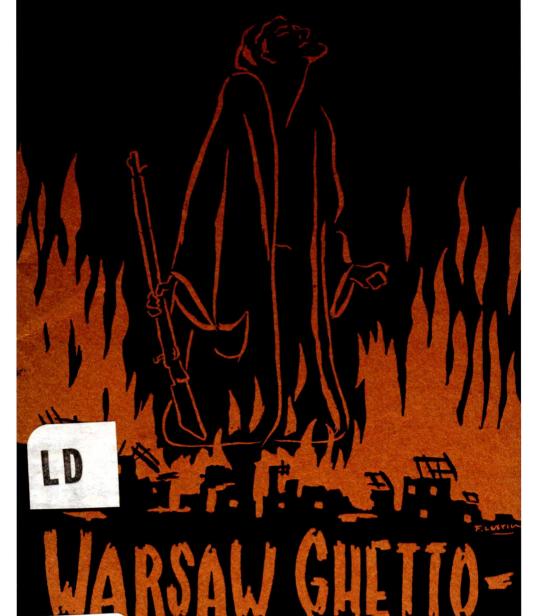
# SIMON HOCHBERGER



LTP 819.91 ALE OF YALOR

By

SIMON HOCHBERGER



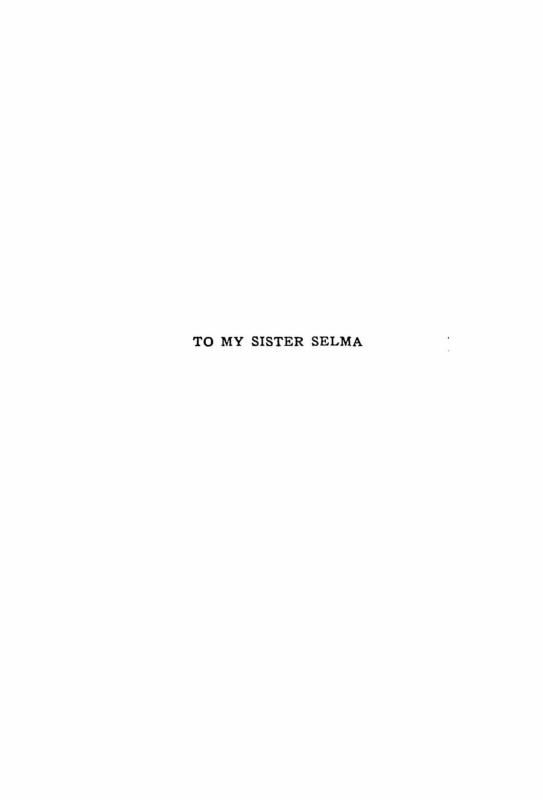
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## PRELUDE.

That ghostly stretch of greyish, hideous land,
Reluctant—as it seems—and not prepared
To yield the tender fragrance of the fertile soil,
That mutilated piece of earth which, here and there,
Is covered with forgotten heaps of ugliness
Resembling ulcers on a corny skin,
That silent monument of weeping emptiness
Is sacred battle-ground where, once upon a time,
The Jews of Warsaw lived—and fought—and died.

The eyes caress the land which holds for good Decaying remnants of a withering past.

And harbours motherly its scattered witnesses:

A broken twig—a stone—a shattered wall

Whose dented outline shows its sharp-edged wounds
A little piece of candle sticking out

Of dusty rubble, lonely and bereft—

Survivors of a haunting Yesterday,

Conveying silently their message to the world.

The stone, for all its simple greyish shade, Might once have been a tiny part Of Warsaw's plodding peaceable Jewish sphere,

That maze of streets which seemed to overflow With milling human flesh and droning sounds And little shops, in back-yards, dark and dull and damp, Where bearded men and placid women tried To wrest their bread and butter (scarcely jam), From less than thousand cubic feet of space.

So poor they were—your brethren of the East ...

