

The following journal was donated to the Institute of Jewish Culture by a survivor who, returning to his native Budapest in 1945, discovered it among the debris of his former home. The tattered leather-bound notebook was badly mildewed from a prolonged and somewhat undignified stay between the window and a leaky pipe. Nevertheless, parts of it remain legible, revealing the events of an intern, a Dr. Ignatz Frankenthal, this survivor's greatgrandfather.

27 April 1839

My first day at St. Theresa's. The hospital is a scant two blocks from the town square, and from my office I can observe the draymen hanging their pails under the frames and hitching the feedbags under their horses' eager mouths. I have always loved this city — so vibrant, so passionate, and such a contrast to the dreary and commercial Frankfurt.

I feel fortunate for having been

guess to be about forty-five. His solemn face, made more narrow by a neat goatee, and his deep-set, somewhat darting eyes exude the look of a man irritated by life's trivialities.

No sooner did I enter his office than he bade me sit and stated my duties. Though mostly staid, he lightened the conversation with anecdotes about his profession as well as his private practice.

This Dr. Vortek is a man of no small

Tomorrow I meet the patients. I am very excited.

29 April

My first day in the ward. Dr. Vortek introduced me to the nuns. Their bland faces, enswathed in black, smiled officiously, and they floated down the halls in their long habits while tending to the sick in silent attention.

According to the doctor, my own work will average four patients a day. Already I was introduced to some. One, named Anna, I believe — poor thing, she lay moaning in protracted labor. Another, Bela, perennially coughs, his eyes burning in either consumptive fever or rage against a cruel world.

Alas! When I look at these pitiful creatures, I share in their helplessness. Why does G-d create such suffering? I remember — from vague and quaint religious instruction as a child — how the L-rd loves all His creatures. Perhaps, Berthe once joked, He created sickness to provide doctors with insight.

When I made this remark to Dr. Vortek he simply glared at me and walked away. He must think he has a fool for an intern.

30 April

At six a.m. this morning Anna finally delivered. It was a healthy, strapping six-pound boy who bawled the minute he arrived in the world. But his poor mother had quite a battle of it, and she lies in a delirium. I could scarcely make out a word she was

# Reb Eleazar's

## Arm

By CHAYA SARAH CANTOR

accepted to this position. St. Theresa's is one of the finest hospitals in all of Hungary, and usually does not admit Jews. I am to meet today with a Dr. Vortek, the director. Needless to say, I am most nervous, having heard only superlative comments about this man. If all goes well, I might receive enough of a salary to finance my wedding. I am certain that Berthe (*rest of entry illegible*)

28 April

I met Dr. Vortek. His presence certainly matches his reputation. He is a tall, stately individual, whose age I

achievement! His laboratory experiments are the talk of the medical world, even reaching as far as London. When describing his belief in the power of science, he grows ecstatic, like a saint at prayer.

I, the shy young intern, virtually cowered in my seat like a schoolboy, which most likely made him feel all the more omnipotent. Nevertheless, he took me under his tutelage, and apparently he approves of me. Time will tell, I suppose. Unfortunately, I remain timid on the subject of funds. But I must inform Berthe.



The man clutched his left arm.

saying, but I heard reminiscences about her little village, and her wedding day.

Thoughts of this bring me to Berthe, and I worry for her. Heaven forbid that she have as much difficulty as this poor woman bearing children. But I must have faith in medical science.

Anna's husband arrived, and he has scarcely left her bedside. In his wife's almost unintelligible dialect, which a nun ended up translating for me, he

asked for a priest. I have often marveled at how these pious, rural folk stubbornly cling to their rituals. They have an almost magical way of thinking.

I tried to comfort the poor man, explaining how we must have hope, though Dr. Vortek, passing by, simply glanced at him with a trace of scorn.

4 May

Anna is finally better, though very

weak. I can't believe that I managed to bring down the fever.

Dr. Vortek complimented me, as did some of the nuns. He said I am a born physician and (*rest of paragraph illegible*)

I must approach him about the stipend. Saturday I have been invited for tea, so perhaps by then I can muster up the courage.

