

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mr. Silver, Individualist

IT WAS nine o'clock on the morning of a new term in P.S. No. 2. The class was standing, each boy next to his desk, waiting for the new teacher. A monitor had placed us in alphabetical order, and my desk was in the first row immediately in front of the teacher's desk. Presently we heard the sound of footsteps in the hall, and a tall, thin man came hastily into the room. Without so much as a glance at the class, he strode to the blackboard, seized a piece of chalk, and quickly wrote in beautiful script: "*Mr. Silver.*" He put down the chalk, brushed one palm against the other with the elegance of a cymbal-player, and sat down at his desk. He took out a paper from a drawer and read out our names. "Raise your right hand when your name is called and sit down," he said. And as each boy raised his hand and sat down, Mr. Silver bestowed on him a sharp, fleeting look.

Mr. Silver's face was long, freckled, and delicately formed. His eyes were steely, yet curiously expressive of his mental reactions to what they revealed to him. A second after he looked at an object his eyes would, as it were, pronounce judgment. The roll call over, he leaned forward, put his elbows on the desk, intertwined the four fingers of each hand, and with his thumbs began stroking in opposite directions an imaginary mustache on his lip. As he stroked, he turned his concentrated gaze on each boy in turn. When he came to me, he stared longer and harder and worked his thumbs with calculated deliberation. I felt uncomfortable under this scrutiny. At the same time I was obliged to repress an impulse to laugh at the industrious workings of his thumbs on his lip. At length he spoke, still looking straight at me. "I'll have no nonsense here," he said sharply and, I thought, rather irrelevantly, since the class sat silent and serious, its eyes on him. "We're here to work and for nothing else. If anyone doesn't like it here," and he suddenly jerked his left thumb in the direction of the door, "he can go *elsewhere!*" As he snapped out the word "elsewhere," it conjured up a bleak, purposeless, sterile, trackless region as unprofitable as the moon. It seemed as if he meant to address the class through me, and I tried hard to look away and so retreat into the safe anonymity of the other boys. But his hypnotic eyes held me fast, and a silence ensued during which the thumbs resumed their work on his upper lip. I knew I should be unable to bear the sight much longer without laughing, and the inevitability of my breakdown and the punishment that must ensue filled me with terror. As far back as I could remember, I had been fighting a propensity to laugh. I would laugh at anything or at nothing at all. I would laugh when I felt sober and grave. I laughed at deformity and mishap when I would rather have cried. Sometimes I had to repress a perverse desire to laugh when a funeral passed by. Yet I had no impulse to laugh at Italian funerals, in which the mourners marched to the sad music of brass bands.

But now, as if at the command of some "Imp of the Perverse," I laughed straight into the face of the formidable teacher who stroked a mustache he didn't have. It was a loud, staccato laugh, and it left me frozen with horror. To my surprise, it came again a second later, ignoring the terror I felt. Mr. Silver left his desk, came close to me, and with his fist struck me repeatedly in the face. I did not mind the blows. Indeed, I was grateful for them, for they released my tears. I was beginning to feel a sense of relief, when Mr. Silver seized me by the scruff of my neck and hustled me out of the room. "You may come back when you've laughed yourself out!" he shouted after me as he closed the door.

It seemed to me that I had laughed myself out *forever*. As I paced the hall waiting for the passing of a decent interval before I re-entered the classroom, I was certain that nothing would ever again seem comical or ludicrous to me. But when I opened the door halfway and saw Mr. Silver at his desk, his thumbs again stroking his lip, I knew I must laugh or die, and I shut the door hastily and fled down the hall and into the basement, where I took refuge in one of the open toilets that stretched in a row the length of the building. My next attempt to enter the classroom proved successful. Mr. Silver was on his feet talking to the class, one hand in his trouser pocket, the other playing with his bunch of keys. I did not want to laugh.

Having established his authority so sensationally on the very first morning of the term, Mr. Silver could presumably afford to relax. And soon he disclosed a provocative and even engaging personality. When not angered and moved to take disciplinary measures, he was breezily efficient and coolly but interestingly informative, even on dry subjects like arithmetic. His approach to teaching was informal—deceptively so we were to discover, for at the first sign of camaraderie on the part of a boy he would instantly change into a tyrannical disciplinarian. He impressed us by doing the unexpected. For example, when explaining sums on the blackboard he eschewed

the use of the traditional pointer, using instead a key selected from a ring of keys he carried in his pocket. This lent an air of intimacy to his demonstrations. We could not of course avoid speculating about the large number of keys he carried about. It was one boy's opinion that Mr. Silver could be another Bluebeard who kept a corresponding number of wives under lock and key. We had to admit that he was handsome enough to marry as many women as he desired. Of one thing we had no doubt. His ambition, his competence, and his authoritative-ness were bound to carry him to the greatest pedagogical heights.

