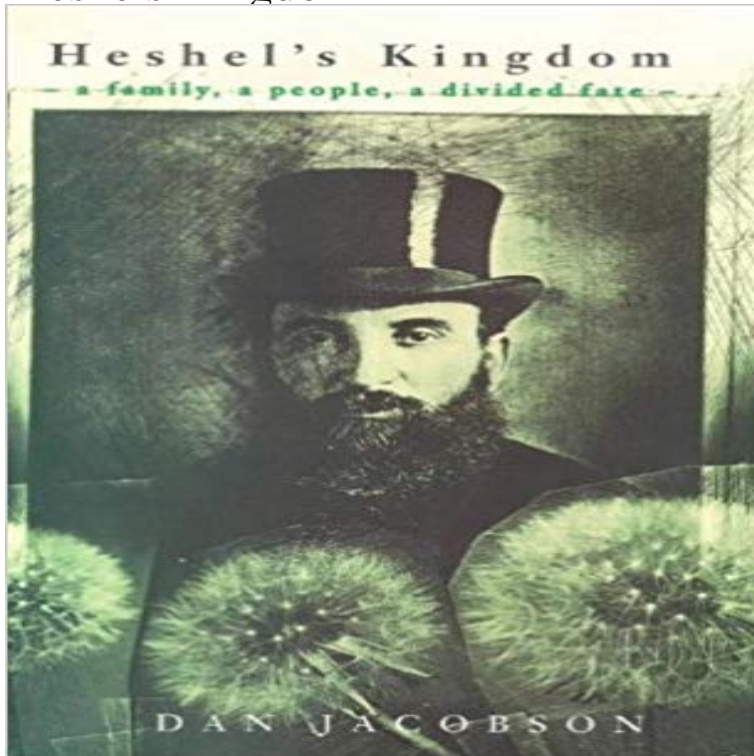


Heshels Kingdom



In 1919 Heshel Melamed, a rabbi in the small provincial Lithuanian town of Varniai, presented his wife and their nine children with his greatest and most unexpected gift: at the age of fifty-three he died, suddenly, of a heart attack. Heshel's widow, children and grandchildren were thus set free to establish themselves safely seven thousand miles away in South Africa. As a result, they were spared the Nazi invasion and the tidal wave of killing that was to engulf virtually the entire Jewish population of Lithuania twenty years later. Prompted by a few of his grandfathers' possessions that had come down to him across the decades - a pair of spectacles, an address book, a single photograph - Dan Jacobson tells the story of Heshel and his descendants.

Everywhere he encounters puzzles, ambiguities and fateful turning-points in the history of nations and individual characters alike. Why, in the course of a short life, did Heshel change his identity not one, but twice? What manner of violent death eventually came to the aunts, uncles and cousins left behind in Lithuania? What kind of lives opened up before those members of the family who had settled in South Africa? In dealing with those questions, Jacobson also raises the most puzzling question of all: the nature of the physical and moral inheritance bequeathed by the past to each of us.

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