

French's Acting Edition. No. 1638

**THE DEACON  
AND THE JEWESS**

A Play in One Act

by  
**H. F. RUBINSTEIN**

1/-



**SAMUEL FRENCH LIMITED**

*11 pages revised  
from H.F. Rubinstein  
10-1-36*

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25 WEST 45TH STREET, NEW YORK, U.S.A.  
811 WEST 7TH STREET, LOS ANGELES, CAL.  
SAMUEL FRENCH (CANADA), LTD.  
480 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, TORONTO

## CHARACTERS

BENEDICT THE POINTER (Jew of Oxford).  
HANNAH (his Sister).  
VIVES  
SIMON } (her Children).  
LEO }  
JOIA }  
GILBERT (a Student).  
ROBERT (a Deacon).  
WINIFRED (a Maidservant).  
Some Visitors (non-speaking).

SCENE.—A house in Oxford Jewry.

TIME.—An afternoon in September, A.D. 1221.

"But when a clerk, so convicted of a crime, has been degraded, no other punishment follows . . . unless indeed he is convicted of apostasy, in which event he is to be first degraded, and afterwards burnt by the lay authority, as was carried out at the Council of Oxford holden [on the 17th April 1222] by Stephen [Langton], Archbishop of Canterbury, of happy memory, in the case of a certain deacon, who apostatized for a certain Jewess, and who, when he had been degraded by the bishop, was immediately committed to the flames by a lay hand."

Bracton's *On the Laws and Customs of England*.

*(Time and other considerations permitting, it is suggested that the above quotation may usefully be communicated to the audience by means of a Prologue:*

*A single beam of light discovers Henry de Bracton, a thirteenth-century lawyer, dictating the passage to a scribe, seated at a table. He speaks coldly and ponderously, referring occasionally to a sheaf of notes in his hand. As he reaches the last words, the scene is blacked out.)*

## THE DEACON AND THE JEWESS

SCENE.—*The first-floor interior of a mediæval house, built of stone, and planned for protection from civil disturbance. The spacious room is divided by a curtain into a usurer's office and a family living-room respectively.*

*The office, occupying about a third of the scene, is on the (spectator's) left. At the rear is a solid front door opening on to a narrow flight of steps leading to the street. The usurer sits with his back to the curtain partition before an oblong table, serving as a counter, with a massive oak chest at his side. On the other side of the table is a bench for the customers. On the table lie business ledgers, and an hour-glass.*

*The living-room, in striking contrast, has a warm and comfortable appearance, largely produced by curtains and tapestries. In the middle of the right-hand wall, a fireplace; to the rear of it a door leading to the other parts of the house. A Norman window, square-headed and plain, in the back wall overlooks the street. Before this window, facing the office partition, is set a chair and a small table for the use of BENEDICT, who, by glancing through the window, can observe anyone outside the front door. A similar table and chair, between BENEDICT'S table and the office, facing front, are reserved for the use of SIMON. The table is untidy with a litter of books and parchment. There is a further table, long and narrow, for general use, before the fireplace. The centre of the room is well provided with chairs and stools.*

*BENEDICT is seated, before a sloping desk, at his table, working laboriously at a manuscript, a pile of completed pages at one side. He is elderly, of patriarchal appearance, and wears a skull-cap. His nephew*

## 6 THE DEACON AND THE JEWESS.

VIVES sits behind the counter in the office absorbed in a book, a keen-faced young man, clean-shaven.

*A pause. Then a loud knocking at the front door. BENEDICT automatically glances out of the window.*

BENEDICT (*calling*). One man. Scholar.

VIVES (*mechanically*). Door opening.

(*With a sigh, he lays his book aside, rises and unbolts the front door, admitting a young student (GILBERT), unsteady with drink.*)

GILBERT (*loudly*). Where's old Jew Leo?

VIVES (*bolting the door behind him*). My brother is out.

GILBERT. Damnation! . . . Brother, d'ye call him? That makes three of the litter I've had to deal with.

VIVES. Perhaps I can be of service?

GILBERT. One Jew's as good as another, eh? Well, I can't wait here all night. I'm going on to a party, see? I've got an account here. Leo knows all about me.

VIVES. Master Gilbert of Worcester, isn't it? (*He returns to his place behind the counter.*)

GILBERT. That's right. You'll do. I want two shillings quick. On the usual terms, eh?

(*LEO brings forward and opens a ledger.*)

That's only by the way. That's not what I've come to talk to you about. (*He sprawls himself on the bench.*) You see this letter? (*Flourishing it.*) It's from my schoolmate and particular friend Nicholas—that's the fellow that's giving the party that I'm going on to from here, if you understand. He's been away to a family wedding or funeral or lawsuit or something, and he's seen my old guardian, Sir Timothy! And here he writes to tell me that Sir Timothy's coming to Oxford to-morrow, and expects to spend one or two days here. Now that's what I call a piece of good news, because it means that with any luck, I should be able to touch



Sir Timothy for quite a tidy sum of money. And that'll enable me to get right out of you Devil's clutches, see? So—in short—what I've come here for is to find out exactly how much I owe you. . . . Give me the two shillings first, or I'll forget it.