Mr. Birnbaum, the principal, might well be jealous of him. Mr. Birnbaum was not a man to be trifled with, notwithstanding the unctuousness of his reading of a paragraph from the Bible in assembly each morning. These paragraphs were baffling. They seemed to make no sense in English, and they lacked the musical appeal my father endowed them with when he intoned them in Hebrew. When they did begin to make sense, Mr. Birnbaum would perversely terminate his reading and leave the story in mid-air.

“And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, ‘My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant.’” (Genesis, Chapter xviii.) Mr. Birnbaum spoke the final phrase as if he were asking a question, placed the embroidered marker on the page, and piously closed the tooled-leather tome, leaving us wondering just whom the Lord appeared to and what subsequently happened.

We even preferred Mr. Silver's quick temper to Mr. Birnbaum's studied reactions to the problems of a principal. Mr. Silver might flare up at a boy, and in his passion hit out at him; but he cooled off rapidly. And if the victim bore the onslaught stoically and showed no resentment, Mr. Silver rewarded him by electing to forget the incident and thenceforward treating the boy with the breezy condescension we thought so becoming to him. As for his attitude to Mr. Birnbaum, it was gratifyingly aloof. Mr. Birnbaum would make unexpected visits to classrooms, hoping, it was generally assumed, to catch his teachers off guard or, at the very least, to make them self-conscious and apologetic. "Please keep right on with what you are doing," he would command genially on entering a classroom. But we learned that most teachers found it quite difficult to carry out this injunction. They floundered about, showing plainly their want of self-possession. On the other hand, some of them, sensing an opportunity of making a favorable impression, pretended a severity that was alien to their natures. This threw the class into a confusion that was not lost on the principal. Mr. Silver, however, always took Mr. Birnbaum at his word and continued what he had been doing without any show of either bravado or fear.

One morning a messenger appeared and told Mr. Silver that Mr. Birnbaum desired to see him in his office without delay. Mr. Silver said: "Very well," breezily, as if he didn't care; but his face flushed and his eyes roamed over the class, seeking out the boy who had betrayed him. The class had reason to be apprehensive about the interview that would take place in Mr. Birnbaum's office. The day before, Mr. Silver had lost his temper and had struck a boy, who had thereafter sulked all the morning and afternoon. The boy had gained a reputation as a cry-baby and a sissy. For this we blamed his mother, who accompanied him to school and waited for him on the sidewalk when school was let out. We

had little doubt that the boy had "snitched" on Mr. Silver and that his mother had lodged a complaint with the principal. The boy now gave himself away by crying softly. Mr. Silver returned as briskly as he had left. The flush on his cheeks glowed more brightly and his eyes looked steelier. "Rabinowitz!" he called out sharply. "Stand up!" The boy got to his feet. Mr. Silver regarded him contemptuously. "Rabinowitz," Mr. Silver resumed, "I am asked to apologize to you for striking you yesterday. I now do so. Sit down!" Rabinowitz took his seat. The tears were pouring down his cheeks. We could hardly blame *him*. It was all his mother's doing. It went to show what an evil unbridled parental affection was. We were sorry for Rabinowitz, but we gloried in Mr. Silver's display of withering scorn. And we were pretty sure that in his brief interview with Mr. Birnbaum Mr. Silver had given the principal little cause for satisfaction.

