

History of the Family Golodetz

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Quite sometime ago it occurred to me to pen my recollections about Shtchedrin and the family Golodetz, but I never had the opportunity to do it. However, chance brought about this situation: In the fall of 1946 I traveled from New York to Palestine on a freight boat, the trip taking four weeks. This forced idleness suggested the idea that I devote the time to writing my recollections about Shtchedrin. Thus the following notes came into being.

I feel called upon to write the history of the Golodetz family because in my youth I was a witness to the "flowering" of that family (1860-1904) and because these recollections have impressed themselves upon my memory. They have been with me and I have been sustained by them all my life. These notes should be of interest, in the first place, to my relatives, who like myself spent their youth in Shtchedrin. Besides, these notes should also be of interest to outsiders, for the mode of life of the Golodetz family was typical of Jewish families in Russia. Since Russian and Polish Jewries were decimated during the war and many places of fond memory were destroyed, it is incumbent upon us, from the point of view of folklore, to record the rise and history of entire Jewish families and thus preserve them from oblivion.

The history of the Golodetz family comprises four generations, and represents their rise, flowering and decline. It is an interesting history, perhaps not as fascinating as that of the Buddenbrooks family in the version of Thomas Mann, but sufficiently attractive to be preserved. Shmaryahu Levine described his book his childhood and youth in Swistocz. That book aroused great interest. I am of the opinion that Shtchedrin is of no less interest, if not more. Regrettably, I lack the literary genius of Shmaryahu Levine. Recollections that have passed through the vision of a gifted writer receive an artistic stamp, a fascinating form and a psychological cast. I am utterly lacking in this gift of presentation. What I can offer is a true description of the milieu of that period, a simple representation of the conditions at that time, as they have impressed themselves upon my mind. My notes cannot therefore lay claims to any literary-artistic merits. They may be able to interest a limited circle of people.

The place from which the family Golodetz hailed is called Shtchedrin. It is in the district of Minsk, six miles from the river Berezina, and some thirteen miles from the Dnieper. One will look in vain in the usual maps for this place. However, in the large maps it is recorded, but erroneously as Shtchedrino. In the vicinity Shtchedrin many battles are said to have taken place at the time of the retreat of Napoleon's army in 1812, and many square knolls are pointed out as mass graves of French soldiers. In my childhood I heard much about this, there is, however, no historical evidence for it. As far as I know, Shtchedrin was purchased around 1830 [1] as an estate in the name of Lubavitcher "Rebbe" Mendel Shneerson, so that the famous rabbis should have a right to the hereditary title of honorary citizen, which at that time carried with it certain privileges. In reality the land belonged to a large group of Jewish colonists, who in addition to being artisans engaged in extensive farming operations. Shtchedrin was considered a Jewish colony. A considerable part of the land, several hundred acres, belonged to Chaim Golodetz, the founder of the family. That land was on a hill, about a third of a mile from the township of Shtchedrin, and was said to have been the estate of the previous owner, a wealthy nobleman. There was a spacious park here, with select fruit trees and magnificent walks, such as one finds on wealthy estates. The official transfer of the part designated as "estate" to Golodetz took place in 1865. I have in my possession the documents in question. According to them, Michlin, as agent of Rabbi Mendel Scheerson [sic], turned over 325 acres to Chaim

Golodetz.

Great-grandfather Chaim Golodetz died around 1876, shortly before my birth. In his will he left each grandchild and great-grandchild a definite amount. I was not the recipient of this gift. I did not know the founder of our family. He is reputed to have been an unusually clever person of impressive appearance, a good businessman and very charitable. I know little about his origin. Earlier he had lived in Azaritch, some 27 miles beyond Paritch, and came in his thirties to Shtchedrin, when that place was purchased for the rabbi of Lubavitch, whose follower he was. Chaim's name was first Golod and was later changed to Golodetz.

The history of the family therefore begins with the founder, Chaim. He lived in a large house on the "estate" with a synagogue near by, and maintained a large household. His sons and, later, their descendents built houses nearby and settled in them, so that in my time the "estate" was a T-shaped assembly of some twenty large wooden houses, erected on three streets, with a population of several hundred people, all members of the Golodetz family.[2] It was a real court, which had dominion over the township of Shtchedrin, and in its way comparable to a dynastic residence. Such a family grouping was at that time a rare occurrence among Russian Jews. Few families can point to such a concentration, only the family Seldovitch in Berezin and the family Hornstein in Radomisl.

The said founder of the family, Chaim Golodetz, engaged in timber cutting operations and became wealthy. He purchased forests in various parts of the country, had them felled in winter and had the logs hauled to a river, where they floated in the Spring southward and were sold to the owners of sawmills. The lumber business was at that time an interesting and complicated enterprise which I shall describe in a special chapter.

Chaim Golodetz was the first to ship timber to the South on a large scale. This was not only due to his own competence, but also to the cooperation of very clever and honorable collaborators. Thus I still vividly recall old Yoshe Rochlin, a tall, broad-shouldered man with his patriarchal beard, who could discourse cleverly and was exceedingly popular with the landowners. He was an adviser to prominent gentry, and enjoyed their full confidence. Other top employees were Nahum Sklovsky and Isaac Ber Kevesh, both of them interesting people. Industry, great ability, good relations with the landowners, and also honesty and propriety made Chaim Golodetz a rich man and gave him the reputation of a prominent "gevir."

His descendents: Chaim had three sons who continued the business and brought it to a considerable height: Leyb (my grandfather), Ber and Zalman. They were prolific. Leyb had two sons (one of them my father) and three daughters. Ber had four sons and four daughters, and Zalman had five sons and six daughters. [3] The sons took wives, and the daughters were married. Outsiders came into the family. The family grew. Contraceptives were unknown. Thus the court grew to include several hundred people in one spot. To the glory of the Golodetz family, it must be said that in contracting marriages money was no consideration. On the contrary, respectable families were preferred to those of wealth. Thus good and fresh blood was added to the family from outside. Through marriage, such names as Eliasch, Bernstein, Friedman, Greenberg, Landau, Monosohn, Lurie, Aberdam, Ginzberg, Kadinsky, and others – all names of high repute – came into the family.

GRANDFATHER LEYB

Grandfather Leyb died in 1888, shortly before my Bar Mitzva. I was his favorite grandson and shown preference in that I was invited to dine with him on Friday night and Sabbath morning, and sang Zmiros in his honor. My friends were jealous because of the favor shown me.

Grandfather Leyb was a kind of nobleman and had the manners of a pampered rich man. He had expensive clothes and fur coats, an expensive shtraymel for the Sabbath, and a

very beautiful silver snuffbox. In his old age he maintained a magnificent team of horses for rides, since the physician had recommended such rides. Frequently he graciously took along one of the grandchildren, which was deemed a special honor. Two years before his death, at the age of seventy and some, Grandfather Leyb suffered a stroke that resulted in paralysis and a deterioration of his mental capacities. He was then lodged in the large living room. Two young men were assigned to take care of him day and night. This illness lasted, as stated, two years. The patient was mentally disturbed, highly irritable and gave us a good deal of trouble.

