

Worthy Editor,

I was born in America and my parents gave me a good education. I studied Yiddish and Hebrew, finished high school,

completed a course in bookkeeping and got a good job. I have many friends, and several boys have already proposed to me.

Recently I went to visit my parents' home town in Russian Poland. My mother's family in Europe had invited my parents to a wedding, but instead of going themselves, they sent me. I stayed at my grandmother's with an aunt and uncle and had a good time. Our European family, like my parents, are quite well off and they treated me well. They indulged me in everything and I stayed with them six months.

It was lively in the town. There were many organizations and clubs and they all accepted me warmly, looked up to me—after all, I was a citizen of the free land, America. Among the social leaders of the community was an intelligent young man, a friend of my uncle's, who took me to various gatherings and affairs.

He was very attentive, and after a short while he declared his love for me in a long letter. I had noticed that he was not indifferent to me, and I liked him as well. I looked up to him and respected him, as did all the townsfolk. My family became aware of it, and when they spoke to me about him, I could see they thought it was a good match.

He was handsome, clever, educated, a good talker and charmed me, but I didn't give him a definite answer. As my love for him grew, however, I wrote to my parents about him, and then we became officially engaged.

A few months later we both went to my parents in the States and they received him like their own son. My bridegroom immediately began to learn English and tried to adjust to the new life. Yet when I introduced him to my friends they looked at him with disappointment. "This 'greenhorn' is your fiancé?" they asked. I told them what a big role he played in his town, how everyone respected him, but they looked at me as if I were crazy and scoffed at my words.

At first I thought, Let them laugh, when they get better acquainted with him they'll talk differently. In time, though,

I was affected by their talk and began to think, like them, that he really was a "greenhorn" and acted like one.

In short, my love for him is cooling off gradually. I'm suffering terribly because my feelings for him are changing. In Europe, where everyone admired him and all the girls envied me, he looked different. But, here, I see before me another person.

I haven't the courage to tell him, and I can't even talk about it to my parents. He still loves me with all his heart, and I don't know what to do. I choke it all up inside myself, and I beg you to help me with advice in my desperate situation.

Respectfully,  
A Worried Reader

ANSWER:

The writer would make a grave mistake if she were to separate from her bridegroom now. She must not lose her common sense and be influenced by the foolish opinions of her friends who divided the world into "greenhorns" and real Americans.

We can assure the writer that her bridegroom will learn English quickly. He will know American history and literature as well as her friends do, and be a better American than they. She should be proud of his love and laugh at those who call him "greenhorn."

1907

Worthy Editor,

Allow me a little space in your newspaper and, I beg you, give me some advice as to what to do.

There are seven people in our family—parents and five children. I am the oldest child, a fourteen-year-old girl. We have been in the country two years and my father, who is a frail man, is the only one working to support the whole family.

I go to school, where I do very well. But since times are hard now and my father earned only five dollars this week, I began to talk about giving up my studies and going to work in order to help my father as much as possible. But my mother didn't even want to hear of it. She wants me to continue my education. She even went out and spent ten dollars on winter clothes for me. But I didn't enjoy the clothes, because I think I am doing the wrong thing. Instead of bringing something into the house, my parents have to spend money on me.

I have a lot of compassion for my parents. My mother is now pregnant, but she still has to take care of the three boarders we have in the house. Mother and Father work very hard and they want to keep me in school.

I am writing to you without their knowledge, and I beg you to tell me how to act. Hoping you can advise me, I remain,

Your reader,  
S.

## ANSWER:

The advice to the girl is that she should obey her parents and further her education, because in that way she will be able to give them greater satisfaction than if she went out to work.

*The hunger for education was very great among the East Side Jews from Eastern Europe. Immigrant mothers who couldn't speak English went to the library and held up the fingers of their hand to indicate the number of children they had. They then would get a card, give it to each of their children, and say, "Go, learn, read."*

*I graduated from P.S. 20 with George Gershwin, Edward G. Robinson, Paul Muni and Senator Jacob Javits, all sons of immigrants.*

them living orphans. Who will bring them up? Who will support us? Have you no pity for your own flesh and blood? Consider what you are doing. My tears choke me and I cannot write any more.