We discovered faint overtones of contempt in Mr. Silver's demeanor toward his colleagues. We couldn't tell whether he disliked the teachers or the subjects they taught, but we were prepared to adopt his opinions and prejudices if we could but know them. We did know that he was partial to realistic subjects, to studies that would be useful in commercial life. But he disdained to be specific and left us to guess at his opinions from his occasional impromptu remarks on politics and current events. These hinted at a philosophy that favored the survival of the fittest and leadership by the confident and strong. Poverty, Mr. Silver intimated, was merely the consequence of laziness, want of ambition, and a disbelief in the potentialities of the active man. He stressed the fact that "our forefathers" (most of the boys and their parents had been born in Europe) "could not have thrown off the British yoke and launched 'our' great and successful Republic had they not been proud, hard, and industrious individualists." And commenting on the reports of a sanguine clash between striking coal-miners in Pennsylvania and the armed forces dispatched to the area by

the Governor of the state, Mr. Silver reminded us that there were no unions and no strikes at Concord, Valley Forge, and Yorktown. No, sir! Only the frustrated and the cowardly would favor unions and engage in strikes. It was the aim of the Socialists to destroy initiative and take from the industrious rich their well-earned possessions and hand them over to the lazy, shiftless poor. And what would be the gain, Mr. Silver inquired oratorically. Why, there would be no gain! he answered himself. If the wealth of the country were to be divided equally, the rich would lose everything and the poor would hardly gain anything!

Whatever the boys, the majority of whom were only too well acquainted with poverty, may have thought of Mr. Silver's contempt for the poor, I could not, try as I did, quite share it. Wishing earnestly to adopt Mr. Silver's opinions on all matters, I examined the habits and behavior of the indigent class of which my family was a part. I found, much against my will, hardly any evidences of laziness.

Perhaps if Mr. Silver had stopped in Rutgers Square some evening and listened to the speakers of the Socialist Labor Party he would have revised his estimate of the poor. I would often join the small crowd in front of one of these men and listen to descriptions of soul-and-body-destroying sweatshops and impassioned enumerations of the iniquities of the "bosses" who owned them. I heard that fathers left for work while their children were still asleep and returned home after they had gone to bed. In consequence they saw their offspring so seldom as to make a mockery of parenthood. I heard with horror that the "bosses" were drinking the blood of their workmen and women. And while I knew that to be only a figure of speech (my mother often accused me of drinking hers), the image it evoked gave me the measure of the soulless cupidity of the possessing class. As the one remedy for all its cruelties and abuses, and on his assurance that we had nothing to lose but our chains, the speaker urged us to unite. The loss

of our chains was also a figure of speech which I was able to translate. But the speaker was vague about the exact change that would occur in our lives following that desirable eventuality. An outline of some program would have enabled me to oppose Mr. Silver's philosophy of competitive individualism. But it was not forthcoming; and the enthusiasm the speakers communicated to me in Rutgers Square was likely to evaporate in the classroom, where I could not withstand the force of Mr. Silver's opposition.

On the other hand, my elder sisters were ardent Socialists and believed strongly in the necessity of unionization. Their arguments were rather persuasive, the more so as they had great affection for me, frequently fondled and embraced me, and sometimes gave me pennies to buy chocolate-covered walnuts or candy-coated apples on a stick. Mr. Silver did not seem like a man who could dispense or even feel affection, though he could easily inspire it. Perhaps his aversion to the poor was really caused by this lack in him and by his confidence and pride in himself. I thought that if all people had his strength and ambition, there would be no need for unions. But my sisters said that Mr. Silver sounded like an unfeeling and despotic man, the kind that takes delight in grinding down the poor. I had to admit to myself that there was some truth in this estimate. Yet one had to see and know Mr. Silver to do him justice. True, he was a despot. But I, who had had occasion to experience his cruelty, could nevertheless appraise him as a benevolent one. At any rate, I was perpetually torn between Mr. Silver's dynamic conservatism and my own inclination toward the liberalism of my sisters and the orators in Rutgers Square.

From one of the speakers I learned one evening of the heroic efforts of the workers in the East Side bakeries to form a union. The man exhorted us to aid these courageous souls by refusing to eat non-union loaves. "Even a child can help 'the Cause,'" he cried, espying me in the group around him.

“When you get home tonight, little boy, look for the union label,” he said directly to me. I followed his injunction when I got home, and I discovered that neither the rye loaf nor the twist bread my mother had bought that day had the union label pasted on them. When I told my sisters of the bakers’ plight, they agreed with me that we were honor bound to forgo eating the unhallowed loaves. My mother, however, took the position that as the bread was not returnable, our eating the loaves could not possibly harm the embattled bakers. Henceforward, she assured us, she would take care to buy only properly unionized bread. It seemed to me that more was involved in the situation than expediency, and I was for consigning the offending loaves to the garbage pail or, if that was sinful, for giving it to our Christian neighbors across the hall. Not being subject to scruples of any kind, Christians, it was commonly held, were prepared to eat everything. My mother would not hear of such a foolish disposition of what she said was perfectly good, non-returnable bread, and my sisters reluctantly agreed with her. I vowed that I would not touch the loaves. But at supper that night my mother remarked that as I had made my point, it was foolish to labor it by starving myself. She then cut and buttered for me a thick slice, which I ate with the melancholy satisfaction of a pragmatic martyr.

