

**IN THOSE DAYS:
THE STORY OF AN
OLD MAN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649372645

In those days: the story of an old man by Jehudah Steinberg

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Cover @ 2017

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BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE HEBREW BY

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PHILADELPHIA

THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY OF AMERICA

1915



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E. Prokesch, M. D. - 2/12/89

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I

When the time drew near for Samuel the Beadle to let his son begin his term of military service, he betook himself to the market, purchased a regulation shirt, a knapsack, and a few other things needed by a soldier—and he did not forget the main item: he ran and fetched a bottle of liquor. Then he went home.

And there, in the presence of his neighbors, of whom I had the privilege of being one, he drank a glassful to “long life,” and offered another to Rebekah, his good wife.

“Drink, madam,” said he, merrily. At this Rebekah turned up her nose, as if ready to blurt out with, “How often have you seen me drink liquor?”

Indeed, it was an affront which she would not have passed over in silence at any other time, but she had no heart for an open quarrel just then, when about to part with her son, and was satisfied with a silent refusal.

"Woman," said Samuel, angrily, "take it, and do as you are told!" But Rebekah was not impressed by his angry tone, for in fact Samuel was an easy "lord and master." As to his loudness, it was but part of an old habit of his, dating from the days of his own military service, to bully his inferiors and to let those above him in authority bully him.

"So are they all of his kind," she would often explain to her neighbors. "They just fuss, to blow off their tempers, and then—one may sit on them."

Rebekah persisted in her refusal, and Samuel began in a softer tone:

"But why does it worry you so much?"

Woman, woman, it is not to Shemad, God forbid, that he is going!"

At the mention of conversion, Rebekah burst into tears, for Samuel had unintentionally touched her sore spot: there were rumors in the town that her family was not without blemish.

"Now that you are crying," exclaimed Samuel, thoroughly angry, "you are not only hard-headed, but also silly, simply silly! 'Long of hair but short of sense.' To cry and cry, and not know wherefore!" With this Samuel turned towards us, and began to plead his case.

"Have you ever seen such a cry-baby? Five times in her life she filled the world with a hue and cry, when she bore me a child, and every time it was but an empty bubble: five girls she brought me! Then, beginning with the sixth birth, she was fortunate enough to get boys, the real thing. Three sons she gave me as my