

Częstochowa Becomes a City

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In the years around 1880, Częstochowa consisted mainly of two parts, divided from one another by large, uninhabited spaces. The upper part - Częstochówka - was sparsely populated. The lower part was densely populated and stretched to the Warta [River]. Across the river, there were no houses to be seen. The old abattoir had sunk into the river and the new one, with the stone building and already with modern installations, held no fear of the water. Further on was a meadow which stretched forth like an endless, green sea. Crossing the second bridge in Zawada¹, there were a few little houses next to the hilly stone quarries. On the way was where the only Jewish horticulturist lived. On the other side, to the south, was the windmill. The water in the Warta was crystal clear, [and was] often visited by women who washed their linen there and, even more often, by those who filled their wooden ladles and earthen pitchers with the "soft"² spring water for brewing tea.

On the northern side of the lower part of the city was the Trinity Square, with the three crosses in the middle of a desert of golden sand. Carts from Kiles³, Mstów, [and] Wyczerpy would pass by here with their village products for the Częstochowa market and travel back with the city's wares.

On Thursdays and Fridays, bands of boys, girls and women went out onto the Trinity [Square] with bags and other containers, which they filled with golden sand to spread over the earthen floors and with which to polish the *Shabbes* candlesticks and other brass and copper utensils, [just] as their grandmothers and great-grandmothers had done before they had come to Częstochowa.

On *Shabbes*, the Trinity [Square] takes on a different appearance. On the "Jewish meadow" next to Głowacka or Szymbia Djabo's mill, elderly Jews lie stretched out in the tall green grass, resting their bones. Small children dance, singing [the waltz]:

*"Pan Ludwik pojechał na polowanie,
zostawił Marysia na malowanie..."*⁴

[Mr Ludwig went hunting, he left Marysia to paint].

The cart drivers' horses graze in the meadow, reposing from the heavy loads that they drag all week long to late in the night. Also grazing, separately from them, are a few "aristocratic" horses of the Jewish hackney carriage drivers which, during the whole week, do not drag any heavy loads, but transport "refined" passengers. The "aristocratic" horses are decked out with silver buttons [and] tassels hanging down from their foreheads.

The cart and hackney carriage drivers also lie here, alongside their horses: Hekelmacher, the *Kłobucker*, the elderly Dorfsman, the small "*Schnellzug*" [Express Train] with the two little runny eyes, the "*Alter Zuken*"⁵, who together with his wife, "*Die Zkente*" [Yid. fem. form of *zuken*], smuggled emigrants, and two "*Tom-cats*"⁶, who always fought with each other over a passenger.

¹ [TN: Although there is a village in the Częstochowa region by this name, as this location was apparently inside Częstochowa itself, it is likely that the author meant "Zawodzie."]

² [TN: See *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. I, cols. 792-793, where the "hard" and "soft" waters of Częstochowa are explained.]

³ [TN: We have been unable to find any locality in the Częstochowa vicinity with a similar name – barring perhaps Kalej; this is most likely a misprint.]

⁴ [TN: The original lyrics by Henryk Sienkiewicz are slightly different: "Pojechał pan Ludwik na polowanie, Zostawił Helunię, jak malowanie."]

⁵ [TN: The first word is Yid. for "old" and the second is Heb. for "old man," viz. a very old man.]

⁶ [TN: Nickname for opportunistic coachman.]

The people-smugglers were then already conducting their business in a systematic manner. One group took the people across the border. Another, which sold fake ship passages and changed currency, without which they would be reported, waited for the emigrants in Lubliniec⁷.

To the south of the lower part of the city, on both banks of the river, is Grosman's mill with a beautiful garden next to it, free for all to enter. Several Jews are employed at Grosman's mill; their household is run in a true Jewish manner and they also do not forget the poor.

A little higher, to the west, is Markusfeld's *Malarnja*⁸. The name Markusfeld is uttered as if it were sacred. True, in *Malarnia*, the Jewish men and young women earned no more than the Christians. Therefore, Henryk Markusfeld did not forget to give a few roubles when a girl was getting married, to give aid to the Jewish workers for a Jewish holiday [and] to provide the poor Jewish children with *matzos* for *Peisach* and coal for winter.

Near the Malarnia, across the cobbled road, lies the Old Cemetery. Directly adjacent to the cemetery is Werde's needle factory. Werde is a Jew short in stature and very clever. He is fond of fine music – an admirer of Mendelsohn. He is also a bit of a philosopher and smokes a pipe. He is not very well-liked in town, because he does not attend the prayer services.