The following evening I found the same passionate defender of the revolutionary bakers addressing a meeting in Rutgers Square. He recognized me and inquired whether I had acted on his suggestion of the night before. When I told him I had, he invited me to mount the podium and tell the crowd about it. I climbed onto the box, but the unexpected invitation deprived me for a while of my powers of speech. The encouragement of my sponsor, however, and the friendliness of the crowd soon exercised a reassuring effect on me, and I began to speak, at first haltingly, then—carried away by my subject and the commanding position I had suddenly attained—volubly and with consideration for dramatic effect. I described with much

detail my rushing home the night before and the discovery of the unlabeled loaves in our bread box. Then, assembling my entire family, I put before them with all the eloquence I could command the aims and ideals of the insurgent bakers. My family (I confessed to my audience) had always been reactionary in thought and feeling, and my pleas, therefore, fell on deaf ears. I adjured them not to touch the accursed loaves or, if need be, give them to the *Chrestchs*. But they were adamant, and at supper prepared to eat them. This I said I could not countenance, and before my mother could reach for a knife, I seized the loaves, ran out of the house, and dumped them in some near-by garbage can. I spent the night on a truck in Water Street, scorning to go home. And with the pathetic prophecy that punishment would certainly await me on my return, I finished and stepped down. Then it was that I first tasted the tremulous delight of applause. In that instant I knew what Jacob P. Adler, Mrs. K. Lipzin, and my own adored Bertha Kalich felt when the curtain descended on one of their bravura scenes. If through some unforeseen obstacle I was not to achieve my ambition to be a great actor, I would certainly devote my life to the cause of downtrodden labor and address crowds nightly in Rutgers Square and on the street corners of the East Side.

Although I had distorted the events of the night before, there was some truth in my assertion that my family held conservative views on political and economic subjects. At any rate, my father held them, while my mother adopted for diplomatic reasons a neutral attitude, though my sisters and I felt that her sympathies were secretly with us. She and my father read *Der Tog*, a conservative daily, while my sisters took *Der Forward*, the organ of the liberals and Socialists.

My sister Molly, who loved poetry and could mimic the declamatory style of the best tragic actresses on Grand Street and the Bowery, memorized some of the poems that were printed in *Der Forward*, which she recited to us when my

father was away from home. There was one poem I never grew tired of hearing. It was a rather long poem, an epic of suffering, hopelessness, and death which gave full scope to my sister's histrionic talent. "In Grand Street, not far from Suckerstein's store," she would begin in a deceptively conversational tone, but with due regard for its rhythm, proceeding to describe a bent and seedy man who daily haunted that busy spot and peddled matches to the indifferent and hurrying passers-by. I cannot recall what transition the poet used to bring this wretched man to the office of a prosperous but conscientious doctor in the neighborhood. But, wild-eyed and importunate, he broke into the doctor's study, and my sister's voice reflected the agony and desperation of the intruder. "My wife! You must hurry! There's no time to lose," my sister intoned rhythmically in accents of anguished impatience. The room became tense with the imminence of tragedy, though we were all quite familiar with the story. At this the heart of the sensitive physician melted. "The doctor snatched his hat and coat," my sister said in an accelerated tempo, "And they hurried on their way." When they arrived in the match-vendor's dimly lit garret, the doctor took one look at the wasted form on the bed and cried: "You murderer! What have you done! Of undernourishment she's dead!" My sister's supreme moment came with the final lines: "The husband with a piercing shriek himself fell dead across the bed." The tears were in her eyes, and she stood rigid, staring ahead, as Mrs. K. Lipzin did in the theater at the end of each act. The tableau my sister conjured up was as corporeal to me as if I were seeing the tragic figures in the flesh. It seemed to me that if Mr. Silver could hear my sister's dramatic reading of this poem, his mind would be cleared of his misconceptions about the poor and his heart would be softened toward them.