Between their worn pathetic caps and clumsy boots
You saw their fluttering coats, no longer black,
With here and there, a shiny spot:
You saw the gentle faces of the older ones
Grow downward into hairy frames
As if to hide their sauntering dreams.
You saw their eyes—
Betraying gaps through which the Jewish soul
Revealed itself in hunting after sparks of light
And being hunted by the dark
Despotic forces of the world.

The stone is mumbling forth its tale,
But searching eyes would stumble forward now
Until they sight the shattered wall that once belonged
To one of their dilapidated homes,
Those tiny worlds where, after tiring days
In streets, in basements, shops or shacks,
The small communities of blood and love—
The Jewish families—
Regained their sacred unity each night.

#### PRELUDE

With smiling eyes and words of heart-felt joy
The mother—most beloved centre of the home—
Greets every one with infinitely tender care
That seems to draw eternal strength
From sources, inexhaustible and wide
And deep as all the seven seas.
They sit around the kitchen-table soon,
Young Jossel, Rivka, Faigele and Hersh
And, maybe, still another few to please the Lord.

The table's headed by the father who,
With patriarchal dignity,
Shares out the bread and reaps the due respect
From all his children, whilst his wife
Walks to and fro and serves the frugal meal,
Delicious, for it has been done
With all the fondness of a Jewish mother's heart.

The sun departs, collecting all her light
And leaving grim reminders of the past behind,
Wrapped up in fine-spun tissues of a tender dusk,
But out of all-embracing violet veils
A timid witness tries to catch the eye:
A piece of candle, pale and scorched and pitiful,
The bearer of a message—woebegone—
That grips your heart and burns your thirsty soul.

Forever will a piece of candle be Associated with the life of Jews

Or with their death.

Their hopes and joys, their grief and their despair,
They are all lit by nervous swordlike flames
Of candles such as this.
Its story—who could tell?
Its hidden fate—who knows?

Perhaps it lent its modest beams of light
To someone on the threshold of eternal dark,
Perhaps it stuck in some distorted candlestick
Whilst, hidden in a cellar, pious people prayed.
Perhaps it was a graceful woman's hand
That held the light to call the blessing of the Lord
Upon a white-clad virginal bride. . . .
It might have been a frightened child's desire
Which kept the candle burning all the night—
It might have been, at last, a shining link,
Resplendent in a chain of solemn lights
To greet the Sabbath on a Friday night,
When every single Jewish home—
The poorest even, in a shack or den—
Became a place of proud and quiet joy.

The table laid with linen, white and stiff,
Two loaves of bread beneath a silken cloth,
Embroidered with an emblem or a word,
A bottle, filled with home-made raisin wine
And, next to it, a goblet for the man,
The master of the house who now comes home

## PRELUDE

From Shul and takes possession of it all—
The warm benevolent smell of drowsy cleanliness
Together with the steaming fragrance of the stove,
The brightness of the woman who,
In frills and apron and with flushing cheeks,
Presents a picture of serenity,
The radiant sparks in smiling children's eyes
Who, in advance, enjoy the feast to come.

And now it starts with that familiar song:
"Shalom aleychem"—peace upon you all—
And then the kiddush—nothing in the world
Tastes like the sweet and mellow home-made brew.
The mautze follows—bread and salt—
To show the Lord their humble gratitude
For all the things he let them have.
However poor the dishes may have been
On paltry six days of the week—
The seventh day is sanctified
By all the gastronomic wealth
The purse would, willingly, provide.

The palate gets his own—so does the heart,
For soon enough the master of the house
Starts singing psalms of praise with fervour great,
And when his eye-lids slowly droop,
Thus heightening his exaltation still,
The tune is caught by voices of the young...
The psalms resound and ring through all the house,

Transforming drab surroundings of the poor Soon into merry playgrounds of the Lord, So beautiful, so warm and bright...

But suddenly—

The lights went out...

The lights went out...

The little candle-end was one of them.

## INTERLUDE I.

The lights went out. The lonely stars were crying, And every tear became a mournful gleam
That touched the souls of withering and dying
Whose living, lasting thoughts kept on defying
The messenger of guilt's destructive dream.

