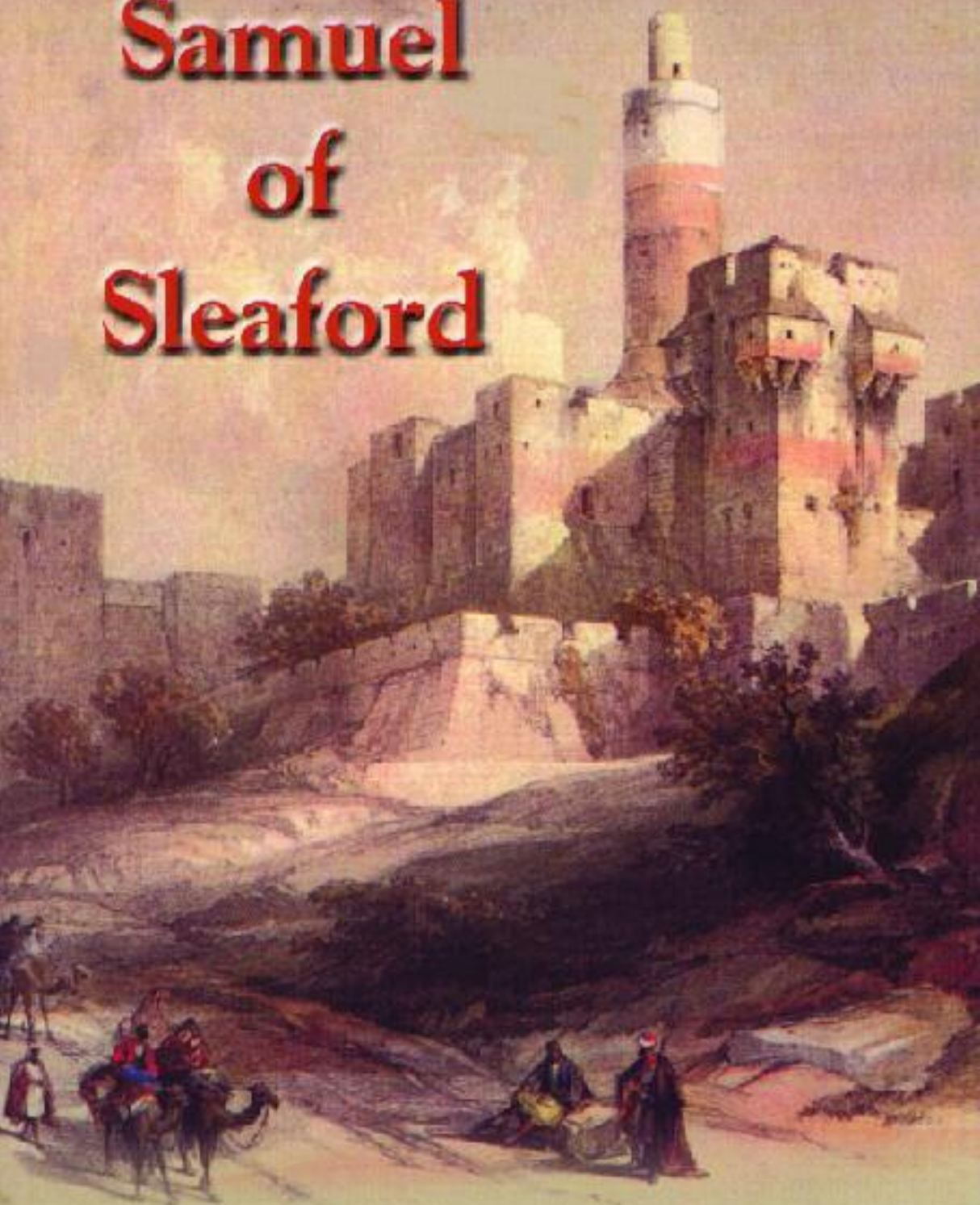


Samuel of Sleaford



The Converted Jew

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The Life of Edward Samuel
The Converted Jew

2002

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EDWARD SAMUEL: 1812-1896

The most remarkable story of a converted Polish Jew.

