

THE EMEK

By

JESSIE E. SAMPTER

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JESSIE E. SAMPTER



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“THE EMEK” has been published serially in *The New Palestine*. “The Jewish National Fund” made possible the extended trip and the intimate knowledge gained in the Valley of Jesreel among the young men and women, most of them college-bred, the recent immigrants who with “black labor” are working the earth and building the villages of new-old Palestine.

JESSIE E. SAMPTER,

Rehoboth, Palestine.

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PROLOGUE

I went home to the Emek.

I rode alone through the fields and the groves,

But everywhere I came, hands were waved to greet me,

Hands stretched forth to meet me and draw me in.

NAHALAL

THE VILLAGE PLAN

Nahalal is a round village built on a round hill top.
Nahalal is a thought, an idea sketched in unpainted planks.
In the gray wooden shack where the town committee meets
Hangs on the wall a plan of Nahalal
Drawn by a German architect. It's a highbrow
Up-to-date city plan, a wheel like Washington, D. C.
The hub for public buildings, with white houses around it
For less than a hundred families, and their farms outside—
An elegant plan in brown and white.

Then you step out where the village thresher stands,
Covered with clean sacks, and you see the water tower,
And the kindergarten, one shack, and the school another,
Wide fields and a cow and two horses browsing on the road.
This is the hub; but Nahalal is a wheel
On the wide mountain top, a ring of houses,
Gray boards with the wind between them, and then farms.
Around it blows the green sweep of the valley
Mountain-bounded, Samaria, Galilee,
In spring. A dream. And a hundred families.

Once Washington, D. C., was a plan on paper.
When Indians camped in the woods.

REGENERATION

I slept in the house of Regeneration
On a black horse-hair sofa. Regeneration
Everyone calls her, in Hebrew, without her surname.
Regeneration is the lone woman farmer of Nahalal,
Working her earth alone, tending her cows and poultry,
Keeping her three room cottage in emphatic comfort
Though she only sleeps there, being all day in the wind.
Arabic hangings on the rough board walls and tables,
Among the pictures, conspicuous, three photographs of a dead comrade,
Shot through the heart defending an outpost against Bedouins,
A young man, in her youth, a fellow worker.
Was he her lover? She has been more than twenty
Years working in Palestine, roughing and tramping it,
Fearless yet careful; she was a girl of alabaster,
White-handed and thin, when defiantly she came.
Now she is broadened and coarsened, the color of earth.
Regeneration is homely—one crooked eye, two teeth missing—
But she dresses with care, she wears a hat on the Sabbath.
On the Sabbath, at breakfast, she had brought in flowers from her garden,
She offered me bread of her wheat, her eggs, her butter, her cheese,
And only the salt and coffee were foreign. She eats the work of her hands.
I said: “Are you not lonely, Regeneration? Would you not live in a group?”
She said: “I have lived in groups and lost my self-feeling.
I want to create, to make a house, to see the fruit of my work.”

She works from four in the morning until ten at night
Just to feed herself, to make her bread and her milk
And earn enough to pay her taxes and buy a hat.
But she is not a lone woman spending her life just to keep alive;
She is creating, she is bringing forth,
Hers the regeneration of the sacred earth.

BEN BRAK

They call him Ben Brak, Son of the Lightning.
He is shaggy and tall as a pirate,
With black hair and whiskers to match;
And his skin is the color of copper,
But his eyes are the eyes of a poet
And his speech is the speech of a scholar
And his clothes are the clothes of a farmer.

He has been many years pioneering in Palestine,
Working hard, thinking hard, hardened to want and to danger,
Old in youth, then young, like the phoenix out of the fire.

He has come to build Nahalal and his own house in Nahalal
A young girl on the porch tossed a peach-blossom baby.
The girl was his wife, a child, and the baby his son.
Date-brown were her braids; the blue her eyes in her thin face
Morning-glories of happiness; yet she looked tired and tense
Like a flower on a dry vine. Bare were her arms and legs.
Their living room was white as the Sabbath cloth on the table.
He showed off his son and told me statistics,
He is statistician of Nahalal:
He knows how many days since it was founded,
How many trees are planted, how many babies are born.
And when he does not dig, he writes articles for newspapers.

Next evening I met him again, on the road by moonlight,
Carrying a hoe. He stopped to tell me statistics;
But soon he said: "Shalom! I must go.
I am on my way to fetch seeds for tomorrow's planting."
And a neighbor remarked to me: "You should have seen his wife last year;
She was young and beautiful. Now she has aged
From overwork." And I wondered when she was born.

THE CHILDREN

In New York and Berlin and London

Psychologists are breaking their heads
To invent a school that shall educate character, will and mind
And not merely pour words into molds of knowledge.

In Nahalal, in a four room wooden barrack,
With three teachers and almost no books,
With a few paints and pencils and paper and rough tables and chairs,
They have made a school
That I should invite the psychologists
From New York and Berlin and London
To come to worship.

Why, in Nahalal, can children call their teachers by their first names
And talk to them comradely, and also to one another comradely,
In lesson time, the teacher busy with a book
And the children with other books,
All studying, each sitting where he pleases?
Why are the children so wise in Nahalal
To know it is sweet to create with pencil or clay
When the teacher does not tell them?
Why do they teach one another? Where did they learn?
Why do they paint so freely, not afraid to dab colors
As the sky and the grass and the cows dab them on the air?
Why do they work so gladly, making chairs, growing vegetables,
Feeding chickens in the dirt of the school yard?
And why are these things so easy in Nahalal
And so difficult and yet so much talked about
In New York and Berlin and London?

I met the older children
In their museum and library
Cleaning the instruments of their orchestra,
Sorting books and arranging specimens;
And they showed me a chart they had made of the rainfall,
And the skin of a rare lizard.
They are hungry for books, they have read all the books,
They are keen for discoveries.

In New York and Berlin and London
You are longing
For truth and fellowship and work and freedom,
And you would teach your children
What you do not know yourselves.

In Nahalal
White butterflies and brown
Are glimmering up the meadow,
The children running with their teacher
For a game of ball before sunset.

Bare-headed and bare-footed
Runs the baby Messiah.

THE COVENANT

Six commandments have the men of Nahalal:

1. Thou shalt not own the land,
But the Jewish National Fund shall buy and own the land.
2. Thou shalt not employ thy fellow as laborer,
But thou thyself shalt work thine own portion.
3. Thou shalt help thy fellow in his work
In his time of sickness or of trouble.
4. Thou shalt plow or reap, thou shalt plan thy sowing,
Thou shalt buy or sell not alone
But only in cooperation with thy fellows.
5. Thou shalt pay thy taxes and thy tithes
According to thy fortune and thy gain,
That all may be equal in bread.

6. Thou shalt pay thy part
For the schooling of the village children
Who are the hope, the vision and the dream.

This is the covenant of Nahalal,
Its men, its women and its earth.

From the deep spring coiled a dragon
Round the hill of Nahalal,
Poisoned swamps that with green fevers
Sucked the lives of valiant men.
Came the army of the nation,
Youths and maidens shovel-armed,
Beat the dragon, bound the dragon,
Eating fevers while they fought.
Now the fields are green with wheat,
The village fringed with willowy groves;
And the dragon is their guardian.
Bound in pipes, he tinkles jingling
While he runs about the gardens—
Friend of man, pure water.

Work from dawn till starlight,
Work in field and barn and cottage,
Work at planting fruit trees, vineyards
That will bear in time's long ripening;
Work at building, work at breeding,
Dirty work in mud and sweat,
Grinding work with broom and kettle,
Husky work with hoe and horse.

This is the covenant of Nahalal,
Its men, its women and its land.

In the blind green country-side
Ringletted with many blossoms
Many-colored and unseen,

Near the sleeping mountains
Bosomed round the valley,
Shines the eye of Nahalal
Lashed with fringe of trees,
Open, round and seeing.

The Sleeping Beauty has opened an eye—
Nahalal—four years ago.
Languidly the mountains stretch,
The sleeping vale arouses.

Once many cities glimmered in this plain,
Camels and mules and riders threaded them,
Beads in the shining life of Israel's sons.
Orchards and vineyards, farms and forest land,
Made a green garden of this wild-flower field.
Where now a lonely Arab horseman rides,
Young people singing passed from town to town.

Armies of many nations mingled here
With whoop of leader, roar of rhythmic feet.
Blood with the rivers ran,
Flesh fertilized these fields.
“The stars in their courses fought against Sisera,
The brook Kishon swept them away,
That ancient brook, the Brook Kishon.”
A hundred times here struggling Israel fell,
Here Israel struck and conquered. Philistine
And Syrian and Assyrian, Greek and Roman
Clenched with fanatics, lovers of this earth.
Thousands of years ago for this we fought.
We bled, we died.—And other armies crossed,
Crunching their boots among the flowers—
Arab, Crusader, Turk, Napoleon,
Allenby and the British Tommy, all
Crossing the fields that slept above our graves.