The lights went out. The lonely moon was shedding Its silvery mist on open wounds and graves,
The tender light saw nameless horror spreading
Where hobnailed jack-boots carelessly were treading
The blocd-soaked path of Satan's fiendish knaves.

The lights went out. The wrathful sun was scorning The brutes in black by whom no life was spared, But into mothers', fathers', children's mourning It flashed, with fiery swords, the fateful warning: Ye Jews of Warsaw! Pray—and be prepared!

## TERROR.

The lights went out. The beast was prowling in the dark, The-fiendish beast, with crooked legs and wings, It roamed across the fields, through streets and yards And left a trail of blood and tears behind. Ye Heavens! Don't ye hear The cries of tortured mankind any more? Oh Lord! Eternal God of Jews! Are hidden from Thine eyes the dreadful deeds That happen to Thy chosen flock? Behold—the fiend of man has broken loose and raves Among defenceless heaps of human flesh.

The wails of Warsaw's Jews moved stone and tree, But not the hearts of those who caused the pain. To be a Jew meant waiting in despair From dawn to dusk, from dusk to dawn, For more atrocities and greater pains. To be a Jew meant stumbling day and night Along the narrow path 'tween life and death. To be a Jew meant giving up all hope To see the light of freedom e'er again.

Like cattle, herded into ghetto-walls, They slowly oozed away in agony

Till longed-for death redeemed their souls. And yet—not even raging death sufficed To satisfy the savage lust Of those who were the masters of the hour: They soiled the Lord's eternal form of man.

The shapeless shadows, cast by empty human shells, Grow high and higher, covering sky and sun And wrapping up the earth in choking clouds Until the world is nothing but a sombre screen Reflecting horror in a flash of light, Without deceit, like writings on the wall.

Don't close your eyes, you people of the world,
Don't shirk the sight—don't hesitate to watch
How human beings, born like you and me
From mothers' wombs and fed by mothers' breasts,
Turned into beasts which sinned against the flesh
And blood of mankind, made alike by God!
Don't close your eyes although the sudden flash might
hurt.

Black caps, black boots, black minds and souls advance—Gestapo—nightmare of a continent.

The little Jewish home grew pale with fright— They came, disguised in human skins, With greedy eyes and minds and hands, To loot what scanty food was left. The scene became an oddly tragic farce

## TERROR

As they produced some dubious names
To make their robbery a legal deed.
Reb Hersh, surrounded by the black-clad mob.
And glued with fear to what was once a chair,
Glanced helplessly toward his wife.

They did not even understand the words
Which tried to pierce the skin like poisoned spears;
A timid shrug was all they both could give.
The henchmen, then, climbed down the scale of values soon:

The food they did not find, ranked high, indeed,
The money less, but cheapest thing of all
They could get hold of, was the flesh of Jews,
Just good enough to spend an ounce of strength
On slaving for the robbing master-race
And then to rot in some forsaken ditch.

As they approached to grab their prey, by force, He raised his arms in fruitless self-defence, A hand lashed out—a brutal hostile claw Whose fingers, bent like fierce attacking hooks, Reached for the reddish beard of Hersh, the Jew. He turned his head, with horror in his eyes—Alas, the hooks were faster than his fear, They gripped the beard beneath his chin and jaw, And when the man, whipped up by pain and fright, Attempted feeble moves to free himself, The vicious grip grew harder still

And harder still the more he vainly fought, Increasing torment and despair.

At last, the fiendish hand began

To drag the victim, by his beard, away.

His eyes turned white, his ghastly twisted mouth
Was but a silent gap, exhaling agony,
His face a sea of piercing scorching flames.

And thus, whilst sons of Hell enjoyed the scene
And let their shameful mirth fill house and street,
Reb Hersh was dragged away from wife and home
To meet his fate.