8 May

Wonderful news. Dr. Vortek agreed to the stipend. Now I need not postpone the wedding. Berthe will be thrilled.

Anna went home today with her baby. I had to laugh; I think she wanted to make me godfather. How would her priest feel — a Jew supervising her child's upbringing? The very idea that she might consider me should indicate how these artificial barriers of religion are breaking down at last.

I mentioned this over tea with Dr. Vortek, though with trepidation. After all, I still consider this a somewhat ticklish subject.

To my surprise he said nothing. He sipped his tea and commented how he had worked extensively with Jewish doctors. He himself has some of our blood in him — a grandmother, I believe — and praised our medical competency.

He turned to me with those deep-set, yet murky, eyes, which turned glassy and opaque under the sunlight. He announced, smiling, "We are lucky to live in an age, Ignatz, when the human mind has triumphed over baseness. The old days of ignorance are gone. Prejudice and superstition are yielding to science and reason. Soon, very soon, my friend, we shall see a higher consciousness dawning."

I smiled back, though for some reason memories of Bela, wringing his



wasted hands and raising them in despair, haunted me.

*(The next entries were ruined. The journal picks up here.)*

24 June

Bela died this morning — my first death. I thank G-d he is finally out of his misery. While waiting for Father Horthy to arrive and administer the final rites, I held the patient's hand as he choked on his blood.

Apparently I am still quite soft, for I couldn't fight the tears. I must have faith in Dr. Vortek's words — that some day science will heal our afflicted.

25 June

I received a most touching letter from Berthe. She misses me terribly. The wedding is set — early September. I had aimed for a later date, but her parents insisted that it not be on Rosh Hashanah. I laughed at this sudden breach of modernity. But certain traditions must be upheld, I guess.

27 June

I watched Dr. Vortek during an operation. With hands like a master artist he sliced an incision into the flesh, and within an hour's time removed the diseased organ. The patient took it manfully — he only writhed once, but was restrained.

I pray that someday I can be just like Dr. Vortek.

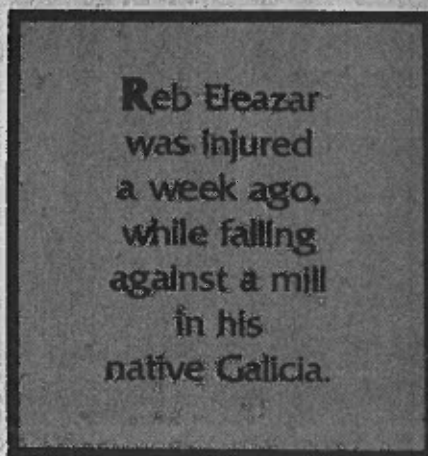
30 June

A man was brought in today — I should say dragged in, for he was supported by his wife on one side and wagon driver, in a dusty jacket and breeches, on the other.

The man clutched his left arm, which oozed clots of blood through his faded workshirt, and his gooseberry green eyes were glazed in misery. He babbled something to his wife, then turned to me in anxious appeal.

Nuns and other patients circled around him, and several guided him to a chair. Although people had been waiting to see me since early that morning, this man's injury warranted immediate attention.

I had him put to bed, and while he was being undressed I posed several questions. He answered in Yiddish, which I understood because my grandparents spoke it. The man was a fellow Jew, though everything about



him — the wispy red-blond beard extending below the chest, the matching curls under his skullcap, which he refuses to remove, and those gooseberry eyes flashing urgently — suggested a Biblical painting in one of our illustrious museums.

I conversed with him in German and gleaned information. Apparently this Reb Eleazar was injured a week ago, while falling against a mill in his native Galicia.

I examined the arm. What a horrible thing it was — mutilated, with scraps of flesh revealing blood-red muscle. A sizable area near the forearm was discolored and extending dangerously near the elbow.

"Why wasn't this treated sooner?" I demanded.

The wagon driver approached me timidly. "It was, sir," he explained. "The doctor at home rubbed it with

grease and bandaged it. Six days later my brother-in-law began complaining that his arm was hurting. The next day it swelled up fiercely, and he fainted. My sister and I finally brought him here."

