Biographical Sketch

GUSTAV BERGER

Gustav Berger started his career as an actor in Warsaw, Poland.

When he played a part in the world renowned "Wilner Troupe" the famous poet and theatre critic Moishe Broderson said of him: "a new face and a rising star" on the Jewish stage.

Gustav Berger appeared in such movies as the "Dybbuk," "A Brievele der Nymen", God, Man and The Devil" and in many others.

In 1936 he made his first appearance in the Parkway theatre in Brooklyn where the critics received him with great warmth for his acting and singing.

Maurice Schwartz saw him as the male lead in "Johnny Belinda" and persuaded him to join the Yiddish Art Theatre Company where he was offered a leading role in "Family Carnovsky," but one week before the opening of the show Gustav Berger was compelled to leave, because Uncle Sam called him for the United States Army.

PHOTO BY SHOLOM RUBENSTEIN, QUE RECORDINGS, N.Y.

After the war he rejoined the Yiddish Art Theatre where he remained till it closed its doors.

Among the characters he created there was "Kaiser Wilhelm" in Dr. Hertz, "Antonio" in Shylock and his daughter, "The Matchmaker" in Hershul Gisopolier, etc.

In America he was the star in such films as: "The Living Orphan," "God, Man and the Devil," etc.

His radio program, "Mazel-Tov Society" is rated as one of the best and most interesting programs on the air.

More recently Mr. Berger has made personal appearances in Yiddish as well as in English.

His program consists of Jewish folklore humor, and original interpretations of the Jewish folklore.

In 1953-1954 he was invited by Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, to render a series of readings starting with the Jewish classics down to the contemporary writers and poets.
INTRODUCTION (Not on Record)

Myself, I am, as I’ve told you, a Drahzener, from Drahzma that is, a little town in Podolier Gubernya, a very little town. Nowadays, Drahzma is already more or less a city, with a railroad, with a station, with a station-house... When Drahzma became a station, the whole world envied us. A small thing a railroad! They thought it would be wonderful, a source of income from which one could coin many a golden coin and be happy! Jews gathered together out of the little villages into our city. House-owners set themselves to rebuilding the houses, erecting new stores; the meat-tax was raised; we began thinking about a new shochet (slaughterer), about a new synagogue, and about appropriating fields to widen the cemetery - in short, it was “a great day for the Jews”. Oh it was something! A railroad, a station, a station house! The wagon drivers even objected at first, they were very unhappy at the development, but who asks them? Tracks were laid out, cars brought up, a station house erected, a bell hung up, and a board painted to read: STATION DRAHMA - so talk to the wall!

When the railroad began to run, my misus asks me, “what are you planning to do, Joasahleh?" (Jonah, they call me). "What shall I do?", I say, “what everybody’s doing. All the Jews of Drahzma are hanging around the railroad, so I’ll also hang around the railroad!"

So I took my stick and went out to the station and became, with God’s help, a “caretaker-in-charge”. What does that mean, a “caretaker-in-charge”? A caretaker-in-charge means: someone is selling a wagon-load of crops and has to have the wagon-load of crops loaded and dispatched, so therefore they established the job of caretaker-in-charge. But since nearly all the Jews of Drahzma have become caretakers-in-charge, it isn’t good. We tire ourselves out; we hang around. Occasionally one buys from the guy a sack of produce and manages to sell it.

So either one loses or one makes something. And sometimes one manages to squeeze a little brokerage business on the side. Anything that’s possible - this - that - It’s bad... there isn’t anything to do. Oh, there didn’t used to be anything to do either? But at least there wasn’t any railroad and the distress, how do you say it, wasn’t so bad. What good has it been for us, the station, and the station-house and the bell, and the whole train-rust?
“And a good year to you, too,” I say to him, also in German and a little in Yiddish and the rest with my hands. And I ask him from where he’s travelling and so he says to me: do I perhaps know of any decent quarters, of a “lodging” for him?

“Oh, what a shame that we have no inn. But even if there was an inn, I’d steer him home to my house. He’s a promising looking German, we could earn something from him.” And then a thought flicks through my mind! “Fool! is it written in the sky that there is no hotel? So let it be that your house is the hotel.” And so I say to him, a little in Yiddish, a little in German, and the rest I make with my hands, I say:

“If Mein Herr wishes, let him call a wagon-driver and I will lead on to the very best inn... ‘lodgings’, that is... first class!”