The time escaped its own established rules
Within the humbling ghetto-walls,
It lost its pulse and ceased to flow
Within the bounds of bitternecs and shame.
There were no days—just sorrows, soaked with light;
There were no nights—just fear, wrapped up in dark;
No seconds beat the drum of life—
Just heart-throbs, full of gnawing grief.

Four hearts were throbbing in a Jewish home One night, when heavy steps approached the house, And each of them contained a hidden threat. They entered—two defiant uniforms, Supplied with human looks And casting human shadows—twisted ones—Designed by flickering yellow candle-light.

#### TERROR

They smelled of drink. Their eyes were vicious slits, Their faces split by smiles of wantonness.

Four hearts were throbbing, shedding nameless fright—
The father, fumbling with his Pentateuch,
The mother—weary—lying on the bed,
A boy of eighteen, with a crippled leg.
And there was Malka, young and beautiful,
A child—and yet a women in her dawning bloom
Which no privation even could destroy.
She had been stitching on a piece of cloth,
And as the two intruders strode into the room,
She was as paralysed as all her folks
Who stared, not knowing what to do.

The men did not pretend to've come in peace,
They did not try to hide their evil plot.
While one of them pulled out his gun
And took position at the only door,
The other thug walked up with clumsy steps
To Malka. who, without the faintest move,
Nor showing any sign of crawling fear,
Stood face to face with him, the deadly foe.
As he looked up and down her slender frame,
His eyes half closed, his jaw pushed out with greed,
She smelled his alcoholic breath
Which made her lips close tightly in disgust,

But then his hand shot out and grabbed her cloth. And with a brutal violent jerk

He tore it down from throat to waist, Exposing thus her frightened youthful flesh To flickering dimness which received the gift of Of softly gleaming skin with pride and shame.

It happened then, that, crippled though he was, Her brother started to his feet so fast. That no one noticed it at first.

He gripped a heavy candlestick of brass And hurled it at the drunk assaulter's head. It hit the brow and set a purple stream Between the eyebrows flowing fast. It was, perhaps, the first heroic act. Te boy had done—and certainly his last.... A shot rang out from where the gun-man stood And almost casually killed the gallant lad. Three Jewish hearts were throbbing in the dark.

Ye Heavens! Aren't ye pierced by all the cries Sent up for succour and for help?
Or are ye just too high above
To hear the moans of slowly dying men,
The sighs of their insulted womenfolk,
The frightened shrieks of children—Heavens—hark!
Ye stones and trees, ye winds and clouds and seas—To all of ye we turn in our distress—
Perhaps we've sinned against the law of God,
"Al chayt" we'll cry and humbly beat our breasts,
We shall atone, but do not let us fall

## TERROR

Through raving hangmen's murderous hands, Have mercy for our children's sake!

Alas—they prayed in vain, no mercy shone Upon the victims of the butchering clan Whose members, day by day, performed With cruel minds and lewd perverted joy Their monstrous dances of decay and death. The lights were out . . .

The beast was prowling in the dark And found its prey.

## INTERLUDE IL

They fought the Jews with terror and starvation, As champions of ill-will and of hate.

Without concern they earned their own damnation
On blood-stained roads of vile annihilation
Which were the one-way streets of Jewish fate.

They fought the people, ravaging and looting,
Infernal crew—on Satan's own behest—
They used their ghastly job of slave-recruiting
To roam the houses, whipping, shouting, shooting...
They tore the child away from mother's breast.

They fought the Jews—the human heart was aching—But suddenly—one day—the brutes in black Got sober—something faint was in the making, Foundations of the ghetto started shaking, The Jews in Warsaw's ghetto-walls—hit back!

## TIT

## THE BATTLE.

The air grew tense inside the ghetto-walls,
Decaying flesh exhaled its evil breath
In every street and under many roofs.
The souls of slaughtered victims strayed and found no

Whilst being cheated out of years
Of harmony with bodies' living strength.
The olden tale came true that human souls
Whose owners died before their time was up,
Would haunt surviving lovers day and night,
Until they were redeemed by righteous deeds.