I used sometimes also to wonder whether my father's dogmatic conservatism would be able to withstand the assault on the emotions of the poetry in *Der Forward*. There seemed to

be a good deal of poetry in the holy books he read or chanted. His voice, too, as he prayed had a decided musical quality, and he employed artfully a variety of tonal shades. The Lamentations of Jeremiah were strangely emotional and dramatic as he sang them, and he intoned the Song of Solomon and the Psalms of David so rapturously that they were moving to hear even if one could not grasp their meaning. There could be no question about the genuineness of his appreciation of the poetry and music of the Bible and other sacred books. What puzzled me was that this appreciation had no influence on his character, opinions, and behavior. They brought him no closer to a consideration of the misfortunes and problems of the poor. Though he was not so lucid as Mr. Silver, he managed to convey the same bias for capitalism the teacher could so brilliantly rationalize.

He seemed never to consider anyone but himself. His displeasure with what he called my mother's extravagance which was summed up in his oft-repeated "I need nothing, myself," could not be justified by the small contribution he made to the support of the household. It is true that my mother spoiled him, as she did me, and I was often jealous of the indulgence she showed him. I could not conceive of a mother loving anyone more than her children, especially more than an only son. Love for children, especially for an only son, I was certain, was rooted in nature. It was therefore immutable. Not so a wife's love for her husband, which was ordained by nature to be secondary. When a husband died, the wife after a suitable period of mourning and quietude found herself another husband. If she truly loved the first, how could she marry a second? It followed therefore that sexual love was an inferior, temporary emotion. On the other hand, when a mother lost a son, any replacement was unthinkable. I had heard of instances where mothers killed themselves rather than live on without their sons. My oldest sister had even read in a novel by a French author about a mother who sacrificed her life for

her daughter. For a daughter I thought that that was going a little too far. In general I was certain that my mother loved me in that absolute fashion. And when she quarreled with my father, as happened frequently, I read in her bitter reproaches the proof I was always seeking, that she did not love him as much as she loved me or in the same way. For while she was often angry with me, and even went so far as to slap me, she was always remorseful immediately after and would kiss and hug me and weep and call me her treasure and joy.

But there were times when I thought she showed a solicitude for my father exceeding the demands of secondary affection. Significantly enough, such instances always occurred on a Friday. It was generally on Friday that my father chose to take umbrage at something or other, and it was not long before I discovered the reason.

He had struck up a friendship with a fellow member of his synagogue, a venerable man with a long beard who lived with his wife in a three-room tenement on Pike Street. Zalman Reich was his name, and my father held him to be the most fortunate of men. For Zalman Reich had been blessed with six sons, all of whom were married and prosperous, and generous to their father to a fault. Mr. and Mrs. Reich (their offspring had united in dropping the "e" out of their surname), my father repeatedly told us, lived in ease and luxury at the expense of their children, who took great pride in their parents' well-being and contentment. Because of the munificence of his sons, Zalman had unlimited leisure at his disposal, and he spent most of his time at the synagogue, where he was greatly respected for his readiness to bid high for the privilege of holding the Torah and to purchase the most expensive seat on Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur. My father never tired of expounding the virtues of his friend and calling attention to the never-ending generosity of the sons.

The latest proof of their solicitude for Zalman Reich made a

deep impression on my father, who came home from synagogue one day bursting with the news. He could hardly wait to wash and dry his hands to tell us. "Some men have all the luck," he said, looking accusingly at me. He then turned to my mother. "What do you think those boys have done for Zalman now? They have made him a present of an operation on his left eye, the one that has the cataract. Zalman told the whole congregation about it today. They've engaged the best eye-doctor, and it will cost twenty dollars! That's what I call children!" I looked abashed and ate in silence. The name of Zalman Reich was always on my father's lips, and his visits to the Reichs grew more and more frequent.

One Friday when I came home from school, I knew by the unhappy expression of my mother's face and by my father's calculated, punitive silence that there had been a quarrel. I saw my father take his prayer shawl and phylacteries from a bureau drawer, wrap them in an old newspaper, and tie the bundle with a string. He then put on his hat and coat and, with the bundle under his arm, stalked out of the house without a word of explanation or farewell. At supper time he had not returned. My mother, unable to conceal her anxiety, sent me to the synagogue to see if he had loitered there. I found no one at the synagogue but the beadle, who told me that my father had gone off with Zalman Reich. This information mollified my mother, but she ate little at supper. When I went to bed he had not yet come home. Early the next morning my mother woke me. She appeared much agitated. "Get dressed," she commanded, "and run to Zalman Reich's. Tell your father to come home. Tell him I'm sorry." At the Reichs' I found my father alone in the kitchen wearing his prayer shawl and phylacteries. When he paused for a moment in his prayers, I delivered my message. He made no reply, and I ran home. Toward evening my mother wrapped two pieces of gefilte fish and half of a twist bread in a sheet of newspaper and bade me go again to the Reichs' and deliver the package to my father.

