which was layed out on the highway toward Kohl and the other street exactly in the opposite direction towards Krushnevit. We also had a few side streets, a Jewish market and a Pig market.

The city had two hundred Jewish families with their own community, a nice Shule, a Synagogue, a Mikvah, and whatever holiness is necessary to carry out religious functions.

Christians and Jews lived together as neighbors. Relations were sometimes cordial and other times tragic. They had hopes and disappointments. There was a separation due to religion between the Jew and Christian which did not allow much intimacy. But contacts between the neighbors did exist.

How old is the town and when did the first Jew settle there, who can tell? Regretfully we did not have a historian in the town. Something could have been found out by interrogating the Holy

members of the community, however, I never was approachable to them. One could assume that the city existed for at least one hundred years. There was evidence of this on the Tombstones at the cemetery.

During my childhood years there was talk of an old Shule that was not in use. It was a complete wreck and must have been a hundred years old.

That is how the life in my town Klodova flourished. During my time there were Jewish families, who raised children, and had nephews. Jews would say in their prayers "Next year in Jerusalem" Here and there a Pollack would throw up to the Jew, the Insulting word "Zshida" "Go back to Palestine." In spite of that, Jews felt that their entire lives were bound up with the town.

My earliest recollections, which remained in my memory was our house. Our house looked out over the school yard. And as a child I was able to observe the beautification of the school house. There were ornaments that famous artists used to decorate the newly built school. The first Jewish schools in Poland contained gorgeous decorations and our school was no exception.

I also remember the Rabbi's assistant, A Jew with a fine beard, well built and a strong voice. He used to stand before an open window of our home and watched as my father bound books and made comparisons between the sacred and secular books.

I remember the widow Hannah and her sons; there were only seven sons, but it appeared as if there many more. They always were practicing different kinds of tricks. They could stand on their head a long time, and even walk on their hands the whole length of the school yard. They were the best ball players and the best tree climbers.

All of these sports were not recognized in our town. This was not a business where people would pay money for tickets to watch. On the contrary, it was considered demeaning, which only the drifters occupied their time with. But my young heart fluttered with happiness when I observed all of these tricks and my first ambition was to imitate them.

Life at the Cheder had its ideological charm and also had its comical side. Before me stands alive a picture of two Cheder students carrying on a war between them. Not merely for sport,

but really to strike one another, and G-d knows what and why this war challenge was about.

Two times a day, exactly, like a clock, Jews went to pray in Shule or in the synagogue. There was a difference between the two prayer houses. In the Shule, one felt in a holiday mood on the Sabbath and on religious holidays, when the Cantor sang with his choir.

During the week, however, it was cheerless in the Shule. The small numbers would lose themselves in the large building. One had to stay in one place and not march up and down as one does in the Synagogue. The Synagogue served not only as a place of worship, but also as an intimate gathering place.

In the winter during the cold days, they would stand around the stove and talk about the whole world. In the summer, between Mincha (morning) and Mirev (afternoon prayers) walked around the school yard. The Synagogue also served as a study center for the young student boys. That's where I spent my youth because that's the way my father wanted it to be and that's the way the environment dictated it to be.

I also studied many years in strange cities. Other boys from my town, also either studied at Yeshivas or studied trades in other towns. At Holiday times everyone of them wandered back to their own town to observe the holidays in their own homes. Coming home at Holiday times was one of the most marvelous things in life, and it provided the courage to endure the hardships living in strange places.

From my last Yeshivah I returned home to my town filled with ideas of renaissance, such as Zionism and Socialism, which permeated the Polish town at the time. It was an awakening that took place in these traditional small cities.

When I attempted to influence other youth with these new ideas I created a lot of enemies among the older people. Above all, the friends of my departed religious father couldn't tolerate my heresy. My life became ever more restrictive and at the first opportunity I left the town for America.

My first months in America were not very pleasant. Although I

was free of religious restrictions, my work was very taxing for me and the longing for my old home was strong. Soon after the first world war broke out and for seven years I was cut off from my town. But often I saw my town in my dreams as if it were real.

Finally the war ended and the first information about my town was for me like a sunny beam that appeared after a long dark night. My city was not yet cut off. Only two Jews were hung. Later information from the independent Poland was more terrible and depressive as more information arrived. The throwing of Jews from moving trains, pulling off Jew's beards. All this information gave me a feeling of despair and I asked myself what will be the fate of my family?