VIVES (*handing him the money from a bag in his girdle*). There you are, sir. (*Entering it in the ledger*.) If you'll sign here, please. (*He passes the ledger across the table*.)

GILBERT (*signing*). Anywhere you like. (*He pushes the ledger back to him*.) Now then, what's the damage, Jew?

VIVES (*after quick reckoning*). To the day after to-morrow—that's Wednesday—it'll be three pounds twelve and fivepence.

GILBERT. Zounds! Why, you stinking heathen

VIVES. You can check the figures for yourself.

GILBERT. Will you hear me out? D'ye think I can screw all that money out of an old skinflint in twenty-four hours? Look here, suppose I pay you back on Thursday?

VIVES. We shall be closed both Wednesday and Thursday.

GILBERT. What's that? None of your dirty Jewish trickery, now!

VIVES. It is our New Year.

GILBERT. Cock's body and soul! New Year in the middle of September!!

VIVES. You can have till Friday if you like.

GILBERT. That's more like it. That'll give me a chance, see? I'll dine the old buffer in Hall and make him so tight he won't know the difference between his purse and his belly, eh? (*Guffaws*.) That's a bargain, then. Three twelve five, eh? You shall have the money Friday morning without fail. That's fair enough, what?

VIVES (*writing in the ledger*). Three twelve five till Friday sunset. Agreed. . . . I'll make you out a detailed account.

\*

GILBERT. Can't wait for that now, or I'll be late for Nicholas's party. (*Rising*.) I haven't seen old Nicholas for—must be nearly a week. He should have been back yesterday, see, but he got kept on the way. He explains all that in the letter.

VIVES (*rising, and going to the door*). I'll have the account ready for you on Friday, then. (*He unbolts and opens the door*.) Good day to you, Master Gilbert.

GILBERT. That's all right, Jew. (*He hunches out, and VIVES closes the door*.)

VIVES (*calling*). All well.

(*He bolts the door, and returns to his seat and book. A pause. His sister JOIA enters from the inner door. She is a Jewess in the early twenties, with dark brilliant eyes*.)

BENEDICT (*looking up*). All well.

JOIA (*approaching*). Is Leo—?

BENEDICT. Let me just finish this line. (*He makes a few further strokes with the pen*.) Leo is not back yet. (*With a smile*.) Worrying again?

JOIA. Sorry. . . . (*Looking over his shoulder*.) May I have a peep? (*Reading*.) "What is thy petition, Queen Esther, and it shall be granted thee; and what is thy request, and it shall be performed even to the half of the kingdom."

BENEDICT. Beautiful words, eh?

JOIA. How much truth is there in the story of Esther, Uncle?

BENEDICT. Is it not enough that the characters are truly drawn—true to life as we know it?

JOIA. Some of them. Haman, yes—Mordecai, perhaps—

BENEDICT. And Esther herself?

JOIA. Show me a King Ahasuerus first! Surely the king is pure fiction?

BENEDICT (*with a smile*). So unlike our own worthy young Henry the Third, eh?

JOIA. Or our late lamented King John!

BENEDICT (*with a sigh*). We are living in a bad time.

It will pass, as all things under God pass, sooner or later.

JOIA. "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday." . . . If one could only realize that!

BENEDICT. Or realize that a brave spirit—like Esther's—is immortal.

JOIA. Oh, Esther was brave enough . . . (*Breaking off.*) After all, she married out of the faith. Think how that must have scandalized the local Community! (*He pats her hand with an indulgent smile.*) I oughtn't to be keeping you. I wanted to talk to Vives. Is there anyone with him?

BENEDICT. Not now. . . . Peace, always peace. (*She leaves him, passes through the curtain, and confronts VIVES.*)

VIVES (*looking up from his book*). All well?

JOIA. All well. (*She sits down opposite him.*) Mother's been lecturing me again.

VIVES. Another brilliant offer for your hand?

JOIA. Why can't they leave me alone?

VIVES. Well, it's a bit hard on the old lady, isn't it? Four grown-up children, and not one of them brought under the canopy.

JOIA. Leo and Simon are both on the way to it, now. . . . (*A slight pause.*) There's no news of Leo, I suppose?

VIVES. He did say he mightn't be back till to-morrow.

JOIA. I wish you wouldn't let him do so much travelling.

VIVES. He likes it, and nobody else does.

JOIA. I get so anxious about him. I can't help it. If only he were more like you—or even Simon.

VIVES (*with a touch of bitterness*). Even Simon.

JOIA. Simon is at least wrapped up in his own thoughts. Leo never thinks at all.

VIVES. And I—I envy both of them sometimes!

JOIA. Vives!

VIVES. Sorry. It's been rather a tiresome day. . . . No, it isn't just that. Always round about New Year I get worked up.

