

My Memories of Father

ISAAC HERBERT KEMPNER

Herschell Kempner — he took the name Harris in this country — was only a teen-ager when he came to America from his native Russian Poland in 1854, but he went on to become founder-partner of a leading and still flourishing commercial establishment in Galveston, Texas. In 1872, Harris married into the Cincinnati Seinsheimer family, and it was in the Ohio city that his eldest son, Isaac Herbert Kempner, was born a year later. The father never called his son “Isaac” — except when vexed with him; usually, and affectionately, he called him “Ikey.” It was not in Cincinnati, but in Galveston, that “Ikey” was raised, and in the following pages he tells us what it was like to grow up within the warmhearted ambit of a comfortable, late-nineteenth-century Gulf Coast Jewish family, and what kind of man his father was — what hopes and aspirations an immigrant Jew could permit himself in post-bellum East Texas.

Most of the memoir is excerpted, with the author’s kind permission, from I. H. Kempner’s Recalled Recollections (Galveston, 1961), but a portion of it — Harris Kempner’s letters to “Ikey” and his mentors at Bellevue High School and at Washington and Lee University — appears here with the much appreciated permission of the Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association, in whose Publications (Vol. I, No. 2 — December, 1957) the letters were first published.

My earliest recollection is of the storm of October, 1875, when I was barely $2\frac{3}{4}$ years old. We then lived on the southeast corner of 20th and M. Hitchcock Bayou covered the area from Avenue M to Avenue N, from 20th to 21st. I remember the mule-drawn street cars with a capacity of about twenty passengers which were the transportation system of that day. They had to move on a wooden tread (for the mules) laid on a trestle of about four feet over the shallow waters of the bayou. The five cent tickets were

not sold by the driver — he had no facility to make change — and, therefore, everyone was compelled and sought to provide himself with paper tickets which were treated as “legal tender” everywhere in Galveston.

As accurately as I can remember the many details of the storm discussed in later years, the southern portion of the island was inundated by the waters of the Gulf, not the bay. There was comparatively little damage on the bay front, at least on Strand and Mechanic Streets. The high waters invaded a portion of the outer edges of our home, but I cannot remember the extent of the damage. The brunt of the destruction caused by this storm was west of Galveston. Matagorda felt much of it, and the prosperous town and prospective port of Indianola was wiped out.

I do not recall either the first school I attended or the at least three governesses who were employed to guide not so much my “book learning” as my conduct. My mother [Elizabeth Seinsheimer Kempner], with a constantly increasing crop of children, sorely needed this aid.

I recall the scourge of diphtheria which brought to my parents and me (and Dan[iel W.] Kempner) the death within two weeks of my two younger brothers, Abe and Sidney, in December, 1879. My father's and mother's grief and that of our Negro mammy, Aunt Eveline, still lingers in my memory. Since then remarkable strides in medicine and the treatment of diphtheria have been made which years later would have saved the lives of these two.

A HOUSEHOLD IN GALVESTON

My recollection of the family life in the latter 1870's is of the main house at 20th and Avenue M, a large and wooden structure facing north, with a long hall, probably fifty feet in length, about ten feet wide, down the center, and a large sitting room and dining room on the right as one entered. Father [Harris Kempner] bought coffee by 300 pound bags (Mocha and Java) from Mexico; rice [was] ordered in barrels from South Carolina; wine from France by the cask. Living quarters were provided on the premises for the cook, several maids, the coachman, and butler.

The management or operation of our household at 20th and M was typical of the times (1873 to about 1882). All the mule teams, drays, and trucks of the wholesale grocery firm of Marx & Kempner were quartered on the rear of our residence property (which comprised at least seven city lots). The Negro drivers or hostlers, most of them recently freed from slavery or children of those emancipated (though father had never owned any slaves), would assemble at daylight to water, feed, and harness the stock. Our cook would serve father coffee and toast, and the coachman would drive him to the store shortly after daylight—never later than 6 A.M. He would return for breakfast between 9:30 and 10 o'clock. This arrangement lasted until, as far as I remember, about 1880 or 1882. The 9:30 breakfast was for the entire family, but did not affect school attendance. I was taught by a governess until we had moved our residence and I was sent to school. Dinner was supposed to be served at 5 P.M. though frequently it was nearer 7 o'clock before we sat down. If we ate at 5 or 5:30, father would often return to the store afterward.