In this connection I should like to say something about medical conditions and care in Shtchedrin. The township had a permanent physician, employed by the community. The "court" had its own "feldsher", whose name was Sholem Mordechai. If someone in "court" took sick, the feldsher was called, who attempted to affect a cure with his own medical preparations. If the patient took a turn for the worse, the physician was brought in from the township. If the condition of the patient became worse still, a physician, Dr. Feiertag, was summoned by telegram from Bobruisk, or Dr. Bloch from Gomel, both experts in their field. When Grandfather Leyb took sick and his illness assumed a grave character, the family was not content with the above physicians. It was customary then in wealthy Jewish homes in the case of illness of the head of the family to summon a professor from a distant part. And so it happened that the well-known Professor Tritschild, of Kiev, was called for consultation and treatment of grandfather. This was an expensive proposition. Professor Tritschild asked 500 rubles per day. The trip from Kiev to Shtchedrin and the return trip took two days. It was planned that Professor Tritschild was to stay in Shtchedrin only one day. Traveling expenses amounted to 300 rubles. Thus Tritschild's visit cost 1800 rubles, a relatively enormous sum for those days, the expenditure of which in the light of the otherwise modest living can only be explained by the fact that Jews cling stubbornly to life and do not hesitate to spend large amounts for the preservation of their health.

Professor Tritschild did not cure Grandfather. His condition became worse. The local physicians were of the opinion that only a neurologist could be of help in this case and suggested calling the famous neurologist, Professor Sykorsky, from Kiev. This was also done. His visit was slightly less expensive, as he charged only 300 rubles a day.

The visit of these two professors created quite a sensation in Shtchedrin and impressed me in particular. The news of their arrival spread in the vicinity. Many of the ailing in the neighboring communities (Rogatchev, Paritchi) hastened to Shtchedrin in order to be examined and obtain relief. The congestion was terrific and the examination could hardly take place. Tritschild as well as Sykorsky had long office hours and the entire procedure kept the population breathless.

The famous Kiev professors could bring no healing to Grandfather, and his condition grew worse. One day one of our employees, Sushe Baberower, came to my father and told him in eloquent words of the miracles of a certain Rabbi in Karelits (near Vilna) who cured the sick and who had become very famous on account of it. It would be a good idea to have him come to Grandfather. My father was a Hassid, a follower of the Kopyst "Rebbe", and as such hardly one to seek the aid of a Misnagdic rabbi. But what would not one do when his father is seriously ill and suffering? The Rabbi of Karelits was invited (about his remuneration I cannot say anything) and he came. I shall never forget his appearance. An old man of medium height, with a remarkably handsome face, surrounded by a white beard, bright piercing eyes, and a kindly expression. An imposing figure! Immediately upon his arrival he was led to the patient. Then he ordered something for the patient (I do not know what it was). The fact, however, is that thereafter Grandfather's condition improved noticeably. The joy and enthusiasm of the family at this improvement were great. The arrival of the Rabbi of Karelits was even a greater sensation than the arrival of the Kiev professors. Again the ailing, old men, women and children, from the

township of Shtchedrin as well as the vicinity flocked to the Rabbi to obtain his aid for their suffering. They came in the hundreds, filled all the rooms in Grandfather's house, and crowded at the door of the room in which the Rabbi received his callers. The congestion grew apace and assumed a dangerous form. The people were seized by an unmistakable psychosis and fought like mad to gain entrance to the Rabbi. In vain did Asher Kevesh, who was standing at the door, attempt to regulate their entry. The pushing and shouting became progressively fiercer. It went on from morning to late at night. Most of the people did not get in and kept on pressing forward. The Rabbi had to return to Karelits, but in view of the large number of people pressing forward he could not leave Grandfather's house. The situation became critical. Then it occurred to Asher Kevesh to lower the Rabbi in the dark of the night through the window and to place him in a coach that took him to the nearest railroad station, where he boarded a train for his home town. This was a daring enterprise. Had the sick people noticed it, they would not have let the Rabbi go. They would have unharnessed the horses and thrown themselves upon the Rabbi in supplication. In this manner, however, he escaped and they were disappointed.

I describe all this for it casts a glaring light on the mentality and morals of those days.

Now the Rabbi of Karelits was gone. The improvement resulting from his treatment, which was at first remarkable, did not last. Several months passed and Grandfather died at the age of 75, I believe. His death made a deep impression. He was buried with great honor. Interment, however, did not take place without incident. This incident, which impressed me deeply, I would like describe. Interment was naturally the affair of the "Hevra Kadisha" which consisted of a number of people from the township. When the news of Grandfather's death became known a revolt broke out within the ranks of that organization. The members declared that they would not proceed with the interment unless the family Golodetz contributed a large sum for the benefit of the township. They demanded something like 5,000 or 10,000 rubles, presumably for the building of a new bathhouse for the community. Such demands on the part of the "Hevra Kadisha" when a wealthy Jew died were not a rare occurrence at that time. They were made, however, only on such men as had done nothing or very little during their lifetime for their fellow man, and now the opportunity was utilized to exert pressure on their families. Incidents of this nature were generally regarded as a grievous insult, a humiliation to the name of the deceased. The "revolt" that broke out at Grandfather's funeral was a surprise and completely unjustified, for the family Golodetz had done very much for the township. Most of its inhabitants (officials, artisans, and shopkeepers) lived from the "court." There was no reason for exerting pressure on the family. But at that time the spirit of hostility and of envy, the reaction against the social use of the people of the "court," stirred up the hotheads of the township and prompted them to insist upon their demands. Thus interment was denied until a specified sum was given. (Among Jews burial must not be delayed.) Negotiations were brief, a compromise was effected. As far as I can recall, my father signed a note for 3,000 rubles and handed it to the spokesman of the "Hevra Kadisha." Later the anger and resentment at the action of the "Hevra Kadisha" was very great. Uncle Abraham Joseph and my father raged against the spokesmen and threatened counter-measures such as economic sanctions. I believe, however, that time anger passed quickly. Nothing happened. The thing was soon forgotten.

Now I wish to bring forward several members of the family circle.

Grandmother Dvoyra

Grandmother survived Grandfather by some fifteen years. She occupied the main rooms in the large house together with us, and died about 1903, an aged woman, quite clever but old-fashioned. All her life was spent in the house and in household duties. She never left Shtchedrin.

The reason we occupied Grandfather's house was that our own was completely

destroyed by fire. This is how the thing came about:

One evening I sat in my room studying. I must have been at the time about 17. Suddenly my mother came in and asked me to come to her aid. The hanging lamp in one of the rooms, which had been freshly filled with kerosene, caught fire because of some defect in the wick. I went over, detached the lamp from its frame and placed it, at the request of Mother, on the floor. But the lamp could not stand and tipped over. The kerosene was spilled and the fire spread rapidly. In vain did Mother and I, and later on also other people that rushed over, attempt to put out the fire. It was beyond control and the whole house consisting of ten rooms went up in flames. Practically nothing of the appointments was saved. This incident, in which I figured as partly responsible, is vivid before my eyes. After the fire our family moved into Grandfather's house, which was now occupied by Grandmother. That must have been in 1893. I remained in that house till 1897, when I left for Leipzig.

Uncle Ber

About Uncle Ber, my Grandfather's brother, I do not know much. He was a stout, rather blunt old gentleman, who was frequently quite disagreeable, so that people were afraid of him.

Uncle Zalman

The third brother, Uncle Zalman, was a handsome man. He was the real manager of the lumber business, and the most important representative of the family. His wife was a descendent of the Baal Shem, the founder of Hasidism. She is said to have brought 17 children into the world, of whom eleven survived (see attached table). I never knew her, for she died comparatively young. The kinship with the family of the Baal Shem was noticeable in the frequent visits of members of that family, generally men of impressive appearance, to Shtchedrin, in order to receive aid from their wealthy relatives. Their prominent ancestry lent them a certain dignity. At the age of 50, Zalman married a second time. His wife, Rivke Feygel, the daughter of Rabbi Byk of Volhynia, was a beautiful and very clever woman, who knew how to manage a large house and how to be a good stepmother to the still small children. As the wife of one of the three heads of the family she played a prominent role in the "court." Then came the time for her confinement. The event was awaited with great tension. But the good fortune of bearing an heir was not fated for the woman. Despite all the efforts of the physicians (Dr. Feiertag and Dr. Bevel were naturally called), the child was born dead. The union bore no fruit. Several years later, when Zalman died, Rivke Feygel left Shtchedrin with great leave-taking and her role was gradually forgotten.