Hearing these words from me, the German becomes filled with joy and says to me, with his hand covering his mouth: “Do they have what to eat? Food?”

“Fool!” he says to me, his eyes full of happiness. He has come all lit up and his whole face shines like the sun. “A smart German,” I think to myself and without much ado, I hire a wagon and conduct him home to my house.

Arrived home, I quickly relate everything to my wife; that God has sent us a guest, a German, quite an article. But does a woman understand anything! She starts berating me because I’ve come at such a bad time, just when the house is being cleaned: “What kind of visitors, what kind of guests, suddenly, in the middle of everything?”

“Woman... don’t...,” I say to her, “don’t speak in our language because the gentleman understands German.” Does she hear me at all in the midst of her housecleaning? She turns right around and starts grumbling. She is grumbling and I and the German are standing near the door, neither here nor there.

Finally, with great trouble, I am barely able to make her understand that this is no freeloader guest, that this is for money, that we can even make something from him... a bone to lick. But that’s not all.

When she’s good and convinced already, she says to me: “Where can I have him lie down? On the ground?”

“Quiet!”, I say to her, “Foolish woman, I’m telling you not to talk because the gentleman understands every word.” Only then did she first understand and so we turned over to him our bedroom and in the wink of an eye my wife was heating the samovar and had set supper cooking.

At first, when my German saw the bedroom, his nose turned up a little bit as though to say ‘it could be a little better’, but what can a German really know! Once the samovar had been brought in, and the tea poured out and he had taken out a nice flasck of rum and had a schnapp (and a little schnapp for me), then everything was all right. He stretched out near all his luggage, as though in his father’s vine-garden, and we became real friends.

After the tea, I have a conversation with him, on this, on that. What is he doing here? What does he deal in? Does he need to buy...
anything? To sell anything! It turns out that as far as needing, he needs nothing. Some kind of machines have to come through... what do I know... a crazy business! And during all this he keeps taking peaks in the oven and asking all the time if the food is ready yet.

"Apparently", I say to him, "Mr. Daitsch, you put great importance on eating!" He answers me with some kind of double-talk, but then, does a German understand what you say to him?

And so it went until the table was prepared and supper served - a wonderful soup, with a whole chicken and dumplings (dumplings) and with barley and carrots and with turnips and with... and with... with (My wife, if she only wants to, she can!).

"Blessings on those who sit at the table", I say to him and he answers me not even half a word. He attacks the food as though after a fast-day. "Blessings on those who sit at the table and a hearty appetite and a great hunger!" I say to him again and he sugs in the soup with great relish. He should even answer me the second time, even a thank you - what? What? "A coarse person, I think to myself, "and a great glutton."

Finally, he's eaten up, smoked a big pipeful, and he sits and smiles. I see that my German is looking around on all sides, apparently looking for a place to rest his head, that his eyes are closing, that he's thinking about sleep. So I give a wink to my missus, "Where shall we make his bed?"

And my missus says to me: "What do you mean, where? Why in my bed, of course!" And she wastes no time but goes and starts making up the bed, re-arranging the bedding the way it really ought to be... (My wife, if she wants to, she can).

I give a look and my German is somehow not very looking. He isn't pleased that the festivities are flying because he crinkles his nose and starts sneezing as though his life were endangered. So I say to him, "Hurry you live long and grow, Mr. Daitsch!" Do you think he even answers me with a thanks? Who? "A coarse person and a wild man", My wife has made him a soft bed as high as the ceiling! It's worthy for the Tzar to sleep on... (My wife, if she only wants to, she can!).

A really comfortable "chaise-longue", and so we bid him a fine good night and go to sleep.

At first, as we're lying down to sleep, I hear that my German is sleeping, God bless him, very well; snores with a wild voice, hisses like a locomotive, whistles and gurgles like a slaughtered ox. And suddenly he gets up and sighs, and groans, and grunts, and scratches himself, and spits, and mumbles, and turns over on the other side and gives a little snore and a hiss and a whistle and a gurgle and gets up again with a groan and with an "oy" and with a grunt and with scratching and with spitting and with mumbling. And thus several times, until he springs up from the bed and I hear the bedding flying to the floor, one cushion after the next, with a terrible anger and crazy wild words: "The devil! Sacramento! Donnerr-wetter!!!"

I run over and look through a crack in the door.

