

I was a child then, but I remember how I began to tremble when I heard these words, because I had understood.

The Rabbi goes on speaking. He speaks of cleanliness and wholesome air, of dirt, which is dangerous to man, and of hunger and thirst, which are men's bad angels when there is a pestilence about, devouring without pity.

And the Rabbi goes on to say:

"And men shall live by My commandments, and not die by them. There are times when one must turn aside from the Law, if by so doing a whole community may be saved."

I stand shaking with fear. What does the Rabbi want? What does he mean by his words? What does he think to accomplish? And suddenly I see that he is weeping, and my heart beats louder and louder. What has happened? Why does he weep? And there I stand in the corner, in the silence, and I also begin to cry.

And to this day, if I shut my eyes, I see him standing on the platform, and he makes a sign with his hand to the two Dayonim to the left and right of him. He and they whisper together, and he says something in their ear. What has happened? Why does his cheek flame, and why are theirs as white as chalk?

And suddenly I hear them talking, but I cannot understand them, because the words do not enter my brain. And yet all three are speaking so sharply and clearly!

And all the people utter a groan, and after the groan I hear the words, "With the consent of the All-Present and with the consent of this congregation, we give leave to eat and drink on the Day of Atonement."

But no one in the Shool has stirred from his place, and there he stands and begs of them, weeping, and declares that he takes the whole responsibility on himself, that the people shall be innocent. But no one stirs. And presently he begins again in a changed voice—he does not beg, he commands:

"I give you leave to eat—I—I—I!"

And his words are like arrows shot from the bow.

But the people are deaf, and no one stirs.

Then he begins again with his former voice, and implores like a child:

"What would you have of me? Why will you torment me till my strength fails? Think you I have not struggled with myself from early this morning till now?"

And the Dayonim also plead with the people.

And of a sudden the Rabbi grows as white as chalk, and lets his head fall on his breast. There is a groan from one end of the Shool to the other, and after the groan the people are heard to murmur among themselves.

Then the Rabbi, like one speaking to himself, says:

"It is God's will. I am eighty years old, and have never yet transgressed a law. But this is also a law, it is a precept. Doubtless the Almighty wills it so! Beadle!"

The beadle comes, and the Rabbi whispers a few words into his ear.

He also confers with the Dayonim, and they nod their heads and agree.

And the beadle brings cups of wine for Sanctification, out of the Rabbi's chamber, and little rolls of bread. And though I should live many years and grow very old, I shall never forget what I saw then, and even now, when I shut my eyes, I see the whole thing: three Rabbis standing on the platform in Shool, and eating before the whole people, on the Day of Atonement!

The three belong to the heroes.

Who shall tell how they fought with themselves, who shall say how they suffered, and what they endured?