

In Time of Test, Family Is Best



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Dan Berg

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The book includes three novels: “Matan and His Family”, “Yakov from Jaffa”, “Reluctant Friends”.

The stories are connected by a common idea.

The reader learns of the brilliant beginning of the Jewish sage Matan's career, of his happy marriage, of his family, and of his and his wife's bitter old age. The children, whom the father and mother loved so much, became the unwitting cause of the tragic ending of the parents' lives. The narrative utilizes historical and folklore materials. The action dates from about the second century of our era and takes place mainly in Babylon. The author does not punctiliously follow literary sources, and the story is a free interpretation of events.

Yakov from Jaffa is a Jewish boy, the son of a poor Jaffa fisherman. An accident happened and the lad was orphaned. The rabbi from whom Yakov studied passed the care of the orphan to the brother in Jerusalem. Yakov was an capable disciple. Even at a young age, he had the idea of becoming wealthy and independent. He desired to escape the hardships of Jewish destiny. Yakov was able to fulfill the dream of his youthful years of wealth. He became a prosperous merchant, traveled the world, lived in the West and in the East. The story, which takes place at the time of the crusades, ends tragically for its main character.

The events of the story “Reluctant Friends” took place two centuries ago. Educated European Jews, the enlighteners, laughed at the ignorance of their Ukrainian tribesmen, the simple hasids. Other opponents of the hasids were the antihasids, who harshly rebuked them for their false messianism. Love between the young heroes of the story sometimes overcame family traditions, and sometimes yielded to them. But then a common misfortune happened, and national solidarity united all three parties.

The author restores justice to women as historical figures who are in no way inferior to men in importance.

Readers will follow with interest the dialogues between characters discussing issues that are relevant today.

The seriousness of the book does not preclude humor and irony.