--My German is standing on the ground, stark naked, throwing the bedding off the bed, spitting in disgust and cursing in his language, you should be spared such things.

"What's the matter, Mr. Daitsch", I say, and open the door. He becomes full of murder and falls on me with his fists, wants to trample me, grabs me by a hand, leads me to the window and shows me how he's been bitten to death, drives me out, and closes the door. "A crazy
"How can it be? It's new to me!", my misus says; "just recently for Passover, I cleaned the bedclothing and scoured the bed with kerosene."

In the morning, I thought my German would be angry and run far, far away from us, but—what? Again "Gut Morgen", again smiling, and again puffing on his pipe, and again asking food to be prepared and meanwhile, with the tea, asking for soft-boiled eggs, cakes...how many eggs, do you think? Nearly ten! And before eating, he took a good schnapp and a little schnappal for me, and he was really living!

Came the night, once again the same game: first he sneered, whistled, hissed and gurgled, and then he groaned, "oyed", grunted, scratched himself, spit, and mumbled, and got up and threw down all the bedding and spit in disgust and threatened and swore in his language: "The devil with it! Sacra-mento!! Donner- Vetterrr!!" And after getting up in the morning — again "Gut Morgen", again puffing on the pipe, and again smiling, and again eating, and again a schnapp, and a little schnappal for me — and so it went, several days in a row. Until the time came when the machines had, Thank God, come through, and it was necessary for him to be on his way.

When the time came for him to be on his way and the German set himself to packing for travel, he says to me I should give him an accounting. I say: "What do we have to figure out, here, Herr Deitsch. It's an easy figure. I have exactly a twenty-fiver coming to me."

His eyes open wide as though to say, "What? I don't understand." So I say to him in German: "You will kindly pay a twenty-fiver... twenty five roubles, that is, and I show him on my fingers ten and ten and five. Do you think he's overwhelmed? Not in the least! He puts on his pipe and smiles and says to me that he would just like to know why he has to pay a twenty-fiver. And he takes a pencil and a piece of paper and asks me to enumerate each item separately.

"You are really a wise man, a German", I think to myself, "but I have more sense in the soles of my feet than you have in your head. Write down, "I say to him, "If you'll be so good, Herr Deitsch, for the inn, lodging, that is... six days...six times one and one half...is nine roubles. Six times two is twelve sawmarks...is ninety kopecks. Six times nearly ten eggs in the morning and ten eggs at night...is one hundred twenty...twice sixty eggs, at sixty per rouble...is two roubles. Six soups, six chickens...at five gulden a chicken, not to mention barley, carrots, dumplings, noodles, onions, this, that — let's say six roubles is a good figure. Six nights — six lamps — sixty kopecks. Schnappes, you had your own — two roubles. Tea and sugar you didn't have — one rouble; that makes three roubles. You didn't ask for any wine — one rouble; that makes four roubles. There wasn't any beer — sixty kopecks; there alone you have nearly a total of five roubles, but in order to have round numbers, write down five-fifty."

"Well, Mr. Deitsch," I say to him, "very sincerely, doesn't that make at least a twenty-fiver?" And do you think he answered me, even with a crooked word? God forbid. He putted on his pipe, smiled, took out a twenty-fiver and threw it down as if it were 3 roubles, he bade us a very nice farewell and he left on the train.

"What do you say, my wife, to a German like that?"
"God should send us a German like that every week and we'd really be all right."

The German had gone away. Three days hadn't passed when along comes the postman and hands me a letter but asks me first to pay fourteen kopecks. What's this fourteen kopecks? They forget, he tells me, to put a stamp on. I paid the fourteen kopecks and opened the letter -- it's written in German and I don't understand a word.

I start carrying the letter around, to this one, to that one; no one can read any German. What a catastrophe! I had nearly run out of everyone in the town when I finally found a proprietor of an apothecary shop who could read German. He read the letter over and interpreted for me that it came from a German and that it thanked me for the wonderfull, restful lodgings he had had with us and for our hospitality and warm-heartedness which he would never forget...

"If that's how you feel, then all right," I think to myself, "very nice. As long as you're satisfied, then I'm happy." And to my missus, I say, "What do you think of that German, God bless Him? No little fool!"

"God should send us every week," she says, "one just like this and we'd really be all right."