The "Dybbuk" haunted Warsaw's ghetto-Jews,
But whilst the husbands, sweethearts, children, wives
Were singly mourning their beloved dead,
It happened that their sorrows and distress
Were welded into one tremendous common grief
By some forgotten, lonely haunting soul
Which days before had left the body of a boy.

They found the body in a hidden yard,
A child of eight or nine, not known nor claimed
By any member of the ghetto-flock.
No search brought forward any trace or clue
That might have solved the horrid mystery.

The naked body, small and pitiful, Was stained with clotted blood And covered with some feasting vermin's life.

There was a ghastly gash beneath the throat,
Whilst on his back the tender flesh was scorched
And showed the sign of Satan's crooked cross.
It also was revealed that lechery.
Had left its horrifying marks behind.
The whole community cried out in pain...
The murdered child's bewildered restless soul,
Not finding anyone of kith or kin,
Embraced the minds of all the wailing crowd
And caught their sobs and changed them into deeds,
Thus making all the people share
The noble mournful kinship to the slain.

The air grew pale inside the ghetto-walls.

And tension made the people's breath go hard

And hoarse.

There comes a time when suffering turns to stark despair

And when despair turns into burning hate,

And hate is waiting for the final drop

That makes the cup of wild emotion overflow.

It was a homeless Jewish youngster's blood That made the people seek their hidden strength, And kindly darkness of the night became The ghetto's true confederate.

#### THE BATTLE

The silent shadows, sliding over walls or roofs,
Were swallowed by their own unbounded source,
The whispers, sent from mouth to mouth through miles
of space.

Were stifled with the velvet of the nightly sky. A stream of secret actions cut its way Through hostile vigilance; for weeks and months, Until—one day—the fateful curtain rose And showed another scene of Jewish tragedy That was about to presently unfold.

The wails of Warsaw's Jews had died away....

A gnashing silence, sinister and fierce,
Prevailed within the sullen ghetto-walls,
When on the eve of Israel's Passah-feast,
In nineteen hundred forty-three,
A squad of black-clad henchmen came to search
The ghetto for the due amount of slaving flesh.

The streets were empty save three oldish men Who tried to reach their gloomy homes in time To share their prayers and what scant food they had. With all the members of their families, In memory of Jews' relief from slavery In Egypt, many years ago.

Alas! the hurrying feet were old and slow,
And those who fied were seen before they knew.
A sharp command, cut through the dusky air
And made their swaying figures petrify

Before the squad that stood prepared to act. The dreaded order struck: You Iews, fall in! But now a thing unheard of, suddenly occurred: The lews stood quietly and made no move. The setting sun would witness something strange, Nav-something unbelievable, come true: Three oldish Jews opposed the men in black Whose order they-deliberately-ignored. The biting words hung feebly in the air. And three old Iews faced quietly the squad, ten strong. The henchmen hardly dared believe their eyes. But their amazement changed to fury soon. A hostile yell rang sharply—words were whips . . . . The next few seconds saw the Jews knocked down. When one of them, the toughest of the three, Attempted painfully to rise, A number of the thugs pulled out their guns and fired, Thus bringing on their own deserved doom.

## It happened in a flash:

Before they had a chance to use their arms again,
A salvo burst from somewhere, with a roar,
And mowed the nearest of the enemy down.
It was a signal for a group of men
Who sallied forth from their strategic hiding-place
And rushed the enemy squad with hail of fire.
The black-clad figures looked for cover, but in vain,
Some fell, the others tried to force their way
Towards a waiting truck, far down the street,

#### THE BATTLE

And whilst retreating, fired some shaky shots....
Their effort lasted but a score of steps,
They fell, face down, not one escaped,
The squad had been wiped out—the fight was up,
And now—the fight was on!

The fight was on within the ghetto walls,
The holy Jewish war was on
Against the deadly forces of the dark,
Against the law of lawlessness
Created by and for a gang of knaves
Who revelled in their devilish plots...
The fight was on for self-respect and faith in man.