Something should be said to characterize the members of the second generation, i.e. the children of the three heads of the family, namely Leyb, Ber and Zalman. But these people are not sufficiently interesting to be described individually within this framework. They were simple folk with some Jewish knowledge but very little secular education. They could not even speak Russian correctly. They were pious - always wore headgear and long coats - primitive, exceedingly honest people. Three from among them came to the fore, inasmuch as they were active in the business and played a leading role. They represented the three branches of the family: My father Moses (son of Leyb), Israel Elye (son of Ber), and Areyeh Leyb (son of Zalman). Along with Uncle Zalman they managed the business and worked busily in the office. In the summer they were in Southern Russia, where the timber transports were sold.

The business was a partnership in which each of the brothers had an equal share, and after his demise was bequeathed to his children. I cannot now evaluate fully the scope of the business, for different criteria were operative then. But it must have been quite a large and complicated one. There were forests in various parts of Western Russia and the Ukraine which belonged to the firm, and the transportation of the timber to the South was a large enterprise. There were some 30 to 40 superintendents who were active in various places. The main office

was in Shtchedrin. Two men were engaged in bookkeeping – the old respectable Isaac Treiwus and his son-in-law Elye Efros. In addition there was a special controller, Abram Donskoy. The bookkeeping, which was very meticulous, was done in Hebrew. The large, massive folios on the shelves made a great impression. Also the correspondence with Jewish merchants and employees was carried on in Hebrew (with a slight admixture of Yiddish). At that time Russian was not popular and was considered a foreign language, to be employed only with "goyim". My father used to say: "To know Russian is, of course, desirable, but a knowledge of Hebrew is indispensable, for this is the language of business correspondence and bookkeeping." In later years we laughed at this instruction of father. We lived in Germany for many decades, quite removed from this type of conception about the practical value of the Hebrew language. Now, after 50 years I have come to Palestine, and I conduct my correspondence and bookkeeping to a large degree in Hebrew, as my father had pictured it in olden days. We have here the return to the source. The chain is closed.

As mentioned, Shtchedrin was about eleven miles from the railway station Krasny-Bereg. This station remained unforgettably in my memory. It formed the point of contact with the world. Krasny-Bereg was a station on the line Libava-Romny and was between Bobruisk and Gomel. Bobruisk was toward the West, toward Germany, the land of culture. Gomel lead toward the Ukraine, to Kiev and the interior of Russia. In my imagination Krasny-Bereg was the point that formed the boundary between East and West, almost the crossroads of two different culture spheres.

Since the population of the "court" was pretty large, and travel for personal or business purposes was gaining in popularity, a lively communication between Shtchedrin and Krasny-Bereg developed. People came and went. To facilitate this travel horses and wagons were kept in readiness. The stables of the Golodetz family were in the courtyard of the office. Four and frequently six horses were at the disposal of those traveling to and from the station. As a rule, the coaches would go to the station twice a day, once at noon to make the train for Bobruisk and Minsk, which left at 3 p.m., and a second time at 1 a.m. to make the train going in the opposite direction. The entire transportation business was in the hands of two Jewish coachmen who had run it for years. One was named Sushe, the other Yankel. Since everything that has to do with horses impresses itself upon a child's mind with particular strength, the recollection of the two coachmen - the constant companions on the trips to and from the station - remained vivid. They were simple men, but interesting in their own way. It would be worth while to describe them in greater detail, but for this my powers of description are inadequate. Thus I have to refrain from it.

LIFE IN SHTCHEDRIN

When you consider that a clan consisting of hundreds of people lived in an isolated area, that the people had no special worries, that women and young girls and also men and boys had little to do, that there were enough servants - then you will understand that in this narrow space, where men and things impinged upon one another, there was an exciting life. Each family lived in its own household, and in addition led a collective existence. People strolled through the streets, gossiped and amused themselves in their own way. The differentiation of the people was expressed in dividing the families into three groups - according to the grandfathers - and that correspondingly there prevailed a kind of a rivalry and petty jealousy, and occasionally also outright hostility, as is the case in so many families. On the whole, however, life was somewhat primitive though not uninteresting. Often people came to town - friends and relatives of sons and daughters who had married to Shtchedrin. Relations thus reached out to Warsaw, St. Petersburg, Minsk and Vilna. Many came for a visit and remained for weeks. There came merchants, matchmakers, collectors for various charitable institutions, booksellers, etc., people

came and went--all through Kransy-Bereg. All these people aroused interest and brought a change into the regularity of life. My father was not altogether wrong when he would say: "Life in a large city is indeed comfortable and pleasant, but in a small place like Shtchedrin it is interesting, lively and exciting."

The Lumber Business

The timber business, which lent to the Golodetz family name and position, was in its way very interesting and deserves, I believe, to be mentioned in the framework of these notes.

As mentioned, the business was so constituted that entire forests in the districts of White Russia and the Ukraine were purchased for the purpose of clearing and transporting the timber to Southern Russia. The purchases were made on the basis of a survey and estimation on the part of experts. The clearing was done in winter by peasants engaged for the purpose. The logs were hauled on sleds to the nearest bank of a river that emptied into the Dnieper. When the winter was over and the thaw began, time logs were tied together into a raft, which consisted of about 200 such logs. Ten to twelve rafts formed a "lot" – a unit of transport. The transport was led by a responsible Jewish supervisor delegated from the main office in Shtchedrin and several assistants. The transport was towed by several special large boats, so-called "dubs," which had six men to row them and a coxswain ("dubovik"). The boats also had an iron anchor aboard. Two rafts required one boat. The entire party thus required a fleet of 5 to 6 boats (some 40 people), directed by a chief "dubovik." As soon as high tide occurred the party sailed. One of the rafts carried a little log house, consisting of several rooms, which served as an office for the supervisor and his assistants, and from which the direction of the transports came. When one considers that each lot had over 100 workers and employees, who had to be fed for months, one can easily imagine what organization and labor as well as financial outlays were required to carry out the enterprise. The local superintendents in the forests were responsible for the management of their particular areas and decisions rested with them. Only the most important instructions came from the main office in Shtchedrin. From there also came the money for the expenditures.

A word about the finances. In those days money was not sent by mail nor by a bank. If the "shipping station" (pristani) was somewhere in the country far from a larger place, it was supplied with money - and occasionally the sums were considerable, running into thousands of rubles - from Shtchedrin by messenger. For this purpose reliable Jewish men were chosen. The money was sewn into wide linen girdles, which the messenger girded underneath his coat. He departed on foot to the frequently distant shipping places. It was not noticeable that the messenger carried such large amounts of money. Never was there a robbery - nor an embezzlement. Firstly, the messengers were honest; secondly, where could the simple messengers have fled to?