"Ach!" I grunted. "Those village doctors." Like Dr. Vortek, I feel only contempt for the quackery that passes for medicine in those places.

Just then his wife wailed, while her brother tried futilely to calm her down.

I peeled off the dirty bandage, which clung to the raw flesh like skin to a grape. Eleazar clenched his crooked teeth, while the gooseberry eyes leaked tears.

With a clamor of voices Dr. Vortek entered, followed by a retinue of nuns. He raised his lorgnette and studied the patient and the plebeian pair hovering by the bedside.

He strode to the patient and recoiled a tad too visibly. Ignoring the man's wife and brother-in-law, he quietly examined the injury.

Immediately his expression changed from ennui to horror. "Why, how did this happen?"

I narrated the wagon driver's tale, while my stately superior shook his head and shouted, "Why, that is disgraceful! Leaving a gash unattended for so long. Look at it — why, gangrene is already setting in. This arm must be amputated at once!"

In sudden fury Eleazar shot up, gooseberry eyes a fiery emerald. "No!"

"No?!" the good doctor shouted back, gaping at the patient.

In terror Reb Eleazar wrenched his arm free and clutched it protectively. "No one cuts off my arm. No one! Oy, I knew it was a mistake to come." He glared at his wife accusingly. "Didn't I tell you? Now look what they want to do! Oy, G-d in Heaven!"

His wife, wallowing in shame and complicity, broke into a louder wail.

In spite of the drama I smiled<sup>32</sup> at the mention of G-d, wondering perhaps about the reaction it would elicit<sup>31</sup> from Dr. Vortek.

The latter frowned and flung the lorgnette from his neck. "Why, this is absurd! Of course it must be cut off. Good glory, man, do you want to lose your life instead of your arm? Show some common sense!"

But the redhead cradled his battered limb, like a girl playing with a doll. "No! Never! Better I should die than lose my arm!"

In a huff the doctor marched out, nuns trailing dutifully behind. At the doorway he spun around and spat, "I am a busy man, sir. I do not waste time on trivial sentiment. That arm shall have to go — and I hope you'll come to your senses before it's too late."

Only after he left did the injured man let his arm drop. I could swear I detected a sigh of relief, as if some evil spirit had been driven out.

#### 1 July

At dawn I visited the newcomer. His wife lay dozing in her chair, dressed in the garments of the previous day, which indicated that she had stayed all night. Apparently she will not allow the nuns near him.

Eleazar opened his eyes, forever green, and smiled at me. Perhaps he feels we are kindred spirits. Or perhaps he expects me to take sides in this battle.

I examined the arm. The flesh is still raw and the area near the elbow discolored, though thankfully not black. That would spell disaster. Nevertheless, it is quite swollen up to the shoulder, and I fear that Dr. Vortek may be correct. Who am I to argue with a man of knowledge?

But Reb Eleazar disagrees. Although he let me prod the limb and stoically bore the pain, he pursed his



"Unless it is cut off you will die!"

lips at the mere mention of an operation. His wife too glares at me, her defiance perhaps bolstered by his.

Later that afternoon Dr. Vortek arrived. His eyes glared like polished granite under the heavy brows, but he had not come within four feet of Reb Eleazar when the latter again shot up and barked, "No!"

Dr. Vortek stamped his foot, snorting fiercely. "I said it once, I'll say it again! Your arm is beyond hope. Unless it is cut off you will die!"

"Then I'll die!" Eleazar screamed, alarming the other patients. "Whatever G-d wills, He wills!"

"Stupidity!"

The doctor bolted. He had started to care for a man with an ulcer whose bed was two to the left of Eleazar's, but now that task was left for me.

#### 2 July

Reb Eleazar remains obstinate. He allows me — and only me — to examine the injury; he will not allow Dr. Vortek within ten feet. I half expect him to erect spikes on the floor.

His wife remains by the bed, posting guard. I'll wager she has not slept properly in over four days, and her pretty face is already lined with dark circles. Her brother-in-law brings kosher food, which he obtains from a market in the Jewish section.

I must marvel at this adherence to their laws. In this day and age, how do people cling to the past, with its antiquated ideas of purity and impurity? No wonder the gentiles look down on us. We have done everything to keep ourselves apart, so naturally we generate enmity.