The first round had been won by Warsaw's Jews
Who bravely faced the martyrdom that was their due.
Alas, they knew what price they'd have to pay
For their delusive victory.
They knew it was a fight 'gainst hopeless odds,
A fight of David with a boyish sling
Against an armed Goliath, big and strong,
And yet, they did not hesitate
To meet the horrid hail of hellish fire
With little more than their despairing flesh,
If only for the sake of blunting just an edge
Of their arch-enemy's ruthless might.

The night, though long, brought but a short-lived truce For news of Jews' resistance promptly reached

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The raging masters of the town,

And whilst the ghetto-elders prayed to God for strength,

The young ones hastily built barricades

And braced themselves for murderous attacks to come.

The hours went by like guardians of eternity
Who called ten hostile corpses to account
For all the evil deeds they'd ever done.
The hours went by and when the hesitating dawn
Stretched out its palish fingers on the firmament,
The ghetto held its breath—the fatal hour had struck.

A whole battalion of the enemy

Took up positions at the gates.

A task force, well-equipped and bound to strike

With weapons strong and fraught with death,

Set out to make reprisals for their loss of men.

A voice released through radio, thundered down the streets,

Commanding ninety elders of the Jewish town To gather at the gate at once and serve As hostages until the armed rebels were found. One hour was given to comply with their command, And should the granted time expire Without the order being carried out . . . They'd come and take the hostages, by force.

A deadly stillness was the ghetto's sole reply. The hour went by—it was the longest yet

#### THE BATTLE

The Warsaw ghetto ever had to live, And when the time was up, the Jews responded not, And when the zero-hour was there, they gravely smiled.

The storm broke loose, the enemy rushed in
With panzer cars and truckloads full of men,
With mortars and machine-guns manned and trained
On Jewish houses, windows, roofs and doors.
But when they tried to enter Jewish homes
And found them locked and gave the first machine-gun
burst,

The storm broke loose in tenfold force.

The army of intruders was received
Wirn torrents of destructive lead,
Whilst women, children, invalids
Used manifold devices harming the attacking foe.
Fron roofs and windows, like in ancient times,
They poured their pots and pans of boiling oil
Upon the raving enemies' heads.
Those Jewish mothers who, not long ago,
Would have despised the very thought
Of harming any living creature in the world,
Accomplished, outraged as they were,
Heroic deeds of everlasting fame.
Protecting helpless children with their flesh,
They threw grenades and flaming bottles down,
Disabling panzer cars and vans and trucks.

A furious battle seared the ghetto's streets,
Each house became a sturdy citadel
Defended with the courage of despair.
Behold—the caftans kept on fluttering,
But with a different air—like flags of faith—
The hands, once used to running over goods
Or holding books of wisdom on the day of rest,
Gripped now the rifle hard and pressed the butt
With zeal against the bearded cheek.

The ghetto-Jews were fighting in a holy wrath
That staggered and amazed the enemy,
As hand to hand fights raged in houses, sheds and yards,
Whilst on the barricades, in open streets,
The younger fighters took their toll of enemies' lives
And paid with all too many of their own,
Not asking quarter from a ruthless foe
Nor giving any. Thus the pools of Jewish blood
Mixed freely with the blood of Satan's master-race,
Not caring much about his racial laws.
The battle raged for hours before the enemy troops,
With heavily depleted ranks,
Withdrew to their positions at the gates.

The war of forty thousand ghetto-Jews
Against the army of the swastika
Dragged on for thirty days, and each of them
Was filled with gallant Jews' heroic deeds
And deeds of stark despair which make the hearts

#### THE BATTLE

Of Jewish people throb with sadness and with pride. The war went on for thirty dreary days—
A miracle of bravery and faith,
Paid dearly for with forty thousand lives.