And now back to the shipping stations. There feverish activity was going on. The rafting and transporting of the "lot" had to be done quickly and for this reason: The logs were destined for the Southern cities Kremenchug, Ekaterinoslav and Kherson. The highest prices were paid in Kherson, and each merchant strove to bring his logs to Kherson. The reason for this was that between Ekaterinoslav and Kherson there were more strong rapids (which recently have become generally known through the gigantic hydroelectric station Dnieprostroy, which the Soviet Government has erected). The rafts had to pass through this rapid current, a distance of some 70 kilometers, to reach Kitchukus, where the normal current began, and from thence go on to Kherson. The rapids could be negotiated only at high tide and in absolutely calm weather. Under these conditions the distance of 70 kilometers could be covered in 8 to 10 hours. In case of wind, it was necessary to wait. But this waiting meant the passing of the high tide, which made it impossible to navigate the river. In such inauspicious cases, the rafts had to be untied and shipped in smaller portions through an artificial canal built alongside. This was very costly and meant a great loss. The transports gathering before the rapids, south of Ekaterinoslav,

when the winds were low, were arranged according to the time of their arrival and dispatched on their dangerous route. This circumstance makes it understandable why each transport was anxious to arrive as quickly as possible in Ekaterinoslav and at the rapid currents, in order not to miss its turn. On such critical days - sometime in May - when the rafts stood before the rapids and waited to be dispatched, there was great excitement. People looked skyward and longed for calm weather. The Golodetz family in Shtchedrin knew the situation. If calm weather prevailed in the morning in Shtchedrin, the same weather also prevailed in Ekaterinoslav and the dispatch of the rafts could be expected. As a rule, a telegram would actually arrive with the joyous news: such and such "lot" has safely reached Kitchkus. The people were satisfied then. But it also happened that the wind blew constantly for a long time, then one knew that the game was lost.

In May-June the lots designated for Kremenchug, Ekaterinoslav and Kherson had arrived and the Golodetzes departed for these cities to realize the business, i.e. to sell the logs. This lasted two to three months. In the fall the people returned home. Then the next season set in and the cycle began anew. From the South, after the sale of the logs, the merchants brought back promissary notes due in twelve months that could be discounted in case of need of cash. The discounting was always done by Isaac Levine in Minsk, the banker to the Golodetz family. It was a question of many hundreds of thousands of rubles. Levine was an agent and broker for the banks of Minsk, a reliable man and worthy of confidence. The business was remunerative. When I was in Minsk, as a child, I saw Isaac Levine's chief bookkeeper and agent of Joshua Benenson - a handsome, impressive man. He was then one of the well-known Hoveve Zion. Later he went to Palestine and became the founder of many settlements in the country.

The Golodetz family in Shtchedrin was reckoned among the first timber merchants in the 1880's and 1890's, in so far as trade with the South was considered. Their transports, generally 10 to 12 during the season, went through the rivers Sosh, Beresina and Dnieper, and were visible to the inhabitants of the adjoining places. When the rafts passed and the people on the banks asked: "Whose raft?" the answer was mostly "Golodetz." Small wonder that the name of the family was well-known in the western parts of Russia. Hundreds of people found employment in the lumber business with the Golodetzes.

For those who know something about the timber business, I would like to add that the average measurement of the logs shipped to the South was then 13.8 meters in length and 27 centimeters in diameter at the top. The stems also attained sometimes a length of 18 meters, and 45 centimeters in diameter at the top. Later the forests no longer yielded such favorable measurements.

I cannot say anything definite about the size of the Golodetz wealth. I was too small then to grasp these things. What clung to my memory is the fact that when Grandfather died in 1887 the estate left to the two sons, Abraham Joseph and my father, amounted to some 400,000 rubles. Since this constituted about a third of the wealth of the entire family this latter must have been over a million rubles, which was a very considerable amount for those days. How things went after 1887 I don't know exactly. They were probably good years. After 1900 things took a turn for the worse. A depression set in in the lumber business in Ekaterinoslav and Kherson. The notes of the southern merchants were not honored and the Golodetzes suffered heavy losses. Bad times began. Then it was suddenly recalled that there still was Lalitchi, which could be utilized for something. Interest turned to this estate.

Lalitchi

The estate of Lalitchi was purchased by the Golodetzes in 1880 and registered in the name of Chaim's three sons. As is well known, the discriminatory laws against the Jews were passed in 1882, among them the prohibition against buying land, so that in this case the purchase could still be recorded in the name of a Jew. The estate was in the district of Chernigov, 10 kilometers from the city of Surazh and 15 kilometers from the railway station Unyetcha. It was a great distance from Shtchedrin, 24 hours journey by train. Hence in the first

years there was little communication between Shtchedrin and Lalitchi.

The estate had an historical past and was very famous. It once belonged to Count Zavadovsky, a Favorite of Catherine the Great. In the center of a large park he had a palatial mansion erected by no less an artist than the Italian Rastrelli, who also had built the palace in which the Duma[4] met. Both edifices are in the same style. Rastrelli invited many Italian artists to adorn parts of the palace in Lalitchi with figures of Greek mythology. The palace, a three-story structure, with symmetrically arranged semi-circular wings on both sides, was very impressive. Zavadovsky ordered the most expensive furniture and appointments from Paris. The palace had 120 rooms, among them the bedroom of Catherine, who is said to have spent there three days. That was in the 18th century. After the death of Zavadovsky the estate changed owners. The last one was Nicholas Alexeyvitch Atriganyev, who led a very extravagant life. I still have in my possession a number of the "Birzheviya Vyedomosti" of August 30, 1899, with a story of Lalitchi by Breshko-Breshkovsky, in which he describes the dissolute life of Atriganiyev and his lavish entertainment. The man ruined the estate and brought it under the hammer. The appointments, furniture, rugs and the like, of the highest artistic value, were purchased by various people, undoubtedly at ridiculous prices and carried away to distant parts. The estate, however, including the palace and appurtenances came into the possession of the Golodetz family. The purchase was not made because of artistic interests but on account of the extensive forests which belonged to the estate and which were destined to be cleared and fall victim to the lumber business. This took place in the following years. The forests disappeared. Only the magnificent park surrounding the palace and in turn surrounded by a stone wall of a 7 kilometer perimeter, was spared. While the clearing was in progress the estate was put under the management of Abraham Khurgin, son of the Shtchedrin colonist, Jonah Khurgin. He had some idea of farming, and was an honorable man who called forth respect. He maintained good relations with the neighboring land-owners and managed the place independently, since the owners in Shtchedrin knew nothing about farming and had full confidence in their manager. Thus it went on for decades. The estate, of some 5,000 desyatins, produced a large potato crop and Khurgin built a distillery, which utilized profitably the potatoes and provided an opportunity for the feeding of cattle - an enterprise that brought good profits. This was a huge enterprise run entirely by Khurgin.

Now about the palace. When the estate was taken over it was still more or less intact. Maintenance, however, demanded very large expenditures. The mere repairs to the roof called for large outlays. No one was interested in it. The estate was only purchased for the sake of the forest. Every thing else was of no interest. And so the beautiful park was left to fate. The roof deteriorated progressively; rain penetrated the rooms and ruined them. The parquet floor made of expensive oak was torn out and sold. The magnificent marble sills were given to the governor when he visited the palace and asked for them. I do not know what the governor thought of this vandalism provoked by himself.

