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THE MEANDERINGS OF MALINSKY

Having a desire for solitude, I went the other morning through the Black Bay to the unpretentious banks of the Charles. As I came upon the wintry scene, it occurred to me that perhaps no where else in the world were the houses turned with their backs towards a river. The thought was uppermost in my mind when a furred coated individual pushed against me, and Malinsky, smoking his cigarette, extended his hand.

"I know," he said at once, "you went to get away from the noise, so you came to where nothing but ash barrels look down upon the floating ice."

"Exactly," I replied.

"The same with me," he rejoined. "Do you remember it is nearly a year since we looked in at the ball and discussed why and who was there."

"You mean, you discussed," I interrupted.

"Quite so, when two men agree it is sufficient if one talks. But did you ever notice that never happens? When two men agreed they argue more with each other than when they disagree. I know a man who, to agree with himself has to talk to himself for three or four hours at a time? When he disagrees with himself he is silent and his eyes burn with excitement. He used to come into my store, and if I didn't take care he would snip a roll of cloth to pieces in his annoyance at not being able to convince himself with his own ideas.

"And that reminds me, I regret I couldn't go down to the Conference of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. The greatest flow of talk ever heard under the sun must have been heard there. The reports read as though a dozen Maggidim had been let loose simultaneously.

"Oh, we are talkers, we Jews. It doesn't matter whether we came from

Sniposhock or Bayern, we are a powerful army of smoozers. Every one of us has the gift of the gab! So it is a blessing we know several languages."

"Why?"

"Because, one checks the flow of the other. As soon as you have to stop and think whether you are speaking German-Yiddish, or Yiddish-German or plain Yiddish, you have to be silent. In a polyglot parliament everybody would be speechless."

"What are you driving at, Malinsky?"

"I would like to get rid of the words in order to get at the thinking. You know how faithfully I read the newspapers—words, words, so little thought. Then the sermons—words, words. What happens to all the words? A Catholic once told me that nothing perishes. If that is true, some place must be choked with the human bubub. Washington street, under the Elevated must be quiet to the storehouse where all the verbal wind of human kind roams about in endless mixed streams. What a jumble! What a confusion there must be there! Sh! It can't be true. And yet there's just such a patch work around us.

"The other day I asked a man why two institutions should not unite. He answered, 'do you believe Jesus ever lived?' Now, if you know that kind of man you don't stop to argue. You ask him another question, so I said, 'do you believe in a Chief Rabbi?' Promptly he rejoined, 'Can you tell me why there should be an organ recital in memory of the son of a baptized Jew, who wrote very Christian Church music? That was quite a long question, but I replied, 'would it have made any difference to you if he had written Chazanouth?' Like a flash he said, 'wouldn't he have been ignored because he was so Jewish?'

"I could see that we couldn't make any headway in that fashion, so I left him, but it did occur to me that that man got very deep in some matters in a few words"

"I don't really see it," I ventured to remark. "It seems to me that you began at one end and ended miles and miles away."

"What of that? Ordered thought is fine. Of course, you will tell me that like all Jews, I am a critic, but truly, I listened the other night to a very great man, a man all ordered thought. I came away impressed that he managed to express a very small idea in five thousand words or more. My questioning friend helped me to understand his position by his questions. Yes, the Jews have troubles. We cut all things with the sharp edge of our understanding; and when the understanding ceases we cease to be Jews.

"Did it never occur to you that though a Jewish man can cry like a woman he thinks positively like a man? Didn't we crystalize the moral code in 'Ten Words,' and Hillel defined the whole law in five Hebrew words. When maggidim have nothing to say they talk by the hour, and when English preachers are in the same boat they invent ideas and spread them over the time limit.

"My Charlie came home the other night and sat up late mumbling over words. I asked him what's the trouble. He told me he was learning a speech. I looked over the manuscript—a regiment of words. Why all this, I asked? 'I have to speak for fifteen minutes,' he said. I suggested that he throw it away and learn to say something in five minutes. Poor boy, he nearly got a nervous breakdown; he must keep it up fifteen minutes so he patched up fourteen hundred words about nothing."

"Well, what does it matter?"