The current wages for household servants were \$10.00 a month for women, \$15.00 for men. But the coachman, the cook, and the housemaid were furnished living quarters on the place and were bountifully fed. Their numerous children, whether legitimate or "source unknown," crowded into the quarters assigned their mothers and were fed by our household without question. In turn they ran errands for mother, her friends, or neighbors, and my first governess repeatedly asserted they were more tractable than I. My governesses tried to teach the Negro children to read; there were no schools for colored. Mother also tried, but found dual difficulties between the birth of her babies and the irregularities of time available for scholastic instruction. I recall the fidelity to my parents of my old Negro mammy, Aunt Eveline, and of another valued aid, a colored midwife, Aunt Isabel, who officiated with the doctor at the birth of several of my brothers.

Mother seemed to relish being asked, as I have been asked many times, how she and father met. She was from Cincinnati, and father knew no one there. The story as handed down by both is that father had made a trip to New York to buy goods for his whole-

sale grocery establishment, principally tobacco, by the carload in hogsheads, snuff, canned goods in carloads or material amounts. In New York City he stopped, in the interest of necessary economy, at a hotel where standard meals were served, with every dish from soup through dessert placed on the dining table at once. Seated across the table from father was a young girl whose appetite evoked his attention. He argued to himself that such a girl must be vigorous and healthy. She was rather goodlooking and vivacious. He arranged to meet her, and after his return to Galveston convinced himself that on his next trip north he should go to Cincinnati (where he had learned she resided), where he undertook to buy whiskey by the carload. He, without calling on any stimulation from his whiskey purchase, proposed and was accepted. The wedding date was fixed, and marriage followed.

I am inserting here an extract from a history of Galveston written in 1879:*

MARK & KEMPNER

The house began business as wholesale grocers, and dealers in foreign and domestic liquors, in May, 1871, and has had remarkable success. It is now among the first houses in the trade, and is not surpassed by any for practical enterprise.

M[ARX]. MARX

The senior member of the firm is a bold, but cautious, businessman, with a head chockfull of good common sense. Before coming to Galveston, in 1868, he was many years engaged in business in New Orleans, Montana Territory, and Salt Lake City. Being eminently successful in the West, and becoming fully convinced that Galveston would ultimately become the commercial metropolis of the Southwest, he came here and united himself with H. Kempner, who had for many years been actively identified with the commercial interests of Texas. Mr. Marx combines in his character all the elements of a popular and successful merchant; genial, warmhearted, energetic, and honorable, he makes

* Charles W. Hayes, *History of the Island and the City of Galveston* (Cincinnati, 1879), pp. 974-75.

friends wherever he goes. He is a boon companion, loves good cheer, and is always affable and accommodating. Brimful of genuine enterprise, he gives a hearty and enthusiastic support to every measure inaugurated to enlarge the commercial scope of Galveston, if it commends itself to his sound judgement. While Mr. Marx is a keen, shrewd businessman, he is quite liberal, and gives freely to public charities.

H[ARRIS]. KEMPNER

Began his business career in Texas, many years ago, at Cold Springs, San Jacinto County, where he built up a reputation for probity and honorable dealing, that had become proverbial. Such was the faith and confidence of the people in his integrity that he became the depository for the entire county, and during the war held large sums in trust for many of the wealthier class of planters. In many respects, Mr. Kempner is the opposite of his partner. He is business all over, is a cool, calculating man, full of ready resources, thoroughly posted in the markets, has no time for pleasure, but is wholly and entirely engrossed in his business affairs. A man of few words, and those directly to the point. Quick to see a change in the market, and take advantage of it. Pushing, driving, energetic, he has no time for the pleasant amenities of life. He thrusts these all onto his jolly, good-natured partner. While Marx looks after the outside business of the house, Kempner directs and manages the inside affairs.

