

Korovan's Translations.

(Alice Bruce, in the 'Christian Endeavor World'.)

"I cannod shtand it, I cannod. All ze t'ime mit zat rent you puts me haff. Von day you zay, "Ja"; Nexd day you zay, "Nein"! Now, to you I zay, no mor' "Jas," no mor' "Neins," I vas tired hof sooch. To-morrow I musht haf it, or yoos stock, efery book hof it, I zell! Nein, nein! vor mor' vords I haf no use, Mish-ter Borden, no uze!"

"If— if— I was able, Gonorowski," feebly remonstrated the white-haired tenant of the old book-store, "I would pay it. You— you know—"

"No uze vor mor' vords, no uze, I zay!" interrupted the excited landlord harshly; "alretty too long you pud me haff. To-morrow I musht haf it, or to-morrow I zell!"

The ill-humored threat tailed off in a dull, guttural cluck. 'My pound of flesh' was engraved in the beady eyes sparkling like polished steel, and Roger Borden with a curious sinking at his heart and a last unconscious plea for leniency in his pathetic, care-worn face, recoiled before the frigid smile that curled and froze on the broad, almost bloodless, lips.

When Simon Gonorowski was angry, it was useless to try to stem the tide of his anger. Under far more auspicious circumstances the book-dealer had tried once before, but the result had hardly justified a renewal of the attempt. Hebrew of the Hebrews, in Simon there was nothing of the Samaritan. In his stilted make-up, for leniency and sympathy there was no convenient niche. If he promised, he fulfilled. If he borrowed, he repaid. With the strict letter of the law he had to do, not with brotherly love.

Ten years without default had Roger Borden paid rent into the grasping palm of Gonorowski. Thirty dollars a month for an oblong strip of dinginess was a top-notch price; but in the street of the bookworms there was nothing more suitable, nothing cheaper.

"Nein!" had Gonorowski eagerly assured him. "Anyzing mor' zootable, anyzing cheaper, you cannod vind. I guaranteez you, nein!"

"But it's—it's a very dirty place," Borden had complained, accentuating the deep wrinkles on his brow.

"Vell, soap, vater, elbow-krease?" promptly suggested the Hebrew, and Roger had smiled.

Is not a smile the immediate precursor of a bargain? At least, shrewd Gonorowski construed it so, and his construction proved to be correct. Without unnecessary palaver, therefore, the sign came down from the musty, fusty old den festooned with cobwebs, coated with sifting of the street, and ingrained with the grime of neglect. But 'zoap, vater, and elbow-krease' did wonders in a rapid transformation scene. Borden's books did the rest; and on a battered shingle, in letters of gold, 'The Bookworm's Paradise' went up to swing and whirl on its rusty bar.

Ten years, yes, full ten years without default; and only on the tenth, on the strength of long tenancy, careful usage and prompt payment, came a modest request for repairs.

"Repairsh! Repairsh!" quoth the astonished landlord. "Vind und vater tight, are you nod?"

"Very true, very true," assented the book-dealer, 'but' and with trembling finger he pointed across the street to the flapping crimson awning of his competitors, Marx & Zohn, 'they are taking my trade away from me, Gonorowski. They have paint and varnish and show cases. I have none.'

He placed his finger on one of a hundred great paint blisters bellying to the weather, and pressed it in with a click!

"Huh!" sneered the Hebrew, 'und vot you expectsh? You paysh me thirty dollar. Zese peoples paysh seexty. Yoos drade vall away. Whosh valt? Mine, hey? Na, na, you vas vind und vater tight. Zat vas the gontract, Mish-ter Borden!"

Clearly the avaricious thirst was unquenchable, appeal was useless; and with a sigh Mr. Borden opened the little drawer in his till, and took out thirty dollars. 'Your rent, Gonorowski,' he said quietly; 'that is what you came for. Take it. Next month I—I may need a little delay.'

'Delay, ha!' crashed the Hebrew meaningly, 'I zink you ged it. I zink you ged it!'

But next month, as he had predicted, the book-seller was forced to ask for a little delay, and he got it—a little, ten days. Then came the present angry demand, the threat of a sale; and Borden was still in a tight place.

His business, like water through an imperceptible crack, had leaked away from him. Returns had not yielded rent and living. The new store across the street, with its enticing glare of color, its varnished floors, its clean, white show-cases, had attracted the eye and loosened the purse-strings of his customers. Could be blame them? Listlessly he glanced around his grimy stock, pulled out the first calfskin volume of a set, and, as he blew a dusty cloud from its gilded top, a big yellow spider scurried round the corner to number two. No, he could not blame them.