I found some comfort that there did exist a self sacrificing revolutionary movement leading to a freedom which had no borders with antisemitism. I breathed with every vibration of my soul with those who are fighting everywhere for a world that would be free of racial hatred, religious prejudice, a world without war that murders millions of people. All my free time was devoted to these ideas.

During the war years the roots which bound me to my town started to slacken some. When I was not torn apart by all this, I thought what kind of contributions did my town make to the holy revolutionary purpose. I couldn't recognize any kind of trend in this direction from the letters I received. One piece of information delighted me though. The youth of the town established a library and I was given a title as an honorary member as one of the town pioneers as being knowledgeable in the field of progressive books.

Thirteen years past since the rise of fascism. Nazism which was cooked up by the love of the Chamberlains arose to the highest peak. The Western democracies were asleep , "The passive sleep, not to mix in" although perhaps they wanted to put the masses to sleep who sought for a better life, and the unavoidable came to be. The Hitler hordes drunk with victory which in some cases was delivered to them on a golden plate, were released with the pleasure of murder and robbery to conquer the world. The slaughtering and the annihilation of the Jews was the first order of business in their daily lives. Poland became infested with Fascist hosts who carried with them murder and death for more than 3

million Jewish settlements. Myself, along with hundreds of thousands of American Jews who left their relatives and dear ones were devastated. We froze with fear when we received information that was more than horrible.

When the bitter war was ended with a disaster for the Nazis, thanks to the heroic Red Army, who together with the allied countries shattered the snakes head. At this time we first saw the results of the bloody fascism.

Not only was all the information about the Nazi atrocities confirmed, but there were scores of horror incidences that related reports of what fascism did to our people in Poland.

The first report was that only 19 Jews remained alive in my town. I sat many days reviewing lists of the surviving Jews and looked for a name of an acquaintance, a friend or anyone I knew. But without success. I often came home disappointed. Among the millions of Jews that were murdered were all of my relatives, brother, sister and their families. It was for me and for other thousands of people, a difficult time, times of pain and grief.

However, the dead cannot be brought back to life. I had a new feeling, the feeling that the Jewish life must be carried on in spite of Hitlerism. It came to be the "Mitzvah to live" which the writer Sholem Asch reminded us in one of his writings.

I devoted all of my fiery spiritual strength to help the survivors of my town. I hoped that from the remnants remaining there would be a new development in my town for a Jewish community, which would then develop under the services of a new democratic Poland which seeks to fight antisemitism and the remnants of ancient feudalism. I was prepared to contribute my part for this purpose, but in reality events went in another direction. Those that came back to the town felt so lost that they could not remain for long and soon fled the town.

The thought to reach America or Palestine, where some of their living relatives resided gave them new courage and energy to take hold of their wandering staff and travel in dangerous ways with the hope of reaching the borders of America.

We must be reminded that they pushed themselves in this direction in spite of the irresponsible propaganda from certain Jewish Organizational leaders. Currently there are several

hundred thousand Jewish refugees in German camps waiting for a miracle. Among them are 30 living survivors of my town. A few of these perhaps will be the lucky ones that America will allow entry. The others will sooner or later return to Poland. It is my deep belief that antisemitism will be expunged from Poland and the Jews there will live in freedom with their neighbors, the Polish people. They will together build a new Poland based on righteous Democracy.

My deepest desire is that our city should not be free of Jews, but rather a Jewish life should sprout and bloom and us the "Landslite" (countryman) from Klodova should help build a stable new life for our town.

What will be of my hopes only the future can tell.



The previous chapters of my departed husband, Mordchi Cooper, ends the pages of his life when he was only a few years in America. If he alone would have written about his later life in America, a large thick book would result. But he was not destined to accomplish this. Perhaps he was too occupied in his community work, or else his difficult life hindered him. Therefore, I want to add even if only in summary his route through life in America as much as I know and as much as he related to me.

Still, before he came to New York and before we met, he experienced a serious personal tragedy. He lost a fine child and was divorced from his first wife. This tragedy remained imbedded in him for his whole life, and he almost never spoke about it.