The house met with a severe disaster in the great conflagration of 1877, but before the smouldering ruins had time to cool, they had rented two large rooms on the Strand, and were actively filling orders from the country, and telegraphing for goods to meet the demand of their extensive trade. As soon as order was restored, they purchased the southwest corner of Strand and Twenty-fourth streets and began the erection of their present large and ornate building, and before the year closed were again under their own roof. When [the] Tremont Hotel was sold, under a deed of trust, they became the purchasers, and at once began improving it, stuccoing the outside, and making many needed reforms on the inside, and secured the services of a thorough hotel man, and threw it open to the public in July, 1877. Soon after, they began the erection of a large, handsome, three-story brick on their old business site, south side of the Strand, between Twenty-first and Twenty-second Streets. This house has shown by its actions and the large outlay they have made in public improvements and costly buildings their abiding faith in the future greatness of Galveston. Few firms have done as much, none have done more, to advance the city by the erection of buildings and aiding public enterprises, of practical utility, than Marx & Kempner.

In 1879, Mother's brother, my uncle Joseph Seinsheimer, was married to Blanche Fellman — then frequently proclaimed as one of the most beautiful young women in Texas. I had the unique experience of being a "flower girl" with five *girls* to precede the ushers and bridesmaid down the aisle of Temple B'nai Israel at 22nd and Avenue I. My velvet knee-length trousers trimmed with lace elicited much comment. This was decidedly to my embarrassment at the reception which followed the ceremony, but the more lasting when my playmates who had heard about the program, my costume, etc., kept up for weeks continuous sarcastic references to my feminine role.

A FATHER'S INTEREST

At the age of ten I was farmed out scholastically as a boarder at St. Mary's University, a Catholic (Jesuit) school under control of Father Trenchard, located on I from 13th to 14th. The bath and toilet facilities there were ancient even for the late 1880's and inadequate and offered the temptation and excuse of my frequently skipping the facilities at the school for the compulsory opportunity of the limited one weekly bath, but which was naturally considered a "must." Godliness, morning and night prayers, was decidedly above cleanliness. But, as a non-Catholic, I was allowed to go home regularly on Sunday (instead of to mass) and on Saturday. Our coachman, generally accompanied by my devoted Negro mammy, was sent to take me first on Saturday, after prayers and breakfast at school, for a thorough cleansing process to the Turkish Baths which occupied the corner of 23rd and Postoffice. Our residence then was at 18th and Postoffice. The prayers before meals were always of longer duration and, by the Jesuit Fathers at school, given much more time and consideration than the meals themselves, but prayers seemed unusually lengthy on Saturday, my day to be away. Usually I was driven by our family coachman first to synagogue services on Saturday before being taken to the baths, giving emphasis to the standard of godliness being superior to cleanliness.

The outstanding social event in the gay 1880's was a bathing

party at dusk — or later — in the Gulf. Large, four-wheeled wholesale grocery trucks drawn by two or three mules were fitted out with benches, providing seats for, I should say, at least twenty. Most times two trucks were necessary to haul the group — men, women, and children — to the beach. All were garbed in bathing suits and long stockings — positively *de rigueur* — covering and touching every part of the human frame from neck to ankle. After the dip in the surf, wet bathing suits were removed, and normal clothing, which had been taken along, was donned. The ladies and the mules had exclusive possession of the truck if only one was brought; the drivers and men retreating to the salt cedars for their change. If there were two trucks, each provided the boudoir for the separate sexes. Baskets of foods had been taken along, cold meats and salads, but always tasty after the dip and so-called swimming in the surf.

To my father and mother, preparation for and performing of my bar mitzvah ceremonies was a serious matter, and both they and Rabbi [Joseph] Silverman (who prepared me for the ceremony) impressed upon me the doctrines of Judaism, the sanctity of the Jewish creed, and the duty of a Jew to his fellow man. A bit of humor injected into the religious occasion was that my father was late arriving in the temple after the bar mitzvah ceremonies were completely over. The congregation's smiles as he entered were widespread, but were not indulged in by my mother. On my bar mitzvah instruction, I have often relied to this day in having my conscience guide my conduct. Regretfully I have never been able, as my parents were, to impress *my* children — much less my grandchildren — with the pride and privilege they should have in being practicing Jews and Jewesses.