NOW Nanaial. Silence and a hundred rammes.
Beauty asleep with creeping streams of fever,
Hill beyond hill and meadow beyond meadow.
We come! The army comes, armed with our hands,
Provisioned with hunger, hungry for this earth,
We come, fanatics, zealots, loving one another,
Flesh of that ancient flesh, blood of the blood
That blossoms many-colored on these fields.
We come laden with dreams, heavy with memories.
We set them down and bare our arms for work.

This is the covenant of Nahalal,
Its men, its women and its God.

BATYA

I met her on Regeneration's porch
One Friday evening. There were tea and talk,
And neighbors dropping in; lean men, and women
With drawn, tense looks from working overmuch,
Young, but already ageless, eloquent-eyed,
Uncorseted in cotton shirt-like frocks.
And a lady from Warsaw, visiting, in silks,
Forty or so years old, plump and well-groomed,
Speaking halt Hebrew, well-informed, well-bred
And gentle, and her daughter, a young pioneer, Batya.
The talk was of the German Emperor's diaries,
Psychology of kings and courts and scandals
That one, a farmer's wife, had read in Russian.

Batya talked little, listened much. Her face,
Soft as her mother's, held a stubborn silence
Locked round with a brown bob of satiny hair.
Before we parted, I had heard: Her mother
Now came to look at her after a year of absence:
One year Batya has been a pioneer.
Link in a group, the group is her adventure.
"Come, visit us," she said, "tomorrow morning."

At the circumference of Nahalal, the village,
"Group B" of "The Young Watchman" pitched its tents,
Put up its barracks with the earth for carpet,
Sweated and sickened filling in the swamps,
And now is getting well at building houses—
Communal works by the young pioneers.

I asked for Batya. There, they said, her tent!
Three cots triangled under the brown mushroom;
The two were empty, Batya in the third.

Ducking in under slowly, I startled her;
But straight she sat, her head alone protruding
From the dark covers, a ripe berry. "Wait,"
She said, "don't go. I'll dress in just a minute!"
And in a moment, with a few swift motions
Juggling the covers, out she stepped full-dressed
In her white Sabbath frock, short sleeved, low throated,
And broidered blue around the throat and arms,
As neat, as prim, as dainty as a maiden
Who stands an hour to prink before her mirror.
Consummate art and under cover. Charmed,
I asked her by what magic she had learned
So deftly to get dressed inside her bed.

"You see," she said—a simple explanation—
"The other two are boys—and there's no room—
That's why."
"And does your mother understand?"
"My mother," answered Batya, "is my mother.
She knows me, so she need not understand."
"And you," I asked, "do you like sleeping so?"
"Why not? It's better in a tent," she said,
"To sleep with boys; if there should be an accident,
A tent-pin break or something blow away,
They're stronger. And besides that, we are comrades.
It's as one chooses. And we chose it so."

With that, one of her tent mates
Came in, a hardened youth with friendly, questioning,
Intelligent eyes and a comrade's handshake.
"We'll show you 'round," says Batya, "You shall see
The chickens and the babies." But a little
We sit upon the cots to talk.
He is ready
To answer and to argue, strong with convictions
That youth brings finished to the waiting world:
"Yes, the group may be more economical
Than the cooperative village. And the women

Are spared such cruel work; they work in shifts
With a just measure. But that's not the question
For me," he said, "It's a matter of character.
Only by thus living, without possession and without desire
For personal belongings are we free,
Social and free, clean of the self-seeking
That dulls the edge of the keen sword of love.
So must we build our land with fellowship
Complete. This is to me the law, for its own sake,
Not because it is practical or economical,
Not because experience proves group life to be better,
But because truth and fellowship and freedom
Demand this abnegation. We are weak:
If we love things, we shall not love each other."
His eyes looked straight, his mouth from a tense bow
Shot the clean arrows of his well-aimed speech,
Denying self with vivid affirmation.
"Sabbath one talks," said Batya. "All the week
One works to prove it. And this life is good."

THE CHILDREN'S VILLAGE

ON MOUNT MOREH

In South Africa they collected the money
And the orphans in Ukrania;
But the land is the old, old hill of Moreh
Where the Midianites gathered against Gideon
Thousands of years ago, where Saul in horror
Passed to the witch of Endor, hearing Death
Nudging behind him with defeat. Here blood
And ghosts and prophets' bones and idols' altars
Have sanctified the land with suffering.

Emma and Beracha have sanctified it with their tears again.
Emma and Beracha, fourteen years old, bob-haired and straight and earnest,
Lead me, their guest, to see the Children's Village:
More than a hundred boys and girls, all ages, all dispositions,
Living together with a few teachers and workers—
All in the teachers' council, or in the children's council—
A working group, just housed, just fed sufficiently,
And living hard and free, as do their betters,
The pioneers. These too are pioneers,
Children who yearned to the Land of Israel.

"When I was left," says Beracha, "four years ago
An orphan, then my married sister offered
To keep me in the city; but I heard
Children were being taken to Palestine,
So I was bound to go to Palestine,
And so I came, and here I want to stay."

This is the army of the children, the Crusade,
The conquering innocents come from the north.
"Here's our school," says Emma, "But it's old fashioned.

As soon as we have funds, we shall make tables
And chairs, and do away with these old benches.
Our library too needs books and chairs and tables,
So we can study more without our teachers
And come to class just for discussion.”

“That,”

Says Beracha, “is what Pogachof is planning.
He says he cannot teach us. We must learn
Because we will it. And we do—most of us—
To work; to learn, that we may work more freely,
More knowingly, and serve our people so.
I want to serve, I came to serve,” she says,
Her eyes aglow with youthful self-importance.
“Now I must go,” says Emma, “for I’m nurse
To the youngest children, four and five years old,
And I must fetch and dress them now. Shalom.”
She takes us to the room with rows of cribs
Where she is matron, shows us there the playthings.
“I think that boys,” she says, “should be given dolls
That they may get the parent-instinct too,
As well as girls.”

Then she runs away,
Her bare knees twinkling down the grassy slope.

Beracha takes my hand and leads me on:
The cows, the chickens, kitchen, laundry, bakery,
The garden, vegetables, nurseries, fields,
And everywhere the children hard at work,
Half-day of work, half-day of study—play
There’s time for, too—but the work’s
An interest, self-planned, responsible.
“Now see,” a gardener boy points out to me,
“These trees I planted, they are doing best.
But Nathan’s vegetables are doing best.
I seem to have a gift for trees.”

It’s Purim eve:

In the great dining hall we gather,

Each dressed in something with the look of a

each dressed in something pretty, each aware,
Through the tense crowd of children, teachers, visitors
From Merchavia, Balfouria, Zerifim, Tel Adas,
Of his own weight, of being host, responsible,
Of singing in the chorus, many-tongued.
Now see the actors monkeying their teachers,
Mimicking work and scathing it in play:
Then making shadow pictures of Esther, of Ashveris;
Then boys as camels striding, many-legged,
Across the desert of the dining hall;
Then dancing—the round *Hora* of the pioneers—
Hand in hand, arm in arm in a wild rhythmic circle,
Big ones and little ones while the clock goes 'round.
And Pogachof, red-haired, red-bearded,
With one tooth missing and a smile a tooth,
Clapping his hands and singing while he dances.
The children cling—orphans are always clinging—
And sing and sing and are loath to go to bed.

Beracha, I remember you, so free,
So active, working, yearning; and I wonder
Whither your hungry eyes will lead you,
Through service on to love, through love to sacrifice.

Freedom and work: That is the faith
Of the Emek. Freedom without work is dissipation,
And working without freedom is slavery.
We work to free ourselves,
And we are free to give ourselves.

Moreh, the mount, looking across two valleys,
Bending above the red-roofed wee white houses
Of several Jewish villages, the buildings
Tinily clustered among Merchavia's groves,
Gazing athwart the carpet of Jesreel
Spread many-colored to the Samaritan hills,
Moreh, wide-visioned, silent, after many battles
Be now an altar! Take our sacrifice

BE HOW AN ANIM! TAKE OUR SACRIFICE.

Moreh, your name has rung around the ages,
Prophets and kings have preached and passed and perished,
And still men dream of justice and of joy.
Moreh, your priests are children.

TOO FREE FOR NEHAMA

Nehama is seventeen or so years old,
Too old to be a child, yet scarce a woman
Along with the teachers with whom she works and earns.
Her prim young face is wistful yet unknowing
Her own deep wishes hidden under duties.
Nehama is out of place in the Children's Village,
Orphaned with the children, too young to be a mother,
Clinging to a past and longing for a future,
And sewing all day long at children's frocks.

"Nehama, don't you want to go into a group,
With workingmen, with young folk like yourself?"

"No, no," she says, (in broken Hebrew still,
But two years from the horrors in Ukania)
"No, no, the workingmen's groups are too free."
"How—too free, Nehama?"

"Every way."

I think Nehama fears both life and love,
Safely and longingly tucked away from both.
At last she says: "Too free religiously;
They do not keep the Sabbath, cook and ride
And wash clothes on the Sabbath.—No, I couldn't."

MERCHAVIAH

THE DRY BONES

Battles on battles sowed these fields with bones.
When the dry bones arose and put on flesh,
This was the flesh, these are the forms that rose,
This is the Valley.