Edward Samuel was brought up as a strict Jew but, having to flee from his native Poland, was in the providence of God led to England. During his journeying he had a few amazing escapes from death. An interesting sidelight of his account of his early days is the view we are given of Jewish life and customs.

Brought to know Jesus as the true Messiah, led to know the doctrines of grace, and convinced of believers' baptism, he became a preacher of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. For many years he was a minister at Sleaford in Lincolnshire.

Sadly his account only reaches the time when he was 33 years old, and it has been difficult to find much about him during the next fifty years when "Samuel of Sleaford" became a well-known name in Strict Baptist circles.

CHAPTER 1

EARLY DAYS IN POLAND

I was born in a small town called Vinooty, in Russian Poland, on the borders of Prussia, on the 14th of the month Nisan, 1812, on the evening before the Passover. My parents were Jews, who were strictly observant of their religion, as were all my ancestors.

I have a perfect recollection of my maternal grandfather. He held the rank of Rabbi over twenty or thirty thousand Jews and, as his office and position required, was notable as a learned student in the Rabbinical writings and traditions. Among other details of his official duty was that of a judge as to things ceremonially clean or unclean, and to him was referred the decision as to alleged violations of the Sabbath. The Jews referred to him many purely civil questions as to frauds or debts and, indeed, he was so respected by the magistrates that if contending Jews and Gentiles had a cause in dispute and took it to them, they were accustomed to depute their authority to my grandfather, leaving the matter for his

opinion and decision. His study was near the synagogue, and there his time was almost completely occupied.

One incident connected with my boyish history impresses the habits of my conscientious grandfather strongly upon my memory. His residence was fifteen miles from that of my parents, and I went to visit him. His study was about ten minutes walk from his private dwelling, and I proceeded thither. He had not been at home during the previous night, a circumstance which created no uneasiness, inasmuch as he had been accustomed to spend three nights in each week in that solitary retirement. It was early in the morning when I went to him to have, according to custom, his hands laid upon my head, and to receive his blessing. Instantly I perceived there was something the matter with his nose, and on inquiring what accident had befallen him, he replied, "Last night while reading, I fell asleep over the candle, burnt my nose, and set my cap on fire." Such was the zeal of my dear grandfather that he fasted two days in every week, Monday and Thursday, and every other day during one whole month in the year, the sixth month Elul, which corresponds with the latter end of August and the beginning of September. On the day of Atonement, which is a fast day, he used to deliver an oration to the congregation, clad entirely in white, wearing no shoes that day – not leaving the synagogue the whole day. His oration was so affecting that the whole congregation was in tears. I remember once witnessing it and, although only a child, not more than eleven years, was equally affected with the rest.

The day before Atonement the most respectable families used to bring their children to my grandfather that he might bless them. His custom was to visit our house once a year and spend a week, including one Sabbath, and preach on that day. Every day during his stay the Jews used to bring their little children that he might lay his hands on their heads, and bless them. In this manner I understand the words of Christ, "Suffer little children to come unto Me." Not to sprinkle, nor baptize, but to bless them.

A STRANGE PROPHECY

I remember another incident, which made such an impression on my mind that I never forgot. I was not more than nine years of age when

my eldest brother, two sisters and myself were on a visit at the aforementioned grandfather's. Sitting at the dinner-table, I did something to displease my grandmother, and she, being naturally not very amiable, as I sat opposite her, stretched out her hand across the table and with great vehemency said, "Nisan" (which was my Jewish name), "as sure as I am born you will kick the bucket." This is a phrase which, though known to Englishmen as a vulgarism synonymous with death, is employed seriously by continental Jews as strongly and solely significant of what they consider to be apostasy from the truth, or a disgraceful adoption of the profession of Christianity.