My parents fearing, with cause I suspect, that my progress at Galveston schools was more rapid than thorough, after my bar mitzvah in January, 1886, deflected my education to Bellevue High School in Bellevue, Virginia, where I spent three years discovering either how poorly I was taught or at least how deficient was my education. Father took Tom Jack and me to New Orleans. Tom was the son of Thomas L. Jack, one of Texas' outstanding lawyers of the era of reconstruction days following the end of the Civil

War; Tom's brother-in-law was Robert Vance Davidson, a prominent lawyer of a later period — subsequently Attorney General of Texas. From the time the train left Galveston till after Father left us in New Orleans, tears streamed down my face. Tom was just the opposite, cool and apparently indifferent to what was in prospect for him; but Tom's father and mother for a decade were not living.

While at Bellevue, I was advised at different intervals of the death of my brother Joe and my old Negro mammy Aunt Eveline. I can still recall my feeling of loneliness when these sad events, by no means concurrent, reached me. There was no one to whom I could unburden myself or who would be able to offer sympathy to me.

At Bellevue, food was substantial in volume, but vitamins were unknown. Dietary methods in selection or preparation were ignored. "Epicureans" among us purchased rabbits and squirrels from the natives living in the area; the school cook prepared them, and there was no objection to having a special stew (always stew) of rabbit, squirrel, or even occasionally quail placed at our place.

The facilities, sanitary, domestic, educational, were rough, if indeed not rugged. There was no school library room or books of reference except those in the home of Mr. William R. Abbott [the principal]. Toilets were outside, concentrated as a unit, distant from the nearest sleeping quarters by at least one hundred yards. Our quarters, usually a four-room cottage, were heated by fireplaces only, to which each occupant had to bring wood from the shed; no running water, hence no hot water. Our bathtub, a good-sized washtub, always had to be shared by at least two occupants. Quite the normal procedure in winter was to break ice in the pitcher or in the washbowl where we frequently poured water the night before so that the ice could be more readily broken; the pitcher frequently, in fact usually, dethroned from its normal resting place and set near the fire or embers for the night.

How my father felt about my education at Bellevue is evident in a letter which he sent to the principal in 1887:

I am in receipt of [the] report of my son for the month of December, 1886, and note that his course of instruction includes only the following,

viz.: Latin, German, mathematics, orthography, and Bible lessons. I did not suppose that he was studying either Greek or French, but did hope and believe that his instruction embraced something of every other branch of your report. Does he not study geography, history, rhetoric, or composition, etc.? Please let me know everything he studies, even to the books he is using. I want to know what my boy is doing. I know he is at a good school and believe you are taking all pains with him; still, you will appreciate a father's interest and anxiety and advise me fully about my son. Above all things I do want him to have a good, substantial foundation, plenty of useful knowledge, and [to be] well prepared and fitted for the practical duties of life — Your kind reply will oblige.

On one of my trips home from school at Bellevue, I awoke to realize the train had not moved for quite a while. Inquiry developed that we were at Little Rock, Arkansas, and likely to remain there several hours till a freight train wreck ahead of us could be removed from the tracks. I dressed, went uptown, found a place to take breakfast. On my return to the train, I saw a sign, "B. Kempner, Shoes." I went in the store, asked for Mr. Kempner, was told he was "in his office in the rear." I after some delay and inquiry found the so-called office, with an elderly gentleman in carpet slippers seated at a desk which with its chair comprised the entire available space. I started out saying I was detained by a wreck on the railroad, saw his name and thought I would like to meet Mr. Kempner since we had the same name. The gentleman immediately said, "I can't help you; people are calling on me for money or aid every day, and I can't help everybody." I tried to tell him I didn't want anything, but he preferred to tell me of the demands made on him. I finally got in a few words to tell him rather positively that I had made a mistake in calling on him, that I would get on my train and leave him and Little Rock. I got as far as the door when he smiled and said, "Now what do you want? I may help a little." I thanked him and said, "No, all I want is to have my train start for Galveston."

NO NECESSITY FOR UNDUE HASTE

To Washington and Lee University, I embarked in 1889 at the age of sixteen and a half; spent three years in [the] academic depart-

ment, no degree, as I flunked chemistry. In the season of 1892-93, I entered the law department expecting also to take chemistry, so as to obtain my B.A. degree as well as my law degree. This proceeding was denied me under the university's regulations. About twelve Texas boys at W. & L. with characteristic Texas pride organized in my sophomore year a Texas club. I was elected president and retained the honor during the remaining three years. We had only one meeting after organizing.