A little higher up, crossing ul. Stacja (later ul. Piłsudskiego), is another Grosman, who gives lime to the poor, with which to whitewash their houses for *Peisach*.

We turn back towards the *Getzevizne*⁹, or ghetto, where peasants arrive from Żarki, Myszków, Janów, [etc.]. There, we also find the [neighbourhood called] "*Ostatni Grosz*" [The Last Penny]. The story of the name "*Ostatni Grosz*" is as follows: [once,] a peasant got very drunk in a pub in that area. When he realised that he was already down to his last *grosz*, he started shouting, "*Ostatni grosz, ostatni grosz...*" [and] thus the name stuck.

Events

It was a great event in Częstochowa when, in 1887, the Russian *Ułan*¹⁰ left the city and the Dragoons came in. The *Gubernia*, or the circle around the Warszawska, Senatorska, Kozia, *Rzeka* [River; viz. Nadrzeczna] and Potters [Garncarska] streets, was besieged with people. Once the parade had ended and the crowd had left – the fresh green grass had been completely trampled. The young trees barely survived, the green benches were muddied. Only the beautiful, green park was spared. In the evening, when together with the buzz of the *chrząszcze* [beetles], the "*povierka*" [Rus.; roll call] was heard, which was the [bugle] call for the soldiers in the Dragoons' barracks to go to bed - things became lively on the First and Second *Aleje* [Avenues]. High-ranking officers in light-blue cloaks, holding *spitzruten*¹¹, strolled about with powdered ladies. The carriages are lit up with lanterns; the white blossoms of the chestnut trees are scattered on the ground like a white carpet; the ice cream man with the white robe and Turkish hat yells, "*Ice cream!*"¹² and, from the distance, the "*Tymme*"¹³ (church), shines forth with thousands of oil wicks in honour of Green Thursday [Pentecost].

Why the officers of the 7th and 8th Regiments did not come out to welcome the Dragoons is a question about which much was whispered at the time in Częstochowa.

⁷ [TN: Before the First World War, Lubliniec was part of Germany.]

⁸ [TN: Name of one of Markusfeld's factories, in which paint products were produced.]

⁹ [TN: We have not been able to ascertain this word's original spelling or meaning.]

¹⁰ [TN: *Uhlans*; Polish-Lithuanian light cavalry.]

¹¹ [TN: The German word "*spitzrute*" means either a pointy military rod used for flogging, or a gauntlet.]

¹² [TN: *сахар морожне*, in Russian, in the original.]

¹³ [TN: Heb., impurity; term by which the local religious Jews referred to the church.]

In the upper part of Częstochowa, where Częstochówka and Jasna Góra are, from where the church with its tall spire looks down upon the city, they were also preparing for something. Stonemasons cut soft marble and laid a foundation for the *pomnik* (monument) for [Tsar] Aleksander II. [People] in town could hardly wait for this event. A great number of Christians waited for the moment when they would see how the Russian Orthodox Tsar stood at the foot of Jasna Góra, looking up to the tall poplars surrounding the church and how Holy Mary - the patron saint of Poland - would look down, from her height, upon that powerful world-ruler. Everything was eventually completed and the unveiling ceremony began. Kith and kin gathered, and Jewish mothers and fathers from the backstreets led their barefoot children, with the handkerchiefs [hanging out] from their back [pockets,] through the dark *Nowy Rynek* [New Market] and *Aleje* (all the kerosene lamps had been put out) up to the little grove to see an emperor.

Once all the military and religious ceremonies had been completed, and the sheets covering the *pomnik* had been removed – the crowd saw the massive figure of Aleksander II atop a tall marble terrace, lit up with dozens of floodlights, standing facing the city and with his back to the church and the Holy Mother. Polish patriots [who were] gathered at the inauguration quickly removed themselves with clenched fists. But Jews, too, ran home as fast as possible, and stuck together. And indeed, already by the following day, people said that the Jews had paid a large sum of money for the monument to be erected facing the city, where the “*Zhyds*” lived. At the time, the wounds of the pogrom in Warsaw were still fresh, and the Jews once more trembled. As usual, two Częstochowa Jewish public figures - Markusfeld and Ginsberg - were forced to put in a great deal of work to resolve the situation. [As a result,] priests in the churches in fact assured [their congregations] that the Jews were not to blame for this.