JOIA. I know. It's the shadow of the Day of Atonement. It catches us all, I think. I'm feeling queer enough. . . . I expect it's good for us.

VIVES (*fiercely*). Can it be good for any man to spend the greater part of his life doling out and raking in this accursed metal? Oh, Joia, it nauseates me so!

JOIA. We have no choice, Vives!

VIVES. I know, I know. But here in Oxford of all places—with the lecture-rooms everywhere about us, doctors of learning giving out all the things I'm hungering to know—and these care-free schoolmen, every door open to them. . . .

JOIA. It may be good for us, all the same—to control imagination, turn inwards to the one door that remains always open to us. . . . (*With a smile.*) I'm quoting Uncle Benedict, needless to say!

VIVES. Uncle Benedict's a saint. It's different for him.

(*A knock at the door. JOIA rises hastily.*)

BENEDICT (*his eyes on the window*). One man. Our people.

JOIA (*eagerly*). Leo?

BENEDICT. Simon, I think.

JOIA (*dully*). Door opening.

(*She goes to the door, unbolts it, and admits SIMON, a sallow young man with an unkempt beard and a premature stoop.*)

SIMON (*mechanically*). All well?

JOIA. All well here. (*She bolts the door again.*)

VIVES (*holding up the hour-glass*). You're before your time.

SIMON (*abstractedly*). I dismissed school early. I wanted to refer to some notes. . . . (*He goes straight through the curtain, removes his hat, substitutes a skull-cap, seats himself at his table, spreads out his books and papers, and is immediately absorbed in study.*)

VIVES (*continuing the conversation with JOIA*). Yes, Simon's happy enough! So long as he can wallow in his theological subtleties!

JOIA. I wonder if he remembers he's going to be married next month! (*Musing.*) Poor Bee! What can marriage mean to Simon?

VIVES. Freedom from matchmakers, my dear.

JOIA. He ought to have been a Christian. Their Rabbis are at least allowed to remain celibate!

VIVES (*laughing*). "Allowed" is good! . . . And they have nunneries for women celibates, remember. That would have been a career for you!

(*Their mother, HANNAH, a stout elderly woman—all nerves—bustles in from the R.*)

HANNAH. All well, Benedict?

(*JOIA, hearing her voice, rises abruptly.*)

BENEDICT. All well.

HANNAH. Where's Joia?

JOIA. Here I am, Mother. (*She returns to the living-room.*)

HANNAH. Isn't Leo back yet?

JOIA. Not yet, Mother. Vives thinks he may not be back before to-morrow.

HANNAH. Benedict, I'm sure you've worked enough for to-day. Remember your eyes.

BENEDICT (*with a sigh*). I dare say you're right, Hannah.

HANNAH. Oughtn't Simon to be relieving Vives? (*Calling.*) What's the time, Vives?

VIVES (*inspecting the hour-glass*). It's just turning the hour. (*He holds it up for a moment to let the remaining sands run through, then turns it over and replaces it on the table.*)

SIMON. I won't be a minute. (*He begins to put his papers together.*)

(*There is a knock at the front door.*)

BENEDICT (*at his post*). One man. A traveller. Leo.

HANNAH. At last! (*Her emotion breaking through.*) All my children are safe!

(*She hurries into the outer room, JOIA following her.*)

VIVES opens the door, and admits his elder brother LEO, a stout, swarthy, red-haired man, with a well-trimmed beard, richly dressed, but travel-stained, and carrying a pack on his shoulders.)

VIVES. All well.

LEO (*with fervour*). Thank God for that! (*He discards his pack and embraces his mother.*)

JOIA (*suspicious*). All well with you?

LEO (*passing it off*). Can't you see? . . . There, there, Mother. (*As she clings to him.*) Well, I pulled it off, Vives.

VIVES (*without enthusiasm*). Good man!

HANNAH. Did you have an easy journey?

LEO. Pretty fair. She's a good nag. I rode her hard, too.

HANNAH. Come and rest yourself, dear.

LEO. I shouldn't mind a drink.

HANNAH. Let me fetch it for you.

(*She hurries through the curtain and off.*)

LEO. Aaron approved the whole scheme as soon as I'd explained the position. We had the deed drawn up, signed and registered the same morning. Not too bad, was it? . . . When's that drink coming?

(*He passes into the next room, JOIA following.*)

And how are the learned members of the family? All well, eh?

SIMON (*rising with books and papers*). I have to relieve Vives. . . . I'll see you presently.

(*He goes abstractedly into the office, and takes over from*

VIVES. HANNAH returns from the inner room, bearing a tray with a jug and goblet.)

HANNAH. Here's your drink, dear.

LEO. Ah! (*He refreshes himself.*) So everything's been quiet here?

(*VIVES at that moment comes in from the office with his pack.*)



VIVES. Including business!

LEO. You've had no . . . unexpected visits?

HANNAH. Nothing of the kind.

LEO. Good. Thank God. I'll have another drink.  
(*He helps himself. Uneasy glances are exchanged.*)

HANNAH. Did you see your aunt and uncle in London?