My grandfather, understanding the phrase, although I did not – methinks I see him now before me – turned his face towards her with a look of the greatest disapprobation, although he was a mild and most amiable man, and whispered something to her which I did not hear. Thus she prophesied the truth. Caiaphas prophesied that there was a need for one man to die that the whole nation perish not; Balaam that there should be a star rise out of Jacob; and my grandmother that I should become a Christian. All was true, and all was accomplished, although spoken by ungodly persons; and I bless my dear Redeemer for the fulfilment of all these things. On my return home, I related the circumstance to my mother who, bursting into a flood of tears, exclaimed, "I would rather die, or follow you to the grave, than live to see that." Hearing these words, and seeing my mother so affected, I was anxious to know the meaning. At my first inquiry I met with a denial; but after many entreaties she told me, with the tears still trickling down her cheeks. Finding the meaning, I began to cry, saying, "Mother, I will never become a Gentile. No, no, not I."

SMUGGLED GOODS

My grandfather on my father's side was also very religious. He had a farm which he let, and the rent supported him. He used to sit in a house every day, close to the synagogue built for that purpose, where the learned Jews met together for the study of the Talmud and to ask each other questions. I am inclined to think that where we read of Christ meeting with the doctors, hearing and asking them questions, the allusion is to the same kind of place.

My father and mother were very young when they were married. They had twelve children, eight of whom were living when I left my native country. My father was a wholesale woollen draper. The goods were all smuggled from Prussia, as in my country it was not considered any disgrace, or contrary to the Jewish religion, as all the towns on the Prussian territories did the same. My father went four times a year to Memel and Konigsburg, seaport towns of Prussia, to purchase his goods, from thence conveying them to Peterburgh and Moscow. He was generally from home about two months at a time, and sometimes longer. We kept four fine horses, and a man as driver, for some years. My father was very prosperous and accumulated a great deal of money; but, before I left home, we were reduced in circumstances. He was taken in Russia by the Kossacks (who are on the look-out) with the smuggled goods, lost all, and it cost a great deal of money beside to set him at large again.

BLIND EYES OPENED

I was the fourth child. When an infant, I had the smallpox and measles together, through which for a time I lost my sight. I remember my mother saying that the doctor who attended me said I should not recover, and if I did, I must remain blind; which I did for twelve months. One summer's day, the servant took me out for a little air. As she was walking in the street with me in her arms, an old Gentile woman, as she passed by, cast her eyes upon me; she stopped and asked the servant what was amiss with the child's eyes. The servant replied that I was blind through the smallpox. The old woman said, "I could cure him." The servant replied, "If you can, you will be well rewarded," but also told her that she doubted her ability, as her mistress had had many medical men, and they could do nothing for the child. "However, if you will go with me, I will hear what my mistress says."

When my mother saw the girl coming and the old woman behind her, she was rather frightened, as the Jews in my country consider that many of the old Gentile women are witches. The servant told her what had passed in the street between the old woman and herself. My mother then asked the old woman how this cure was to be effected, whether by magic or witchery. If that was the way, she would have nothing to do with her.

She replied, No, that she would use simple means in her presence. My mother told her to call again in three or four days. Her motive for this delay was to write to her father to ask the lawfulness of it. The answer she received from her father was to this effect that it was lawful, providing that the woman did not kneel down to pray, or use any form of words, and my mother took good care to follow her father the Rabbi's counsel.

On the third day, the old woman came, and my mother told her if she could cure me, she should be handsomely rewarded. She affirmed she could. If it will not be too tedious to my reader, I will relate the means the woman used, whereby the cure was effected. She asked for a pewter plate, a piece of clean linen rag and a lighted candle. She then took the piece of linen rag in the presence of my mother, set light to it, and put the lighted rag upon the back of the pewter plate. After the rag was consumed, it left on the plate a kind of yellow moisture; this she took with a feather and applied to the skin which was grown over my sight, and continued the same once a day for about a fortnight when, at the expiration of that time, I could see, although it left a great weakness behind which I expect to carry to my grave.