After he was alone, he came to New York. His striving for knowledge and learning turned him towards discovering a teacher's seminary and he became a student in this teacher institution. After a few years of diligent learning, Mordchi became a Yiddish teacher.

At that time we met among mutual friends, became strongly attached and in a half year we were married. We lived together barely 17 years. The first years were difficult from the economic point of view. As long as we were more or less young and idealistic the difficult situation did not strongly affect us. He was politically very astute and influenced me greatly. He, so to say, raised me politically.

After the time of our wedding, he occupied himself broadly with community activities. He became a member of the People's Fraternal Order and also joined the party. He contributed through the organizations greatly in cultural fields. He was the cultural director of the various branches of the Fraternal Order. Whenever there was a cultural commission he was always selected as a representative.

After enduring with economic difficulty half of our time of being together conditions improved little by little after Mordchi opened a business jointly with a young man, who invested a little money in the business.

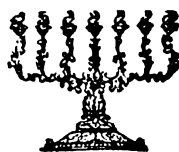
Mordchi worked himself up in the business and made a very comfortable living. He remained, however, the same dedicated worker on behalf of the progressive movement. As he wasn't anymore in need, he contributed with a broader hand to the different causes. He contributed much and influenced others to

give. After the second world war in Europe with the horrors of Hitlerism , when 6 million Jews were destroyed, Mordchi became active in the Klodova society of his countryman, and threw himself in with life and limb for the survivors. He came in contact with tens of refugees. Everyday he would receive packs of letters from Europe which were asking for help for him to make contact with their relatives or for direct help from him. He helped them in both cases. As far as possible (he was already very ill from his malady), but it did not deter him from his work. He also helped build the "IKUF corner" because cultural endeavors were the most important things in his life.

Already in the last few weeks before his operation, when he was very ill, he held a book review on Sholem Asches "East River". He impressed everyone with his deep interpretation of every personality in the book and literary handling of the review.

Mordchi had a lot of work to do and a lot of plans to carry out, but disastrously, his premature death disrupted this. One of his most important plans was to take a trip to Europe and to stop over for a little while in Poland. He wanted to study first hand the situation there in order to help them build as far as possible a new Poland.

It is really a wonder how strongly he believed in his ideals. Any criticism or attacks made against the progressive movement didn't deter him or influence him. He continued his work with the same tempo. No work was too small or too hard for him to do if it was necessary. Everything he did was with modesty. He didn't talk about it and didn't boast about it. He felt that his greatest responsibility was to battle for a beautiful and righteous world.





מעקם און ענא קופער

In Memory of my Unforgettable Husband Mordchi Cooper

Here stands a grave still new
The remains of a tragic life
At the head of the grave
A monument, a hard stone

A mild wind blows
Birds are singing quietly
Everything still, no noise
Oh how sad I feel

There was a friend
Who is no more
Great is my grief
For what I lost

My heart is pressured
Like a heavy stone
With hardened tears.

Whoever, death concealed
Cannot be discovered
For his spirit and his aspirations
For a beautiful righteous life.

Here stands a grave still new
The remains of a tragic life
At the head of the grave
A monument, a hard stone

August, 1947

What is it Good For

A song by Anna Cooper

In memory of my beloved husband Max Cooper

What good are the lakes with clear waters
what good are the fields with green grass
What good is the orchard keeper with juicy fruit
What good are the wine gardeners for sweet wine
If you're not here

What good is the sun with illuminating rays
What good is the clear blue sky
What good is the transparent mild winter
What good is the happy summer
If you're not here

What good is the city full of people
What good are the show windows full of merchandise
What good is the house
What good is the street
If you're not here

What good are the concerts
What good are the plays
What good are the spectaculars
What good are the movies
If you're not here

There is no joy anymore
All I do is think
My heart is full of grief
And my consolation is my tears.

TO THE UNTIMELY DEATH OF COMRADE MAX COOPER

by David Yudzhinik

Silenced voice
A direct look
You won't come back again
You left us just today
In an eternal quiet way

Only the shining figure
Of your sincere human heart
Who will be here with us in battle
Till the day of victory
That will fulfill your dream
Of a world with happy people
Of a world without suffering
Of a world with sunshine
Always creating, always will be

Sleep in the meantime comrade, sleep
You did not live in vain
But suffered and strove
Forever the hero lives within us
Who builds a new world

24, July 1947