They fought the endless stream of grey-clad troops, Diminishing their force continuously,
And when, cut off from all the world,
They did not have a single cartridge left,
They fought with axes, knives and stones and fists.
Alas—the weapons were too weak and poor
Against the tanks and cannons of the foe—
The bastions fell and, one by one, the houses went,
With their defenders proudly fighting to the end,
Until but one house, finally, was left,
Held only by a tiny force of youths.

It was the Jewish workmen's club,
Defended stubbornly by some surviving few,
A group of five young men and one young girl.
They had no scrap of ammunition left,
And all there was, in all the world,
Between the valiant youths and lurking death,
Consisted of a bolted iron door
And their determined will to carry on
As long as they had still an ounce of strength.

When finally the enemy forced the door And stormed the house down savagely,

The lads engaged the raving troops
In close encounters, fighting with their naked hands.
The fight was out before it had begun,
And rifle-butts were red with slaughtered victims' blood.

The war was not quite over yet—
Delighting in their easy victory,
The soldiers suddenly caught sight
Of Channa—last defender of the Jewish bounds.
She leaned against the balustrade
And stared at them with flaming hating eyes
As if to say: "Look out, you killing fiends,
The war is not quite over yet,
The Jews you've done to death, live forth in me,
I represent the ghetto now, alone,
And I shall carry on the fight—
Come on, you hirelings all—I challenge you."
She squarely stood and faced the squad of men
Who, after seconds of a ghostly lull,
Leapt forward soon to catch the welcome prey.

But Channa, young and fast, flew up the steps
And left the stumbling men behind,
Who, gaping first and roaring then with mirth,
Put down their rifles and took up the chase.
They dropped their arms, they did not want her blood,
It was her throbbing living flesh they sought,
It was her flaming womanhood

## THE BATTLE

That hastened their besotted steps

And shortened, inch by inch, the space

Between the hunters and the hunted one.

But when she almost was within their reach,
She suddenly swung around and raised her arm
And, out of some discoloured little jar
She had been clutching all the time,
Released a spray of acid into staring eyes,
Creating panic 'mong the horde.
A few pursuers who were closest at her heels,
Fell backwards, crying out
In utter blindness and insufferable pain,
And falling down they blocked the stairs,
Thus holding up the others for a precious while,
Which gave the girl a chance to run up higher still.

She reached the roof and, for a fleeting while, Stood quietly and viewed the silken sky Before she slowly stepped toward the edge.

The bunch of soldiers, reaching now the top,
Still hoping, 'tween their rage and greed, to catch the
prize,

Came just in time to witness in bewilderment The last scene of a people's tragedy, Too great for them to understand.

Before they could prevent the deed, She pulled a piece of cloth from 'neath her blouse: A flag—the sacred Jewish colours—blue and white.

She covered head and body with the ragged cloth And—with a whispered "Sh'mah Yisroel" on her lips—Jumped into pale eternal emptiness.

The Warsaw ghetto was not crushed. It died.

## EPILOGUE.

A ghostly stretch of greyish hideous land,
Reluctant, as it seems, and not prepared
To yield the tender fragrance of the fertile soil,
A mutilated piece of earth,
With some forgotten heaps of ugliness,
Is all that's left of Warsaw's Jewish battleground.

The twig, the stone, the shattered wall,
The little piece of candle, sticking out
Of dusty rubble, lonely and hereft,
Have finished now the tale
They owed the world and all the Jews
Who come in humble pilgrimage to mourn their dead.

Some day, a boy might come who lost his dear ones here And, guided by the great eternal force Connecting past and present, life and death, He—unawares—might find the battered candle-end And light it up and say the old traditional words Which glorify the dead and praise the name of God: "Yisgadal veyiskadash shmej rabbo..."

The soul of man pays homage to the memory Of Warsaw's gallant Jews,



## EPILOGUE

And from the hearts of every Jew in all the world A holy vow descends upon the nameless graves And rises to the Heavens high:

THEIR SACRIFICE SHALL NOT HAVE BEEN IN. VAIN!

THE JEWS OF WARSAW DIED THAT ISRAEL MAY LIVE!

THE END.