

THE JEW OF DENMARK, A TALE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649310487

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M. GOLDSCHMIDT

**THE JEW OF
DENMARK, A TALE**

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JEW OF DENMARK.

A TALE.

BY

M. GOLDSCHMIDT.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL DANISH,

BY MRS. BUSHBY.

LONDON:

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND CO., FARRINGTON STREET.

1852.

PT 8129
G5J62

PREFACE.

THE following translation of "En Jöde" was made from the original Danish between two and three years ago,—although circumstances have retarded its publication.

It is now offered to the public by the permission, and with the entire approbation, of its author, Mr. M. Goldschmidt, of Copenhagen.

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"Ah, good madam," said he, "you must keep yourself well to-day; this is not a time for sick fancies. There is the devil to pay with the Spaniards, but you must not be afraid of the guns, for they will not hurt you."

"Schema Iisroel!* she is ill;" cried the sister, rushing to the door to call her maid.

Philip Bendixen took Isaac Bamberger out of the room. "What could tempt you to speak so as to frighten her?" he asked angrily.

"Heyday! why, don't you know it was just *not* to alarm her. Hark—how the drums are beginning to beat, and the guns to fire! Was it not better to prepare her for all that?"

And loud indeed was the uproar—the windows of the houses shook as the drums (to whose measured sound marched the burgher militia with their clanging arms) beat lustily, and the single cannon the town possessed sent forth its thunder, darkening the air with its volumes of smoke.

Great was the anxiety of Philip Bendixen, as he paced hurriedly back and forwards, and in vain endeavoured to busy himself with some out-door occupation.

At length the joyful news was brought to him that he was the father of a fine boy. Philip sprung up in the air in his exultation, and then laying his hands on his head, "Adaunoi Elauheinu! Gebenscht sei dein nome!"† "A son! A son!" he exclaimed, reverentially.

He rushed towards his wife's apartment to see the welcome little stranger; but being repulsed by the females who were in charge therein, he ran into the shop, and kissed and embraced Benjamin, shouting to him at the same time, "A son is born to me!"

"Madsel tauv!"‡ responded Benjamin.

"Thanks, thanks, Benjamin; and now it were well that thou shouldst go with the joyful tidings to Rabbi Jokuf, he shall be mau;§ also to Simon Nasche, and all the other Jews in the town. But my brother-in-law—where is he? True, he went home. Run over to him, and beg him to come back presently—and stop, Benjamin!" cried he, calling him back, when he had got half across the street. "Here, take a pound of coffee, and two or three pounds of sugar, and some rice and flour, and this money, to old Martha. Tell her I send it that she may have a day of feasting and rejoicing in honour of my son's birth—*my* son! yes, I *have* a son!"

* Hear, Israel! An exclamation of terror or surprise.

† Lord, my God! Blessed be thy name!

‡ Blessed be God!

§ This word may perhaps best be rendered by, "to stand father."

Almost as rapidly as events had been happening in Philip's house, had the militia of this little town in Funen been delivered from their apprehensions. The Spaniards had taken their departure in the English ships, and it might have been a question whether they or the townspeople were the most satisfied.

The latter now fell on the Jews. Because they had not taken any part in the warlike preparations, they were called cowardly wretches, who were strangers to all patriotic feelings and regard for their native land. Knots of people, on their way to the public houses, stopped before the habitations of the Jews, and gave vent to their wrath by shouts of imprecations, groans, and injurious words.

"These Christians are a droll set," said Isaac Bamberger, with a sneer, to Philip, at whose door a group of common people had stopped for a few minutes hooting and hallooing. "They will not suffer the Jews to enter any of their militia corps while there is peace, but when any disturbance happens, they rail at us for not serving with them. I trow I will go over and kick my dog, that is always chained up, because he stays ever at home."

"And how will that punish *them*? Let them scream themselves hoarse," said Philip Bendixon, as he betook himself to his wife's apartment.

Eight days after this, the little family were all assembled in the invalid's chamber, on the occasion of the infant's admission into the Jewish community, and many were the exclamations of surprise and satisfaction at the boy's size and beauty. Old Rabbi Jokuf laid on the cradle a *horro*—a gold coin on which was inscribed a Hebrew benediction, which was to preserve the child from *the evil eye*—and said, in an elevated tone of voice, "He shall become strong as Judah, and blessed with wisdom like Assur!"

Isaac drank a bumper of wine, and cried, "Yes, that were well; but I must maintain that his arrival in this world took place upon a day by no means the most fortunate for such an event. Had the boy been a Christian, the martial uproar that ushered in his birth would have betokened that he should become a great hero; but as a Jew, it will but give him double aversion for war and warlike matters. He is destined to be so timid, that even the Jews will call him coward."

All laughed except the mother; for women are by nature chivalric in soul, and love-courage in their sons. She replied, "No, no, Isaac; when the boy is brought up under thine

eyes, and sees every day thy big sword, perhaps he will not turn out such a craven."

"A bargain!" cried the uncle. "I will bring him up! After he is weaned, let him be my pupil."