 If their young strong frames
Flying on Arab chargers through the plain,
Swinging the hoe, driving the plow, or kneading
Bread in the trough, are troubled by old eyes,
Deep visioned, seeing sorrow, wisdom-shadowed,
Remember: These are the dry bones of the slain,
This is the spirit of the living Lord,
This is the Valley.

These were the first to come—these are the pioneers—
Into the Valley green and fair and empty.
They came before the War, with hoes and guns:
First came the watchmen, riding lonely steeds,
Then twenty men and girls to a small slice
Of land bought in the midst, bought of the Arabs,
Fair priced, by Israel's national treasury.
They slept in Arab hovels of dried mud,
They bought their water from an Arab well,
They plowed their strip of land and sowed their wheat.
Hunger and fever, loneliness and death
Went grinning down the field beside their plow.
The dry bones roared in putting on their flesh.
Shuddering in the stark heat, they found the well
Closed to them, for the Arab would not sell.
For thirty hours with parching throats they worked,
While up the mountain path to Nazareth
One drove their mules to carry water down.

Athirst, they dug, and digging still, and digging
They came to water, made a Jewish well
On their own land, and drank the stream of life.

Upon the knoll where stood the Arab huts,
Around the ruins fig trees spread their tents,
Rich foliage, many patterned, greens the spot.

Of those first twenty, only few remain
Sometimes, when urged, to live those days again
In tense speech. Twice and thrice the group has changed.
The national funds have lent them land and houses,
And half a hundred living now in houses
Well-built and clean, with a stable like a castle,
With forests and with orchards and with food,
Are as spoilt children to those pioneers.

SOLDIERS

At Merchaviah are some soldiers from the Jewish Battalion,
Americans citizens, five years at Merchaviah,
Hebrew speaking, Hebrew thinking, stubborn as prophets,
Fighting with plowshares and pruning hooks
To win the land they came to take with guns.

THE JEWISH TOURIST SPEAKS

“In summer they burn and in winter they freeze.
Then why do they come and why do they stay?
No stoves in the winter, in summer the fever,
No clothes that are pretty, no theatre, no opera,
No movies, no crowds, nothing doing, no future,
No hope for advancement, no wealth, no career;
And food, if sufficient, not tasty, not meaty,
Beans and rice, beans and rice, rice and beans for a change;
So that often they suffer from semi-starvation
And call it a sickness—‘the weakness’—and rest.
Don’t you pine for Fifth Avenue, yearn for Broadway?
Don’t you long for a bath in a white porcelain room?
Can they stand these discomforts, this pricking and sticking;
Just camping at night and just working by day?
Then why do they come and why do they stay?”

THE SABBATH AT MERCHAVIAH

Hebrew we spoke though we had known each other
In English America;
And the sharp terseness of that ancient tongue
Matched his compact, powerful little person.
He was not tall, but firm
And brown from the blows of the sun.
A socialist born and bred, radical, revolutionary,
This legionaire has been breaking his “ism” against the earth.
“Life is bitter here, it is terrible,” he said,
“I would tell nobody to come.”
“Then why do you stay—why have you stayed so long?”
“Because I am a Jew; I have no other place.
Here I am free. And freedom
Is dearer than bread or joy.”

“But is not life here good, just, true,
The life in the group, the fellowship?”
“It is just, it is true,” he said, “but it is small;

As I am still a socialist, this is too small.
Sometimes we bore one another, being so few;
Sometimes we irritate, harass each other;
Friends generally, we have our likes and dislikes;
We should move on.”

“Then,” I said,
“You can move on to other groups,
To other fellowships.”

“Truly,
That is the hope: We are a fellowship
Rich in our poverty, in our common property
Throughout the Land of Israel: It is true
We have not solved the social problem
For the world, but for ourselves we have solved the social problem.”

(As the Jew in Palestine has solved the Jewish problem
Not for the Jewish people, but for himself.)
“I wish,” he said, “you could be here this Sabbath,
To see how beautiful it is.”

I remembered
Nehama and her horror of their Sabbath.
I told him. “Is it true you wash and cook
And ride upon the Sabbath?”

He’s a “radical,”
Makes no pretence at what is called “religion.”

“It’s true, the women cook as much as they find needful;
There is no formalism. But the washing
Is never done on Sabbath. No, we rest
With all our might. Yet if a girl should care
To wash her blouse or rinse some handkerchief,
We make no inquisition. As for riding,
We sometimes take our wagons out on Sabbaths
To pay calls at the neighbouring settlements,
And singing, whistling, trundle down the roads.
But once there came a tourist, very urgent—
A Jew—and begged on Sabbath for the hire

Of a wagon to take him on to Ein Harod.
No, Sir, we said, we don't do business
On Sabbath. No, Sir, we are not *goyim*."

On Friday evening there is singing, chanting
Of Hebrew ecstasies about our God
That would in other lands be called a prayer.
Here it is not a prayer, here it is re-creation.
Hands join in circle, feet begin to beat,
The circle sways, the feet and hands
And heads and bodies sing and dance,
The Hora turns now right now left,
With swaying, praying, playing forms,
Faster and faster, lighter, lighter,
Leaping, laughing, clapping, chanting,
Circle within the circle panting,
Dancing with passion, dancing with power,
With love and joy till the midnight hour.

Long sleep and tender rest
While the fields rest, and the beasts;
Singing again, and books and quiet talk,
And time for courtship and gay visiting,
And time for thought and speechless thanksgiving,
The mystic ease of muscles taut and tired.

There will come One,
Singing through the valleys, blowing a horn.
And while the synagogues with windows closed
Chant ancient beauty staled for want of air,
And the old rabbi stays to keep some code
Of the mummied law, these will arise and sing
And follow, follow, follow!

You that do not live religion, can talk religion.
You think faith has to do with a belief,
You think faith has to do with how you keep

Your dishes or arrange your days of rest.
Faith is a fellowship, faith is a life,
Faith breaks all bonds and is bound even unto death.

VISITORS

The dining room with its long plank tables,
Its long board benches,
Its linen curtains flowered red
By girls' deft fingers,
Phonograph in one corner, maps of the land and pictures
And checkered sunlight falling through the windows,
Is also guest-room, meeting-place, salon.
In from the kitchen stray the women, aproned—
One big with child—to eat an early portion,
For these must serve their comrades' meal.

Here the men stop for gossip. Here one reads in the evening,
Here one meets in long and loud and tense discussion,
Sitting on benches, tables, arms on shoulders,
Affectionate, antagonistic, close.

There's always plenty of one kind at least,
Now beans, now sour milk, now cauliflower;
And guests are welcome, beds are found for all.

Beside the door step, on a friendly stone,
There sit some wanderers escaped from Turkey,
From the army, Jews that served against their will,
From eastern lands; one son of Tiberias
Counting ten years of absence without news.
Tiberias—there he left his wife, his children,
Thither tomorrow he will climb by foot
Knowing nothing, having nothing but his staff and knapsack,
Lonely, a stranger begging at his home.
Tense are his eyes, with smiling, wistful glance,

Young, despite thin and darkly bearded face,
And long wierd coat. He speaks but little,
Awaiting the hours, afraid, impatient, eager.

Come in, share beans and rice and bed with us,
And know the Land of Israel is your home,
Even should that smaller home have vanished.

Tomorrow onward! And a few days later
I saw him climbing up the hills toward Safed
From low Tiberias, knapsack, staff, alone,
And his closed face and eyes bent on the roadbed,
Measured, mechanic steps were fearful to me
With centuries of searching.

THE ORCHARDS

Here the heart must sing and the head grow dizzy with fragrance.
Oh, what gardens, what gardens, palm and citron and fig,
Orange, almond and olive, alleys, aisles, rotundas,
Each a bloom in its season, kissing the breeze with balm!

Roots that suck into sweetness the poisoned breasts of fevers,
Trunks like the strings of a viol, lifting song from the swamps,
Foliage magical rising from the moisture of the meadows,
Raping the earth to save her, kissing away her tears.
Here the nightingale madly strings its beads of music,
Trilling the tale that only those who know understand.
Here in the pearly moonlight when the fruit is big on the branches
Life rises triumphant out of the deadly night.

Shade from the staring sunlight, rest when the day is fading.
Oh, but the days of effort, hunger, heat and sweat,
Hell for the sake of heaven! Half the year it was pasture,
Half the year it was desert, till we came and broke the land.

MERCHAVIAH THE VILLAGE

The village, flung along the ridge with cottages
Of stone, and barracks L-shaped down the valley,
Has one wee wooden house whose square of garden
Is patterned into beds of gay mosaics,
Prim coquetry of flowers. Here lives a “stranger,”
A Russian peasant woman gray and saintly,
White-kerchiefed, one who from her Christian strictness
Passed over to the Jewish discipline
With Christian fervor. Hard her hands with toil,
Her house and garden ranged severely clean.
And as I cannot understand her speech,
Rich and exotic, she complains not.

Not so the others. Poverty and love
Struggle and wrestle fierce for Israel’s land.
The older settlers—come before the war—
See neighbors gather but not land increase;
And the newcomer, spectacled, blackshirted,
Digging his well or hoeing in his garden,
Stops long enough to say: “It’s very hard,
Not land enough, not water, and too many
Mouths to be filled. Why don’t they give us more
Land, water, when the valley spreads so far?”