I saw the palace for the first time in 1894, when I came to Lalitchi in connection with my duties. At that time the palace was still in such a condition that one could go through the rooms and still see some of the vanishing splendor. The decorations over the staircase - at that time I understood very little of the symbolic representations of Greek mythology - were still intact. After many years everything fell into decay. Only the proud structure remained standing. As stated, when the estate was taken over the appointments and inner furnishings were there no longer. Only in a corner there were still a few pieces of furniture and these were shipped to Shtchedrin. I recall these pieces quite well: a living room set, in Catherine the Great style, of exquisite mahogany upholstered in expensive silk, a table, a large sofa and chairs. This furniture was put into Grandfather's room. After his death the furniture was used by Grandmother and her "little godchildren." No one understood the value of the furniture and cared for its preservation. In the course of years the furniture was completely worn and ruined. Only a magnificent secretary of most beautiful mahogany was left. This beautiful piece came into possession of Aunt Eva

Eliash, who, treasured it, first in Shtchedrin and later in Kiev. What became of the secretary after the Bolsheviks seized Kiev no one knows. Lastly, I should like to mention the large bookcases of light unstained oak that were brought from Lalitchi to Shtchedrin ((how these gigantic bookcases standing some 4-5 meters were transported is still a puzzle to me) and distributed among the three brothers. The cases were so high that they could not be brought into the rooms. The headpieces had to be removed.

All these pieces of furniture - remains of an old palace - appear to me now retrospectively in a beautiful aspect. At that time both the others and I understood very little about antique furniture and had no idea of their value.

In 1880-1900 we lived in Shtchedrin without thinking much of Lalitchi. It was rarely mentioned and never visited. It was too far. Only in 1904, when business reverses set in and money became scarce, it was decided to sell the estate and to convert it unto a source of income. The relationship among the members of the family was then rather loose. The business was no longer conducted as a partnership. Everyone was for himself. Lalitchi could no longer be sold as a whole, it was necessary to divide it into three parts among the descendants of the three heads of the family. These were eleven in number (two descendents of Leyb, four of Ber, and five of Zalman) who had to negotiate among themselves. Now, it is a well-known fact that a rationally managed estate (fields, meadows, distillery, forests) can hardly be divided, for the whole thing represents an organic unit, which cannot be separated. Consequently, many and various suggestions were made. For years the three groups of heirs negotiated with one another and could not reach an agreement. Each group believed that the other was getting the better part of the bargain. The tension grew. In all likelihood no accord would have been reached had not the condition of the individual families become so critical that the division appeared as an absolute necessity, a question of life and death. Thus, in 1908 the division was officially carried out. It was, as stated, a division into three parts, and a later division among the members of the groups in question. My father had to come to an understanding with the heirs of his brother Abraham Joseph. His share included the distillery and palace, at that time half in ruin. In 1912, Maklakov, then governor of Tchernigov and later Minister of the Interior, "persuaded" my father to rent the palace – for 15,000 rubles, I believe – for purposes of a theological seminary. My father agreed. In 1917 the Bolsheviks confiscated the entire estate for the benefit of the peasants. Thus came to an end the period of Lalitchi in the position of the Golodetz family. My father's deed to Lalitchi is still in my possession. It is worthless.

MATCHMAKERS

The concept of the "shadken" is familiar with us Jews. He is the man engaged in the arranging of matches. As a rule it was an avocation with people who wanted to earn a little extra money. But there were also those who devoted themselves exclusively to this profession. The business, if successful, was highly lucrative. If a match was successfully concluded the matchmaker received a fee of 2% of the dowry from the bridegroom as well as the bride. The matchmakers guild consisted of men that operated locally and of such as operated all over Russia and Poland – the so-called "world matchmakers." Several representatives of the latter category are vivid in my memory: a certain Mirsky, tall, stately, very handsome, urbane, well-mannered, was always on the road in the pursuit of his business. Here he was in St. Petersburg, then in Moscow, Kiev and Berlin. In the summer he was in Marienbad or Karlsbad, constantly striving to unite in matrimony sons and daughters of wealthy Jewish families. He was a welcome visitor and because of his influence and contacts well received by the heads of the families. From time to time Mirsky also came to Shtchedrin, where there were many candidates of both sexes. As a child, I admired his poise and good manners. Whereas other matchmakers were frequently regarded as annoying visitors and were treated accordingly, Mirsky was regarded with respect and "offers" were discussed with him. He came, as a rule for one to two

days, visited the houses of the candidates and left. This applied also to the other matchmakers, although they did not enjoy the reputation of Mirsky.

In Shtchedrin, we too had a "world matchmaker", Yerahmiel Kanoorovitz. He was most of the time on journeys through the various parts of Western Russia. An unusually clever person and highly skilled in his profession, he frequently came to our house and engaged in long conversations with my parents. His stories about people and places, family conditions, his experiences on his long journeys were always exciting and held the audience spellbound. He conducted an extensive correspondence with his clients. I saw him frequently writing for hours and mailing piles of letters, which impressed me greatly.

Weddings in Shtchedrin

Weddings always introduced sensation and change into the workaday life. The large number of families in Shtchedrin provided about two weddings a year. These were celebrated with great pomp. Several weeks prior to the event came the "sarver" (caterer) Ysroel Ey!e from Bobruisk and immediately began to prepare the colossal amounts of food. Fish were bailed in huge caldrons over an open fire in the courtyard. Everything was prepared in large quantities. The Shtchedrin music band (klezmer) was of course not sufficient for a Golodetz wedding: a big orchestra (20 to 25 players) were brought from Bobruisk. With it came a famous badchen, a merrymaker, who was the master of ceremonies and entertained the guests. At the head of the orchestra were two violinists, who were good musicians. One was named Artche and the other Osher. Both filled the audience with enthusiasm, but there was no agreement as to who was the better player. The predominant opinion was that Osher was the greater virtuoso, but Artche excelled him in improvisation. The music of the latter touched the heart and moved the audience.

Weddings lasted, as a rule, one week. There came "mekhutonim" (in-laws) and relatives, occasionally quite interesting, more or less "cultured" women from various parts of Russia. The arrivals were lodged in the houses of the various families and were the subject of curiosity and admiration.

Weddings took place usually on Tuesday. Before and after came banquets for the mekhutonim and close relatives. Monday evening was always set aside for a "banquet for the poor." Hundreds of poor from Shtchedrin and vicinity would profit from the wedding. The people were generously received and feted. It was considered the proper thing in the family to mingle among the poor and to serve them. After the sumptuous meal money was distributed among the poor. Someone with a sack full of coins stood and distributed the gifts, amidst great tumult and shouts, among the poor.

The "khupa" and the wedding evening were conducted in the traditional manner. I particularly recall the wedding of my sister Bella, perhaps because of an unusual event in the general program of things. Attracted by the news of the approaching wedding, three actors, professionals from a Yiddish theatre in a neighboring city, came to town. One of them was named Byelogolovsky. The men offered to present after the wedding meal several dramatic sketches. My father was in a good mood (the match between Bella and Israel, the son of Uncle Zalman, was to his liking) and he agreed. After the meal the actors appeared masked as a "rebbe" and Hasidim. They sang, danced and presented various scenes. The success was extraordinary. The older people and the guests knew as yet nothing of theatre and were fascinated. Old and young stood crowded, some mounted benches and chairs in order to have a better view of the presentation. So great was the actors' success that they were permitted to give a special performance. They were richly rewarded. I understood at that time nothing about the theatre, but Byelogolovsky, with his disguise and mimicry impressed me greatly and remained in my memory. He was probably riot cm had artist.

TEACHERS

Of our “melamedim” (teachers) the following remained in my memory: Shaye Zavel, my first teacher, who taught me the reading of Hebrew, a harmless and kindly man. In addition to becoming a teacher, he was for many decades a cantor and reader of the Torah in the Golodetz synagogue, a central figure in the house of prayer. He had a good voice and discharged his duties as the main cantor on Sabbath and the holidays in an excellent manner. He practically never made a mistake during the services on the Holy Days and during the reading of the Torah.