His food is meager, consisting mostly of wilted vegetables and the cheapest cuts of meat. Most of the time salt herring dominates. *Ach*, if only he knew what he was missing! Hungarian cuisine is sublime.

No matter how small the portion, this grizzled Jew never fails to recite a blessing. He is thanking his G-d for the

No matter how small the portion, this grizzled Jew never fails to recite a blessing.

food, which he thinks was provided by some special arrangement.

This afternoon Dr. Vortek entered, as usual, but kept his distance from the bed. He examined the man with the ulcer, then cast a cunning, if not contemptuous, glance, to his left. The proud Reb Eleazar stared back. The two adversaries then parted.

3 July

The patient still refuses. The arm remains stable, but is quite bruised. I have tried applying a new set of bandages.

Reb Eleazar grit his teeth as I peeled off the bloodied layers. I examined the torn ligaments but refrained from offering advice.

Reb Eleazar smiled at me in trust, sensing I wouldn't sacrifice him to the forces of evil. He spoke freely, as if to commune with my soul.

"A nice lad like you," he declared, "will make a fine doctor. G-d should grant you success."

I sighed sympathetically. "We are lucky to live in an age of discovery." Then I brightened. "Do you know that nowadays there are fine prosthetic devices? Why, you can have an artificial arm that would match this one—"

"No!" roared Reb Eleazar.

Silently I changed the bandages. In his mind, as clouded as it was, a living but battered arm was better than something wooden and pretentious.

4 July

Dr. Vortek, standing by the wall, shouted across the room to his opponent.

"You are foolish! Absolutely foolish!"

Hair slightly awry he paced the hallway, raising his face to hurl another remark.

"Do you think I am talking out of pure emotion? I am the voice of reason. I have seen this in actual battle. Soldiers die from such wounds. Suppose you die from yours?"

Reb Eleazar kept his gooseberry eyes riveted to the man with the ulcer, not daring to move them.

"You have a wife!" Dr. Vortek pointed to the woman, groggy from sleepless nights. "You must have children, am I correct?"

"Three," the Jew answered with pride. "May G-d protect them."

"Then how can you abandon them?" Dr. Vortek wrung his hands, reminding me of poor Bela. "With you dead, no one will support them. Do you realize you are taking food from their mouths?"

Eleazar continued watching the man with the ulcer. He finally swiveled his head, lips curling under his beard in reply: "I make little enough with two arms. Do you think I'll bring in more with one?"

"*Ach!*" In defeat Dr. Vortek flounced away.

5 July

Wonderful news. I received an offer to complete my residency near Vienna. Berthe is just as delighted as I. She looks forward to the greater proximity to her parents, and the

charm of Vienna, which makes Budapest pale in comparison.

Reb Eleazar still refuses. As usual, I examine the wound, change the dressing, then leave.

6 July

I went to inform Dr. Vortek of my residency.

I found him near the window, eyes locked onto a carriage in the streets or something else passing him by. I remained standing, respectful, hesitant to interrupt his reverie.

Finally he caught my reflection in the glass and hissed, "Obstinate! Like a mule!"

Immediately I guessed the object of his thoughts, and I quietly answered, "Sir, he simply will not part with that arm."

"Never in my life have I seen anyone that stubborn!" The doctor spun round. "So typical of his sect — insensitive, self-righteous, and appallingly primitive!" He gasped in embarrassment. "Do forgive me, Ignatz."

"That's quite all right," I mumbled. "My family has modernized."

"And little wonder," the doctor

With his right arm he opened a velvet bag and extracted a leather object.

declared. "Why, look at him. Something out of the Middle Ages. With his dirty beard, his long black coat — why, if I were he I'd be mortified!"

He slammed the window shut and hurried to his desk. "He clings to his arm the way he clings to his accursed faith. Even though both things should

have been discarded long ago. Why, they only bring him pain. But there is no reasoning with him. His mind — why, it just isn't rational!"