Even in the group, hardier in endurance, I had heard:
“We are cramped round with private property
Of Jews. The national funds would stretch in vain,
In village or in group, thirsty for irrigation.
Had we the water, we could plant intensively,
Orchards on orchards, forests of plantations;
Had we the land, we could stretch far in fields,
Barley and wheat, extensive cultivation,
Our water tower serves our houses, orchards,

Also the village; but the fields go dry.”

(One half the year the heavens pour abundance,
The other half must man dig deep to find it.)

So there is hunger still, unease, anxiety,
And not yet all the inventions of necessity,
And one would ask: “How of those other lands
From which you came? Is struggle here too fierce?”

But one’s ashamed. There’s no deserter here,
And love throws poverty and holds him down
In the wrestle. “We are free and fearless here;
The bread of freedom’s sweet though it be lean.
Better the stones and dust of Israel’s land
Than wine and dainties in the hall of slaves.”

TEL ADASHIM

From Balfouria, from the hill of Moreh
One saw it lovely, nestled red-roofed
Among foliage, among meadows,
The whiteness of its houses mellowed,
A tiny village.

Coming nearer,
The toy lost charm; the houses are but hovels
Bought of the Arabs; broken streets between them,
Mangy walls, bald-spotted plaster
And sickly-looking children scantily clad.
One woman welcomed us as visitors
Into her house: enormous, white-washed room
With stove and pots and table on one side,
Beds on another, and a baby's crib
Covered with netting. Cases used for chairs,
A camp for home, a cave to eat and sleep in.
Her skin was burnt with many years of work,
Walnut, and wrinkled like the walnut shell;
Her black hair cropped against her neck and curling
Like a Hottentot's above her broad brown forehead.
She welcomed us with a warm hand and spoke
Out of a heart grown soft with suffering
Under the knotty shell of toil.

The teacher

A youth just from college at Jerusalem,
Had worked and dreamed of work before he studied,
And volunteered for a school among the farmers.
Compact he was, athletic, brown and stiffnecked.
The school: A barrack empty save for benches,
A black-board and a map of Palestine;
A shed for carpentry beside it, where they made
The benches; a vegetable garden and some fowls.

The kindergartner, tall and white and dainty,
With braided hair and vision-seeing eyes,
Greeted us too, unlocked for us reluctantly
The kindergarten-room, another barrack,
With tables, but no chairs save wooden boxes,
Pictures a few, but many shells, stones, berries
And other toys ingenious, loving hands
Can cull from intricate nature.

“See,” she said,
“We have no chairs; but we have boards and soon
Children will make them in their carpentry.”

Purim, the schools were closed. The teacher led us
Up a steep broken stair, to his own cubby-hole,
One-windowed, narrow, with a bed and table,
A lamp and a few books. And followed children,
Clinging to him and her, large-eyed and hungry,
For love or food, who knows?

“It’s not so bad,”
He said, “the workers here are known as mighty,
Diligent and well-trained, true farmer-folk;
And if it seems that they live hard and ugly,
It’s the hard task they took, bad houses, land neglected.
And here the children, living with their parents,
Cannot be nursed and nurtured as in groups.
But these are stern, heroic comrades.”

As we left,
We were enticed to taste of Haman’s pockets,
Crammed full of jam and seeds of poppy. Godspeed
They gave us, comrades greeting comrades,
In the slow, peaceful siege of Israel’s land.

And all the roads were lined with wheat and trees,
Green triumph waving flags, with here and there
A tawny figure taut against the sun
In labour.

THE WATER TOWER

MARKENHOF AND ZERIFIM

A water-tower, gray against the sky,
And ringed with scaffolding, unfinished;
And round the water-tower clinging close
Two camps, of strangers, making peace with water.
Why should there be two camps, each tiny,
Two sets of workers on the wide, wide plain,
Two sets of chickens and two incubators,
Two sets of babies ranged in dainty cribs?
Because there is one water-tower—that's why
They came together—and they stay apart,
Though friendly, because there are two minds, two hearts,
Two methods, come from two far lands abroad.

Alike, yet different. One sees it in the girls,
The way the pictures in the dining barracks
Are framed and chosen here and here,
The flowers—blue lupin—on the table at Markenhof.
For Markenhof is German, Zerifim Russian!
At Markenhof in Germany they studied
Farming together; and now they farm together,
Not free, nor these, nor these, from the schools of exile.
One sees a different order in the barns,
The chicken runs, no doubt even in the fields.

But one's the water-tower; as in a German,
A Russian village rises the church steeple,
Symbol of unity, of upward striving,
Of godliness, so here the water-tower
Lifts up the heart of man thirsting to God.

KFAR GIDEON

“Hold up the mules, unharness them!
To-day is Purim! Hold them up!
We’ve had some wine, and you shall have some,
You’ll sing, you’ll dance, you’ll jig with us,
Whether you will or whether you won’t!”

There’s no one more jolly, there’s no one more stubborn,
There’s no one more wild than an orthodox Jew.
Just let him get loose in the joy of his godliness
And the poor, weak *Halutz* must give in to his peers.

Here’s the *Halutz*, pioneer from Merchaviah,
Lifted high by these black-beards, carried into the synagogue,
Regaled with five cups, willy-nilly, and carried
Back to the cart to harness his mules.

A handful of shacks and a family in each of them,
A desperate struggle to keep the mouths going;
Forty families together that left Transylvania,
With hopes and with money, with cows and with kin.

The cows died of plagues, the children go milkless,
A family of ten fill a room full of beds.
The money is scattered, the crops problematic,
But there’s wine for the *Kiddish* and cake for the feast.

“We had comfort and money; we came to be human.
We are crowded and hungry; but now we are men.
What we prayed we are doing, what we hoped we are making,
And the land of our dreams is the land of our pains.”

Today there’s a wedding; a maid Transylvanian
Is wedding a youth from Balfouria, the village,

An American youth, in Maryland born.
Oh, she's pretty, he's witty; it's only a pity
Their people abroad cannot dance at the wedding.
There's a farm ready waiting, with kine and with poultry,
There are fields for the man and a house for the wife.

The idyls of troubadours, dreams of Arcadia
Are here with their poetry, here with their pains;
And if sweat is not dainty and dung is not savoury,
Then know, though the pains have a poignant reality,
And romance grows weary with trudging the sand,
The poets are fakers, their songs are but jabber
To the joy and romance that sing in our land.

THE MIZRAHI GROUP

These boys are orthodox and those are freethinkers;
These pray with caps and shawls in formal Hebrew poetry,
Those pray naked to the waist in the sun, hoe in hand,
Without words but with long Hebrew thoughts.

These insist they are cooperative, not communistic;
They explained to me the difference between cooperative and communistic
groups.

But cooperative beans and herring taste the same as communistic.
Their tents are the same khaki, their cots the same unmattressed,
Their lives the same hard, brotherly, moneyless, share and share alike.

This bearded boy is cook—for the one girl worker left them—
But there's not much to spoil in beans and herring.
The oilcloth-covered boards, the tin spoons, the tin dishes,
Are communistic, godless instruments of God.

It's as hard for a Mizrahi to be without girls as for a freethinker;
A psalm is as moving chanted in prayers or sung in the field.
The Daughter of the Voice and the holy Presence
Have neither sect nor party, but come to the pure hearted,
To the blistered hands and the weary thighs,
That bleed for the sake of Zion and thirst for the well of the Lord.

THE YEBLONA REBBELE

Up to his knees in mud—
The Yeblona Rebbele—
Up to their knees in mud
That were up to their ears in theology.

Beards and earlocks
And spades and shovels
Have brought together
The word and the deed.

Talk of faith and works:
This is a working faith
That comes with its praying shawl
To wipe up the swamps of the Holy Land.

Knee deep in mud all week,
And dancing and singing on Sabbath
With a free heart of inner satisfaction
For having made the word a deed!

Talk of martyrs rejoicing,
Of Akiba foreseeing Messiah
Because of an hour of despair!

The Yeblonda *Hassidim*
And their Rebbele,
Rejoice in digging out the fever beds
Of the swamp-entrenched mosquito,
Rejoice in building barracks
For their city-spoilt wives and children.
And the old men fight with the young
For the privilege of redemption
Of our land by digging.

Merchants and brokers from Warsaw,
Oblivious of newspapers,
Wiping the sweat from their cheeks,
Joke about the price of wheat
While breaking the ground to grow it.

“We all live together
And share, such as they are, our knives and spoons and forks.
There’s a wise mother on the Committee
Managing the joint household;
And the Yeblona Rebbele
Has gone up to Jerusalem
To make our commune a member
Of the workingmen’s organization.”

At Passover
The Yeblona *Hassidim*
Visited the farmers at Nahalal,
Neighbors in the lonely, burgeoning valley,
Jewish hands stretched across the grass.
There was no inquisition
As to earlocks or beards or *teffilin*,
For the Yeblona Rebbele knows
That in the Holy Land
In whose bosom are embedded
The roots of the tree of life,
There’s not much difference between the holiness
Of this man and that man who works.

