



# The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl and Sheyne-Sheyndl and Motl, the Cantor's Son

*Sholem Aleichem*

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This volume presents an outstanding new translation of two favorite comic novels by the preeminent Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem (1859–1916). *The Letters of Menakhem Mendl and Sheyne Sheyndl* portrays a tumultuous marriage through letters exchanged between the title character, an itinerant bumbler seeking his fortune in the cities of Russia before departing alone for the New World, and his scolding wife, who becomes increasingly fearful, jealous, and mystified. *Motl, Peysi the Cantor's Son* is the first-person narrative of a mischievous and keenly observant boy who emigrates with his family from Russia to America. The final third of the story takes place in New York, making this Aleichem's only major work to be set in the United States.

Motl and Menakhem Mendl are in one sense opposites: the one a clear-eyed child and the other a pathetically deluded adult. Yet both are ideal conveyors of the comic disparity of perception on which humor depends. If Motl sees more than do others around him, Menakhem Mendl has an almost infinite capacity for seeing less. Aleichem endows each character with an individual comic voice to tell in his own way the story of the collapse of traditional Jewish life in modern industrial society as well as the journey to America, where a new chapter of Jewish history begins. This volume includes a biographical and critical introduction as well as a useful glossary for English language readers.

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