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Parricide on the Pampa?
A New Study and Translation of
Alberto Gerchunoff's Los gauchos judíos
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**FOREWORD**

I found this book waiting for me at a most propitious time. I had just come back from the country where I spent many a quiet afternoon in the fresh pampa air; I was still imbued with the spirit of the plains, and the image of the sunsets that turn the green hills into a fiery red was fresh in my mind. This new book, so full of Argentine flavor and aroma, revived these fond memories of my native region. I enjoyed it immensely, since I am an unabashed enthusiast of works deeply rooted in our tradition.

This book, then, brought back warm reminiscences of a region whose landscapes and sensations are closely bound to the best years of my childhood. A writer who was not born under these benevolent skies, but who grew to love and to understand them, has offered me a bouquet from my native land. Just a few short years of contact with the land and its original inhabitants were enough for him to ably capture its spirit and unforgettable utopias in colorful sketches of the Jewish colonies established near Montiel. The colonists cut their first furrows at the edge of this wild and impenetrable forest, long ago a refuge for men whose savage acts of bravery became the stuff of leg- 

Gerchunoff’s stories are short, yet the author succeeds admirably in describing the countryside and its folk. The book rings true, and it is filled with so much local color. The episodes first seem scattered and unrelated, but they gradually come together through the strong expressions of love for the land and of gratitude for its bounty. In Ger-
With an outstretched arm the Lord delivered us from Pharaoh, in Egypt.

*The Passover prayers*

Behold my brethren from the cities and the colonies, the republic is celebrating its great feast, the paschal feast of its liberation.

Bright are the days and sweet the nights; hymns rise up to departed heroes; voices of jubilation reach the skies, hued blue and white like our flag. Meadows come alive with flowers, fields with green.

Remember how, back in Russia, ye set tables to celebrate the ritual of the Passover? This is a greater Passover.

Rest your plows and deck your tables. Cover them with cloths of white. Sacrifice your choicest kids, set out the wine and salt of benediction. Generous is the flag thatSuccess the ancient hurts of our race, that binds its wounds with maternal care. Wandering Jews, tortured and torn, redeemed captives, let us bend the knee beneath the unfurled banner; in unison, beside choirs bejeweled by light, let us intone the song of songs that begins thus:

"Hear Oh ye mortals..."

*Buenos Aires, May of the Argentine Centennial*
In the sordid, snow-covered city of Tulchin, a city of glorious rabbis and historic synagogues, the news of America filled the Jews' hearts with dreams. Whenever some visiting rabbi preached in the temple, whenever some dispatch in a newspaper from Odessa spoke about the far-off lands of the New World, the Jews would congregate in the bome of their most important coreligionist and ponder the plans for emigration with the graverness of tumults.

I remember those gatherings well. Those were the days when restrictive edicts multiplied in the Holy Russian Empire. Cossack lances were destroying ancient synagogues; old arks (santurions), solemn, noble, historic arks, their tops graced by the shining double triangle of Solomon, were carted through the streets. I remember the rabbis' words and the women's weeping when the Cossacks burned the holy books in the great synagogue,
the synagogue donated to the city by my grandparents. The entire community dressed in black. It was the eve of Shavuot, but the palm fronds for the spring festival were covered in mourning; the women and children were covered in mourning, and the old men fasted forty days and forty nights. It was then that Rabbi Yehudah Ankoroi, the Dayan, traveled to Paris to reach an agreement with the Baron Hirsch about the founding of Jewish colonies in Argentina. When he returned, the Jews gathered in our home to hear the aged Doctor of the Law bring the good tidings:

"Baron Hirsch, may God bless him, has promised to save us. My colleague, Rabbi Zadok Kahn, will guide his efforts."

The Dayan went on to paint a wonderful future for his persecuted people, with the eloquence honed in synagogue debates. His emotion-filled voice trembled, as when he preached in the temple about the Promised Land. His hand, dry and gnarled from turning the pages of the texts, stroked his long white beard. His small, lively eyes sparkled, illuminated by the light of prophecy.

"You'll see, my brethren, you'll see!" he said. "It's a land where everyone works and where the Christians won't hate us because there the sky is different, and justice and mercy fill their hearts."

Rabbi Yehudah Ankoroi's words soothed the departed spirits of the sad Jews, who looked like phantoms in the light of the moon shining through the tall windows. Lost in ecstasy, they managed to mumble, "Amen."