7 July

What luck! The residency will begin sooner than I expected. I leave next week. Dr. Vortek, somewhat calmer, celebrated with me. (*rest of entry illegible*)

8 July

Our pious patient is still a mule. Not only does he refuse to yield his arm, but he boldly crossed it with the other while I confronted him for the last time.

"Just tell me, please," I finally cried, "why you cling to that arm. Why do you persist in keeping it? Not even the threat of death will make you let it go."

Reb Eleazar looked away, shaken by my attacks. Nevertheless, the arm remained enclosed in its sheath.

"A bloody, battered arm which you're better off without," I pleaded. "Why won't you see the light?"

Deliberately Reb Eleazar loosened his grip. With his right arm he opened a velvet bag and extracted a leather object.

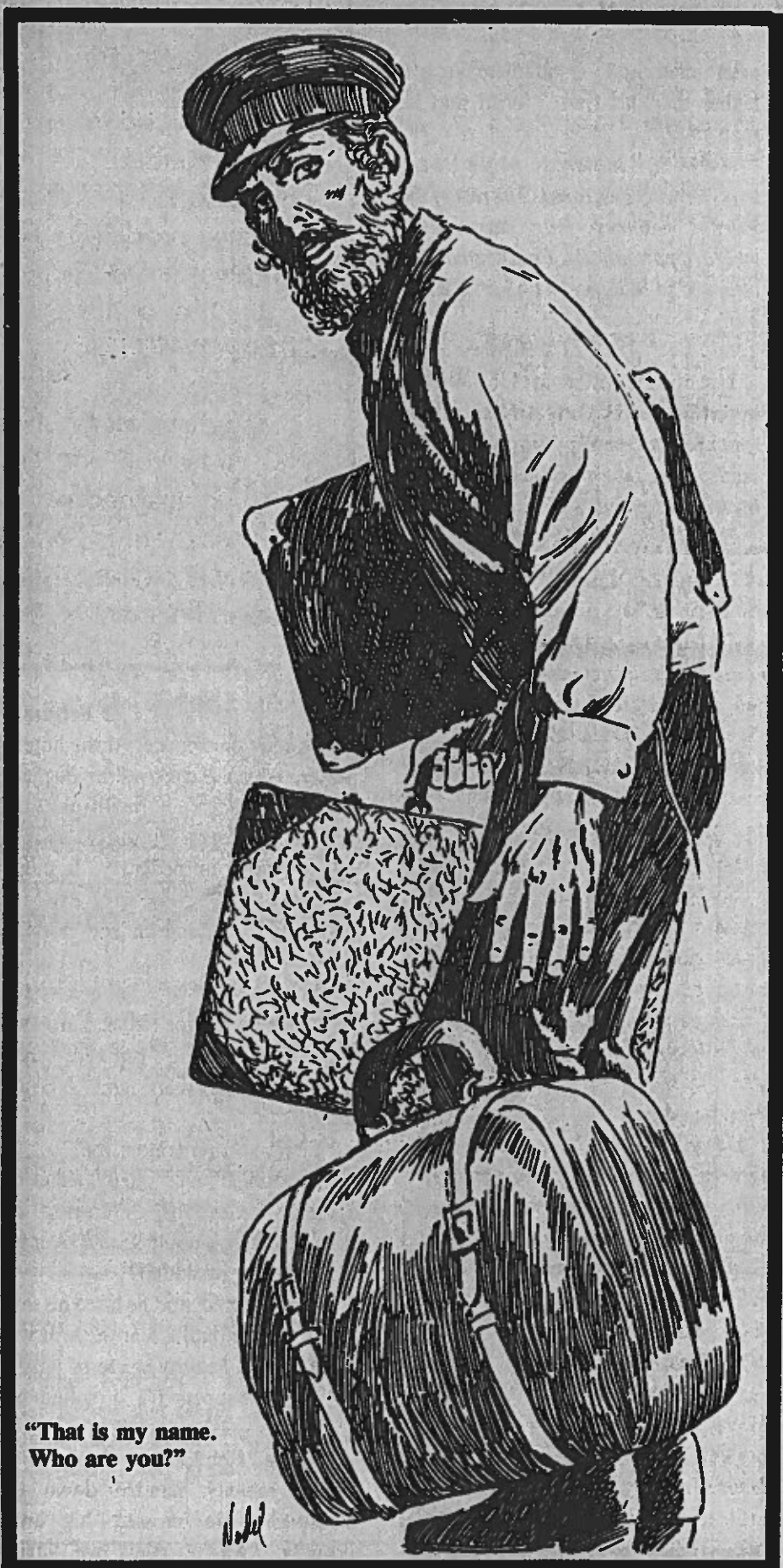
I recognized it at once. A pair of phylacteries — *tefillin*, I believe they are called.