This weakness of sight the Lord left to remind me of the superstition of the Jewish religion – the goodness of my covenant God in directing the means – His knowledge of past, present and future. He knew what He intended to do with me – to call me by divine grace, to send me to preach the everlasting gospel, which requires much reading; therefore, in His infinite mercy, He was pleased to restore my sight. Often I am overwhelmed with gratitude to the dear Lord in reading the Word, and especially since writing this little work, discovering so much weakness in my sight, for His goodness in blessing me with the little I have – knowing that, if He sees fit, He can strengthen it still more. It has many times brought me to a throne of grace, to thank Him for the past recovery and to pray for a continuation of the same.

The circumstances of my case I remember my mother relating many times.

RESCUED FROM DEATH

One Sabbath morning, going to the synagogue by myself, clad in my best, there was a lime pit full of water with a plank in it, and being but

a child, I began to play with it and tumbled in. I could not cry for fright. I struggled until my strength was exhausted, and at last sank down. The water again brought me to the top, when an old Jew with a long beard, a neighbour, going to the synagogue, seeing some one in the pit ran to it as I was just sinking the second time, and took me out for dead and conveyed me home. All thought I was dead; the usual remedies for persons apparently dead from drowning were resorted to, and I recovered. Here was a brand "plucked from the fire," as well as literally from death by drowning. Had I died, what would have become of my soul? I must have eternally perished.

O the watchful eye of a covenant God over His dear children, even when in nature's darkness! He watches them in a peculiar way, as soon as they come from the womb of their mother. He follows them up step by step to preserve them, because they are a people whom He has chosen to show forth His praise; and this they do when they are taught by the Spirit of God. They praise Him for electing and adopting love. O for a heart to love Him, for a tongue to proclaim the riches of his grace! Here I have another Ebenezer to erect; first, He restored my sight and after that my life.

CHAPTER 2

A REMARKABLE ESCAPE

It is a custom among the respectable Jews in my country at the Passover and Feast of Tabernacles to have a number of poor Jews out of the hospital, according to their circumstances, to celebrate with them those festivals. It was the day of preparation for the Passover; my father being from home, my mother went to the hospital to select three poor Jews, and brought them home with her. She asked one of them to go to the garden and dig up horseradish for bitter herbs to eat with the paschal lamb. I was very delighted not having to go to school; also, with it being the Passover, I made myself very busy, as on that day they clear out all the leaven from their premises. Generally two persons are engaged. One has a lighted wax candle, and the master of the house has a wooden spoon in the one hand and a quill in the other, searching every corner for leaven crumbs. Previous to that they put small pieces of bread in various parts of the house, which are gathered up with the spoon and quill. They then tie them up carefully in a piece of clean white rag, and kindle a fire purposely to burn the leavened bread, spoon and quill together. The reason the fire is kindled purposely is that it is not to be used for anything else. It was very pleasing to me as a boy to see my dear father search for the leaven. In case of my father being away from home, another male must take his place; he was away on the occasion I am alluding to. Our holy apostle speaks of "leaven" of a different nature, the "leaven of malice and wickedness." This leaven the Spirit of God only can remove.

But to return. Overhearing what my mother said to the man about digging the horseradish for bitter herbs to eat with the paschal lamb, which is a piece of lamb roasted, I went to the man and asked him whether he would allow me to go with him, which he did. The snow lying on the ground, he took a shovel and axe, went to the garden, removed the snow, and with the axe was going to loosen the earth, it being at that time very hard. I was about to take up a piece of the horseradish when he let down the axe on my head. Seeing what he had done, he ran off and left me insensible and wallowing in blood. My grandfather saw me from the

window, ran out and brought me in, thinking I was dead. A medical man was immediately sent for who, when he came, gave little hopes of my recovery; but, should I recover, to all probability I would be a lunatic. Here again I was plucked like a brand from the jaws of corporeal and eternal death. Little thought I then what the paschal lamb and the bitter herbs shadowed forth! Blessed be God for an experimental knowledge of both! The great Apostle of the Gentiles explains the meaning: "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us," and the herbs are the sufferings for the profession of Christ. "He that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together."