"* * *"

On Saturday afternoon Tubbin's most respected citizens gathered in my parents' house to enjoy in religious dis-
back to that way of life we will be returning to our original path. May we live to kiss the earth of the new land, and to bless my children's children under its skies."

Thus spoke Rabbi Yehudah Anahavoi, my father's venerable friend, last representative of those great rabbis whose wisdom brought brilliance to the synagogues of Portugal and Spain. As I repeat his words, I kiss the earth of the new land of peace and happiness in his name; and like those Jews who heard him speak, I say, "Amen."

The Furrow

A cold wind is blowing through the distant maquiyo trees. The countryside glitters beneath a thick, snow-white frost, and the morning lingers lazily, sprawled under a haze, sun-dimming log. Up ahead, farmers are already at work; whenever the wind slows you can hear their plow's turning wheel.

We need to mark off a new plot for tilling. We have yoked the gentlest oxen, and set a stake tied with a little red cloth at five hundred meters. We will cut two furrows, one coming, the other going. We all realize what a solemn occasion this is.

The pair of oxen stands ready, rhythmically chewing its cud, as if also aware of the day's special meaning. But it is Barbos, the dog, who really understands what is happening. The morning is too interesting for the rest of the family to stay indoors. Here then comes Mother with a jug of steaming hot coffee, followed by the girls. Little by little, everything is set.

"Are we ready?"

"Ready!"

My brother steers the plow as I guide the oxen. "Right! Left!" The oxen understand the importance of their mission, so they walk slowly, with a dignified gait. The stake faces a chain tied to the middle of the yoke, a solid yoke fashioned by hand from quebracho wood on those days when rain kept us from working in the fields.

The plow groans. Mother and the girls march behind it, keeping its slow pace, while the sparrow flutters...
about, less serious than Barbos, who runs ahead of the oxen, mimicking their step by moving his head back and forth and wagging his tail. Barbos has the easy humor and keen intelligence of an experienced farmer, so he has no trouble understanding why this is a momentous event. He walks on, ignoring the frequent partridges and bothersome sparrows. The oxen pull the plow forward, sweet and resigned, foaming at the mouth, yet scarcely feeling the weight of the yoke ignominiously strapped to their enormous horns. And the earth, chilled by winter, yields, sending forth a strong, moist aroma that the family breaths in like deep perfume, as the plow’s wheel chants the psalm of bountiful harvests.

Off in the distance, the little cloth unfurls, proud as a standard, and a sparrow gives chase to a snake lolling in the sun.

FRESH MILK

The girl sat by the fence, milking the gentle cow. The sweet animal stood still as her calf nibbled at the tiny blades of grass. Moist drops of dew melted in its mouth like crystal beads perched on a bed of red. Flashes of pink crisscrossed the horizon; the colony was waking up. Gates opened and bearded elders appeared in doorways, humming their morning prayers. Dawn—God’s divine dawn praised by holy nibbles—brought the day’s first exchanges:

“Remigio, should we rake today?”
“No, Don Ephraim. There’s been too much rain. We’d better plow.”

“All right. Come in and have some mate. Listen, Remigio, wake up Chico and Feo.”

The sound of voices carried on the early morning breeze wafted over from the nearby house:

“Tafi Ephraim, are you going over to the station?”
“I’m sending my farmhand.”

“Then have him ask if there’s any mail for me.”

And down by the picket fence, its poles twisted like wizened aub pod, the girl is milking the gentle cow. She bends, and as her fingers squeeze the magnificent udders they let forth a stream of foam. In the soft light of the autumn dawn the girl’s full, firm breasts shine through her parted blouse like fruit ripened by a summer sun.

Drop by drop, with a soft music that keeps time with the girl’s breathing and the cow’s quiet snorting, the milk fills the pail.
The afternoon is fading into sweet, peaceful quiet. The shadows of the trees stretch out, making their way back to the gold-tinted sky. Workers have ended their day, and the village is quieting down. The horses, now in their stables, are calm and content.

The old postman, bearing a letter, begins to make his way back from the village. As he walks, he reflects on the letters he delivers each day, each one holding its own story.

The village square is empty, with only a few people scattered around. The quietness of the afternoon is palpable, and the sounds of the village seem to fade away as the sun sets lower in the sky.

The postman reaches his destination, and with a smile, he places the letter on the mailbox.

