

Josel Berliner

## I am a Pioneer in California



For some years, now, I have been a farmer in California, near a small town some ninety miles from Los Angeles. There are four of us here - myself, my wife Louise-Leah and [our] two, small children.

We rise quite early to feed the farm animals, the chickens [and] the dog. We then milk the cows, separate the cream from the milk and sell it. Afterwards, we water the vegetable plot [and] the fruit trees. When the fruits and vegetables ripen, together, we harvest the vegetables from the garden and the fruits from the trees and prepare them to be stored for winter. We freeze the vegetables, [thus] preserving hundreds of crates of food for the winter.

Every fortnight, we clean the henhouse, the stable and the yard. Our small income is from the sale of the eggs, the butter and the milk. Almost every day, some market-day takes place in the small towns around us. There, we sell what we have to sell and buy what we need. In the beginning, a farmer's life was tough. Having worked all my life as a tailor, bending down in the field and in the yard was difficult for me. I was forced to dig four-hundred holes in the ground, each to a depth of three feet, to fence off the field, in order to prevent others' animals from entering. Nowadays, I already carry the bundles of hay and the sacks of oats with ease and at a rather good pace!

About 9:30 in the morning, we are usually done with the work around the homestead. Then, until two in the afternoon, I spend time in the markets, where we buy and sell. Between three and five, I work in my little tailor's workshop, which I operate on a small scale. Then, back to chores at the house. That is more or less what our life at the farm looks like. All in all, it is not easy. But I feel healthier than I did as a tailor in the city.

In Fresno, some thirty miles from here, there are two Jewish centres - a reform temple and an orthodox synagogue. We are affiliated to the former. Around two-hundred children from the entire vicinity learn at the temple's Sunday-school. They are taught religion and Jewish history, and are shown pictures of the subjects taught. The children are fond of this school and they cannot wait till Sunday, when they will be taken there. My children Butch and Chanale attend the Sunday-school. The [reform] rabbi has taught them that, when my wife Leah lights candles on Friday evening, they are to say "Good *Shabbes*, Mummy! Good *Shabbes*, Daddy! Good *Shabbes* to all the Jews! Good *Shabbes* to the whole world!" I am not religious, but I am pleased that the children will not become completely assimilated here. The *Arbeiter Ring* [Workmen's Circle] branch in Fresno is not a large one. The B'nai B'rith lodge is mostly involved in welfare and aid to Israel. We, at the *Arbeiter Ring*, are very much engaged in our cultural and communal work.

In my youth, in Częstochowa, I belonged to the SS (Socialist-Territorialist) Party. I exchanged blows with the "Good Boys [Gang<sup>\*</sup>]", fought in the ranks of the Self-Defence [Group] and, for several year. sats in the Święty Krzyż (Holy Cross) prison in Kielce. I emigrated to America, [where] I sweated in the sweatshops, went on strike [and] fought with "scabs" [strike-breakers] and the police in the streets of Chicago. I pulled a cart of fruit and vegetables around in Los Angeles and then I became a

---

\* [TN: This was one of various Jewish organised crime syndicates in Poland, which dealt in extortion, theft, etc.]

manufacturer of ladies' apparel. Every season, I racked my brains over the new trends and fashions. But, the whole time, the ideal of "territorialism" lay in my bones - which meant that I had to settle on the land. Now, I have attained my ideal and I do not regret it.

I hope that once the children grow up, I shall also fulfil the territorialist dream of my youth and that we will settle in Israel, which I shall make my homeland, not from afar, but to actually live there amongst all the Jews.

As my short narrative about a Jewish farmer in California was written specifically for the book which is being published for our friend Raphael Federman's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary [of social activism], I, my wife Leah and the children send our heartiest greetings to my good old friend and comrade Raphael Federman, with whom, by the way, I rejoiced a few years ago, when we met again in Los Angeles, in his capacity, then, as Chairman of the [United] Czenstochover Relief Committee.

We wish him many more long years of good health and fruitful work in all his intensive social and Jewish cultural activities!