Shmerl, my second teacher, who taught me mainly the Bible, is of no special interest. His instruction was given within the framework of the “kheder”. Six to eight children were instructed jointly in one room, which was put at his disposal by one of the parents. Each boy in his turn had to bring kerosene for illuminating the room. Shmerl was frequently strict and occasionally even “aggressive.” On the whole, however, he was considerate with the “court” children. I do not recall that that we were ever beaten, as was elsewhere often the case. The intervals between the terms (sof hazman) were wonderful: one did not attend kheder and could enjoy himself.

After Shmerl came Zalman Shimen, my last melamed who was supposed to teach us the Talmud. He was not very successful. I believe I was the only one of the students who learned something, inasmuch as I went through several tractates of the Talmud and even attained the study of the Codes. I do not, however, recall much of it.

Far more interesting was the circle of teachers who instructed us in secular subjects. In the first place, let me mention Motodetsky. I did not know him, since he had been in Shtchedrin in the 1870's. He was a true revolutionary. He is said often to have expressed the intention to assassinate the Minister Trepov, the one who throttled the Russian revolution. One day he actually left Shtchedrin and went to St. Petersburg where he made an attempt on the life of the minister. He was apprehended and condemned to death.

Other teachers – of the older generation – whom I recall only vaguely were Weinberg and Pollak. They were teachers of Russian and German. I was too small to retain any impressions of them. All I know is that they were highly regarded. In my days came to the fore:

Eskin, who taught Russian, geography and arithmetic – a typical teacher. He was there for many years and practically all the young of Shtchedrin were taught by him. His wife, a passably intelligent woman, established in her house a lending library. It contained many of the Russian classics: Turgenyev, Goncharov, Pissemsky, Tolstoy and others. Also periodicals were available: “Ruskaya Mysl,” “Vyestnik Europi” and others. All books were wrapped and bound in linen covers and were thus circulated from hand to hand. This library brought to the young people in the Golodetz family an acquaintance with Russian literature. We read the books very avidly. A new world came within our vision. The characters Bazarov, Rudin, Oblomov, etc., occupied our minds and brought the outer world nearer to us. In this sense it may well be said: Mrs. Eskin did more for the education of the Golodetz youth at that time than many a teacher.

We must also mention Shadur. This man is of interest because of his unique history. He was the son of a simple tanner in Shtchedrin. In his youth, he had left Shtchedrin and somehow made his way to Berlin. For many years, he was not heard of and was considered a lost son. Rumor had it that he was studying at the University of Berlin. One day came the news that he was returning to Shtchedrin. The report was received with great interest, since he was viewed as a very suitable teacher for German. Shadur came back changed beyond recognition. Not a trace of the Shtchedrin “bokher” remained in him. Instead, there appeared a thoroughly German-looking young man with Berlin manners and a Berlin dialect. He no longer spoke Yiddish. His past was as if obliterated. There was nothing Jewish about him, he appeared a real German. The people of Shtchedrin were amazed at him and laughed at his peculiarities. For a long time, he was a popular subject of conversation. An additional factor heightened the amazement over him: he was a strict vegetarian. He ate neither meat nor fish, nor eggs, neither

butter or milk, but only vegetables. Such a thing was unknown in Shtchedrin and the people could not get over their surprise. He ordered a large quantity of soup and hash of vegetables for one time and this lasted him for several days. Someone coined the bon mot: "What my goat refuses to eat today, the teacher Shadur will eat tomorrow and the day after." At that Shadur looked very health and had a fresh skin. He spend several years in Shtchedrin as a teacher of German, and later went to Uman (district of Kiev). Nothing was heard from him after that.

Other noteworthy teachers were Batalin and Shigalin, men of excellent education and systematic knowledge. However, I cannot say much about them, since they taught pupils of a younger generation and consequently I had little contact with them.

A teacher of whom I think with admiration, love and reverence was Ghenin. He was engaged by my mother as a tutor for our family and lived in our house. He was at that time about 28. He was a short, stocky individual, with an abnormally large head. His intelligent face was surrounded by a little black beard. He had completed his studies in the Jewish Teachers Seminary in Zhitomir. What this institution meant for the education of Jewish youth is well known. The students were given there a thorough education and later as teachers disseminated knowledge and culture among the Jewish masses. Ghenin wanted to enroll at a university, but his application was refused because of the Jewish quota regulations. He even traveled to St. Petersburg, where he was received by the Minister Delyanov, but did not succeed in gaining admission to the university. But he did not give up his efforts. To keep the wolf from the door, he took a position as tutor. He lived in our house for about two years, and I must say that he gave us much in that time. He was a versatile man and a keen thinker who acquainted us with much Russian literature. He read with us the Russian critics Byelinsky, Dobrolubov, Pisarev, and others, and in his conversations transmitted to us much of the world of general ideas. He was, moreover, musically inclined and helped up advance along these lines. From Shtchedrin he went to Borisov, where he graduated as an "evtern", the Demidov Lyceum (a law school) and became state rabbi in that city. He died comparatively young.

After Ghenin came to us De Boer, an elderly man, a gentile. He, too, lived in our house and taught German, English and, surprisingly, bookkeeping. He was from Holland and had come to Russia in 1878, at the time of the Russo-Turkish war, as a newspaper correspondent. After the war he remained in Moscow and was employed here and there as a teacher. Fate brought him to us in Shtchedrin. He was then somewhat over sixty, a tall, slender figure with a gray Vandyke beard. He spoke only German. For some reason or other, he was particularly interested in the Talmud and studied the German translation of the tractate Berakot. I frequently saw him absorbed in the study of this book. Frequently he discussed Jewish problems with my father. At that time I understood very little of such things and am therefore in no position to report on them.

De Boer was with us for only about a year. He was a believer in the "cold cure" and insisted that his pupils likewise submit to this "cure". In the middle of winter we were rubbed with snow every morning. I was the first to object to this barbarous treatment. My brother Benjamin continued the "cure" for a while but stopped it ultimately. Only De Boer continued it. One winter day he went to Minsk. He caught cold, possibly because of the snow rubbing, developed pneumonia and shortly thereafter passed away. Thus the tutelage of this remarkable man came to an end. De Boer was my last teacher in Shtchedrin. Then came other times and other teachers.

MILITARY SERVICE

Something should be said about the arrangements in the Golodetz family for military service. To be a soldier was considered the worst calamity. Up to that time no one in the Golodetz family had served in the army. The young people obtained somehow – naturally through bribery – exemptions from military service. One of the means was the "Kvitantsya", a

certificate possessing the miraculous property of exempting its owner from further military service. These certificates were issued in the time of Nikolai I to those young men who volunteered for military service, and read that that young soldier in question had purchased freedom from the military service for another young person who would be drafted. These certificates, so to speak, were a release from military service for money. They were expensive, some 5,000 rubles, a high sum for those days. But a rich Jew, concerned for his family, paid that sum in order to keep his son from military service. The original kvitantsyas could be entered in any name. It could be later be transferred, but only to a brother or cousin. At the request of our mother, our father had purchased a kvitantsya for the seven sons, in the eventuality that their release could not be obtained in the ordinary manner. In reality, all seven sons slipped through without being called into military service. The kvitantsya held in reserve was never utilized. What happened to it I cannot say. I was freed in Surash, near Lalitchi, by drawing a high number. How that happened has remained the secret of the people involved in the procedure. In order that my brother Benjamin receive "Igota" (a special prerogative) my birth certificate was postdated by one year.