In 1891, Father wrote to the president of the university to express his interest in my work at W. & L.:

Dear Sir:

I have a letter from my son Ikey asking my wishes as to his future and suggesting that he could now take up the law course. I desire his education and training to be thorough and complete. He is young yet. There is no necessity for him to begin the study of a profession and to embark in life prematurely. When he comes out to take his place among men, I want him fitted for any position to which he may aspire or be called. I prefer that he read law, but at the proper time. He seems to think for himself that he is now ready. What is your opinion? Is his general education now finished? — or entirely sufficient? — do you think for all purposes? According to the “old way” of learning, a collegiate education embraced regular grades of study: the Freshman, Sophomore, Junior and Senior; and when a boy went through the senior course, he “graduated.” In this sense has my son “graduated” at your university?

While he ought not be hindered or delayed in taking up a professional course, if fully prepared for it, but, on the contrary, should be encouraged in it, if through with his general education — at the same time there is no necessity for any undue haste in his case. I am glad to be able to say I can afford every facility and opportunity, and he has health; and, I hope, the mind for the best mental attainments. Is the “ground work” now ready for the professional course to be added? I do not want to influence your judgment one way or the other. I want your plain simple views on the subject and your careful consideration and recommendation — please also have him thoroughly examined and tested by your other professors — as many as you deem proper — I will of course pay the charges for it and for a full report of the result showing in what he is proficient and deficient with recommendations — not a report on your usual printed circular form — but full, general, and searching — to which please add your personal views. I will thank you very much for your kind attention

to my requests and full reply to this letter with bill for the special examinations and report.

If Ikey were your son, under the circumstances, what would you wish him to do? As you advise, so far as I can, I will do. I shall leave this matter with you and have heard Ikey talk about you. I know what you think will have great weight with him. So I ask of you that, after you have concluded what to say to me, that you take him aside, show him this letter, or not, as you think proper, and tell him what you shall have advised me with reference to him, and induce him to your way of thinking about it.

Very Respectfully Y[ou]rs.

When I returned home after three years in academic work, my father asked for my general impressions of what my education had so far done for me. He always expressed great confidence in the influence which advanced education could exert — doubtless because it had been denied him. He strongly desired his children to have a complete and thorough university education. He wanted me to go abroad after I finished in law, and at the time of his death had completed arrangements for me to enter the University of Göttingen, Germany. I remember telling him I doubted the need or wisdom of such a move as after my three years in college, particularly in the study of moral philosophy under the guidance of a professor who had been a Presbyterian minister, I was inclined to have some socialistic theories which he, my father, might not approve and which might be encouraged in a German university. His reply was, “You are almost twenty years old. If at twenty you are not socialistic, you have no heart. If at forty you are still socialistic, you have no mind.” Shortly before his death, he wrote to me:

Dear Iky:

I am in receipt of your long letter of the 23 inst. I have read and reread same several times.

It is my wish and desire that you should, after finishing at Lexington, go to Germany and remain there untill you have learned to speak the German fluently, and from there proceed to France and learn the French (and Spanish if possible). I certainly appreciate your motives for wishing to be at home, but you must remember that you are quite young. I can

for the next 2 or 2½ years do without your assistance. After you return from Europe with a liberal English education — read and write English, German, French, and Spanish — you will then be of sure enough help to me and the pride and honor of your parents. The place Göttingen is a beautiful city of about 25 or 30,000 inhabitants — has one of the finest universities in Europe. Plenty Americans reside there, and only the purest of German is used there. This is my only reason for sending you to Göttingen. I am altogether willing that you should travel in Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Bavaria, and England — if you so desire, I will gladly furnish you the means When you land at Hamburg or Bremen, I will have [your cousin] Jake [Cohen] and his wife to meet you and from there go with them to Breslau, their home — see my father, if possible, and sisters — remain a few days — travel some and remain in Breslau and Berlin each [a] few days.