End.
Siesta

Sabbath Day: holy day of rest sanctified by rabbinic writings, extolled in Yehudah Halevi's poetic hymns. The kolney is dozing lazily, heavy with sleep. Its whitewashed little houses, thatched in yellow, sparkle in the sun, the benign sun of a country spring. A solemn peace has descended from a sky cleansed by last evening's shower, and sweet murmurs rise up from the earth. Orchards are in bloom, fields alive with green. In the center of the pasture a brook is intoning its georgic melody, the slow, grave chant of water spinning in small eddies. Up on the road, a dead snake lies motionless like a scribble in the dust.

The flocks are resting in the pasture. The oxen chew their cud and shake their heads, as if in thought; their horns shatter the sunlight into a thousand streaks of blue. This is also their holy day. Over in a corner the mare's bell tinkling and her colt is cavorting happily in the grass.

The slaughterman's house lies in silence. Rabbi Abraham is asleep, and so are his sons; there are still hours to go before the afternoon prayer. Jacobo, the orphaned farmer's son, is busy braiding his pony's tail. A light wind ruffles his bombachas and the sunlight glistens on his boleadoras and knife. The old grandmother is sitting by the door, holding her granddaughter on her lap. She wears a milk-white kerchief on her white hair; her wrinkled, sun-browned face bears the marks of deep suffering. She sighs heavily as the little girl begins to hum a tune.

"Jacobo, leave that pony alone! It's the Sabbath."
"Am I working, Doha Raquel?"
"Yes, my child, you are. Hasn’t Abraham taught you that you have to rest on the Sabbath?"

In the background, the little girl is softly singing her melody [in the popular venacular]:

Weep and lament, O ye daughters of Zion,
Weep and lament with us...

"Grandma, do you know that song? I’ve never heard you sing it."

"Yes, my child, I know it. Let’s see now, your hair is good and filthy."

"I just had it washed yesterday."

"It’s still dirty."

Slowly and patiently, the grandmother runs her fingers through the child’s hair.

"You see," she says, tickling her fingernails. "Here’s one... no, two, three, four... You have so many..."

"Grandma, tell me that story about Kishinev," the child says, still humming her tune.

"Here’s another one! They’ve done a very bad job on you, my dear."

"And the ballad about the shepherd, Grandma?"

"That’s a nice one, my love. Did you learn it?"

"Rebecca taught it to me."

The grandmother cleans and cleans the blond curls, as her granddaughter sings on:

There was once a little shepherd in Canaan, 
When he became rich he traded in grain.

"Grandma, tell me the story about Kishinev. Do you remember it?"

"Yes, child. See, I’ve just found one more. I’m telling you, they didn’t wash out your hair properly. It’s full of lice, one two, three. Look at this huge one! They’d eat you alive if I weren’t cleaning them out."

"But doesn’t the Book say that you shouldn’t kill living things?"

[“What are living things called?”]

"Cherubim-chiefs."

"Yes, my child."

"Well then..."

"Cows are living beings and your father still slaughters them."

Just then, a neighbor, Don Zacarias, stops by to greet them.

"Good Sabbath, Doña Raquel."

"Good year, Rabi Zacarias. Here I am with my granddaughter. They’ve done a very poor job on her hair."

"We have to take good care of our children, don’t we, Doña Raquel. What would become of them if we didn’t?"

"May God watch over us, Rabi Zacarias. Children love their parents only when they’re gone."

"That’s true. You know what the Commentator says: Children miss their parents when they die just as the plucked flower misses its stem... Hey, Jacobo, don’t you know that it’s the Sabbath?"

"I’m not plowing, Don Zacarias. I’m just grooming my horse. I’ve already given him water and now I’m getting him ready to round up the flock after dark."

"Your’re not supposed to be cleaning him either."

"Isn’t Doña Raquel cleaning Miriam’s head?"

"Leave that gauchito alone! All he knows is how to be fresh. Look at him! He even looks like a gauchito in that getup—bonsachas, belt, knife, and even those horrible little pad things to kill partridges! But when he’s in synagogue he keeps his mouth shut because he doesn’t..."
know his prayers. And to think that he’s been educated by my son, the slaughterer!”

“That’s how the young are nowadays. By the way, have you heard the news?”

“What news? Tell me.”

Don Zacarias nodded towards Ishmael Ruderman’s nondescript hut.

“Well, his daughter…”

“Yes, I know. Abraham’s already told me. What a terrible shame. But is it really true?”