LEO. Of course. They sent all the stock messages.

HANNAH. And dear Jesca?

LEO. As plump and plain as ever!

HANNAH (*laughing*). There's a way to speak of his fiancée!

JOIA (*voicing the general suspicion*). What was on your mind, Leo, when you spoke about unexpected visits?

LEO. If nothing's happened, nothing's likely to happen now.

JOIA. Hadn't you better tell us, all the same?

VIVES (*gravely*). I agree.

LEO. Oh, very well, only it's not a very pretty story. . . . It was partly my own fault, perhaps. . . . The fact is, I had a little trouble at Wallingford the night before last. I was feeling a bit cheerful, I suppose, what with the way the business had gone, and some Rhenish wine I'd had for supper. Anyway, one of the tavern wenches came over to me, and of course we got talking, and fooling about generally. Then she started ragging a fellow at the next table, and I suppose I joined in, and it finished up in a regular scrimmage.

HANNAH. Leo, oh, Leo!

LEO. I'm sorry, Mother. I'm made like that, I suppose.

VIVES. Who was the man at the next table?

LEO. That swine Nicholas. (*VIVES starts.*) What's the matter?

VIVES. He recognized you, of course?

LEO. I dare say he'd forgotten all about it by the time he'd slept it off. We were all of us pretty fuddled. . . . Still, I'll admit I didn't feel too happy the next morning, and if I hadn't made that appointment with

old Isaac, I'd have come straight along home to warn you all.

VIVES. Did Nicholas make any definite threat?

LEO. Not that I remember. Anyway, if he'd meant mischief we'd have heard something about it before now. He must have been back here by noon yesterday, and he's not the man to let the grass grow under his feet.

VIVES (*slowly*). Nicholas arrived back to-day.

LEO. How do you know?

VIVES. Never mind about that. I know something more. Nicholas has invited his fellow-rowdies to a party to-night. We had better prepare for emergencies.

(*A pause of general consternation.*)

LEO. Oh, Lord, and I was looking forward to a decent meal!

HANNAH. Leo, oh, Leo!

JOIA (*her practical genius asserting itself*). We'd better give him his meal, Mother. If they're going to raid us, they'll wait till it's dark. We've just time for a quick supper.

HANNAH. I'll go and help Winifred dish it up.

(*She bustles out through the inner door.*)

JOIA. Who'll give the alarm in the synagogue? Vives?

VIVES. Right. (*Looking about.*) Where did I put my hat?

JOIA. Leo, will you test all the bolts and bars? Carefully, please.

LEO (*bestirring himself*). The funny part is I knew all the time I was making a damned fool of myself. . . .

JOIA (*to BENEDICT*). Uncle, dear, hadn't you better start putting your things away?

(*VIVES has found his hat and staff. At that moment there is a knocking at the front door. Everyone starts.*)

Who is it, Uncle?

BENEDICT (*peering through the window, calmly*). One man. Clerk.

LEO. Trust an ecclesiastical customer to poke his nose in—

JOIA (*calling*). Wait, Simon. (*To the others.*) We must get rid of him quickly. Simon's no use. Vives—? No, you're going out . . .

LEO. Let me admonish him!

JOIA. Haven't you done enough mischief?

BENEDICT. Now, Joia . . .

JOIA. Sorry, Leo, but there's a lot at stake.

(*The knocking is renewed.*)

(*She suddenly decides.*) I'll deal with him myself. (*Moving to the curtain.*) All right, Uncle, I know what you're going to say. I'll remember. (*She strides into the office.*) We're preparing for a raid, Simon. Take your books into the next room at once. (*She bundles him safely through the curtain, and calls.*) Door opening. (*She unbolts the door, and confronts a young, grim-looking deacon* (ROBERT). *She recoils, stifling an exclamation, then speaks rapidly.*) Sorry to have kept you waiting, sir. I'm afraid we can't see you before to-morrow. Our business is closed— (*She begins to push the door to.*)

ROBERT. Let me pass at once! (*Brushing her aside, he strides into the room, adding contemptuously.*) I have not come to borrow money! (*He looks about, then crosses himself anxiously.*) Where is the Jew called Benedict the Pointer?

JOIA (*defensive*). What do you want with him?

ROBERT (*more aggressively*). Where is this Benedict? Do you hear me?

JOIA. He can't see anyone. (*Her indignation rising.*) We are going to have our supper.

ROBERT. Will you answer my question, Jewess?

JOIA (*losing control*). I am a human being! (*She strikes him on the face.*) That is my answer!

(*A gasp goes up in the adjoining room. All—save SIMON, who is again engrossed in study—turn to BENEDICT, as for counsel.*)

BENEDICT (*calling in a steady voice*). Let him come in to me.

(ROBERT, *trembling with passion, crosses himself again, before calling back.*)

ROBERT. Molest me at your peril!

(*He marches into the living-room, in a state bordering on panic. JOIA, panting violently, remembers to re-bolt the front door before following him.*)

BENEDICT (*mildly, sizing him up*). You are quite safe among us.