With love, I am your father
H. Kempner

During the eight years I spent away at school and college [in Virginia], I did not come home for a single Christmas or Easter holiday. It took three days each way to make the journey — and eight days were the limit of our Christmas holidays; Easter was only from Good Friday to Easter Monday morning; and my parents, particularly my father, were strict constructionists of school rules. The result: I, to my regret, miss today, and always have, sharing any holiday spirit of Christmas festivities. I presume habit in my youth has unconsciously warped my sense of enjoyment of something then denied me.

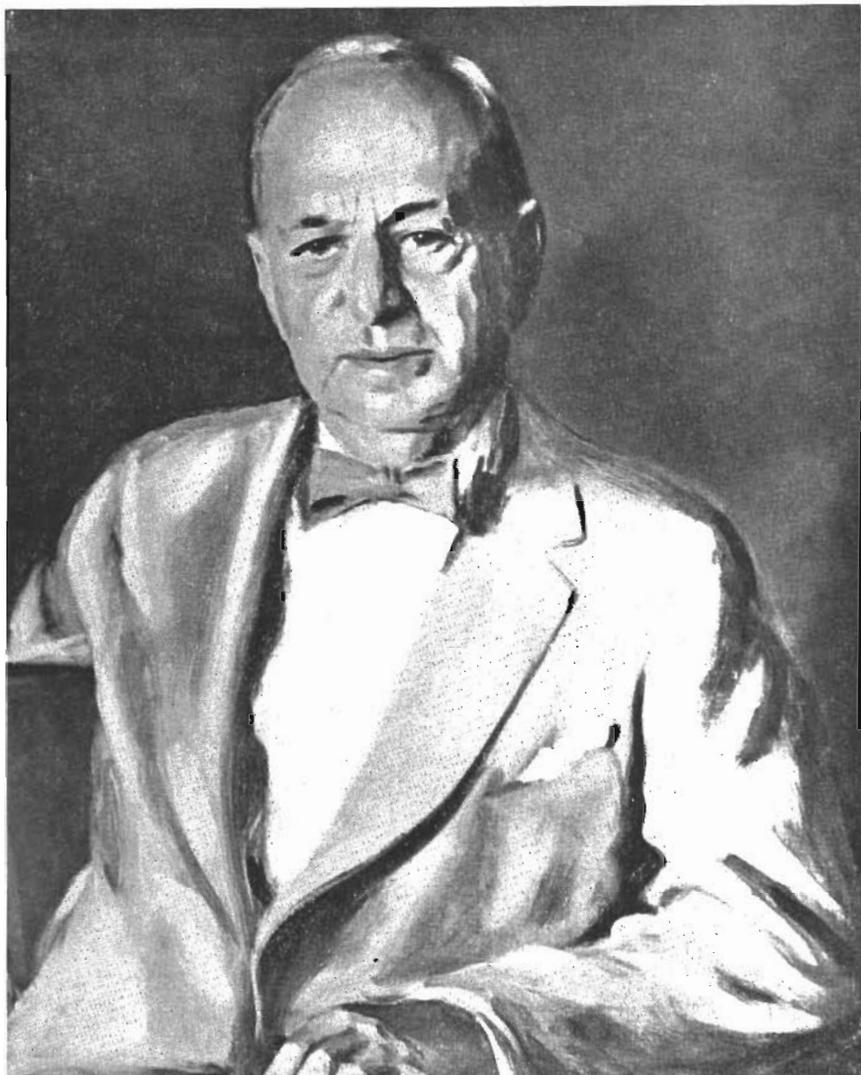
MY HERSHELL IS DEAD

I remained in the study of law [at W. & L.], passed all examinations creditably, second or third in my class of about fifty, but was called home in April, 1894, by my father's illness. I did not return for final examinations in June. The trip, after I received the telegram instructing me to come home, will never be forgotten. My brother Dan, who was at the University of Virginia, had a similar wire. We telegraphed each other and arranged to meet en route. The journey seemed endless, but we finally arrived about twenty-four hours before Father passed away, though he was con-



Courtesy, Mrs. David F. Weston, Cincinnati

Harris Kempner
Texas Pioneer



Reproduced from I. H. Kempner Testimonial Dinner booklet, Galveston, Texas, January 1-3, 1961

Isaac Herbert Kempner, of Galveston
Industrialist, banker, and communal leader

scious enough to recognize us. Our mother's grief was heartrending. Except for Dan and myself, the other children were too young to realize what had occurred.