“I’m afraid it is. This morning Rabbi Ishmael didn’t come to the synagogue, and it was his turn to read today’s chapter. Then my brother told us what had happened. She ran off with his lashed horse. Would you believe it? With a gaucho!”

Jacobo interrupted their conversation.

“Rennigio’s a terrific fellow. He taught me how to lasso and how to break in a horse.”

“You see what I mean?” Doña Raquel exclaimed. “It’s all the same to this little renegade… it’s as if she ran off with a Jew.”

The sun begins to set, and the herdsman’s voice sounds off in the distance. Rabbi Abraham appears in the doorway, covering his imposing figure with the “little tunic” whose four ritual fringes brush against Raquel’s hair.

“Good Sabbath, Rabbi Abraham.”

“Good Sabbath, good year, Rabbi Zacarias. What do you say to the news?”

“We saw it coming. She always lit the samovar on the Sabbath and ate chickens slaughtered by the gaucho. What a slut! Do you think there are enough people in the synagogue to hold the service?”

Rebecca comes out with her hair tousled from sleep. She sits down under the eave where the tools are kept.
There were some two hundred families gathered in the area near San Gregorio, near the Rockies, waiting for the train to arrive. The train was due to arrive on the tenth of June, the day of the great celebration in celebration of the anniversary of the journey.

It was a fragrant spring morning, fields of blossoms dotted the countryside with people talking among them, enjoying the pleasant weather. The immigrants were coming from Russia, and among them, there was a rabbi from the city of Vilna. Some had come by the Yellow River to help with the new arrivals, and some gauchos played a game of dice.

Our colony's slaughterhouse was the scene of much excitement. With his counterpart from Rost, Prak, hoping to better his circumstances, the time was ripe for the big crowd. He expected the slaughterhouse to be packed with people, and the gauchos were already at work.

The heifers were killed in an area near the city of Vilna, where they had studied the holy books together. The slaughter was a huge event, with people from all over the region coming to watch. It was a sight to behold before Grandfather Hirsch began his project.
"He's never practiced the rabbinate," the visitor from Rosh Pinah informed the colonists who were listening in on the conversation. "After finishing his studies he went into business in Odessa and wrote articles in Hatfping, a newspaper published in ancient Hebrew."

The two men went on to argue over a fine point of domestic law, and the slaughterer from Rachil cited the decision of the great Ramboam concerning the killing of cattle.

The wait for the newcomers awakened dormant memories. Everyone in the crowd relived the morning of departure from the Czar's cruel empire and the day of arrival in the promised land, in the Jerusalem exiled in sermons and acclaimed in leaflets whose Russian verses, printed under the portrait of Baron Hirsch, praised the excellence of the soil:

To Palestine and to the Argentine,
We'll go, in song,
We'll go, brothers and friends,
To live and be free...

"Don Abraham," the sergeant called out, "here comes the train."

A murmur of excitement ran through the crowd. A cloud of smoke could be seen rising beyond the hill, curling up into the clear sky. As the train drew near, everyone broke out in cheers.

The immigrants began to pour out of the cars. They looked sick and miserable, but hope shone in their eyes.

1 Ramboam: Malmonides. Ramboam is a contraction of Rabbi Yosef ben Maimon, the sage's given name (author's note).
In the fields

THRESHING

The farmhands finished loading our sacks of wheat at nine. The threshing, machine stopped turning, and we gathered for our morning coffee by the shade of the tall, unthreshed bundles. A fierce sun beat down on us. The cropped fields shimmered in the strong light like the bristles of giant golden brush.

Far off, in the pasture, in the gullies, in the grassy knolls by the small lagoons, the oxen were grazing, slow and sad, blissfully oblivious to the lapwings' boisterous cackling.

The mayor, an astute and loquacious old man who had been elected by the settlers at an assembly in the synagogue, was marveling at the harvest and the quality of the wheat.

He was practically illiterate, and his knowledge of Scripture was limited to a few select passages committed to memory that he recited on the appropriate occasions—when he distributed a piece of fencing, or supervised the purchase of a roll of wire.

On this particular hot and sunny morning, standing in the shade of the bundles, and surrounded by his fellow farmers, he began to sound forth about the wonders of country life.