ROBERT (*finding his voice, as he draws himself up*). Which of you is the Jew Benedict?

BENEDICT. I am.

ROBERT. Stand up! (*After fumbling in his pocket, he has drawn out a document.*)

BENEDICT (*obeying*). Willingly.

ROBERT (*after referring to the document*). You have three sons?

BENEDICT. Nephews. They are all present.

(*Only SIMON remains seated as usual. JOIA now reappears through the curtain.*)

My niece you have already seen. . . . Come here, Joia. (*She goes to him.*) You were not watching. You have been dissipating valuable energy. (*She bows her head, ashamed. He smiles.*) Just separate yourself from that savage young woman! And consider: good and bad nature, good and bad manners—all human values—are relative. Here is a man of strong feeling, impatient to discharge an unpleasant duty, and who honestly believes we are Devils in human form.

ROBERT (*loftily*). I decline to bandy words with you.

BENEDICT. Pardon me, sir. I was addressing my niece. (*To JOIA.*) Give me your hand. (*Taking it.*) Just close your eyes, relax, think of eternity. (*She obeys.*) Are you freed? (*She nods. He drops her hand, and turns to ROBERT.*) Now, sir.

ROBERT. I have been charged by spiritual Authority



to make inquiry concerning reported breaches of the Jewry laws.

VIVES. May we know who you are?

ROBERT. I am a Deacon of the Abbey of St. Oseney—Robert of Reading my name.

BENEDICT. We are attentive.

ROBERT. I have to remind you that, while we are obliged to suffer your presence among us, under Royal Licence, bounds have been set by Holy Church for the protection of the faithful from the contamination of your influence. To ensure restriction of intercourse, you are required to wear badges when you go abroad so that all men may know you for what you are. Will you produce your badges? *(There is no response.)* Do you plead exemption from an ordinance decreed in Rome more than five years ago?

BENEDICT. The ordinance has never been enforced in Oxford.

ROBERT. It will be enforced on future. Look to it. A white band, two fingers broad, four fingers long, conspicuous on the outer garment. Is that clear to all? *(Murmurs of "Quite clear, sir," betraying anxiety to be finished with him.)*

JOIA. I will sew them on myself. I have enough material, I think.

VIVES *(motioning ROBERT towards the curtain)*. If there are no other complaints, sir—

*(At that moment a maidservant (WINIFRED) enters from the inner door bearing a laden tray.)*

JOIA *(motioning her back)*. Presently, Winifred . . .

*(HANNAH has entered from behind.)*

ROBERT *(turning quickly)*. What's that? *(Addressing WINIFRED.)* Stay, you. *(She obeys. To BENEDICT.)* Who are these?

BENEDICT *(equally, indicating each in turn)*. My sister Hannah—widowed mother of our young people—and the maidservant—

ROBERT. A Christian maidservant? *(There is no denying it.)* As I suspected. *(He turns upon the girl.)* Come hither, woman. *(She advances.)* You can put the tray down. *(She deposits it on the long table. Sternly.)* Do you lodge in this household?

WINIFRED *(already scared)*. Yes, if you please, sir.

ROBERT. And you call yourself a Christian? *(She assents humbly.)* Do you know what is meant by excommunication? *(She gasps in terror.)* Were you not aware of the grievous sin you were committing? Answer me!

WINIFRED *(trembling)*. I never thought about it, sir.

ROBERT. Laxity and ignorance everywhere! Are your parents living?

WINIFRED *(faintly)*. My father, sir. *(She begins to cry.)*

ROBERT. Does your father know that you have been imperilling your salvation? *(She can only sob.)* Does he live in this city? *(She bows her head.)* Listen to me, you poor degraded creature. You must return to your father immediately. Go at once and put your things together, and I will take you to him. *(As she hesitates.)* I will wait here for you.

*(She goes out, sobbing hysterically. He folds his arms, and stands resolute.)*

HANNAH *(who has shown increasing agitation)*. Oh, sir, pardon me. Her father is a drunken brute.

JOIA *(quietly)*. He won't listen to us! Isn't that plain enough, Mother? *(She goes over to BENEDICT.)* Oh, Uncle, I feel utterly free—freer than ever in my life before. I can see quite clearly behind the screen of this man's hostility. The real man must be quite different. Or is there nothing real behind?

BENEDICT. Remember the words: "I have said, Ye are Gods; and all of you are children of the Most High."

JOIA. How is one to reach the God in a man?

BENEDICT. Through God. There is no other way.

JOIA. Yes. *(She closes her eyes for a moment, drawing a deep breath. Then, suddenly matter-of-fact.)* We are

neglecting present needs. It is growing dark. Vives, you must give the alarm at once. (*He bestirs himself at the word.*) Leo, will you see to the door?

LEO. Right. (*Hurrying towards the curtain, he barges into ROBERT "accidentally on purpose."*) Oh, sorry. I didn't notice you. . . .