Be advised that in several days I am leaving with my two living orphans for Russia. We say farewell to you and beg you to take pity on us and send us enough to live on. My address in Russia will be —— [Full name and address were given].

Your Deserted Wife and Children

*The most dreaded word in the Yiddish language is agunah a deserted wife. The Jewish Daily Forward at one time ran a regular feature seeking husbands who had deserted their wives, and the Jewish Information Agency of New York also had a bureau seeking deserting husbands. It was a very sad thing, especially when the wife had been left with two or three children and no income.*

1908

Esteemed Editor,

We were sitting in the shop and working when the boss came over to one of us and said, "You ruined the work: you'll have to pay for it." The worker answered that it wasn't his fault, that he had given out the work in perfect condition. "You're trying to tell me!" The boss got mad and began to shout. "I pay your wages and you answer back, you dog! I should have thrown you out of my shop long ago."

The worker trembled, his face got whiter. When the boss noticed how his face paled, he gestured, spat and walked away. The worker said no more. Tired, and overcome with shame, he turned back to his work and later he exclaimed, "For six years I've been working here like a slave, and he tells me, 'You dog, I'll throw you out!' I wanted to pick up an iron and smash his

head in, but I saw before me my wife and five children who want to eat!"

Obviously, the offended man felt he had done wrong in not standing up for his honor as a worker and human being. In the shop, the machines hummed, the irons thumped, and we could see the tears running down his cheeks.

Did this unfortunate man act correctly in remaining silent under the insults of the boss? Is the fact that he has a wife and children the reason for his slavery and refusal to defend himself? I hope you will answer my questions in the "Bintel Brief."

Respectfully,  
A.P.

ANSWER:

The worker cannot help himself alone. There is no limit to what must be done for a piece of bread. One must bite his lips till they bleed, and keep silent when he is alone. But he must not remain alone. He must not remain silent. He must unite with his fellow workers and fight. To defend their honor as men, the workers must be well organized.

I would be very thankful to you if you could advise me in this situation.

Respectfully,  
Unhappy

ANSWER :

A person is not valued by the hair on his head but by what is in his head. Those who laugh at this young man's red hair have no brains and he should not be disturbed over their stupidity. He has more reason to laugh at their heads, which are empty.

If an intelligent person greets him occasionally with a "Hello, Red," he means no harm. The same one would greet a blonde with "Hello, Blondie!" The letter writer has absolutely no reason to be upset about this.

1909

Worthy Editor,

I often spend time with a group of forty people, thirty men and ten women. Among them are religious and non-religious people, and we do not pass the time in idle discussions.

Recently we read a report in a newspaper about the movement to give women the right to vote, and for the past few weeks we have been carrying on a debate about it. I am one of the group that is in favor of giving women full rights, but most of the others are against it. The opposed argue that it would be very bad to let the women get to the ballot box, because that would destroy their family life. The woman would then no longer be the housewife, the mother to her children, the wife to her husband—in a word, everything would be destroyed.

A woman must not mix in politics, they say. She was created to be dependent on man, obey him, love him, supply all his comforts and be a mother to his children. The question

arises: Must the woman then be considered a slave, and the man the master? Isn't it obvious, then, that women in many cases show themselves to be cleverer than men? These same people who recently celebrated the hundredth birthday of Abraham Lincoln, for having freed the Negro slaves, now talk with a satirical grin about women's freedom. Just as the opponents of the Socialist movement point out that Socialism will be harmful, so those who argue against voting rights for women say that this will destroy family life.

This is not so, because a woman is a human being just like a man. The capabilities that women have already shown confirm this. Plenty of facts can be cited from the past. And if women are recognized as human beings, they must also be granted all the rights of human beings. I think that if women are considered human beings with all their rights, then family life would be better and richer.

With Socialistic regards,  
L.V.

ANSWER :

The arguments against the opponents of women's rights are very good ones. The fact is that many intelligent women are already taking part in various activities and they still remain excellent homemakers.