RABBINICAL TEACHING

I was educated from a child in the Mishna and Talmud, and also read the Old Testament, but this was only a secondary consideration; the former was the principal. When seven years of age I could repeat from memory the whole book of Psalms and the Song of Solomon. I deliberately repeat this in the face of the fact that I have reason to believe there are individuals who have ignorantly expressed their doubts of its truthfulness. No well-informed Jew would stumble for a moment at such a statement. Every Jew knows, or *ought to know*, that the Jewish youth (at least on the continent) are NOT interdicted from *reading* the Song of Solomon. But my ignorant critic is thus far right, that the teachers of youth in the schools are prohibited from taking that book in its due course for exposition until the age of thirty is reached. A similar incredulity has been manifested as to what I have said respecting the Book of Psalms. I would desire those, who doubt the possibility of such a thing, to ask any intelligent Jew as to the ordinary recitation of the long 119th Psalm by the women of the Jewish community at certain periods in every married woman's history.

I proceed with my history. At nine years of age I had daily to learn three or four pages of the Talmud, which consists of questions and answers of the various Rabbis. At my grandfather's annual visit, he always examined us boys to ascertain what progress we had made through the year. I recollect that once in my presence he told my father that I should

become a Rabbi. My father expressed and manifested his pleasure at the thought. However, it was rather an unfortunate remark for me, for it served as the reason for keeping me more closely to my lessons. But God had something better for me in store. He has raised me to a higher dignity than that. He has made me a king and priest unto the living God, and put me among His family, although unworthy of the least of His mercies. O! the depth of the riches of His divine grace!

LEAVING HOME

I continued at school until I was about sixteen, when a circumstance transpired in providence that I left home. The cause of my leaving home was fearing that I should be forced to be a soldier.

When Alexander, the Emperor of Russia, was on the throne, he took no Jews in the military service; he was rather a friend to the Jews than otherwise. After his death, Nicholas, his brother, succeeded him. After his coronation he issued a law compelling Jews to serve in the army and navy. This law was a terror to all the Jews in his dominions. The reason was that they must eat and drink those things which were prohibited by the law of God to them as a nation, break the Sabbath day, violate other festivals and, indeed, deny their whole religion. They would rather die, or even follow their children to the grave, than see them turn from their religion. This I had painfully to know when called by divine grace. The law obliged them to serve from fourteen years of age; they were sent to academies, where they were trained for the army or navy according to their abilities. The method they had of taking the Jews was so many from a thousand, and the heads of the synagogues were obliged to return the numbers. At first they took the lower order but, as already said, the town we lived in was small; therefore they were soon picked out. I witnessed at sundry times, when these young men were sent away, that the cries and lamentations of their parents and relations were most distressing, and almost heart-rending. I remember on one occasion being so affected that I fainted away. They rend their garments on these occasions as if mourning for the dead.

After the lower class were picked out, it of course came to the more respectable families, which was done by casting lots; and, knowing that sooner or later it must come to our turn, my grandfather advised that I and

a brother, a little younger, should quit the country. My eldest brother, being married, was exempt, and the other too young. When this law was issued, there was also another law passed, not to give any passports for males from fourteen years of age to twenty, to prevent them leaving the country. I have known fine young men chop one and two fingers off from their right hand to disable them from service.

At length it was resolved that we should leave home for the purpose of going to Konigsburg in Prussia. As there were no passports allowed, we left in the middle of the night – a banker's son, myself and brother. It is a night much to be remembered by me, my grandfather and grandmother, father and mother, brothers and sisters, all weeping. My grandfather, who was seventy years of age, with a long white beard, placed his hands on our heads and, with tears trickling from his eyes, pronounced a blessing. Some of the words I have not forgotten, although so many years since. The words were these: "May the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob bless and preserve you, protect and defend you from all harm, keep you in His fear, help you to study His laws, strengthen you to obey Him, nor suffer you to forsake Him." The last words were these: "If you forsake the Lord, He will forsake you; but, if you cleave to Him, He will cleave to you." They then kissed us all affectionately, wishing us the presence of the Lord, and bade us farewell.