(ROBERT, *disconcerted, stands aside.*)

HANNAH (*as VIVES, hat and staff in hand, is following LEO*). VIVES. (*He turns to her.*) Tell Rachel to bring her baby along. They'll be all alone.

VIVES. I'll call there on my way.

HANNAH (*kissing him*). Don't be long, dear.

(*He leaves her, and passes into the office. LEO has already unfastened the door.*)

JOIA (*to ROBERT, who is showing signs of apprehension*). We are expecting a students' raid. My brother has to toll the synagogue bell, to warn our people. We have other preparations to make. . . . Pray be seated.

(*She motions him to a chair between SIMON's and BENEDICT's tables. He steps back to the position indicated, but remains standing. LEO having seen VIVES out, and re-bolted the door, now returns.*)

LEO's hungry. We haven't time for a sit-down meal. Anyone who wants had better help themselves without ceremony.

HANNAH. A little food will do all of us good. (*To LEO, who is rubbing his hands.*) Go and wash first, dear.

JOIA. Don't be too long. We shall want you to see to the bolts and shutters, remember.

(LEO, *with a gesture, passes out through the inner door.*)

(*She turns to SIMON.*) Simon! (*He waves her aside.*)

HANNAH (*going across to him*). Supper, dear. Put your books away at once. I expect you've had nothing since breakfast, as usual. (*As he commences laboriously to put his books together.*) Here, let me help you with

them . . . (*Pushing by ROBERT, in her anxiety.*) I beg your pardon, sir. . . .

(*During the following speeches, SIMON, assisted by HANNAH, takes his books out, LEO returns, SIMON follows him back and HANNAH joins them at the side-table, where, after a murmured grace, they help themselves to food.*)

JOIA (*approaching BENEDICT, who during the preceding speeches has been adding touches to his manuscript*). And now, Uncle, your precious parchments. (*Carefully, she collects the sheets from his table.*) Shall we pack them in the new chest? (*Inspecting the top sheet.*) I do like this design!

(*Involuntarily, ROBERT has been throwing glances, betraying a connoisseur's interest. Noticing his movement, she turns to him quite naturally.*)

Would you care to see it?

(*She holds the sheet out. Despite his scruples, he cannot take his eyes away.*)

ROBERT (*stammering, as he comes forward*). If I might . . . just a glance . . .

JOIA. The marginal decorations are rather unusual.

ROBERT (*bending over the parchment*). Extraordinary!  
JOIA. They are really annotations. If you look closely you will see they are formed out of Hebrew characters. (*She has led him forward into the middle of the room.*) Those are vowel-points underneath. The pointing is the most difficult part.

ROBERT. So that is why he is called the Pointer? I have a slight knowledge of Hebrew . . .

JOIA (*staring at him*). You——? Have a knowledge of our language?

(BENEDICT *has come forward.*)

BENEDICT. Excuse me, May I take them now? I think I would rather pack them myself.

ROBERT (*feelingly*). They must be carefully handled!  
BENEDICT (*with a smile*). One learns from bitter

experience! (*He has taken the sheets from JOIA.*) You must be tired, my dear. Why not rest yourself? (*He points to a chair beside her, then goes out with his manuscripts.*)

JOIA (*as she drops into the chair, to ROBERT.*) You have an eye for calligraphy?

ROBERT. It has been my study since boyhood. We have some pretty good penmen at the Abbey. But your uncle— (*Seeing a chair.*) Will you permit me? (*He seats himself.*) Your uncle is a master!

JOIA. My uncle is a master of many arts. Grammarian, translator, poet, philosopher . . . But, before all things, he is a teacher—a teacher of the way to live.

ROBERT. The way to live? But—but—

JOIA. But he is also a moneylender. Is that what you were going to say? Yes, we are all partners in the business. (*He shrinks from her.*) Don't you understand? We have no right to live here unless we practise usury in the King's service. And money corrupts. Do you think we don't know that? Why else should we cling so tightly, so desperately, to the fabric of our law?—the law that separates us from all other people. . . . And so the barrier grows and grows! Suspicion, misunderstanding, hate—there is no end to it. . . . Don't you know all this?

(BENEDICT has joined the others at their meal.)

HANNAH. Joia, dear, aren't you coming to join us?  
ROBERT (*huskily, hardly knowing what he says.*) Will you tell me some more that I don't know?

JOIA. Do you know that, despite every obstacle, there has been a continuous tradition of scholarship among the Jews of England? Our great Abraham ben Ezra wrote his most famous work among the usurers of London. Here in Oxford, before the crusades, the founders of your schools were friends and comrades of our rabbis—

ROBERT. Before the crusades, you say?

JOIA. The crusades destroyed that fellowship—blighted every hope—

ROBERT (*roused.*) You are speaking of a Holy warfare!

JOIA. I am speaking of a warfare in which my father—as gentle a man as ever breathed—was beaten to death in the streets—a warfare that wrought havoc and desolation in every Jewish home throughout Europe. How otherwise would you have me speak of your Holy wars?