Early one morning, the terrace of the *pomnik* was found dirtied with offal. From then on, a military guard was positioned by the Tsar’s statue.

A few weeks later – another scramble. The “*Straż Ogniowa*” (Fire Department) renovated their premises at the tollgate between the ul. Targowa and ul. Krakowska. A firefighter went about on the top of the wooden tower, wearing a brass helmet on his head and [holding] a trumpet which he blew incessantly. People said that this tower was the tallest in the world. The firemen dragged out the new wagon with the rubber hose, speedily harnessing the horses. A little Jew, Poznanski, with a new hat and a gleaming hatchet at his side, also busies himself here. He takes pride in his heroism before the Jews gathered on the *Shabbes* afternoon. The wagon sets off. The music plays, and the crowd gives a hurrah.

That same night, the trumpet is blown – a fire! The bell rings on ul. Senatorska - “*bim-bom!*” The sky is red. Half-naked people run - “*Where is the fire? Where is the fire?*” - “*Tam (there)!*” People run breathlessly up to Częstochówka. There, a stable is burning. But by the time the firefighters arrived there, it was all over. It had only been a drill by the Fire Brigade.

In the city, it was said that the new wagon with the hose had been donated by Markusfeld and the horses by [Karol] Szwede’s beer brewery.

A few days later, a few fellows gathered in front of Aba’le *Shoichet’s* and made their own repetition of that fire in Częstochówka. One of them, Wigdor Brukarz, in his tenor’s voice, sang “*It’s burning...It’s burning...*”. Basses assisted him, “*Where?...Where?...*”. Altos and sopranos answered, “*At the priest’s...At the priest’s...*” [Then,] the whole choir, “*Bring water... Go put it out... Bring water... Go put it out...*”

All of Częstochowa sang this song for a long time and amused themselves [quite] a bit.

Jewish Streets

The poorest of the Jewish population lived on the *Rzeka* Street [River, viz. ul. Nadrzeczna]. When the river rose due to the thawing ice, it looked as if the sea had surged into Częstochowa and wanted to swallow up the poorest streets. The lower down they were by the river, the higher the water stood inside the little houses - sometimes up to the beds. There were very few wooden floors in these dwellings. Once the water retreated, they would clean out the mud and sprinkle sand. On *Shavuos*, much *tatar*¹⁴ was spread out. Around the houses were gardens in which they would plant *Rosh Chodesh*¹⁵ radishes, scallions, cucumbers, sunflowers, and other [things].

When a couple were wed, their main household possessions consisted of two¹⁶ second-hand beds, a little table with two stools, a chamber pot [and] a wooden ladle for water. A large part of the household items were wedding presents. The bride, as part of her “trousseau”, brought a green trunk. There was seldom a wardrobe in the house.

The Potters Street [ul. Garncarska] was already a bit more cheerful - with Jewish shops, a pub, [and food] wagons with bread, *griskelech*¹⁷, pretzels, smoked herring, [etc.] But this street was not much wealthier, especially the side by the river, where one could pass from one street to the other through the courtyards. This is where all the arriving characters ended up - harmonica players, those who read cards, cast lots, warded off the evil eye, conjurers, musicians and regular poor folk, who came to collect *Rosh Chodesh* money¹⁸. Although very poor themselves, the ghetto residents also gave charity - if not a whole *grosz*, then a *prutah*¹⁹ (a fourth of a *grosz*).

Crossing the street, [the neighbourhood] from Frajmark’s house and up to the *Talmud-Torah* was already inhabited by the more bourgeois elements of the Meat-Market Street [ul. Targowa] - those who had stalls in the Old Market. There, mothers gave their children a roll with a hard-boiled egg for *feshber* (a [tea] break between lunch and supper). Meat-Market Street was then considered the street of robbers - the heroic meat-hackers in the butcher shops, the later renowned “Good Boys” [criminal gang] - the Kantors, Abram-Ber Murzyn, Wolf-Jankel, the Zygases. Lads, who were already well-known even back then, also included Awreme’le *Kłobucker*, his brother Manes, Icyk “*Shlize*” [The Slippery], Josef “*Japcok*” [Cheap Wine], Hersz-Lajb “*Dem Yumete’s*” ([The] *Binyumete’s*²⁰), Nuchem-Jankel Fridman, Chanina Lauker, [and] Daniel Bac.