Trembling, the Jew said, "I need my arm for this."

"But can't you wear it on the other, for heaven's sake?" I shouted. "Why do you need this piece of leather at all? For this you would risk your life?"

"Yes," Eleazar answered curtly. "And if I had no left arm I would lay it on my right arm. But for thirty years — since I was bar mitzvah — I have wrapped *tefillin* around my left arm every day. My *tefillin* have guided me in my faith, and as long as I live I shall proclaim my devotion to G-d. Whether or not I die is His will. Explain *that* to your friend, if he can

Adar 5750



"That is my name.  
Who are you?"



even understand — that there is a will higher than his own!" With that he spat.

*(Over a hundred pages were irrecoverably destroyed. The rest of the journal resumes four years later, where apparently Dr. Frankenthal has returned to Budapest with his wife and son.)*

21 February 1843

I sent a courier to Dr. Vortek, informing him of my arrival. I look forward to seeing him again. His medical training and insight proved invaluable to me while in Vienna.

Berthe had trouble putting Josef to bed. The little boy is more excited than either she or I.

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"My tefillin  
have guided me  
in my faith,  
and as long as I live  
I shall proclaim  
my devotion to G-d.  
Whether or not  
I die is His will.  
Explain that  
to your friend,  
if he can  
even understand —  
that there is  
a will higher  
than his own!"

22 February

An odd coincidence. At the hotel & porter, as usual, removed my luggage from the carriage. I normally pay little heed to domestics, but this one caught my attention immediately. It might have been the gooseberry eyes, so sharp and piercing in the hospital ward.

"Reb Eleazar!" I exclaimed.

In amazement the redhead dropped the baggage. He blinked, then mumbled, "That is my name. Who are you?"

"Don't you remember me?"

He studied me warily, like an animal staunchly defending its domain. Then a smile spread over his face. "Dr. Frankenthal?"

We embraced, and he lifted his shirt sleeve. Other than a scar the arm was whole and a healthy shade of pink.

"What happened?" I spluttered. "Why, it's good as new!"

"Herbs," Reb Eleazar explained. "A family remedy, handed down for centuries." He crossed his arms proudly. "Nu? I guess we village

people are just too advanced for you." He added ruefully, "I missed you, though. Where did you go?"

"Vienna," I answered. "And you? When did you leave?"

"Over a month later," said Reb Eleazar. "Each day that foolish doctor came in, urging me to cut my arm off. Each day I said no. Even when he threatened to bring in the police and half the convent, I said no. The arm that lays tefillin places its reliance on simple faith." He grinned. "With a little help from herbs, of course."

24 February

I had tea with Dr. Vortek yesterday. The man is haughty, though his frame is somewhat tired and hunched and his eyes flickered ominously.

His face, more narrow — even hawk-like — twisted into a sort of smile at me, though he quickly let it droop.

I discussed my progress at Vienna, and how I might return to Germany for further scientific research.

"Germany is definitely the place of progress," the doctor remarked.

I mentioned Reb Eleazar, and how his arm, which the doctor and I both took for moribund, was hale and hearty, along with its owner.

To my surprise the doctor's features contorted, turning devilishly red in ancient memory.

"That lout!" he hissed. "Contradicting me with his outmoded ideas. Simple faith. I still don't understand how that arm healed. Some chemical reaction, I suppose. To this day I would still have had it amputated."

