

# THE JEWISH HERALD

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NO 9

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## Prayer or Medicine-Which?

(From Memoirs of Rabbi J. T. Loeb.)

Once upon making our rounds to collect funds for a public cause from Jewish citizens in Washington, Mr. S. O. and I had approached on the subject a well-known business man in X street, and as was our custom in the cases that proved unusually stubborn, we made our appeal here in particularly strong terms. We did our utmost to make clear the urgent necessity of the worthy cause. We used up all the diplomacy at our command in an effort to induce the brother to offer some contribution. But all this to no avail. The gentleman in question lent no ear to our many pleadings. He remained cold and stiff as an automaton, and absolutely refused to respond to the call of charity. Whereupon I sought to explain to him the importance of the "Zedakah" as a life-saving virtue, citing thereby the Scriptural passage *Uzedaka tazil mimaves* (Benevolence will deliver from death), as also some of the Talmudic sayings to the same effect. The brother listened with peculiar grace to this last part of the "speech." I thought that I had conquered, and was about to celebrate my victory, when the brother suddenly rose from his seat, as if determined upon having the upper hand in the matter, and in a tone of triumph he raised the following question: "If *Uedakah*, charity, benevolence, prayer, or any other thing that goes with religion, be the only essential in the subsistence of life, or the well-being of humanity, why then buy medicine, or call for a doctor, in the case of sickness? Why not grasp the Prayer Book, the Psalter, or any other object of a religious nature, and be cured forever from every possible ailment." The question thus propounded created a stir among those present; and, curious though it may seem, this innocent query of the simpleton is ever likely to irritate

the minds or even shake the faith, of the many. In this particular instance, the practical seemed to have the mastery over the ideal, and finding it difficult to explain away the coarseness of the argument in a direct way, I hit upon the parable for a solution of the problem; and thus I said: "Let me relate to you a little story, one that is quite familiar to many of our new arrivals in this country, and which bears an essential reference to the subject of our discussion: *ecno kijnick* Russian V., took sick. He was advised to consult a physician and obtain medical treatment. This being his first experience of the kind, he was altogether unaware of the nature of the doctor's business. Arriving at the office of the medicine man, he waited his 'next' and then told the doctor the details of the case. The medico, austere and dignified, hands him a prescription with the following directions: 'Take this with two tablespoonfuls of warm water three times a day.' The unsophisticated 'moujick' grabs the precious piece of paper, for which he paid two roubles, and, gazing at it for some time and wondering what charm is contained in those mysterious characters the sage has jotted thereon, he finally stows it into his bosom-pocket and repairs directly to his home. Arriving at his house, he puts the slip of paper in a potful of water and boils it until he thought it was time to help himself with two tablespoon of the liquid. \* \* \* Upon his second visit to the doctor's office, the doctor asked if he was taking the medicine regularly,

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