Justice can reign among people only when they all have equal rights. If one has more power than the other, it leads to injustice. Those men who are opposed to giving women the same rights they possess are acting from tyrannical instincts because they actually want to rule the women.

their wives and children and only when they take us out to eat can they see them. When a man wants to ask his wife something, or when a father wants to see his child, they don't let him. Children get sick, they are taken to a hospital, and it often happens that they never come back.

Because today is a holiday, the Fourth of July, they didn't send anyone back. But Tuesday, the fifth, they begin again to lead us to the "slaughter," that is, to the boat. And God knows how many Jewish lives this will cost, because more than one mind dwells on the thought of jumping into the water when they take him to the boat.

All our hope is that you, Mr. Editor, will not refuse us, and print our letter which is signed by many immigrants. The women have not signed, because they don't let us get to them.

This letter is written by one of the immigrants, a student from Petersburg University, at Castle Garden, July 4, 1909, on the eve of the fast day of *Shivah Asar B'Tamuz* [the seventeenth day of the month of *Tamuz*, when Jews fast in memory of Nebuchadnezzar's siege and destruction of Jerusalem].

Alexander Rudnev

One hundred immigrants, aged from eight to fifty-eight, had signed this letter (each one had included his age). To stir up public opinion and the Jewish organizations, the letter was printed on page 1 with an appeal for action to help the unfortunates. To affirm the authenticity of the facts in the letter, the *Forward* stated that in the English press it had been announced that during the previous week six hundred detained immigrants had been sent back. And on the day the letter from the one hundred was printed, they were sending back two hundred and seventy people.

The *Forward* had previously printed many protests against the unjust treatment of the immigrants confined on Ellis Island, also against the fact that masses were being sent back, and the *Forward* was not silent on this letter.

Ah, home, my beloved home. My heart is heavy for my parents whom I left behind. I want to run back, but I am powerless. I am a coward, because I know that I have to serve under "Fonie" [the Czar] for three years. I am lonely in my homesickness and I beg you to be my counsel as to how to act.

Respectfully,  
V.A.

## ANSWER:

The answer states that almost all immigrants yearn deeply for dear ones and home at first. They are compared with plants that are transplanted to new ground. At first it seems that they are withering, but in time most of them revive and take root in the new earth.

The advice to this young man is that he must not consider going home, but try to take root here. He should try to overcome all these emotions and strive to make something of himself so that in time he will be able to bring his parents here.

*Most of the immigrants were young boys or girls whose parents had sent them on to America. They were to earn enough money to send for their parents later on. Naturally these young boys and girls were very lonesome for their mothers and their homes, and on Saturday afternoon the Thalia Theater in New York was filled with shopgirls who had a good cry listening to Lucy German sing "Eibega Mama [Eternal Mother]."*

1911

Dear Editor,

I am a newsboy, fourteen years old, and I sell the *Forverts* in the streets till late into the night. I come to you to ask your advice.

I was born in Russia and was twelve years old when I came

to America with my dear mother. My sister, who was in the country before us, brought us over.

My sister worked and supported us. She didn't allow me to go to work but sent me to school. I went to school for two years and didn't miss a day, but then came the terrible fire at the Triangle shop, where she worked, and I lost my dear sister. My mother and I suffer terribly from the misfortune. I had to help my mother and after school hours I go out and sell newspapers.

I have to go to school three more years, and after that I want to go to college. But my mother doesn't want me to go to school because she thinks I should go to work. I tell her I will work days and study at night but she won't hear of it.

Since I read the *Forverts* to my mother every night and read your answers in the "Bintel Brief," I beg you to answer me and say a few words to her.

Your Reader,  
The Newsboy

## ANSWER:

The answer to this letter is directed to the boy's mother, whose daughter was one of the shopworkers who perished in the Triangle fire. The unfortunate woman is comforted in the answer, and she is told that she must not hinder her son's nighttime studies but must help him reach his goal. And an appeal is made to good people who are in a position to do something for the boy to come forward and help him further his education.

*The Triangle fire was a disaster. My mother along with other East Side mothers hung a piece of black crepe out of the window on the day of the funeral. All the girls were buried in the Workman's Circle Cemetery and the cortege was followed by some hundred thousand workers.*