Again I found him alone. He opened the bundle and saw what it contained. He showed no surprise, but sat down at the table and ate the fish with his usual relish.

On Sunday morning he returned home and was received by my mother with, to me, shocking manifestations of remorse and delight. For days after, I found myself neglected by her, her mind only on the problem of avoiding a repetition of his flight from home. I could not now deny to myself that she felt an unnatural love for him. I lay awake suffering agonies of jealousy and wondering how she could prefer him to me. For aside from my being her own flesh and blood, her only son, I knew myself to be kind and affectionate (except for a few inconsequential exhibitions of willfulness), and could feel pity for others; whereas my father was self-centered and unfeeling, and had, like Mr. Silver, no use for the poor. I had to admit he was handsome, but was that sufficient to make up for his outbursts of temper or his long, apparently premeditated silences, which were even harder to bear? Could it be that I had misread the character of my mother, that she had not really merited the love I had trustingly lavished on her? I determined to withdraw my love from her entirely and give it all to my older sister, Hannah. Hannah, I had no reason to doubt, loved me and no one else. She was lovely to look at, and had such a beautiful voice that I could not concentrate on my homework when she sang old Russian songs, and even the next-door neighbors refrained from rapping on the wall in protest. Once in a while a suitor would appear. But thus far she had shown no preference for anyone but me.

A few days after my father's memorable flight my mother became her old self again and I found myself once more the center of her life. I was now, as in pre-flight days, the "apple of her eye," her "Benjamin," her "staff," and her "rod." I decided I had mistaken a momentary aberration for a fundamental change in character, and I submitted at first warily and later unreservedly to her embraces. Only on Fridays I was

aware of a certain faint aloofness and reserve in her attitude toward me, a preoccupation with something that I felt had no relation to me at all. But her indifference to me vanished the moment my father came home from synagogue. She met him at the door with a basin of water and a towel. And when he had silently washed and dried his hands and taken his place at the head of the table, preparatory to saying a prayer over the pair of twist breads in front of him, she hovered near him, poised to interpret his peremptory gestures and wordless sounds; for piety forbade the use of speech until the prayer was over and bread had been broken. In those suspended, critical moments my father, perhaps finding the salt missing, would point with his right forefinger dramatically at the loaves and make impatient sounds like "M-m. M-m." And my mother would try to guess what he meant and offer him one thing after another, while his voice rose in pitch more and more irately as she successively guessed wrong. At length the process of elimination would point to the saltcellar, and the ordeal would be over. My sisters and I always watched this performance with resentment. I wondered if Zalman Reich behaved so imperiously toward *his* wife. I determined that when I grew up I would *force* my mother to rebel against her husband's high-handedness, whether she loved him or not. There was, too, such a thing as divorce. Many couples we knew threatened to divorce each other, though none ever carried out the threat. At any rate, someday I would insist on a divorce. I would then find out once and for all which of us she really loved.

In the meantime I would dedicate myself to the important task of making the world a better place to live in for the people around me. With the end of the school term and my promotion to the next grade, the influence of Mr. Silver's jaunty conservatism began to wane, and in the summer vacation it disappeared altogether. Night after night I made impromptu speeches from crates or the back ends of wagons. And the more I spoke and the more I was applauded for my impas-

sioned delivery, the more certain I was that the workers of the world must either unite or perish. There came a moment, however, when I wavered between socialism and anarchism. One night, what I thought was a Socialist meeting turned out to be an anarchist rally. I had heard vaguely about anarchism, a philosophy even more abhorrent to Mr. Silver and my father than socialism. But now, as the speaker explained it, it seemed to hold greater promise for a better world for the poor and suffering than socialism. Indeed, socialism could be considered only as a steppingstone to the ideal of human existence which anarchism promised. When, with my help, the workers of the world had united and lost their chains, I would then examine the philosophy of anarchism in greater detail. At the moment the possibilities for man appeared limitless.