Another week goes by and I'm coming from the station-house when my wife meets me, carrying a letter, and tells me that the postman made her pay twenty-eight kopecks.

I open the letter - again in German. I run to my apothecary and ask him if he'll please read over the letter. He reads to me that the same German has just crossed the border and since he's travelling home to his fatherland, he thanks me very much for the wonderfull, restful lodgings he had had with us and for our hospitality and our warm-heartedness for which he will never forget.

"My troubles on his head," I think to myself and come home.

Another month goes by, another two months - no more letters, an end! I had almost begun to forget the German. Suddenly I get from the railroad a notice of twenty-five rouble parcel. "What kind of parcel worth twenty-five roubles?" I think and think and break my head and my missus sits and beats her brains and we can't think of anything at all. A thought then comes to me: Since I have friends in America, would this perhaps be some kind of gift, a steamship ticket or a lottery ticket? I waste no time and come to the railroad to take out the parcel.

They say to me will I please pay two roubles, twenty four kopecks and they will give me the parcel. No help for it, I have to get two roubles, twenty four kopecks, and pay it, and take out the parcel. I take out the parcel, a very nice box, well wrapped, and I come running home and start unpacking it, and doesn't there fall from the package a portrait? We give a look at the portrait - just what I've dreamed about this night and that night for a whole year! It's his, the German, that ne'er-do-well, with the long neck and with the high head and with the pipe in his mouth!

Attached to the portrait is a letter, in German as usual, again the same story: he thanks us for the lodging and for our hospitality and warm-heartedness which he will for ever and ever not forget. An irritating German! Be should burn! You can picture for yourself what wishes and blessings we both wished on him during this, which if even half of them come true, God in Heaven!
Several more months went by — an end, no more German! Thank God, rid of a worthless burden, into the ground with him! I was simply delighted! ... You think it's finished? Near me out, it's not the end yet.

Some time ago there comes to me a despatch saying that I should, for God's sake, get up and go to Odessa and as quickly as possible, to some man, a merchant by the name of Gorgelstein. He is staying at the Hotel "Victoria" and needs me very urgently in regard to some business. "Odessa! Gorgelstein! Hotel Victoria! Business" my wife asks me, "What does it all mean?"

So my wife starts in to convince me to go. "Why question it," she says, "Maybe it's really an urgent business. Maybe crops...maybe a commission..."

But it's easy to say -- travel to Odessa! A trip to Odessa means expenses. But since it's a business matter, do you debate? In short, I manage to get a few roubles, to get myself on the train and I travel to Odessa. In Odessa, I start asking around, where is the Hotel Victoria. I finally asked my way to the Hotel Victoria.

"Do you have here," I ask, "one Gorgelstein?" There is one, they tell me but right now he's not in his room, I should return ten o'clock that night. I come ten o'clock at night - no Gorgelstein. I should come ten o'clock in the morning and I'll find him. I come ten o'clock in the morning, where is Gorgelstein? He's not there, Gorgelstein.

He was just there and asked please that when the Jew from Drashma comes, they should ask him to come either at three in the afternoon or ten at night. I come three in the afternoon, I come ten at night -- no Gorgelstein!

What good is it? I wasted in Odessa six days and six nights, ate troubles and slept plagues until finally with great stress and fatigue I was finished waiting for Gorgelstein.

This Gorgelstein looked like a respectable man, with a nice black beard; he greeted me very nicely, asked me to sit down. "Do you are," he says to me half in Yiddish, half in German, "the Jew from Drashma?"

"That's me," I say, "the Jew from Drashma. So what is it?"

"At your home, a year ago last winter, a German had lodgings?"

"At my home," I say. "What is it, then?"

"Nothing," he says; "But that German is a partner of mine in the machinery business. I have a letter from him from London. He writes me that you'll be here to see me in Odessa and that I should, without fail give you from him a very friendly regards and thank you for your wonderful, restful lodgings which he had in your home and for your hospitality and warm-heartedness and your earnest sincere treatment which he can in no case, absolutely never, never forget, as long as he lives..."