It is time to make our readers somewhat acquainted with this uncle, who had volunteered to play the part of an Aristotle to this Philip of Funen's son. He was what is rarely found among the Jews, a tall and very powerful man. It was told of him, that on one occasion, when two peasants began to fight in his shop, he lifted one up in each arm, knocked them several times together, and then flung them forth. Though he was hated as a Jew, and envied as a rich man, all his fellow-citizens stood in awe of him, and dared not but treat him with respect when they saw his athletic figure among them, and shrunk beneath the half-laughing, half-threatening glance of his keen eye. His hair was already beginning to turn gray, for he was past fifty. In his youth, in Germany, his native land, he had been engaged in military service against the French; and after a variety of adventures and changes of fortune, he had settled himself in Denmark, where he married a woman without fortune, and where unforeseen losses had at one time plunged him into the most abject poverty. He used in after-days to tell, with a degree of pride and complacency, how he and his wife had subsisted a whole winter on a capital of two rix bank dollars, which he laid out in small wares, and, pedlar-like, went about the country selling. When he came home one Friday evening, he found his house burned down, his wife ill, and his only child dead. Unconquered in spirit by these calamities, he devoutly kept his sabbath, then burying his child on the Sunday, he set forth with all his worldly goods made into a bundle, tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, which he carried under his arm. He now lived in a large house, and was a wealthy man; but whenever he saw a small coin, he failed not to observe that his present fortune had commenced with a similar insignificant sum, and therefore that he entertained the greatest respect for such small money.

Philip Bendixen, the newly-made father, was a quiet and peaceful man. The servants in his family, and servants often give the truest character, averred only that he was terrible when he *was* angry, but that his anger never lasted long. It was rumoured that, during his bachelor estate, he had lived a very gay, and not over strict life; but this was merely a report which might have had no foundation in truth, while it was certain that after his betrothal he had become exceedingly religious, and bitterly censured those who erred.

Late on the evening of the day when the somewhat noisy ceremonial of congratulations had taken place, Philip Bendixen stole softly into his wife's little apartment. She was reclining behind the white curtains of her bed in a calm slumber, his child, its soft cheek tinted like a rosebud, was sleeping sweetly in its cradle, whilst the night-lamp cast a mellowed light upon its little face; and the Jewish matron who had undertaken to watch by them had sunk into a deep sleep on a low stool by the bedside.

Philip gazed in silence for a few moments on this scene of comfort and repose; his heart swelled, and he bowed his head and prayed:—"Almighty Father! Ruler of the universe! I humbly thank thee that thou hast given me a son to read *Keadish** over my grave. If it be thy will to call me hence soon, take, I pray thee, all good fortune from my head, and shower it over that of my son. I will bow down to the dust and worship thy name, if thou wilt bestow prosperity on him!"

Such was the blessing invoked over the cradle of the child who is to be the hero of this tale.

CHAPTER II.

As the boy grew older, his father began to think of his future education.

"He shall not go to school. He shall not have to put up with *rishes*,† said he, "and, being exposed to the sneers and gibes of the other children, learn rudeness from them. When he is old enough, I will teach him myself all that a Jew ought to learn; and afterwards I will send him to Copenhagen."

No one was more rejoiced at this determination than the uncle, as it would permit of his amusing himself with the child to his heart's content. Often did he come for the boy, and taking him from his mother, carry him over to his own house. There he would retire with him to a remote room, and lock the door, so that it might have been supposed he was instructing him in the art of magic. Had any one seen Isaac Bamberger on these occasions, they might have indeed imagined he was bewitched. He would seize up the child in his arms, and jump about the floor with him, while

* A prayer for the soul of the dead; a requiem.

† Malignity towards the Jews.

he howled in his ear, and made sundry noises resembling trumpets, drums, the neighing of horses, the lowing of cows, and the barking of dogs. When the infant laughed loudly and scratched him in the face with his little nails, he would set him on his knee to ride, and gallop him so violently that the child, after trying to be amused, would end by crying. The uncle would then take him by the ears, and hold him tight until he was quiet, exclaiming, "I will teach you to be afraid, youngster!" He then would make droll grimaces until the child began to laugh, when he would catch him up and hug him so closely that he would cry again. As the boy ripened in intelligence, he would add to these exercises tales about warriors and knight-errants, legends from distant lands, and Bible anecdotes respecting the Jewish heroes of old, so that the boy in after-years, not remembering where he had acquired all this legendary knowledge, almost fancied that it had been born with him.

The father one day remarked to Isaac, who had as usual come for the child, "The boy is so often with you, Isaac, that he really will not know who is his father."

"I should make just as good a father to him as you," said Isaac; "and the child is turning quite clever under my care. He can already say his *Krischmo**—who taught him that, I wonder? and now I will teach him to say the grace after meals too."

"Very well, Isaac, teach him what you like until he is six years old; I shall then take him in hand and instil into him our Jewish lore."

"You teach him a great deal too much," said his mother, with an air of anxiety; "you tell him things he cannot comprehend. It would be much better for the boy if he were allowed to play and prattle with other children, and sport about in the open air."

The child looked at its mother as if he acknowledged the truth of what she had said, and felt that she had prescribed the best remedy for that infantine longing which made his little cheeks so pale.

"To-morrow," cried the uncle, "he shall go with me on a nice excursion into the country!"

* The Jewish creed, which is introduced into their form of daily prayer.