The other side of the *Rzeka* Street [ul. Nadrzeczna], from the Synagogue to the *gubernia* [Town Hall], was inhabited by coachmen, cobblers, rag-dealers (Machry²¹ was the main buyer), poor Christians who worked in the factories, and felczery [paramedics]. There was also a soap factory [and] a small bead factory. On the corner, across from the Dragoons’ barracks, was a neglected cemetery. On the other side of the street, where most of the courtyards went through to the Potters Street [ul. Garncarska], the foremost locations were occupied by the Korpiels or the Djaboŝ – both with used wares and scrap metal, and also with the pub where the old Korpiel, a Jew with a long *arba-kanfes*²², sold a drink of

¹⁴ [TN: Most likely ref. to the reed-like wetland plant *Acorus calamus* or Sweet flag, which in Polish is called “Tatarskie ziele”; it is the custom on the festival of *Shavuos* to spread out greenery and flowers.]

¹⁵ [TN: Heb. “First day of the month”; little radishes – the spring and summer type – which grow within a month or less.]

¹⁶ [TN: Due to the laws of family purity, religious couples have separate beds.]

¹⁷ [TN: Griddle cakes, viz. type of crêpes cooked on a griddle.]

¹⁸ [TN: It is the custom to increase charity to the poor on *Rosh Chodesh*, just as it is done on the eve of a *Shabbes* or holiday.]

¹⁹ [TN: Biblical coin of the smallest denomination, used in Yiddish and Hebrew to denote all such coins regardless of the currency.]

²⁰ [TN: Made up of the male name *Binyumin* (Benjamin) with the ending -ete, making it female, and the possessive apostrophe denoting that the subject was this person’s son, thus “*Binyumete’s*” – the son of Benjamin’s wife (or daughter).]

²¹ [TN: מאכרי in the original; as this surname does not appear to exist, we may surmise it was a nickname.]

²² [TN: “Four corners”; ritual garment with tassels worn by Chasidic men over their shirts.]

liquor for a *dreier* [three-*grosz* coin]. A bit further along was another pub run by a Jew, who looked completely unlike a pub-keeper. People spoke to that Jew like to a rabbi. They would call him by his surname – Dawid Federman. He was an orthodox Jew, but not a fanatic. All the poorer weddings were held in his premises. The courtyard was a long one, with a passageway from the Potters Street to the *Rzeka* [Street]. In this yard, Wolf Boms or Miriam (“Marjem”) Izka’s [daughter] drew long wires through a press to make brass rings.

A little further was yet another pub – *Drewniak*’s. This was the home of the coachmen. A little further on was *lce-Lajb Schuster* [the Cobbler], *Aryje Schuster*, [and] *Fajertag Schuster*; down to [ul.] *Spadek* - *Zalma Zygas Schuster*, *Jachet the groscherin*²³, the *Kelbmans*, [and] *Ceszynski*. These were *Częstochowa*’s “Four Hundred”²⁴.

The Goats Street [ul. *Kozia*] was, at the time, also not entirely inhabited by Jews. Shepherds grazed their livestock in the fields. Fat cows would come into the little Goats Street, where women stood with pitchers at the ready, waiting for the Gentile women to finish milking the cows.

In 1889, *Izrael Win* settled there. He and his wife *Szajndla* were honest, fine folk. He was one of the founders of the *Shoicher Toiv*²⁵ Society, together with *Mordche* and *Jankel Hekelmacher*, *Symcha Meszengiser*, *Abram-Nussen Fridman*, [and] *Wigdor Szwarc*, [who] was the permanent *gabay* [trustee/collector]. *Majer Biczner* had a small house on the little Goats Street at the time. *Jechiel Melamed* had a small *cheder*. On the corner lived the lamplighter. It was frightening to walk from *Gitla-Esterl*’s shop to *Golda*’s house. The abandoned houses told the story of the horrific fire in the 1870’s. Many people were burnt at the time. When people were looking for gold amongst the ruins after the blaze, a weak and burnt wall collapsed, burying several people beneath it. Ever since, people were scared to pass by there at night. Many swore that, at exactly twelve midnight, they had seen the dead in their white burial shrouds. People wearing white clothes would, in fact, pass through there - but they were [just] workers at the flour mills.

The little ul. *Senatorska* was already completely different. Young *baleboselech*²⁶ lived there, as well as Chassidic children with little, long caftans, merchants, brokers and cane-twirlers [viz. idlers]. On *Shabbes*, one saw many *shtreimels*²⁷ here, [and] black satin robes with white stockings²⁸. The majority of the Chassidic *shtieblech* were also concentrated here. The most revered place in the little street was at the *Pijqczka*’s [female drunkard]. At her pub, it was jolly every night. If a husband did not come home, his wife already knew where to find him. Quite a lot of scandals actually took place here in the middle of the night.