A misfortune has settled on me. And I'm planning, God willing, after the Holidays, if God will give me the strength, to move somewhere from Drashma, to another town somewhere; to run away wherever my eyes carry me; to distant regions - only to get rid of that no-good, that German, cursed be his name and his memory!
A STORY ABOUT A GREENHORN

BY SHLOM ALICHEIM

Tr. Isaiah Sheffer

You say America is a land of business—nevermind. It has to be that way. But after all, marrying and selling one’s self for business—that’s already, excuse me, something piggyback. I’m not preaching any moral, but I tell you it’s a fact, that ninety-nine percent of the greenhorns here marry for the sake of business. It bothers me, and when I see such a greenhorn, he doesn’t get away with it. Leave it to me; I’ll tell you a nice story.

One time, I’m sitting in my office (going through the mail,) when in comes a greenhorn, still quite a young boy. And with him a little wifey. What shall I say?—Blood and milk. As beautiful as the day and fresh as an apple just off the tree. After coming in, he says to me, “How do you do! Are you Mister Baraban, the business-broker?”

“Sit down! What’s on your mind?” And he opens up his heart to me and tells me a whole story, etcetera, etcetera; how he’s a boy just ten years in this country, a “knee-pants” make by trade, and there fell in love with this young girl. She was a working girl who had saved up a thousand dollars in cash, and he married her, and he’s looking for a business so they should be able to make a living and not have to work in the shop, because he has, (it shouldn’t happen to you,) a rheumatism, (let it stay with him), etcetera.

I look at the little wifey and I say to him: "And what kind of business would you like to go into?"

He answers me, "He would like to open up a stationery.

And he gives me to understand that in a stationery, "she" would be able to come and help. You understand a greenhorn? Not enough that he found himself a woman, an engross for the holidays so beautiful; and not enough that she brings him a thousand dollars in cash, but he is determined that she should work for him and he should sit around with his friends, playing pinchile and so forth— I know my people!

I think to myself: "Dammed if you’ll have from me a stationery! I can better agree that you should like a dog in a laundry. From me you’ll become a laundryman!"

"How come a laundry occurred to me? Because I had just had in my hands laundry to sell. And so I say to my greenhorn: "Why do you need," I say, "to bother with a stationery store eighteen hours out of twenty four, looking out in case a schoolboy should come by and buy a penny’s worth of candy? Why not leave it to me?" I’ll give you a nicer business, a laundry in the Bronx; you’ll work regular hours and live like a King!" And I take a pencil and give him a figure-out, that after all expenses, rent and shirt-ironer and family-ironer and delivery-boy and laundry bills and so forth, there remains for him clear thirty odd dollars a week-- Does one need anything better?

"What would it cost?"

I say: "A thousand dollars would be a bargain, but leave it to me, I’ll get it for you for eight hundred. You’ll pay," I say, "the few dollars, close your eyes, take the key, and you’re all right. Meanwhile," I say, "be well and come back in around three days, because now I have no time—and goodbye!"

And myself, I went up to my laundryman and gave him a small-toy, telling him that God had sent me a fish, a greenhorn, and that he now has a chance; if he’s a man, to get rid of the laundry and make some money; he should know what he has to do, and so forth...
Well the thief understood what I mean, and says to me: "Just bring him, the fish, and it'll be all right..."

In three days around, my greenhorn is there, he's brought a deposit, and install him there with his wife for a week's trial, as is the custom. And my laundryman had no doubt seen to it that the trial week should appear all right, and even a little bit on the other side of all right -- and so the business was settled. The greenhorn counted out the few dollars, the laundryman gave him the books and the key; I took my commission, from both sides actually, and so forth. --Mister Baraban, Business Broker knows what he has to do, and, how do you say it, finita la commedia.

Oh yeah! That's what you say. For my part, the comedy is just beginning. Because when everything was all settled etc., etc., there first burned in me a fire toward the greenhorn, why it comes to him, the so-and-so, a little shelled egg right into his mouth; such a little wife, a thousand dollars in cash, and a ready-made business, without headaches. We have to buy the laundry back from him at half price and give it back to the previous laundryman. How! For such things, I am then Mister Baraban, Business-Broker. With me, there is no thing which cannot be accomplished. So I went exactly opposite the laundry of the corner of the second street and bargained with the agent for a room, slipped him a ten-dollar bill for a deposit, and hung a sign in the window:

"LAUNDRY OPENING HERE"

Of course, two days don't go by, but my greenhorn is here, with an excited head: The meaning of it! He is ruined!

"What's the trouble?"

He tells me about the misfortune. Someone evil has rented a story exactly opposite him and is opening a laundry!

"So, what do you want, greenhorn?"