On my father's death, Friday, April 13, 1894, it was discovered that while he had prepared and, after discussion with his attorney, approved the terms of his will, he had not signed it. The result necessitated the cumbersome handling of the estate by my mother nominally as "survivor in community," requiring a tremendous bond, which was generously and without compensation signed by individual friends, acceptable to the court. In the present day of self-interest, a group would be hard to find to give bond for over a million and [a] half dollars to cover an estate whose continued solvency or liquidation would be dependent on the integrity and ability of a twenty-one-year old with no business experience beyond that gained by three or four summers casual work in his father's office.

On the night of my father's death, about an hour after his passing away, I went, shaken with grief, out on the west porch of the second story of our then home at 16th and I. I looked into a sky of darkness, only a few stars visible. Alone and disconsolate, I talked aloud how hopeless was the future for my mother and her eight children and made a vow that, as I could not help the dead, I would always seek to help the living. I realize how this resolution has helped me. The thorough cooperation of my brothers and sisters to keep our family relations free from strife and the family fortune intact has been our goal. Each and everyone of my brothers and sisters have kept our interests on an equal and equitable basis.

I vividly recall how Mother's grief broke out anew on the eve of the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashonah, following Father's death, as she entered our home after coming from services at the synagogue; with tears streaming down her face she cried, "How can there be any happy New Years?"

It is authoritatively related that when a cable was received by our paternal grandfather in the village of Jaskrow in Poland, he immediately, before opening the message, said, "Mein Herschell (which seemed to be Father's Russian or Polish name) ist todt"

[My Herschell is dead], even though my father cabled him several times a year.

Father's career is in retrospect a saga of personal achievement, a demonstration of the potentialities and rewards of individual initiative, intellectual honesty, and free enterprise. In New York in 1853, an immigrant boy, sixteen years of age with less than \$100.00, disembarked from a forty-day voyage on a sailing vessel. He worked as a day laborer there, a bricklayer's assistant; studied the English language at night. Four years of loneliness ensued in a strange country, [but he] determined, through it all, to work and help his less fortunate parents and sisters. He heard of Texas, decided to move there; settled (I never knew why or exactly in what year) at Cold Springs, San Jacinto County, presumably early in 1858. This date seems accurate because in the court records of Harris County is listed a fine of \$5.00 and costs levied against and paid by Harris Kempner on May 21, 1858, for riding horseback through the streets of Houston at a speed of five miles per hour. He had left his native Russian Poland because of decided reluctance or rather unwillingness to be forced into the military service of the Czar. But when his neighbors in San Jacinto County and adjoining, who had become his customers and friends supporting his modest mercantile pursuits and been so kind to him, enlisted in the Confederate Army, he volunteered with them. He was wounded while on active service as a private in Parson's Cavalry Brigade; then promoted to a lieutenant and transferred to the quartermaster corps.

He came to Galveston to engage in business some time between 1868 and 1870. Galveston then was the distributing commercial center for all Texas and the site of whatever culture later generations would admit prevailed in Texas. Incidentally, I saw a newspaper clipping boasting that it then took only eight days for mail from San Antonio to reach Galveston.

In 1872, he and our mother were married by Rabbi Isaac M. Wise. He had by then, under the impact of industry and ability, become a sterling citizen, a wholesale merchant, a member of the firm of Marx and Kempner at Galveston — who, along with Kaufman and Runge, P. J. Willis & Company, Legerse & Company,

Leon & H. Blum, were known statewide as the state's leading grocery merchants.

My father's philosophy of charity rested on the basis that he really wanted to help ameliorate poverty and illness and to give to worthy causes and deserving individual poor. He was a strong believer in the power of the churches, cathedrals, and synagogues, but felt keenly that the hypocrisy and narrowness of many all too often belied their faith and diminished materially their potential spiritual influence.