Now began the prophecy of my grandmother to be fulfilled, that I should forsake the Jewish religion. My spiritual birth was appointed by God to be in London: place, means and time are all by His divine appointment. His will cannot be counteracted, nor His counsels disannulled: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." As London was to be the place, so death and hell could not obstruct the way. "O! the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

CHAPTER 3

ESCAPE FROM POLAND

We left home at midnight in disguise, a banker's only son, my brother and myself. A kind of chaise, with two horses belonging to the banker, and four men were waiting outside the town to convey us to a village, fifteen miles from the town, joining the Prussian territories, to the house of a Gentile, where were waiting twelve men with guns and pistols to escort us into Prussia, which at that place is separated from Russia by a deep valley. This valley was watched by Cossacks; about every five miles there was a cottage or kind of station, from which stations they rode to and fro. The people of the village had a perfect knowledge of the movements of these patrols; when one had passed, there was about a half hour's interval, which time we embraced for crossing the valley. Here time might not be lost as the danger was very great. If these patrols overtook any person and resistance was made, they were allowed to shoot them dead on the spot.

From the cottage before mentioned we prepared to encounter the danger of which we were sensible. As we advanced towards the valley, two men of our company were previously placed on the lookout when, at their signal, we had to run as fast as possible. But we three boys, with fright and fatigue, could not run as fast as the rest; therefore we were sometimes carried, and sometimes dragged. After we had crossed the valley, there was a small mountain to climb. When arrived at the top we were safe – which we scarcely reached, when we saw a patrol galloping on his horse after us as fast as he could, but he was just about three minutes too late.

On the Prussian side there were six men waiting for us with a waggon and fire-arms. When they saw us on the top, they all cried with one voice, "All right"; and great was our joy, as it was the first time we had heard a voice since we left the cottage, being compelled to cross the valley without speaking. While writing, methinks I can see myself in the valley running; sometimes falling down, sometimes dragged by one, and then by another. Thus my pilgrimage began with danger, and is still encompassed with the same. Being in an enemy's land, I had to watch then; but much more now, as the danger is greater, the greatest enemies being within.

Well may the Son of God say, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." It is no small mercy to be kept from carnal security and false peace. That covenant God who has delivered me doth deliver and I trust will continue to the end. Thus, dear reader, I have traced the cause of my leaving the land of my nativity, not to return again, and my arrival on the borders of Prussia.

We will now proceed on our journey to Konigsburg. We remained that night at the first village in Prussia, in the house of one of those Prussian men who were waiting for us. It is true, we all three went to bed in one room, but we had no sleep; there was a candle burning in the room, and we were talking during the remainder of the night. Now and then a secret tear stole from our eyes; again one would burst into a flood of tears, and the others follow. On the one hand, we were leaving affectionate and weeping parents and friends, and on the other we had to face an unknown world. These things would alternately pass, and repass in our minds; sometimes we encouraged each other by saying, we were young, and we will go to England, and make our fortunes. Thus passed the first night.

The next morning we were conveyed to a small town. The man took us to an inn where my dear father was accustomed to put up, and was well known. We had letters of recommendation from my father and grandfather; so also had the young man with us from his relatives. This little town was a place where the Russian and Polish Jew merchants used to resort, it being situated on the borders of both kingdoms. At this inn there were two merchants going to Memel. Seeing us youths respectable looking, they enquired from whence we came, and where we were going. We told them, and showed them our letters. One directly replied that he knew my father well, and had heard of my grandfather. We also told them that we had no passport, and that we were going to Konigsburg to an uncle of my mother's, with the expectation that he would get us a passport to England.

After this conversation he left us for a couple of hours, and then returned and told us it was dangerous to travel without a passport; and that if we would go with him to Memel, he would take care of us, and see us safe to Konigsburg. We thanked him, and were very pleased to accept such a benevolent offer. With this he immediately set off to the Burgomaster, and had our names inserted on his passport as his servants. When he