BET ALFA AND HEFZIBAH

THE TWO GROUPS

Bet Alfa is "Group A" of the "Young Watchman,"
Troop of a hundred boys and girls
Gone farthest down, far east into the Emek,
On the lone slope upraising tents and barracks
Close to the camp of Hefzibah, a tested group
Of pioneers, older, more immured
To scouting, labor and malaria.
Long they have worked together; most are mated;
Many have children. First at Hedera
Hefzibah worked, then pioneered to the Emek,
And when they moved, malaria moved with them.
That's passing too. (Waist deep into the swamps
One sends the fighters with their patient spades.)

Hefzibah and Bet Alfa both have many Germans,
Both are a bit highbrow, Bet Alfa more so, being younger,
Both are orderly, proud of their efficiency,
And so there's peace and fellowship between them;
But still they're separate, separate nurseries,
Separate dining barracks, but one school,
One dairy, one dispensary—cooperation
With freedom, by agreement.

At Bet Alfa

There's a girl carpenter who learned abroad
Her skill, and stands all day
Measuring boards and marking them and sawing,
In the comfort of bobbed curls and knickerbockers,
And singing as she works. It's a pity
The girls who cook had learnt no skill abroad.
Hard to cook in huge cauldrons for a hundred,
With nothing good to choose from, and a longing

To plow and plant the earth. There's a boy baker
In Dutch *sabots*, bare legged, at the oven.
Food is a precious thing. We've still to learn
That men and women are as worthy of service
As babies, cows and fields of wheat.
The first good building is sure to be the stable,
The second is the nursery, and then
Come barracks built for sleeping, lastly houses.
Hard on themselves, these pioneers,
Careless of self, deep centred in our purpose!
But they are precious, precious waste.

Among the waving flags of wheat
That green or gild the fields about
There stands a palm tree, greened about
With lesser foliage. Slenderly
It lifts its spreading hands of blessing
Toward Hefzibah and toward Bet Alfa:
This is the spring, this is the throb of life,
The pulsing water.
And the young heart beats swifter to the rains,
Eyes used to books now read the clouds for signs.
Water and fire and earth and air, the elements
Now clench these hearts and move to prayer the lips
Of Israel's priests, young devotees of work.

THE CHILDREN

Tippety tiptoe the naked children
Are dancing over the hill.
They have come out to play at the heat of the day
And leap from the window-sill.

One-year-olds, two-year-olds, three-year-olds, four,
Out at the window and in at the door.

Beside the nursery barrack

Beside the nursery barrack,
Pink and perfect and unconcerned,
The babies of Bet Alfa
Are taking the air.

Neat cribs in a row,
White cages for little birds
Covered with white veils
And sweet with love and cleanliness!
The community babies
Are tended by community mothers,
Young, girlish, rosy Madonnas,
And nursed each one by his own mother,
Clasped in her tender hands.

When the men go hungry
Because the fields have failed them,
When strong men joke over a pea-porridge,
The babies and their mothers are fed on cream and honey.
This is the Great Harvest,
This is the hope and the mystery,
This is the Temple, hung with laughing pictures,
The nursery, the luxury, the treasure-house of the group.
The older children,
Free, responsible,
Live together in their own barrack,
And go to work and play
And go to study and sing
Freely, responsibly.

In the long dining-barrack
The children have their own table
With flowers on it. They carry their own dishes,
Orderly, arrange their service,
With Rappaport, the teacher, sitting among them
But no other grown-up.
They are a bit impertinent,
As impertinent as grown-ups

As important as growth up

And much more honest.

Rappaport is teaching

Around a table in the children's barrack

Several barefooted children in working clothes.

"The children would object," he says,

"To a visitor. Come, visit me this evening,

After the lecture on earths and fertilizers.

Then I have time."

The children are friendly

But unconcerned, disconcerned.

They are good friends, dear comrades with their parents,

But they are free and independent.

Rappaport, long ago in Europe

Poet, educator and philosopher,

Shoe-maker, learnt shoe-making to serve humanity,

To shoe mankind, but now has left this labor

To teach all day the village children.

His cobbler's shop

Is dear to him; he sleeps there still.

The smell of leather

Eases his soul that chafes a bit at books.

He is thin, emaciated,

With burning eyes and very friendly lips.

"Four of the children are my own," he says,

"The others are from the twin villages,

Bet Alfa, Hefzibah; and from Tel-Yosef

Where there's no teacher, a few have come to live.

Ten minutes' walk—they see their parents Sabbaths.

The little ones learn in the morning,

Play, work in the afternoon. The older ones

Work in the morning, study later on:

Bible and mathematics, physics, chemistry,

The land, the people—learning and life are one.

Books—they will read when they have learnt that books

Are less than life, are born of life, are barren
Flowers of a fruitful life, of work and love.”

Rappaport dreams for youth, of youth organized
The world over, to save the world.
He looks forward, seeing aghast our failure
The beauty of new childhood, redeemer of the world.

A gust of wind
Rattled the barrack boards and smoked the lamp
That spluttered on old shoes made good as new.

Elijah Rappaport,
Child-eyed, child-souled,
Rose wondering to peer between the boards.
“A rough night after a hot day,” he said.
The lamp blew out, and fumbling in the dark
We felt our way to the door and through the wind
Sought each our separate flapping tents.

THE TENT

Thunder of double wings of canvas
Flapping, rapping hour on hour.
The wind has power!
A windy night and a thick safe tent,
And a warm safe bed.
But overhead
Rapping, flapping, cracking, creaking,
Breaking, that won't let you sleep
For continuous waking.
And then you say: “It'll not blow away!
It never did before.”
And your heart is clear and your head is calm
For all the thundering, raging, roaring.
Weary body, open eyed

Tries to rest but beats and beats
With the motions of the wind
Shaking life, urging, imploring
For something you cannot give,
For the gift of death, the uttermost of life.
It never blew away before.
But the tent pins tug and tug,
And the canvas like a rigging
Fights the seas of savage wind.

Now a little flea
Jumps up from the sand
And crawls to torture you under your night-shirt.
He is quite unconcerned
By the restless, importunate wind
That makes you relax so stubbornly.

The night turns gray,
And you doze through the war and the attack
And the torturing prick of the flea,
Till your tent mates call you in the cool dawn.
Dew on the grass, a kiss of fragrance in the air,
Carressing, whispering winds before a scorched day,
Tenderest beauty greets sore limbs and eyes.
And somebody says:
“The tents almost blew away last night.
It was a rare night for wind.”

GIRLS

Ada, a month from Poland,
Live-eyed, pretty, wistful,
Come to join her sister,
Lounges on the other cot
Tired from a day in the kitchen
But itching to talk.

Ada is lonesome;
Her sister has man and baby,
Her comrades have their comrades,
She has not found a companion.
Had she a companion, Ada would be happy.
She likes to work,
She likes the life, simple and free,
She loves the green plain, the mountains up behind Hefzibah and Bet Alfa,
The vision of Moab's cloud-hills over Jordan,
The flowers, the fragrant warmth of Esdraelon.

But there's no one to talk to—
Just simple talk, not intellectual.
Bet Alfa is horribly intellectual,
All college graduates and highbrows:
There's no one to walk with by moonlight.

“The relations of the boys and girls?”
She says, “They're good, you cannot know how good they are.
The boys prefer the boys to girls
As comrades, just for talk and talk.
And when night comes or even Sabbath,
There's no one to go walking with
In this gorgeous country.
Everyone is too tired. Everyone wants to sleep.
It's not interesting to sleep.”

So Ada is lonely; Ada likes to flirt.
Here love grows like a flower; it does not flutter
Like a butterfly.

Shifra
Who could not work in the city,
Always thinking of her own development,
None too wise yet striving to be intellectual,
Has found herself by forgetting herself,

Can work without wondering
Whether she will learn French from washing dishes.
Here everyone is intellectual
Yet everyone works in field or barn or house
And knows that thoughts are ripples on the surface,
That intellect is no better than a spade to dig with
Into the deep earth of life.

Shifra

Has grown simple and smiles freely
As nature meant her to, and says:
“Here a girl is valued for her value.
If she is stupid, nobody condones it,
If she is wise, she is given the power of council,
If she is pretty, well, she is merely pretty,
And that is pleasant but doesn’t help her work.”

Where there is hard working and hard living
There is hard loving.
And love is not fenced with the thorns
That make it forbidden fruit.

It may be bitter fruit,
Fruit that sticks in the throat,
But it is not shameful fruit,
Not rotten.

The babies
Are flowers of love alone, of pure love
Unsullied by the wish for power or career
Or family or comfort or position
Or wealth or name or married safety.
Love is love.
And when two love they go to dwell together
As man and wife, in tent or barrack.
And when two cease to love, they part again,
As decency demands.
But few are the partings, very, very few.
For love is love:

FOR LOVE IS LOVE.

Not vanity, nor flattery, nor idle appetite,
But love, love alone.
And love lasts.

“O my God, the soul which thou gavest me is pure;
Thou didst create it, thou didst fashion it,
Thou didst breathe it into me.”

Pure burns the flame of love
On the altar of labor.
Eyes shine with the truth of love,
With the freedom of honesty.