"I am well aware that we are not in Jerusalem," he commenced. "I am well aware that this is not the land of our ancestors. But here we can sow and harvest our grain, and at night, when we come in from the threshing floor, we can thank the Almighty for having brought us out of Russia, where we were hated and lived in misery and fear."
The wheat is cut and threshed. “The wheat is cut, the wheat is threshed,” the foreman says as he points to the two large drums. “The wheat is threshed.” He parts the sheaves and shows me the machinery he turns over to his daughter. In the foreground, a large drum is set up. The sheaves are fed into the drum, which spins and separates the wheat from the chaff. The wheat falls into a hopper, from which it is conveyed to a winnowing machine. The wheat is then conveyed to a barn, where it is stored until it is ready to be ground into flour.

The foreman explains, “This is the process of threshing. The wheat is fed into the drum, which spins and separates the wheat from the chaff. The wheat falls into a hopper, from which it is conveyed to a winnowing machine. The wheat is then conveyed to a barn, where it is stored until it is ready to be ground into flour.”

I watch as the wheat is processed, marveling at the efficiency of this ancient technology. The foreman seems proud of his work and takes great care in explaining the process to me. I am grateful for his hospitality and the opportunity to witness this traditional method of threshing.

As we finish our conversation, the foreman’s daughter approaches, holding a large bag filled with freshly threshed wheat. She hands it to me and smiles, saying, “This is the wheat we just threshed. It’s fresh and ready to be ground into flour.”

I accept the bag and express my gratitude. The foreman nods and waves me off, saying, “Thank you for visiting. If you need anything else, just ask.”

I say goodbye and walk back to the car, carrying the bag of wheat. I am filled with a sense of excitement and anticipation, knowing that I will soon have the chance to taste the flour made from this fresh, freshly threshed wheat.
THE DESTROYED ORCHARD

It was a clear, warm day. A soft wind was blowing gently through the freshly-planted fields of green that stretched out on both sides of the village. The boys were herding the cattle into the large clearing that separated the two rows of houses, preparing to take them to pasture.

We were enjoying the period of rest just before the start of a new planting season, so that morning we had time to go to the synagogue. It was the anniversary of a neighbor's death, and his sons had to recite the memorial prayers.

The main topic of conversation was last night's altercation between two feuding families. The mayor had made valiant efforts to broker a peace, ably assisted by the learned slaughterer, who, well-versed in the requisite legal precedents, cited salomonic arguments and mouthed edifying quotes. After each side had hurled a sufficient number of insults at the other, and had dredged up enough damaging gossip about the rival family, a reconciliation was effected.

Each of the former enemies now felt free to give us errands to run at the station, where we had decided to spend the afternoon.

"Pick up my mail, won't you?"
"Bring me the rice I bought last Sunday."

By the time we left the synagogue, the sky had turned a deep blue, and it seemed to hang lower. The orchards stood out in full bloom behind the houses, some whitewashed,
To the orchard, to the orchard! for the flowers are growing. Ah, they are many, the flowers, so many, so many. A sea of flowers.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the fruit is ripe. At the end of the orchard, the orchard, the orchard.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the sky is blue. The sky, the blue sky, so blue, so blue, so blue.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the wind is blowing. The wind, the wind, so strong, so strong, so strong.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the sun is shining. The sun, the sun, so bright, so bright, so bright.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the birds are singing. The birds, the birds, so sweet, so sweet, so sweet.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the earth is green. The earth, the earth, so rich, so rich, so rich.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the rain is falling. The rain, the rain, so soft, so soft, so soft.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the animals are playing. The animals, the animals, so happy, so happy, so happy.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the world is beautiful. The world, the world, so wonderful, so wonderful, so wonderful.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the peace is quiet. The peace, the peace, so peaceful, so peaceful, so peaceful.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the love is strong. The love, the love, so deep, so deep, so deep.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the joy is endless. The joy, the joy, so infinite, so infinite, so infinite.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the hope is bright. The hope, the hope, so radiant, so radiant, so radiant.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the future is bright. The future, the future, so promising, so promising, so promising.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the present is beautiful. The present, the present, so precious, so precious, so precious.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the past is precious. The past, the past, so meaningful, so meaningful, so meaningful.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the journey is exciting. The journey, the journey, so adventurous, so adventurous, so adventurous.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the adventure is endless. The adventure, the adventure, so exhilarating, so exhilarating, so exhilarating.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the mission is noble. The mission, the mission, so devoted, so devoted, so devoted.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the dedication is strong. The dedication, the dedication, so strong, so strong, so strong.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the commitment is unbreakable. The commitment, the commitment, so unbreakable, so unbreakable, so unbreakable.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the faith is strong. The faith, the faith, so steadfast, so steadfast, so steadfast.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the spirit is alive. The spirit, the spirit, so vibrant, so vibrant, so vibrant.