THE MAIL

Halfway between the "court" and the township was the meeting point of old and young. This took place daily, in the afternoon when Motel, the mailman, distributed the mail. Letters were the means of communication between little Shtchedrin and the great world, and consequently there was excitement at the time of the distribution of the mail. Recipients of letters communicated news and told of other events. At any rate the recipients of letters and newspapers belonged to the most interesting moments in the daily life of the people of Shtchedrin.

Very vivid is the memory of the great fire in Paritchi around 1889. Practically all the homes were burned down and the victims came in the hundreds to Shtchedrin, where they found shelter. The increase in population, the influx of new people, changed the entire appearance of Shtchedrin and aroused great interest. Here I should like to point to something that was typical in the life of the Jews in olden days. Rich Jews went in summer to spas such as Karlsbad and Marienbad. This was considered the proper thing.

To travel in the vicinity, to make outings out of pure interest in the neighborhood, as is customary in other parts of Europe, was unknown in Shtchedrin. It appeared to be superfluous and unseemly to travel for no apparent reason except curiosity. Tourism was unknown. Thus I never got to see Paritchi, a township of only 10 kilometers from Shtchedrin. I know the place only from hearsay. Why it never occurred to anyone to go over there – there was regular communications between the two towns – I do not know. This was part of the backwardsness of those days. The same applies to Bobruisk, the county seat. People went there only when it was necessary, but never for pleasure or entertainment.

REMINISCENCES

When my thoughts turn on the wings of memory to old Shtchedrin they dwell over a number of people and events, which I would like to record in these notes.

One of them is our other grandfather, Chaim Korngold, the father of our mother. He was a handsome, slender man, with fine features and a white beard. He lived with us in a specially furnished room. I see him before me, bowed over folios of the Talmud, studying the Talmud in a sing-song, and occasionally writing elucidations and commentaries to the works of the scholars. The table was covered with manuscripts. I vividly recall his exposition of the Song of Songs on Passover night after the Seder. His sing-song accompanying the most beautiful passages of the book touched the heart and fascinated the audience. In 1890, at the age of 60, he went

together with the rabbi of Simferopol to Jerusalem to end his days there, as was the custom. There he married an elderly woman about whom I know nothing more. After a year or two, he came to Shtchedrin to visit his children. Here he took sick with uremia and suffered greatly. Dr. Feirtag and Dr. Bloch were called in. They treated him by means of cathartics, but without results. He died after three days and was buried in Shtchedrin, not in Palestine as he had hoped. He was a jolly old man, full of fun, who played with his grandchildren as with his equals. When he came back from Palestine he told us about the difficult journey, of the trip between Jerusalem and Jaffa that required several days, of the difficulty of landing in Jaffa and of the water shortage in Jerusalem. When I juxtapose this to the landing in Haifa now, the auto line Tel Aviv-Jerusalem, the houses with all the modern improvements in Rehovia, the colossal progress that the country has made since 1890 becomes evident.

For the portrayal of Grandfather Chaim Korngold I include here a photograph taken some 70 years ago, representing the family with Grandmother at the head, the sons in frock coats, white trousers and cylinder, the daughters in the Biedermeier style. My parents are also in this picture. [5]

My memory also dwells upon Moyshe Yavelov. He came to Shtchedrin from Minsk as the son-in-law of Israel Elye. He was a young man of some general education, spoke Russian well and knew literature, both Russian and Foreign. He had the gift of satirizing people in poems and aphorisms. He composed excellent lampoons, mostly in Yiddish, about persons and events of the day. The poems were striking, full of biting irony. The songs were received with great interest by the "court" society, were frequently rendered and remained "hits" for a long time. Some members of the family still remember and recite fragments of them. Yavelov may be regarded as our "court poet" and satirist of that time.

I also recall Isaac Ber Kevesh. He was one of the most important managers, a contact man between the office and the authorities and landowners. He lived in Bobruisk and came frequently to Shtchedrin where he was our guest. He could tell much about the life of the Russians and Polish aristocracy, about counts and dukes of olden and more recent days, narrate episodes and describe scenes. His stories of life in the higher circles fascinated and stirred the imagination. People listened to him very eagerly.

A town figure, not without interest, was Blumke, the wife of Moyshe the Shames (beadle). Moyshe was all his life beadle of the Golodetz synagogue, and manager of the bathhouse and the mikva. Women know what the mikva was in olden days. Blumke had only one aim in life: to do good, to help the poor and needy. That was her hobby; it filled out her existence. She ran from house to house and collected money and things for the poor and sick. She was indefatigable and helped as much as she could, not merely out of kindness but to a certain degree out of selfishness. Every good deed was a mitzva. Blumke was determined to acquire as many mitzvas as possible and to prepare adequately for the hereafter. That was the meaning of her actions. She used to say, "Mitzvas, good deeds, are like precious stones on the journey. Who can pass by without thinking of filling his pockets with them?" Thus the woman lived with one thought – to be good to others and thus provide herself with mitzvas, the currency of the hereafter.

Other characters come to mind.

Abraham Ber, the messenger, the father of my friend Gankin, now in Jerusalem. A very appealing person with considerable knowledge not only of religious but also mundane matters. He lived in the township and came on holidays to visit us. I listened with great interest to his conversations with my father about nature phenomena, about the life of men and animals. A man who had received no secular education and yet know a great deal about natural sciences. He impressed me.

Abraham Havkin, the mayor of Shtchedrin, who ran the affairs of the township. A tall, impressive man who could be very witty.

Moyshe Mordecai, the violinist of Paritchi, who settled in Shtchedrin for a few years after

the fire in his home town. He was a good violinist and instructed Benjamin and me in music. As a teacher he was not quite up to par. He taught me a false position of the left arm and of the right hand, which remained with me for the rest of my life. Later we had another teacher, Jacob Epstein, who came from Kharkov and was considered an outstanding virtuoso. He played with great sweetness the "Legend of Venjavsky" and with great temperament and verve various "Krakovyaks".

I also recall Sholem the Cantor. He lived in a small house near the "court". By calling and talents he was a cantor, but this position could not quite support him and he struggled all his life. We saw him frequently. He was a fair tenor and highly gifted musically. Although he had no musical training, he could charm beautiful tones out of a violin. He possessed compositions of famous cantors (Sulzer, Lewandovsky) and frequently sang these songs with great feeling. He was an artist through and through, but in Shtchedrin no one paid any attention to him, he was not appreciated. Under different circumstances, he may have become a great artist, a famous singer. This way his talents did not attain their full development.

The following episode is quite old; it belongs in the 1870's and was told to me later: One of our town officials traveled from Vilna to St. Petersburg. In the station restaurant of the first class sat a group of gentiles at a table; before them was a copy of the paper "Novoye Vremya", from which some of the members read and argued passionately. The name of Shtchedrin was repeatedly mentioned. Our man naturally became interested. Unobtrusively he approached the group and noted the date of the paper. He came to Shtchedrin and reported the incident which aroused great curiosity. What could there be in the paper about Shtchedrin? The copy in question was obtained and lo, there was an article about the famous novelist, Saltykov-Shtchedrin, who had absolutely nothing to do with the township of Shtchedrin.

In 1882, the family Golodetz received the title of Hereditary Honorary Citizen because Chaim Golodetz had been for so and so many years a Merchant of the First Category. There came a large, printed certificate, beginning with the words, "We, Alexander III", and listing all members of the Golodetz family. At the end were affixed the seals of the Master of Heraldry and of the Senate. A copy of this document is still in my possession. At that time, I was then six years old. We were proud of it. The title, Hereditary Honorary Citizen, appertained only to those members of the family that had the name Golodetz. It did not appertain to the children of fathers who married into the family. For the first time there came up a differentiation that aroused dissatisfaction. Originally, these "honorary citizenships" carried with them various privileges, especially the right of residence outside the pale. Later, these privileges were abrogated.