Father had great faith in Texas and in Texas lands. He came from the agricultural section of Poland and knew land was treasured there, but there those in his religious and social status could not — were not permitted to — acquire it. He had great esteem for his right in this country to acquire land; he had fine judgment to select land and a visible pride of possessing what land he could pay for. He would not buy on credit. He selected investments in rural land rather than city property. He frequently reminded me that city property was subject to being excessively taxed and municipal affairs badly managed. He pointed out to me occasionally in the early 1890's his fear that Galveston would not become a large city because of her inadequate water supply. At that time, we depended on cisterns to catch rain water to supply household or factory needs. I sometimes wonder if his views on city property and avoidance of heavy personal indebtedness did not, in the years after his death, influence my reluctance to invest in city property anywhere. He was averse to investing in city properties generally in Texas; he believed taxes for municipal improvements would absorb much of the profit from increased values.

FATHER SUED THE SANTA FE

Father was innately and inherently reverent — with strong attachment to and pride in Judaism as a religious belief wherein he could put his personal faith in one God to whom alone all humans are accountable. He was deeply religious. He observed strictly all Jewish holidays — fasting at Yom Kippur and having the Seder ceremonies at home each year at Pesach [Passover]. He was uncon-

ditionally tolerant of the faith and ceremonies of others, but he thoroughly mistrusted the good faith and sincerity of any one who changed his religious belief or, rather, deserted his early home and church or synagogue training — any such person, he insisted, either was an atheist or an opportunist seeking social prestige.

Father was a student of, or at least gave much thought to, what I might call practical economics. He regarded interest on financial obligations as at once the source of readily earned revenue and the tool that tended to make income more pliable or viable. He readily undertook to borrow money within prudent limits to acquire land or bank stocks, where he felt sure earnings would yield more than the amount of interest he was called on to pay and increase in values would enable him readily, though gradually, to discharge the obligation.

In the spring of 1893, a party near Cleburne, presumably a cotton dealer, wired my father, "How much per bale will you advance on bill lading?" As his business was advancing on cotton shipped him for sale on commission, he wired back the prevailing price. The shipment was made with draft on our firm. The money advanced per bale was paid against railroad bill of lading. When the shipment arrived it turned out to be linters, about one-fourth the value of cotton, that a third firm, apparently by their scheme, had collected as their indebtedness from an uncertain debtor. Father sued the Santa Fe Railroad which issued the lading, the oil mill that allegedly was in collusion with the shipper, and a cotton firm that apparently by the scheme collected a debt from the shipper. An attorney, after hearing Father's opinion of his clients, said, "Well, Mr. Kempner, you must think all cotton men are thieves." Father answered, "No, but I think some skillful thieves have gotten in the cotton business."

He had tremendous regard for the law and for the respect and obedience accorded legal interpretation. He felt pride in having his annual invitation to the judges of the Supreme Court of Texas to come down from Austin to a formal dinner at our home being regularly accepted for over ten consecutive years. He felt it was a distinguished honor which a lowly born Pole could enjoy nowhere except in the United States.

He was a man in whom the spirit of charity prevailed to a remarkable extent. Even in his earlier years he gave out of proportion to his limited means. He paid the expenses of six or more of his nephews to emigrate from Poland to Texas and found employment for them on arrival. He constantly remitted funds to his three sisters and other relatives in Poland, to the poor of the locality from which he emigrated, to the impoverished in East Texas where he, a foreigner, had first located and been hospitably received. His charitable disposition sprang from his sense of justice or, rather, of injustice aroused by seeing some people afflicted by persecution or stricken through no fault of theirs. Though given the usual opportunity, shortly after coming to Texas, to own Negro slaves, he declined to acquire any, though among his friends in East Texas their Negro slaves were well provided for and slavery regarded as humane and an economic necessity. He highly regarded his privilege to vote and always exercised it, though he had no desire to participate in local or state politics. He retained from his Polish youth vivid recollections of the evil perpetuated by arbitrary or venal officeholders and the persecutions of Jews, solely because of their religious belief. In this new country where personal liberty was vouched its citizens, he recognized and possessed the value of faith, cultivated admiration for integrity, the effective warmth and need of charity to the impoverished or unfortunate. Three things Father guarded zealously: his religious heritage, his American citizenship, his responsibility to society in general as well as to his family in particular. These objectives, encouraged by Mother, he preached to me, which I have ever tried to practice.

CORRECTION

Inadvertently the late Rabbi David Philipson's date of death was erroneously given as 1948, on page 133 of the November, 1966, issue of *American Jewish Archives*. The correct date of death is 1949 — June 29, 1949, to be exact.