To the orchard, to the orchard! for the love is forever. The love, the love, so eternal, so eternal, so eternal.
the orchards were stripped bare and the locust invaded the wheat fields.

The sun was setting now, and the air seemed less suffocating. We headed back to our houses with heavy hearts. The slaughterer muttered silent curses under his breath as he began to recite the evening prayers. Raquel put her smock back on, and by the time Don Gabino returned with the cattle, the only sounds you could hear around the colony were the women’s muffled sobbing and the barking dogs.

Jaime found Esther picking watermelons in the field by the well. She was crouched between the rows of heavy, bent cornstalks, with her skirt wrapped around her waist and her feet hidden by the thick undergrowth of melon leaves and flowers. The air was heavy with the smell of fresh, moist earth, and the yellow sunflowers shone brightly in the soft light. When she saw Jaime, Esther stood up and pushed the cut melons off to the side, slowly letting her skirt down. She could feel herself starting to blush, and could barely blurt out in a voice that seemed to come from someone else’s mouth:

"Back from work so soon?"

Jaime did not answer. He sat tall on his horse, as if he had not heard a thing, staring at the ponting and disheveled young woman lost among the plants that reached up to her neck. He took in her strong features, the way her full, firm breasts brushed against the stalks of corn, and the restless look she had in her eyes, black as freshly-plowed earth after a rain.

Esther knew the reason for this unexpected visit. Jaime had been pursuing her for some time. The songs he sang at the dances were for her; for her, too, were his displays of horsemanship at the rodeos. And she did not dislike this daring young man, who was strong as an oak and quick as a squirrel.

When she felt calmer, Esther looked up at Jaime’s sun-
burned face and repeated her question without even noticing.
This time, he exclaimed,
"Look at this, Esther!"
He stretched out his hand to give her something that she could not quite make out at first.
"What is it?"
"It's for you."
The gift was some partridge eggs, that he had found near the hill. Esther took them in her hands and Jaime got off his horse to help her.
"Careful! Don't hold them like that or they'll break."
They bent down together to wrap the eggs, and Esther's hair brushed against the young man's face. She could feel him trembling with excitement.
"Esther..."
A long silence passed between them, a long, anxious silence. Esther tried to slide her swirling emotions by talking about anything—anything at all—but she could not think of what to say.
"The corn in our field is nice and tall now, isn't it?"
"Yes, it is."
"Taller than Isaac's..."
"Esther," Jaime tried again, "I have to talk to you."
Esther lowered her head and picked at some leaves with her trembling hands.
"I've heard that they're planning to marry you off to a fellow from San Miguel," Jaime went on. "You know who told me? Miriam did. No, it wasn't Miriam, it was the mayor's sister-in-law."
"I'm not surprised!" Esther answered. "She goes around telling everyone that she wants me to marry her cousin, the cripple."
"They've also told me that the groom's father would..."

give your family a pair of oxen and a cow."
Esther shook her head, but Jaime persisted.
"How do you feel about it?" he asked her.
"I haven't made up my mind yet."
"Esther, I've come here to tell you that I want to marry you."
The young woman said nothing; only after Jaime repeated the same thing over and over, did she finally simmer:
"I don't know. Talk to my father."
A light breeze stirred through the tall corn and gently dropped some sunflower leaves on the young woman's dark hair. One slipped down to her bosom and its yellow tip showed through her blouse.
"I'm going home now," she said.
"I'll go with you, Esther."
They stood up, and a sudden impulse took hold of Jaime. He pulled her toward him and embraced her in his powerful arms. Then he brought his lips to hers and muttered the beginnings of a scream with a strong, firm kiss that rippled through the cornfield. When he let go of her, his arms went limp, and he just stood and stared at her, shaken by what he had done.
They said nothing more to each other. Jaime climbed on his horse and they slowly headed back to the colony, riding across the countryside under the warm sun. Just before they reached her house, Esther turned and said to him:
"Oh, how everyone will envy me!"
"And me! Listen, Esther, I'm going to break in my little white mare for you."
When they came to the house, Jaime called Esther's father outside, and announced his plan:
"You know, Rabi Eliezer, since my field lies right next to yours..."