Father in black blouse,
Mother, barefooted, in an apron,
White kerchief on her head,
Come to the dining-barrack
Swinging the boy between them
By his little hands.
O, you little laugher, you little chaffer,
Sit still on Father's knee!
Don't put your hands in the soup.
All day they have worked, Mother, Father,
All day you have played with your comrades.
Comes evening, comes time for love.
Let's away to the still meadow,
Out under the fig tree;
We'll romp in the grass,
Silently, laughingly,
With the joyous earth.

TEL YOSEPH

JOSEPH TRUMPELDOR

This is a regiment of the Army of Labor,
Camped on Tel Yoseph—the Hill of Joseph—
A bay of Mount Gilboa.
There's another regiment at Ratisbon,
And one at Gilladi in Galilee,
And groups sent here and there
To carry the banner of labor,
Brotherhood and devotion.

All these are joined
By one purse and one purpose,
And what one group needs another group supplies.
This is the brotherly covenant
That divides them from other groups,
Splits them off from Ein Harod;
But all pioneers are comrades,
However they may wrangle with opinions.

Tel Yoseph
Is named for Joseph Trumpeldor, the hero
Who died defending Tel Hai
In upper Galilee
Against an attack of Bedouins.
In the days when France and England
Uncertainly shared the dangerous borderland,
Trumpeldor went because it was dangerous
To help defend the outpost.
There with a handful of boys and girls
He fell, meeting proudly
The death of heroes.

Now Joseph Trumpeldor
Is general of the Army of Labor,
Invisible leader; and his monument
Is the rock of Tel Yoseph.

Wild flowers golden, red and purple
Zigzag 'round the barracks; steeply
Rise the walls of stone, defences
Against Bedouin invaders.
They are no longer needed,
Disuse has abandoned them to flowers,
For the empty valley
Is filling with brothers that bring security,
And the Arab neighbors,
Turned from foes to brothers,
Have learnt the sweetness of peace.

Also Tel Yoseph has learnt
From the Arab; and the Arab's wooden plow,
Crude branch of a tree to break the upper earth,
Tel Yoseph's farmers have imitated in iron,
Compliment of civilization
To elemental wisdom.

Tel Yoseph grows less dangerous,
But not less lovely.
In summer there's still malaria to grapple with;
And across the valley is a hill
For Tel Yoseph, for Ein Harod, for all Nuris
To build a healthy village on.
If Tel Yoseph moves
And leaves its wild flowers and its fortresses,
Malaria, mosquitoes, fountain, garden,
Will it remain a grave, a monument
To Joseph Trumpeldor?

I would sing a song, immortalizing,
To Arab thieves, to Bedouin wild-

to Arab thieves, to Bedouin raids,
To fear, to weariness, to sickness,
To fever, to malaria, to hunger,
To bad food badly cooked,
To crude workers learning at the plow,
To rebellion unspoken, pain in the deep night.
For I would sing
Heroes and heroines
At the plow, at the oven;
I would sing for their children
Who shall go safely to school in a safe village,
Of Joseph Trumpeldor and of Tel Yoseph.

NURSERIES

Black are the barracks, but come closer,
See how neatly they are finished:
Order here, and even beauty.

There are two nurseries in Tel Yoseph,
One at the foot for flowers and trees,
One on the summit for babies.
Trees one sells—it's business—
But flowers are for joy.
And about the fountain
Greened with mosses.
Before the barrack
Dining-room there is a square
Full of flowers, snap-dragons, roses,
Carnations, daisies, phlox and pansies.
And there's a rosy girl, a fat one,
In roly-poly knickerbockers
Happily carrying water-cans
From the fountain to the garden.
Only give water and love to the Land of Israel
And it blooms.

On the summit
Are the babies sweetly sleeping
In hygienic cribs.
A tiny girl in rompers
Has come out on the rocks to build a house
Of stones and nails; she hammers them
To see if one can nail together stones.
And here's her comrade busily
Washing something in a pool of water.
"I'm washing the nails," he says,
"To make the house clean."

In and out the nurses
Move quietly with broth or towels,
While the mothers are working
Somewhere in field or kitchen
Dreaming contentedly
Of the hour when they shall hold their babies.

Meanwhile the babies sweetly sleep
In hygienic cribs.

THE BLUE SHIRT

In every group is a sewing room
With shelves around it curtained white
Where is kept the store of clothing,
Linens; and among them in the center
Sewing-machines busily buzzing
All day under the deft feet and hands of women.

On Fridays—or between them—come the members
For supplies, clean shirts, clean dresses:
Even girls choose here their dresses
From the common village store.
I have sometimes asked in wonder,
Seeing girls in dainty cotton
Frocks embroidered, Arabic robes
Many colored and becoming:
“Can a girl forego the pleasure
Of a dress that suits her spirit
As a petal fits its flower?”
“But we come to choose,” they answer,
“And we’ve dresses almost labelled
Since we always use the same.”

So human nature
In a juster, happier arrangement
Finds itself as ever satisfied.
Even the boys
Have preferences and can express them
In a blouse or in a belt.

“For example,” says Joel,
“I always get this blue shirt from the store room;
No one else would care to touch it,
For although it is not mine,
I have an inner connection with this blue shirt.”

His eyes are as blue as the shirt.

CIVILIZATION

Tel Yoseph, a group, a *Kibbutz*, of two hundred
Boasts of order, work in schedules,
Hours of rest and hours of play,
Has a stage in its long dining hall.
Best of all—and pride peculiar—
Tel Yoseph has electricity,
Bulbs for light in all its barracks,
And explains its proud discovery:
“Electricity is cheaper, cleaner
And less drudgery than lamps with oil.”

It's incongruous
With the bare legs and the simple
Cots in barracks of bare boards.
But one forgets
That simplicity is the peak of civilization
And electricity goes deeper to the heart of the mountains and the stars
Than even oil or coal.

In Tel Yoseph
There are boys in the kitchen more than girls,
For the girls do not know
That their rebellion against the kitchen
Is a rebellion against a slavery
That they have happily escaped.

One can be as free in a kitchen as in a field.

Talk of civilization:
There's an American girl at Tel Yoseph
From a sophisticated home of comfort.
She is most at ease
In her blue smock and her white kerchief,
There's a light in her eyes that her sisters may envy for its beauty,
And seek cosmetics or a style of dress to give them.

But there's a beauty
Cannot be imitated; it's too real.
Through browned skin unprotected by veils,
Through cheeks ruddy from the sun itself,
It shines from the eyes:
Freedom and wisdom,
Simplicity.

EIN HAROD

THE DINING HALL

A village eating together,
More than three hundred persons
Meeting thrice daily
To eat together.
Thunder of voices, hail of feet
Storming against the walls.
Steam of many bodies
Misting the air.
This is the sacrifice to labor,
Offering on the altar of achievement:
More than three hundred men and women
At the clang of a gong
Gathering slowly, lingering in groups,
Into the huge, bare, wooden dining hall
Around the bare board tables
To chipped enameled plates,
Sitting wedged together, sweating,
Passing huge bowls absently,
Talking, discussing, eating absently.

Many comrades love this little crowd
Who cannot bear the smaller groups,
The intimacy and the fear of quarrels
Breaking their lives. Immune to noise,
They go their purposeful and silent way,
Eating to eat and working to be free.
Ein Harod is not group,
It has no unity;
Its people come from everywhere.
Lonely, deserted one can be
In that crowded dining hall.

Yet when a stranger
Comes at noon into the dining-hall,
To him steps a member of the committee,
In working shirt, bare throated,
Invites him to be seated,
Sees that a steaming bowl is passed to him
And bids him eat.
His neighbor speaks to him;
He is accepted tacitly as comrade.

Such is the hospitality of bread and salt
To the wanderer in the Emek.

OLD PEOPLE

Old people,
Parents from abroad
Who many times tried to prevent their children
From coming, now have come to join their children.
So there are grandparents at Ein Harod,
Old pious souls who kiss the earth with prayer.

For them, as for the little children,
There is a separate dining room;
And the old ladies keep the kitchen
And cook and serve as they see fit.

The meals are special there, as for the children,
More milk, more eggs, and all the chickens
The old folk wish to take from the village poultry yard.

Here's the first communistic group
Of grandparents, joining the old and new
Vision of Jewish duties. But most Jewish—
More than your economic social theories
Or your dear customs and observances—
Is this respect, this tenderness
About the extra milk and eggs and chickens.

THE LITTLE WHITE ROOM

Strangers took me into their white room—
White washed boards in a wooden hut—
The man gave me his cot to sleep on,
And the woman her mirror to use.
He slept elsewhere, camping out, and she
Accepted me as sister for a night.
Dainty was the room, sweet with flowers in vases,
Sprinkled with little German prints on the walls.

This is a German couple,
Only a while in our land.
The girl has two long braids still,
And her mother's picture over her bed.
She is working with the cows,
She comes in very tired,
But not too tired to ask if all with me goes well.

THE HOSPITAL

The hospital is a pleasant place
Clean and white and quiet,
And from all over the Emek
One comes to rest there when one is ill,
Or for childbirth.