He wants me to find him a customer for the laundry and he'll thank me in the finest way and will always pray to God for me, and so on and so forth. I calm him down and tell him that one doesn't find a customer so easily. But he should leave it to me, I'll try my best. Meanwhile he should go home and come back in three days, because right now I'm buried in business, etcetera, and—goodbye!

And myself I send a message to my old laundryman and tell him so and so: Now you have a chance to buy back your laundry from the greenhorn for half price.

He says, "What's that to you! Leave it to me. Am I not Mister Baraban, Business-Broker?"

He says: "All right."

I say: "Will I get a commission?"

He says, "All right."

I say, "I must have for this a hundred."

He says, "All right", And so forth.

Meanwhile, the three days go by, my greenhorn is here with the little wife. The wife has become a little paler, but she's still very nice looking, like the sun.

"What's new?"

"What could be new," I say, "you have to thank God that I have just barely been able to find a customer for your laundry." But what, then? "You will have to," I say, "lost money."

"How much"
"Don't ask," I say, "how much you're losing, but ask how much you're gaining; because", I say, "as much as you're getting, it's like found money. You're dealing," I say, "with American competition. "They can," I say, "drive you into such expenses that you'll have to," I say, "get up in the middle of the night and run away with one shirt."

What do you think, I put such terror into them that they took half of what they had put in and paid my commission also, because I don't work for nothing and — no more laundry!

But hold on. You're still not finished. If you have a ten dollars to the agent and hung out a sign for a laundry. So the question asks itself: Why should I let ten dollars go down the wind just like that? Does Mister Barnabas, Business-Broker have stolen money, or what? That's one thing. And secondly, the greenhorn is still burning my heart and it irritates me: the so-and-so still has several hundred dollars in his pocket and a little wife at his side — pure gold! Where does he deserve this? Mister Baraban, the biggest business broker of the East Side has to have a wife, ugly and a Xantype besides, and this greenhorn — does God have to send him such a cutie, you know, a real charmer — heh, my hair loses everything on doctor bills!

So I waste no time and write him a postal card, he should come to me for an appointment at such and such a time, I have business with him. He doesn't wait to be asked and comes at the appointed time and what's more, with her, with the little wife. I sit them down, my dear guests, and tell them a story, and thus and thus: "You don't know what a trick that thief, that old laundryman, played on you — your hair would stand on end!"

"What, for instance"

"What, for instance," I say, "It was he who rented the store opposite you and hung out a sign for a laundry, in order" I say, to scare you so you should give him back his laundry for half price."

Hearing this story, the two people became inflamed, and especially the wife. Her two eyes burnt like coal! "IsActive," I say, "that you should have a reckoning with him, with the thief, that he should remember you!"

"What can we do to get back at him?"

"Leave it to me," I say, "and I'll take care of him so that with me, he won't even look forward to the awakening of the dead!" "And you," I say, "will benefit from this. You'll have! I say, "a better business than before!"

They look at me like doves, as they say, "From your mouth into God's ear! And may you live long," and so forth. And I set before them a plan: Do they have to buy a strange business and pay someone else from night until morning? Why don't I go to my own landlord and rent them the same store which that thief had supposed to rent, and I'll fix them up for about three-four hundred dollars a laundry exactly opposite his laundry and be set up in competition with him. Whatever he takes, I'll take cheaper and I'll make him move in three weeks or my name isn't Barnabas!"
MISTER GREEN HAS A JOB

By SHLOM ALEICHIM
Tr. Isaiah Sheffer

--How do you do, Mister Sholom Aleichem? I don't know whether you know me? I'm a little bit related to you, a second or a third... that is, not with you, but with your Tevya the Dairyman and his relative Menachen Mendel of Vehupitz...oh! Oh yes! It interests you! You've stopped! Stay a little while with me here on the sidewalk and we'll chat a little bit about America, what a golden land it is. And not just about America, but about her business, how one is ragged, but with richness and with honor, until God sends along the right job; and if God helps one goes to work on the right job, there is hope that in time one can work oneself up, to be well-off, to grow into a Jacob Schiff, a Nathan Straus, (or even a Harry Fischel) -- in one word -- to be all right...