ROBERT (*springing to his feet, and crossing himself frantically.*) You are a witch, I think.

JOIA (*gently.*) Don't be afraid of me, Robert. We worship the same God.

(*The tolling of a bell in the distance. She rises.*)

Do you hear? It is the signal to our people. They will take shelter behind strong walls.

(*Those at the table have also heard, and are alert.*)

BENEDICT. I must return to my post. (*He goes to reseal himself at the table.*) Simon, you had better wait at the door.

(SIMON *shuffles into the office, mumbling to himself.*)

ROBERT *remains standing as in a trance.*)

LEO. I'll fetch that shutter. . . .

(*He hurries off, and continues on the move, first bringing in a heavy shutter for the window, then seeing to bolts, etc., as the action proceeds.*)

HANNAH. Joia, dear, have a taste of this pie—just to please me.

JOIA. All right, Mother. Don't you worry. I'll look after myself. . . .

HANNAH. I'd better get out some extra bedding for refugees. . . .

(*She is about to go out, when WINIFRED enters, cloaked for leaving, and carrying a bundle. JOIA signs to her to go to ROBERT. HANNAH waits fearfully.*)

WINIFRED (*to ROBERT.*) I'm ready now, sir.

ROBERT (*staring at her.*) What? . . . Yes, yes, I



remember. (*He passes his hand over his brow.*) You must stay here, of course.

WINIFRED. But my sin . . . You said I'd be excommunicated. . . .

ROBERT. It was no sin. You will be absolved. . . . What am I saying?

JOIA (*taking her arm*). We are all sinners, Winifred. . . . We can only pray for salvation. (*Drawing her aside.*) Listen. There may be a raid to-night. If you'd like to go with him to safety . . .

WINIFRED. But you've always let me stay before, miss. Can't I make myself useful? Oh, don't you send me away!

JOIA. Of course we won't. Just put your things back, quickly, and get the spare bedding out . . .

WINIFRED. Yes, miss. Oh, thank you, miss. . . . Thank you, sir.

(*Relieved beyond further expression, she hurries through the door. HANNAH goes after her.*)

JOIA (*half to ROBERT, half to herself*). God is merciful.

ROBERT (*distracted*). I don't understand. . . . (*As she turns from him.*) Stay! There is something I want you to know.

JOIA. Yes?

ROBERT. I have seen you before to-day. In the streets. More than once. . . . I knew you lived here. I never told anyone. I—I half wanted to speak to you. . . . (*Breaking off.*) Why am I telling you all this? Oh, I am ashamed!

JOIA (*looking straight at him*). I recognized you at once when I opened the door. In my mind, I have spoken to you—many times. That was what maddened me to strike you—

ROBERT (*panic-stricken*). I must go at once.

JOIA. Of course. I will take you to the door. . . .

ROBERT. No, no. How can I leave you like this? . . . What have you done to me?

JOIA (*as desperately*). God is still with us. Seek God all the time. God is merciful. Only have faith in God.

ROBERT. How you must despise me! You have reduced me to nothingness.

JOIA. Listen. I have heard my uncle say that only when we feel we are nothing can we hope to reach God—to grow in his love—

ROBERT. Let me try—let me pray . . . (*Frantically.*) How can I pray here! Oh, I am lost!

JOIA. Go back to your church. Pray anywhere. Forget all else.

(*There is a knock at the outer door. LEO rushes in at that moment.*)

LEO. Everything's secure.

(*A tense pause.*)

BENEDICT (*at the window*). Vives. Rachel with him.

LEO. Let me open! (*He rushes into the office.*)

JOIA (*to ROBERT*). Come quickly. (*He stumbles after her, through the curtain.*)

LEO. All right, Simon. Leave this to me. (*Calling.*) Door opening.

(*He unbolts and opens the door, while SIMON, relieved of further responsibility, shuffles back to the living-room to retire into his corner. HANNAH meanwhile bustles in.*)

BENEDICT (*informing her*). Vives and Rachel.

(*She hurries across into the office, as VIVES appears at the door.*)

LEO. All well here.

VIVES (*panting*). Quick, Rachel. (*He helps a woman, with a babe in her arms, through the door.*) They're in full cry. Townsfolk as well. . . .

HANNAH (*receiving RACHEL*). Come inside, dear. You're quite safe now. (*She helps her on to a seat in the living-room before returning to the office. Meantime:*)

VIVES (*remaining in the doorway*). There are some stragglers behind, I think. . . . I was just in time. We heard a yell as we were leaving synagogue. . . .

LEO. I'll put the shutter up. (*He hurries back to the*

*sitting-room and fixes the shutter over the window. Meanwhile :)*

ROBERT (to VIVES). Is there nothing I can do ?

VIVES (surprised). What ? You ? That's very good of you, sir. . . . *(He keeps glancing back into the street.)*

ROBERT. Do you think if I were to remonstrate with them— ?

VIVES. A churchman ? But no one could hold that drunken rabble ! *(He glances out again.)*

JOIA. We're used to it. They'll disperse before the morning.