The expectant mothers
Freed a while from work,
Idling deliciously in a strange place,
Are tourists, visitors,
Inspecting Ein Harod, its community work shops, its nurseries, its spring,
Gazing with curiosity at the biggest group,
And received as distinguished guests.

THE SCHOOL

There are two houses full of babies,
The best of houses, the ruddiest of babies,
Infant Bacchi lolling in naked contentment,
Waiting for their nurses to bathe their succulent bodies,
Waiting for their mothers to bare the abundant breast.

And there's a house for children,
With sewing room and kitchen
And poster pictures of playfellows
Running around the walls.
There's Haya Sarah, old pioneer,
Ruddy cheeked and plump,
Mother of a young daughter, farmer student
At the girls' farming school in Nahalal,
Mother of two little boys, naturalists,
Whose stuffed birds edify the school room,
Whose snakes in alcohol grace the school museum.
Haya Sarah is sewing linen hats,
Dozens of them, for the village children,
Sitting all day long at the machine in the children's sewing room
And chaffing with the children that run in and out.
Children are washing dishes and slicing vegetables.
There are good things to eat in the children's larder,
According to the books, to the ritual of health,
To the worship of infancy: The first fruits to the first fruits.

A group of barefoot children is pulling a child-sized farm-cart
Full of food supplies; their teacher helping to push it.
One little boy seeking solitude
Has dubbed himself shepherd,
And tying the kid to the lamb,
Has gone off to the meadow
To watch them eat grass and to tickle their ears.

But the school room
Is not deserted; there a group of children
Is reading the Bible,

Reading of the *Emek, Gai, Afikim*,
Valleys, glens and winter streams in the Land of Israel.
“What is the *Emek*?” asks the teacher,
Speaking the language of the Book.
“This” answers a boy, “this here is the *Emek*,
And *Afikim* are Wadys, and *Gai*—I know the *Gai*—
It’s the break in the mountains;
There, I can show you.”

Gilboa and Ein Harod
Are written in the book
That the children of Ein Harod
Are learning by heart and head.
And the book of Ein Harod,
Written, sung tomorrow,
Will be the sequel in the same tongue
Of the Book of the Judges.

“Now let us do sums,”
Says the teacher,
“I’ll tell you about a cow
Who gives so and so many quarts of milk a day,
To make so and so much butter;
And you’ll tell me
How much butter we can make in a month
If we keep so and so much milk for drinking,
And how much cheese from the curds.”
“What of the milk on the Sabbath?” asks a little girl.

Then we imagine a vat
Into which the milk is poured,
And the teacher must answer as many
Questions as the children.

When school is over, a boy and a girl
Pile the chairs on the tables and wash the floors
With pail and mop and plentiful streams of water.

There's a flower garden to tend,
There are chickens and pigeons and vegetables,
There are little brothers and sisters.
The tiny ones in the garden
Are gathering stones to play with.
One proudly lifts his head, a three-year-old; and says:
"We are working."

That is the pride of Ein Harod, the test of manhood:
"We are working."

GENTILE TOURISTS

They came to see the well where Gideon chose
The Lord's three hundred knights—at Ein Harod.
Begloved, begoggled and becameraed,
Their auto waiting safely on the road,
They walked adventurously, carrying
A dainty lunch in napkins and wax paper
To eat and drink at Gideon's soldiers' spring.

Clear bubbles the water
Out of the sheer rock rising,
And the iron gateway built
Has not hindered the wild flowers,
Vetch, anemonies and poppies,
From climbing up the tumbled rocks
Where Ein Harod's barefoot school children
Love to scramble hunting for caves.

Clear flows the water, ice-clean tastes the water
That is captured to slake the thirst
Of several Jewish villages.

Ein Harod leans against the mountain Gilboa
And looks out to the plain
And greets the spring with its fallow

And greens the spring with its loam.
Cool flows the water
Over the tired, dusty, sweaty bodies
Of the laborers, men and women,
Come to dip at the cool of the day;
Beyond, at the shaded turn.

These tourists have not come
Either to lap or to kneel.
They drink from nickel traveling cups:
The Lord will not choose them.

They look suspiciously
At this village full of Hebrew-speaking
Rabble, barefooted and slackly clad,
With white kerchiefs on their heads.
And they befriend me with courteous coldness
In English. They have not come
To see the three hundred chosen of the Lord
At Ein Harod. It just a bit disgusts them;
They'd rather see the chickens than the babies,
The neat and scientific incubators
And thousands of orphans 'round the stepmother
Of a shaded lamp. That's nice, though not historical.

They really are most interested in history
And haven't time—so sorry—for the village.

But just above the spring is the first barrack,
Shoemaker's room, and they come in with me
And greet, with nose-stopped condescension,
The shoemaker, a young and bearded Jew
In overalls and eye-glasses, beautiful,
With dreamy, student's eyes and worker's muscles.

It's good they had not time to visit
The carpenter. They might have turned their noses
Up at Jesus

Up at Jesus.

NURIS

THE WATCHMAN IN THE VINEYARD

The mare stood stark against the moon
Daintily silhouetted,
Finely balanced as a harp
Waiting for her master's hand
To draw music—
Waiting.

The earth was white as snow,
The vines were silver as an old man's beard,
Shadows tattooed the ground.
A draught of white wine in a cup of sapphire,
Intoxicating, entrancing, glowed the moon.

Magic silence was torn asunder
By hoot of jeering jackals,
A cheer, a wail, a phantom carouse.

The mare stirred not, finely chiseled
Flanks of black against the moon—
Waiting.
Her master, hero-muscled,
Crouched to hide among the vines.

Clap of a gun-shot,
Shriek of a bullet.
The mare vibrated
Like the string of a harp
Touched by her master's finger.
The howling ceases,
The moon stares,
The mare stands statuesque.
To the roots of the earth,
To the zenith of heaven—
Silence.

VISTA

From Giva, the hill, the loveliest of groups—
With conscious, well-trained workers,
Well-painted barracks,
Crowned with its vineyards, proud of its small numbers—
From Giva, the perfect little group,
One looks out over the many-colored valley
And counts the villages.

Four years ago this land was Arab pasture,
A sea of grass between the hills and hills.
Then came small craft, the tent-sails,
Camping scouts.
And still at Ein Harod and at Bet Alfa
The tents remain, the barracks are too few.

Count the villages:
There's Ein Tabor close by,
Twin hill to Giva,
A cooperative village
With farmer's mother, father, son and daughter
Housed in one barrack on the tried family plan,
Taking the place of the forbidden laborer.
And he that has the largest family
Has the best produce and the highest taxes.
There's an old man in a rabbi's cap
Hoeing a flower garden, a young woman
Watering her vegetables while her twin babies
Roll in the poppies.

Ein Tabor is charming
For its green gardens 'round its tiny huts.

And down the valley
There lies Ein Harod
Against the mountains:

And against the mountains,
Ranged farther east, Tel Yoseph,
Then Bet Alfa, Hefzibah;
Two railroad stations, nerved about with trees,
And the bright rails, blue vein of traffic wending
From Lake Kinnereth to the Mediterranean,
Where throbs a long, thin line of cars,
Trailing its smoke and crawling up from Jordan.

Beyond the valley open towards the Jordan,
The steady cloud-wall of the Moab hills
Pastelled against the shaded blue of heaven,
Confines the valley spreading rounded arms
To heaven that holds the earth against her breast.

O light, holy light! The valley of Esdraelon
Is an opal set between two sapphires,
The deep blue-green Mediterranean
And the deep blue-green sea of Galilee, Kinnereth.
O light, white light, the passion of all colors,
You hold the earth to heaven,
The little earth
Sailing in the sea of infinite space.

DEGANIA

INTO THE DEPTHS

In winter, the garden of Eden,
In summer, the courtyard of hell.

Here flows the Jordan
Blue from the snow-fed springs of Hermon,
Through green meadows, fields of wheat,
Thickets of tropical trees, of citron and of fig.

And here in the bend of his bosom
Lies Degania, twin group to Merchavia,
High headed and firmly built,
Proving her more than dozen years of travail.

In the wonder-spot of the world,
Deeper far than the face of the Mediterranean,
Flourishing where the harp-lake Kinnereth
Gushes her music into the river Jordan,
Gazing across the river at Tiberias,
The black and white stone city,
Gazing north at the broad snow-brow of Hermon,
And south and east and west
At the opalescent mountains
Set 'round the azure bowl of heaven,
Degania, the fruitful,
Sits on the east bank of the River Jordan.

HISTORY

Here beauty and tenderness
Have known their birth throes of agony.
The histories and the old songs

the histories and the old sagas
Love the shores of Kinnereth.
Here flourished Greek cities
And Jewish citadels.
Here fished the fishermen that were poets.
Here walked the hero
Of the strangest fiction
Ever woven from truth:
Jesus of Nazareth.
The world turns to this lake and to this river
With dreams of purity that are dreams of freedom,
And is bound in chains of the past,
Unfree, enthralled in mysteries.

This is the battle ground of freedom:
Here in the days of Titus
Zealots gathered together
On the heights above Kinnereth
In the fortresses rock-bounded
Of two opposing cities,
Fighting to the last breath of the last man,
Smashing the destroyer's hand
And dying free.