At present I still can't say about myself that I'm all right, but a job, thanks to the Almighty, I have already, and the wonderful thing with this job is that I got it myself, with my own smartness. But I see that you want to know...It interests you...Who is the individual who is speaking to you? If I tell you that this is Mister Green speaking, you will think: Green? Yellow? Blue? It's as good as nothing. Here I'm called Green, over there I was called Greenberg. From where? From Osslsa? From Osslsa. From Yehupitz. From Kaslilvke, from Toplick, from Sipola, Uman, Berditchev -- in short, from those kind of places.

And I did what all Jews did: ran around, brokered a little, until the time came that we were driven out and found ourselves re-incarnated here, in Columbus' land. And we ate until we had eaten out our last shirt, then became begrimed in another way and went and did all kinds of hard labor -- things didn't go well!

Until there came the first day of the month of Elul. And when the first day of the month of Elul came, I saw in the papers how they advertise for cantors, synagogues, minyans. In the stores I saw they had set out prayer books, holiday prayer books, shofars, prayer shawls; and the people, I saw, begin to smile towards the Almighty, begin to cater to God for the sake of business. So I did some thinking and said to myself: "Mister Green, how long are you going to be a greenhorn? You make something out of the first of Elul and the Ten Days of Penitence also!"
Absorbed, as your Teyva says, in these thoughts and ideas, I wandered into a place of worship. The First Day of the month of Elul, the congregation is praying, they are saying "God is My Light". They finished praying and someone calls out: "And who will give us a blow?"

"A blow! Let me!"

You will ask, how do I come to give a blow? The story is like this. A shofar-blower in the old country I actually was not. My father neither. My father's father also not. But as little rascally boys, when the first day of the Month of Elul came and we set eyes on a shofar, we blew and blew for fun until the caretaker threw water over us and drove us out of the synagogue. In short - I'm familiar with the work, and how do you say: "If people say he can do it, why argue?"

Well, what do you think? I take the shofar in my hand and go out with a Tekiah-Shevurah-Teruah (tr. note: these are the different trumpet calls on the shofar) and then I let go with a Great Tekiah that they could hear, without exaggeration, at the Brooklyn Bridge! Bearing such blowing, they call me over: "Where is a young man from?"

So I say: "What's the difference?"

So they say: "Perhaps you'd like to be our shofar-blower for the Holy Days? Our shofar-blower died."

"If I'm able to make a living from it," I say, "then why not."

"Making a living from blowing alone is difficult," they say, "unless you were to do something else in addition."

"What, for instance," I say, "what else shall I do? Be a driver in addition! A garbageman or a street-cleaner?"

So they say: "Since you're a blower, a shofar-blower that is, then we can't expect such mental work from you. The one thing we can give you, they say, "is a chance to blow shofar in a public synagogue."

So this goes into my head and I begin to think: If I have a chance to blow in a synagogue, I can also have a chance to blow in two synagogues. And why not in three synagogues.

And I went downtown, from one synagogue to another, from one minyan to another, everywhere made inquiry, demonstrated my art in Tekiah-Shevurah-Teruah, had great success, because I, when I blow, people come running from all the synagogues. My blowing was heard by Judges, Congressmen, Assemblymen, and everyone said: Wonderful!

You can understand that the first year I had only one synagogue and two minyans. The second year -- three synagogues and five minyanim. This year I have prospects for, God willing, up to a dozen minyans, and I'll be able to make a nice few dollars. Oh, how can a man take care of so much business? Don't ask. This is America, in this country you help yourself out. In one place, my Tekias came a little earlier, in another place a little later, in another place still later. "I try my best," that the public should be satisfied, because if perseverance is the time, I'd lose both my job and my reputation.

You wonder, Mister Sholom Aleichem, why I use more English words than Yiddish? But this is because of the children. They're already real Americans and don't want to speak a word of Yiddish at home! You should see my boys, you'd never in your life say that these are Jewish children. And me, myself, if I meet me after the High Holy Days, you won't recognize me either. With me, when it gets to be a short time before the first day of Elul, I take off my suit, let my beard grow, take on an "old country" look; and as soon as the Holy Days are over, I take a shave, put on my hat, and become a gentleman, - what isn't done in America for the sake of business?

I see that you, Mister, you would like to write about me in the papers; you've already Americanized, and you give our little book -- nevertheless, do it in good health! I'll even thank you because for me it will be an advertisement. But just as I'll even ask you please to put in my address: "Mister Green, Cherry Street, New York City, please."

I hope we'll meet sometime uptown. Meanwhile, so good-bye!