ROBERT. Suppose I went to the castle for help ?

VIVES (with a laugh). Help for Jewry—from Sheriff Falkes de Bréauté ! He'd only want to join in the sport ! *(He glances again into the street.)* Refugees coming !

*(He helps an old woman through. HANNAH, advancing, leads her to a seat in the living-room. WINIFRED has reappeared with pillows, etc., which she proceeds to arrange about the floor. Further refugees arrive and are similarly received and accommodated, WINIFRED making herself useful generally, serving refreshments, etc. Distant shouting becomes audible.)*

JOIA. They're coming !

VIVES. Yes. I'm afraid we'll have to shut the door. *(He peers out anxiously.)*

JOIA (to ROBERT). You must go now. *(He hesitates.)*

LEO (hurrying back to the office). Anyone else in sight ? *(He joins VIVES at the door.)*

VIVES. Isn't that old Manasseh ? He'll never get here.

LEO. It's his rheumatism. *(Impulsively.)* I'll bring him in. *(He dashes into the street.)*

VIVES (shouting). Too late ! They're round the corner already. . . .

*(The shouting becomes louder.)*

JOIA (to ROBERT). Now—now ! There's still time !

ROBERT (with sudden resolve). Yes, now. *(He plunges after LEO.)*

HANNAH (calling from the living-room). Are you barring the door ? *(She comes through the curtain to see.)* What's the matter ?

VIVES (shortly). Leo's out. He went to help old Manasseh.

HANNAH (with a stifled cry). Oh, God !

VIVES (watching out). They've got him between them ! . . . Look out !

*(A shower of mud and stones comes through the doorway, accompanied by more audible insults and imprecations which now become more or less continuous. "We want Jew-boys," seems to be the favourite slogan. A breathless moment. Then LEO and ROBERT, bearing a whimpering old Jew, stagger in. A further volley of stones follows as VIVES pushes the door to, and proceeds to bolt and barricade it, with JOIA's assistance. From this point, onwards, the play proceeds to the accompaniment of a muffled din of voices, fluctuating in volume and punctuated by the sound of missiles striking the door and walls of the house. The voices on the stage must be raised to carry above it.)*

LEO. It was a near thing ! *(To ROBERT.)* Are you hurt, friend ? *(He himself is bleeding at the head.)*

ROBERT (fiercely). Not I ! Not even hurt !

LEO. How's the old 'un ? . . . All right, Mother. It's nothing.

HANNAH. Come and let me bathe it for you at once.

JOIA (who is tending the old man). It's only fright, I think.

LEO (to his mother). Oh, well, if it'll make you happy, Mother . . .

*(He follows her through the living-room and out the other side. JOIA supports old MANASSEH to a place among the other refugees.)*

VIVES (to ROBERT, haltingly). Sir, we are grateful. . . .

ROBERT. Grateful ? Ha ! *(He laughs hysterically.)*

VIVES. But—forgive me—your presence here, if it should be known . . . might it not do you harm ?

ROBERT. Very likely. . . . Degradation. Other penalties. Perhaps extremest. . . . (*Looking about him.*) Where is your sister?

VIVES (*embarrassed*). With the others. . . . (*He indicates the direction.* ROBERT *takes a step forward.*) My uncle may recite a prayer, perhaps. You will not be offended?

(ROBERT *shakes his head.* VIVES *leads him back to the living-room.* *The company sits hushed with the realization of danger so near at hand.* Only SIMON, *seeing ROBERT, is shocked out of his preoccupation.* JOIA *goes to ROBERT, takes his hand.*)

ROBERT (*urgently*). Don't go away from me.  
JOIA. Yes. It must be strange for you.

(*He suddenly falls on his knees, buries his face in his hands.*  
*She turns to her brother.*)

Vives, oh, Vives, I am so afraid for him.

(*A long concerted howl, as of wild beasts, rises from without.*)

BENEDICT (*in a voice which rises and falls above the fluctuations of the clamour*). "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust. For he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his pinions, and under his wings shalt thou take refuge. His truth shall be thy shield and thy buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flieth by day; of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor of the plague that ravageth at noonday. A thousand may fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand. It shall not come nigh unto thee. . . ."

*The CURTAIN has fallen.*

## NOTE

The identification of Benedict le Puncteur of Oxford (so described in a surviving Tallage Roll) with a distinguished Massorite, litterateur and moral philosopher known for centuries under his Hebrew name, Berachyah ha-Nakdan, was established by Joseph Jacobs, author of a work, *The Jews of Angevin England*, now unfortunately out of print, but invaluable to students of mediæval Europe and modern Germany.

All that is known historically of the case cited by Bracton as the precedent for burning heretics in England is discussed by Professor F. W. Maitland in an essay, "The Deacon and the Jewess; or Apostasy at Common Law," included in his *Roman Canon Law in the Church of England*, and reprinted, with a note, by Israel Abrahams, on Jewish versions of the affair, in the *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society*.