The family Golodetz lived in the "court" like a large society. The interests were somewhat primitive, they were not on a high cultural level. They were, however, many-sided. Life was easy, there was not much to do. In the morning people went to the synagogue, which was the center for all, as it were, a local club. The prayers were said hastily, and people chatted about this and that. After the "davnen" the people went home. The older people went to their business, the younger ones to their studies. No one was overworked. Noon dinner was at 12. At 4, one had tea. At 6 we went to receive the mail at the post office. Then it was time again for the synagogue. The evening was free for conversation and gossip. On holidays, one did nothing.

My father's house occupied a special position in the "court" and was recognized as the center. He was the most active person in the conduct of the business and was considered the leading figure. Our mother was an educated person for those days, with cultural interests. She came of a good family in the city of Mogilev and had attended in her adolescence a girls' private school. She spoke Russian and German quite well. In our house there were the Russian paper "Novosty" (published by the Jewish journalist Notovich), the German "Gortenlaube" and "Uber Land und Meer". The illustrations contained in the last acquainted me in my childhood with the events the world over. I still recall the illustrations in connection with the death of Kaiser

Wilhelm I, and the illness of his successor Frederick (probably in 1888).

The preferred position of our house makes it understandable why important visitors, like the "ispravnik" (county police chief) or the "stanovoy pristav" (police sergeant) were received in our house. Their arrival was generally announced by the sound of bells attached to their carriage pole. They were cordially received by Mother and remained as a rule to the next day. These officials did not come because of mere friendship or for pleasure. Mostly they were urged on by the wish or attempt to obtain a small "loan." This was a usual occurrence. As a rule their wishes were granted in consideration of the situation.

THE TOWNSHIP OF SHTCHEDRIN

Shtchedrin was, as mentioned, half a kilometer from the "court". It consisted of two long parallel streets and had a population of some 2,000 people: farmers, tailors, shoemakers, blacksmith, shopkeepers, clerks, teachers. Very many of the people lived from the Golodetz family. Life in the township was thoroughly Jewish. At the head of the community was the "starosta". Among the adjuncts of the town was the rabbi and the physician. In my memory have remained the physicians Pines (later in Ekaterinoslav), Friedman (moved to America), and Danziger (later in Almavir). So far as I can judge retrospectively, they were competent physicians who did a great deal for the people.

There were practically no gentiles in Shtchedrin. Besides the "shabbes goy" there lived on the periphery of the town one or two Christian families who were thoroughly judaized. They spoke excellent Yiddish and were familiar with Jewish practices.

Shtchedrin was on a highway that linked together the surrounding villages. Frequently the peasants had to pass in their wagons the main street of the town. They did it not without fear of being molested by Jewish urchins, perhaps with the same sentiment that Arabs pass through Tel Aviv. On the whole, in the 100% Jewish Shtchedrin there was such freedom in the everyday life that I as a young boy could not understand why Jews complained constantly about Jewish oppression and suffering in the world, when not a trace of it was evident in town. Apparently Shtchedrin was an oasis unmolested by enemy forces.

Here my notes end. It was a necessity and a satisfaction for me to unpack the memories preserved in my mind (Department "Archives") to air them, transpose them onto paper and then put them back into the archives of the mind, where they will remain for the rest of my life. I cannot and will not separate myself from them. Had I not made these notes, these recollections would have been lost at my death. This way a copy remains.

I have carried these notes up to about 1897, which I left Shtchedrin and went to Leipzig. This was the crucial point in my life. During my student years I spent my summer vacations in Shtchedrin. In 1904, the family left Shtchedrin altogether. Never again have I seen the home of my boyhood days, but it is still vivid before my eyes. Other members of the Golodetz family remained there for several years more, but I believe that in 1910, the "court" became empty. Then came the war and after that the Bolsheviks. What happened then I do not know. The members of the Golodetz family lived scattered throughout many cities and contact was lost.

One branch of the family – our immediate family – was carried by fate to Hamburg and later to London and New York. The branch grew to a lusty tree with strange blossoms. A botanist would hardly recognize the tree from which the branch sprang on the basis of an examination of the new tree. Science calls this metamorphosis. It is yet to early to write the history of this branch.

The End.

1. According to the Evreickaia Entsiklopedia the year was 1842.
2. See estate map.
3. See Geneology of the Golodetz Family.
4. The Duma = Parliament
5. See Korngold photograph.

Geneology of the Golodetz Family

Chaim Golodetz Wife, Zlata

Leyb (son) Wife, Dvoyra

Children:

Abraham Joseph	Wife, Gittle (nee Landau)
Moses	Wife, Esther (nee Korngold)
Feygel	Husband, Simha Kevesh
Chave	Huband, Chaim Eliash
Rashe	Husband, Joshua Bernstein

Ber (son) Wife, ?

Children:

Mordechai Joseph	Wife, Nehama Gittel (nee Lurie)
Israel Elye	Wife, Minna (nee Friedman)
Isser	Wife, Sara (nee Golodetz)
Leyb	Wife, Bella (nee Isemakh)
Slove Peshe	Husband, Moses Mordechai Rabinowitz
Sarah	Husband, Elye Benjamin Greenberg
Feygel	Husband, Ephraim Nahum Golodetz
Malka	Husband, Nehemiah Berlin

Zalman (son) Wife, ?

Children:

Ephraim Nahum	Wife, Feygel (nee Golodetz)
Joseph	Wife, Anna F. (nee Finkelstein)
Arye Leyb	Wife, Sarah (nee Aberdam)
Sholem	Wife, Kisha (nee Fradkin)
Israel	Wife, Bella (nee Golodetz)
Feygel	Husband, Jacob Halpern
Frume	Husband, Elye Chaim Wolfson
Sarah	Husband, Isser Golodetz
Adel	Husband, Isaac Rabinowitz
Rosa	Husband, Joseph Tsemakh
Sonya	Husband, ? Fradkin

The above table includes only the second generation. This one had again a large progeny. Raising them was not expensive. There were many servants and maids available. Thus the population of the "court" attained toward the end of the last century some 200 members. Life there was gay and astir.

Photography was taboo to the religious Jews of those days. There were no cameras

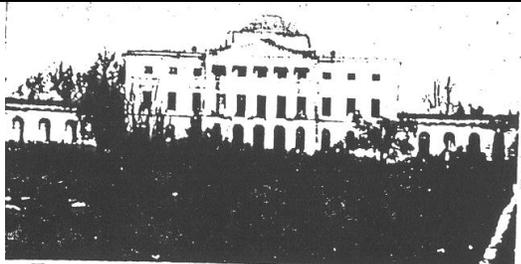
available. Only grandmother Dvoyra, was persuaded to consent to be photographed in her old age. Regrettably, I do not have that photograph. Neither do I have a photograph of Shtchedrin or of the "court," Yet the picture of the "court" and of the Township is very vivid before my eyes. I could draw a sketch of the Golodetz settlement, showing the location of the houses and the adjoining grounds. [see estate map]



Korngold family (sitting second from left: Esther; standing behind her, her husband Moses Golodetz)



Village band in Shtchedrin



Ляличи, Черн. Дворецъ врем. Имп. Екатерины

Lalitchi: The Palace



Ляличи. Черн. г. Охотничій домъ въ паркѣ.

Lalitchi: The Hunting Lodge