He rose, and laughter erupted, piercing the laboratory walls. "But just wait. Reason will triumph over piddly belief, and science will prove me correct. Some day mankind will  
(writing faded)

\$1.50

7"03

# The Jewish Reader

Volume 10, No. 1

March 1980





## TO OUR READERS

This issue's feature story "Reb Eleazar's Arm" represents a bit of a change for *The Jewish Reader*. Instead of taking the usual story form, "Reb Eleazar's Arm" is the diary of an nineteenth-century European doctor who has attempted to assimilate into the secular world. His confrontation with an Orthodox Jew makes for what we believe is interesting, troubling reading.

"Reb Eleazar's Arm" is based on an actual incident. We hope that you will enjoy it, but we also hope you will study the story carefully, as there are some significant lessons to be found in it.

Our cover is dedicated to Purim. Both "Torah Highlights" and "This Month" focus on this joyous holiday.

We are proud to feature the third winner of our Writing Contest. We are grateful for the response to the contest and hope you will continue to submit entries.

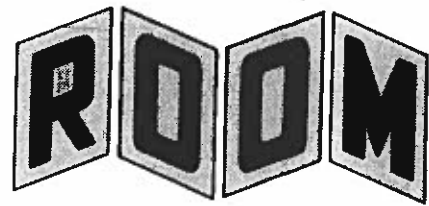
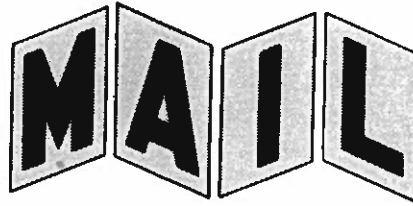
Due to space limitations "Our Wonderful World" does not appear this issue. It will rejoin *The Jewish Reader* in the Nissan edition.

Have a happy and rewarding Purim!

This publication  
is made possible  
by a grant from  
the educational division  
of the



Laboratories



### Satisfaction

Please keep up your wonderful magazine, as I look forward to its coming every month! For the first time in my life I enjoy reading about the Torah portions, and the stories are of course always great.

Thank you so much.

Beth Goldstein  
Tampa, FL

□ □ □

Whenever I'm bored, I just open up your magazine and start reading some really good stories. "Mitzvah Boy" (Teves) was a real good story. I felt bad for the family when the boy was acting so nasty. The author Chanie Gerstner did a good job! Keep it up! I love your magazines!!

Hinda Brook  
Brooklyn, NY

□ □ □

I really like your magazine, even the \$50 Torah Quiz. But how come you don't have it anymore in the magazine? It really took up my time when I was bored, except it can't anymore because it isn't there. I really wish you would put it back there.

P.S. I thank you beforehand in that you *will* put it back there.

Shmuel Kogan  
Brooklyn, NY

*We hope to print a Torah quiz in the next issue.*

□ □ □

I'd like to make some comments about your stories. I really liked "Mitzvah Boy," and I think it taught a lot of facts about the Depression. It

teaches the fact that if you're poor and don't have money try to make the best of it. It is an important lesson to learn.

I like "This Month" very much, because it tells a lot about holidays and all the special dates and things that happened in Jewish history in each month.

"My Brother, My Enemy" is one of the best stories I've ever read in *The Jewish Reader*. It shows the conflict between the same family during the Civil War, simply depending on where family members live and support. It's an important story, and teaches a lot about slavery in the 1800's.

"Torah Highlights" I really like because it gives you facts to ponder about and interesting points from famous rabbis and the Torah. I thank Avraham Goldstein very much for that excellent section.

"Our Story" is good, because it teaches plenty about our history and really fills your brain up with facts. When I read it I feel I know the whole Jewish history, and I feel great because I know the answers to so many of my questions, though sometimes it can stretch on and get boring.

"The Story of Don Yosef Nasi" is my favorite and always keeps in me in suspense. Keep up the good work.

"Our Wonderful World" is great, and teaches me a lot. "News in Review" tells me about important news around the world. Those are great.

Noam Shimmel  
Newton, MA

*A big thank you to everyone. We hope you'll continue enjoying our magazine in the months to come.*

## **Reb Eleazar's Arm**

**By  
Chaya Sarah  
Cantor**

A physican comes up against  
a force he cannot understand,  
or conquer.

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**By Rochelle  
Maruch Miller**

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continue their flight to the  
North.

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**By Avraham  
M. Goldstein**

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