For himself he would not have minded. It isn't difficult for an old man left alone, and hard by the goal, to take the buffets of the world if the glad hand is denied him. But Borden was not alone. In the little living cell behind the store was a link that held him to the struggle—his blind, motherless daughter, Mima; and, at the thought of her, in Borden's red-dimmed eye a tear diamond glistened and trickled slowly to the corner of his nose. Aimlessly, with hands plunged deep in empty pockets, he slouched across to the window, and stood gazing wistfully out at the crimson awning, seeing only a ghostly panorama of the past. In the streaky light of a dust-laden sunbeam he looked the one essential figure in a picture of poverty; for at best he was but a gray, ill-kempt, broken-down old man, a drifting derelict on the ocean of need. High up, on the finding ladder, his green, threadbare back turned toward the door, his shallow visage buried deep in age-mottled pages, stood the Hebrew; and before him a gap in the close-packed shelf, from which he had extracted a tattered volume, made up the background detail for the depicter of life.

When he delivered his ultimatum, Gonorowski, feigning interest in the sages, had ascended the ladder. To do him justice, his first weak impulse, snuffed at birth, had been one of pity. Yet somehow, and with a feeling perhaps akin to the feline desire to torture the quivering prey, he remained, and from his vantage-point cast furtive glances at his victim. No, he could not modify his threat. A subtle, voiceless sensation still urged that course. But why should he? These beggar Gentiles could borrow, yah! And among his lending brethren there were legions praying for just such business. If he modified, he might dash away "per zents" from a worthy son of Israel. Nein, nein, he could not modify his demands.

'The quality of mercy is not strained
It droppeth—'

'Bah!' He closed the unorthodox volume with a bang, and pulled out another.

'Rod of Aaron!' in a breath he muttered, gazing like one entranced at the magic title on its pages:

"Korovan's Transzlations," edizion hof sixteen fifeen! Hey?" he purred.

Slowly, like black, revolving beads his eyes drew nearer to his prominent nose, and his broad lips parted. 'Und he marks it twendy zents. Hey, your drade vall away, mine old vriend? I zay, "No vonder, no vonder!" Korovan's "Transzlations," sixteen fifeen, Dan!"

From his inside pocket stealthily he pulled out and opened a limp, battered book. Between its pages scribbled black with notes lay a newspaper cutting with the red-cross hall-mark of importance. 'Marx & Zohn,' it announced briefly, 'will pay seventy dollars for a well-preserved copy of Korovan's "Translations," edition of 1615.'

'Ha,' again purred Gonorowski, 'und zey are gonvenient. Chust across the streed.'

Click! An elastic band snipped snugly to its place, and just as Roger Borden turned his dim eyes to the ladder he saw a tiny slip of paper flutter unnoticed by the Hebrew, to the floor.

'Bud who knowsh, who knowsh?' the latter was arguing. 'Alretty zey might haf purchased a copy. Befor' I buy I vill see. Ya, I vill zee. Twendy zents? Nein, it ish nod mooch, bud chust zo vall I zee'; and, glancing furtively down at the bookseller, he replaced the precious volume, and descending the ladder hurried to the street.

From his dust-begrimed window Borden watched the gaunt retreating figure till the swing doors of Marx & Zohn concealed it. 'Now, what does Gonorowski want with them? Funny he should have turned tail so soon,' he mused; 'it isn't like him to do that. Hey, what does it mean?'

Suddenly his swift upward glance rested on the Shakespeare and the Korovan. The Hebrew had not replaced them as he found them.

'Shakespeare, Shakespeare? No, no,' decided the book-dealer, 'it was not Shakespeare that interested—ah!'

A little thrill stirred his blood, an unreasoning, faint hope, as he slouched over and picked up the newspaper cutting. 'Mima! M-Mima!' he shouted suddenly, pocketing the slip; and before the blind girl had time to appear framed in the musty-smelling old curtains her father was descending the swinging ladder with the Korovan clutched tightly in his trembling fingers.

'M-Mima,' m-my darling,' he stammered, 'y-you stay behind the counter for—for a little, just a little. A—a business call, Mima, a business call. It will not take me long, dear. There, now, there,' and he led her out and into the narrow passage built up with books. 'This way, my dear; face this way. Ah, there now! And say—yes—say I—I will be home in just a minute, just a minute, my dear!'

'Father?' she questioned, her anxious, and sightless orbs, like fatomless pools, fixed full on his face.

'No, no, nothing wrong, my dear, nothing wrong,' he answered her. 'There now, just a little, just a little!' and he was gone.

Ten minutes later, when he crossed the warped threshold of his dingy little store, his face was radiant and his step was brisk.

'Mima! Mima!' he cried joyously, 'I—'

'Ha, Mishter Borden, you haf returned,' interrupted a croaking voice from the ladder. 'You haf a book I vood like to buy. Korovan's "Thanszlations," twenty zents, I zink you mark it. I saw it here ven—'

'I have just sold it, Gonorowski; I have just sold it,' replied Borden with a quiet smile; 'and your rent, here it is. I will not have to keep you waiting, after all. I am glad.'

'Zold!' muttered Gonorowski, "'Korovan's Transzlation" yos half zold. My rent you paysh. No vaiting, hey?' And very slowly he came down from the ladder.