Here to Degania, to Kinnereth,
Came their children's children's children, pioneers
In the old search for freedom.
These too have known the birth throes of agony
In the breast of beauty:
Arab huts and Bedouin neighbors,
Green fields burnt to gold in the furnace of the sun;
Fever, sunstroke, vermin, hunger,
Loneliness and a fearful death.

Pioneers are restless:
They go to new dangers, new conquests.
Few of the first remain:
Those that are alive have gone to the north and south—

Those that are alive have gone to the north and south—

The defense of the north, the conquest of the south—

To new freedoms.

On their adventurous steeds

They ride now into the desert

To plant gardens of fruit and villages full of children

At the edges of the southern wilderness.

Only Baratz remains,

He and his wife and their five children,

Hard as the rocks and joyous

As the flowering groves.

Now there are tall stone buildings,

Stone stables, pipes for water,

Comfort, organization for the ways of work.

Baratz, too, is restless,

Half the time adventuring

The country over, organizing, leading;

Half the time back with his family

Comradely working.

His wife is busy in the stable,

In knickerbockers, barefoot,

Her firm face almost as dark

As the short black curls that crown it,

Ageless—her hands in the hay.

Here they were married

At Degania near the Jordan,

Out of doors, in those first days.

To the wedding gathered all the

Pioneers from all the mountains;

Galilee came down to dance.

Twelve to one years old, their children,

Barefoot, busy, careless youngsters,

Are born free! There's Deborah

THE COMRADE. THERE'S DEGANIA,
Red-cropped, freckled,
Loves her work more than her books.
Let her! Leave the books alone!
She is living history; let others read it.

TALL HOUSES

Offspring of Degania A,
Degania B sprawls out
Ten minutes to the south
Through vegetable gardens, fields of grain, plantations,
Where the little streams of irrigation
Run along the path, tinkling,
And boys in open blouses,
Barefoot girls in bloomers,
Wield the hoe in the mud.

There is a tall stone building
Three stories high, high ceilinged, roofed with gardens,
At each Degania, white and beautiful,
With porches and with airy stairs;
And the best portion of these best of buildings
Is rowed with little cribs and baby yards.

One vivid morning at the hour of nine
I strolled into Degania B,
Looked at the absent-minded cows, the tattling chickens,
And talked to women working 'round the buildings,
To the mother-nurse busy among her babies,
Once teacher; and each comrade that I met
Asked me: "Have you already breakfasted?
Come, have a bite with us."

At Degania A
One has to step across the baby yards
To go into the tall house.

O, it's airy!

The perfumes from the groves and flowering gardens
That bank it, blow with every little breeze.
And for the run-about there's such a room
As women, cutting, pasting, love to make,
A joyous room. But all the little children
Are out of doors playing with Jordan's shells
Or digging in the dirt around the stables,
At work.

In summer

When only Jordan's waves can cool the flesh,
When the warm perfume breathes the fumes of death
And sun-soaked clods of air depress the earth,
Up to the roof ascending from the depths
One climbs to catch a breath of living air
And gazes towards the melting snows of Hermon,
The lucid blue of water, pearl-bright mountains,
And strikes the line where hell and heaven meet.

FRIDAY EVENING

Friday at dusk
Along the dusty road from Samakh,
Afoot, on donkeys or in carts,
Came the teachers of the Emek,
Men and women clad as workers,
Thirsty, sweaty, tired, eager
To a meeting of the teachers of the Emek.

We gathered under a ring of palm trees
In the grassy garden,
Sprawled on the cool earth, in the evening breeze and starlight.
Someone began—was it Pogachof, the jovial?—
A psalm: “When the Lord turned our captivity.”
Others joined, a chorus flooded the night,
Song after song.

That Sabbath evening
A temple folded ’round us
Dome of ebony inlaid with silver,
And the Presence came upon us
Walking in the garden
At the cool of the evening.

Fragrance of incense,
Aisles of cypress, pine,
Censors of orange bloom,
Voices of priests, devotees of holy childhood,
Filled the night with a new song
Praising the Lord.

THE SABBATH OF THE CHILDREN

We talked all night of children,
Went to sleep to dream of children,
Rose again to shouts of children,
And stepped across the rails of baby yards

To climb the stairs to the roof garden
And talk there all day long of children.

Young men and women,
Mothers, fathers, teachers
Sat attentive
To listen to the many-phased questions:
“Is it better for us, for our children
Sleeping with us in the one-roomed family,
Or in the children’s house together?
How shall we rear our children
To love work and one another,
To carry on the dream of fellowship
That is our vision, to bring the dream to life?”

In a solemn moment spoke a father-teacher:
“We did not know that we should have this problem.
We came to work, to live in fellowship,
And we forgot that we should soon be parents.
We did not think of children. Here they are.”
Tears wet his leather cheeks and with an earth-roughed hand
He brushed them off.

“We, too, are children.
Some of our children do not wish to work.
How can we teach them love of work?”

“Do we think too much about them?
Are we pampering our youngsters
While we immolate ourselves?”

“Some of our children love too much to work,
Neglect the book, whose wisdom leads to work.”

“Our group is far too small. The children miss
Society of children. They’re too few.
Can we not bring in others, gather orphans

The country over? So enrich our store
And make our children's house a pioneer society?"

"Too few? Yet we are too exclusive, fear
Contamination for our sacred seed
By joining bourgeois children to the group,
Or children of a lower culture. Here
Right in Degania we have sinned against
The broader brotherhood of Israel:
In Samakh was a Jewish father wished
To send his children here to learn with ours.
And we refused. He's a Sephardi merchant;
And now his children in the Arab school
Chant Arab poetry with splendid intonation.
Right in Kinnereth, the Jewish,
Yemenite Jews were turned away who begged
To send their children to the village school.
Contagion? Is our social vision smashed
By over-prizing of our precious seed?
We feed our children well and clothe them well,
Yet they must live the hard life of a worker.
If they are soft, will they be sons of ours?"

"When in the lowlands raged malaria,
From several villages we sent our children
For a summer in the hills at Gilladi.
What of the central school? The children's village?
Away from us, dependent on themselves,
They'll learn the hard life of a pioneer."

"Don't say it! If the children do not need us,
We need the children! What a barren,
Dead place would Ein Harod be without children. '"

"Economy led to the children's house,
The baby house—economy and labor.
And love, that finds its noons, its evenings, mornings

For dear companionship of parents, children,
May gain by leaving discipline to teachers,
To common childish duties, life itself.
But is it economical? Our babies,
Each two of them, absorb a woman's labor."

"The price is high; the fruit worth its labor."

"We in Degania want our children with us,
And every evening we take them back
To sleep with us."

"And we, in Tel Yoseph,
We send our older children away from us
To live and learn at Hefzibah.
'We want our children.' That is narrow talk,
Self-visioned, unenlightened. Let our children
Be free of us; then they will be our children."

"We ourselves need educating, freeing!
We do not know, we search, we doubt and question.
What is the faith we give our children? How
Shall we replace the beauty that is past,
The home, the synagogue, the Sabbath candles?
We grope to give our children what we miss."

"From what we are, our children take their root.
From what we seek, their search will find direction.
Our social living makes our social school
Its flower. Our simplicity, their simplicity.
And if our hearts cry out for something more,
For songs, for prayers, perhaps, for a new way,
Our children, too, will seek, running before us,
And maybe find, and run to us again,
Laying the treasure in our laps."

At dusk

Children come up. A little chubby lad
Makes love to strangers and perches listening
Upon his father's shoulder—looking, too,
Across our heads towards Hermon and Kinnereth.

The stars awake. We stroll among the trees,
Down cypress avenues, past orange bloom
To the cool, leafy banks of Jordan.

Evening:
In the dining hall they set the phonograph
On Hebrew folk song records. But we sing
So loud one hardly hears the phonograph.

Talent from everywhere: Solos and mimicries;
Pogachof, spirit of the deepest searchings,
Taking off Ghetto characters, and earnestly
Tickling our humor till we weep with laughter.

Miriam Baratz, clean of stable stuff,
Dressed in a cotton frock, and glad her husband
Is home a bit to romp and dance with her,
Sets pace for the gay *Hora*, and her children,
Dancing in clodhoppers, join hands with them.
Others join hands. A rollicking, clattering *Hora*
To tuneful voices! Now Deborah sends
Her clodhoppers skipping madly to the walls,
And dances barefoot, holding fast her father,
Her red head bobbing with the fearful effort
To keep his pace. You'll keep his pace, Deborah!
Just dance and dance, and we shall clap and clap!

Sobered after intoxication
Of beauty and of fellowship,
After the Jordan, Hermon, blue Kinnereth,
Long arguments, keen insights, dancing, singing,
We'll back in silence through the night

To a clear morning, shower-bath and work.

EPILOGUE

This is the Valley of the children,
This is the Way the singing children go,
Eastward and upward towards a rising sun.
Freedom and work—the gift our children ask—
Freedom and work—the gift our land has given—
Are calling us, prophetic voices calling
To the Beginning at the end of days:
Youth.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Whether or not page breaks were also breaks between stanzas was not obvious in several cases.

[The end of *The Emek* by Jessie Sampter]