²³ [TN: Occupation, possibly small retailer.]

²⁴ [TN: Term coined in the 1890’s in ref. to New York’s high society.]

²⁵ [TN: Heb. “Seeks Good”; from Proverbs 11:27: “He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.”]

²⁶ [TN: Diminutive form of “balebosim,” or middle-class burghers.]

²⁷ [TN: Traditional Chassidic holiday fur hat.]

²⁸ [TN: These were usually knee-high, and were worn with breeches.]

Cheders, Talmud-Torah²⁹

Ul. Warszawska and Krakowska were populated by Jewish families. The majority of these streets' children studied at Icek Krasser's - an angry, strict, broad-boned teacher. Girls, too, learned at his *cheder*, but not together. When the boys studied, the girls sat in the yard and vice-versa.

The second *cheder* was Mojsze Lerer's³⁰. He was a tall Jew, who always had gastric troubles and could not sleep. He would travel to the *Rebbe* of Rozprza³¹ to hold a *Melave Malka*³². For the Jewish holidays, his pupils would make rattles [for *Purim*], tops [for *Hanukkah*] and decorations [for the *sukkah*]. He would often take them on a "*majówka*" [long outing with a picnic]. The majority of the children from the *Aleje* studied with him.

That same year, the first *Talmud-Torah* was opened on the *Rzeka* Street. Towja was the first *melamed*. Many children, aged 6-18, studied in this *Talmud-Torah* – big boys, mostly from the countryside, barefoot, who were only first starting the *Alef-Beis* [alphabet]. Had Towja studied with each pupil separately [as was done when studying the alphabet], he never would have finished. During the winter, this *cheder* was closed due to the snows and frost - the poor children had no boots and no *baszłyky* [warm hats with flaps to cover the ears and neck]. The mothers of those children, who did have warm clothing, were ashamed to send them to the *Talmud-Torah*.

The winter of 1889 marked an historic moment in the Jewish life of Częstochowa. Many Jews arrived from various localities, from villages and towns. In the surrounding localities, Jews were simply dying of hunger and cold. From there, they flocked to Częstochowa, where people gave charity and there was a free *Talmud-Torah*. Many poor households were crowded with the incoming families. The rich could not bear the [constant] knocking on their doors. The *Kehilla* called a meeting of the city's wealthy burghers and it was decided that the poor households would be given coal, a few *gulden* a week in accordance with the size of the family and, in addition, coupons for bread and potatoes. It was announced in the synagogues that all those in need were to come and register. The registration took three days, during which Markusfeld delivered a speech to the assembled Jews and explained to them that one did not need to be ashamed to accept charity. Wealthy women also made the rounds of the houses to see who needed clothes. Doctors, the first among them, Dr Rus and Dr Wassertal, extended free aid to the sick.

Many children died that winter. One Luzerl was supposed to take them away to the cemetery but, instead of carrying them to Kucelin, he buried them in the snow. In the springtime, the little dead bodies were found in the middle of the road.

That same year, immediately after *Peisach*, the *Talmud-Torah* was relocated from *Rzeka* Street to Potters Street - [to] a large building with a gate in the front. There were two divisions: one with Towja for the *Alef-Beis* children and the other, where the *melamed* was Reb "*Lulka*" [Pipe] Hendel, for *Chumash* with *Rashi*³³.

In 1890, the *Talmud-Torah* children had a joyous winter. The town elders came to the *cheder* with shoemakers and measured every child for boots. Many children received warm clothes and *baszłyky*.

²⁹ [TN: A *cheder* (pronounced "chajder" by Polish Jews) was a one-classroom religious school, usually in the teacher's own home, whereas a *Talmud-Torah*, while sharing the same religious curriculum, was a normal-sized school with numerous teachers for different ages, and was maintained by the *kehilla* or other institutions.]

³⁰ [TN: Although this surname does exist and is quite common, in this case it may be a nickname, as it means "teacher."]

³¹ [TN: *Rebbe Awrum-Mojsze Waltfried* of the *Przedbórz Chassidic* dynasty.]

³² [TN: Festive meal held on Saturday night to see off the *Shabbes*, usually held not long after the night had fallen; as *Rozprza* is over 70 km from *Częstochowa* (although there was already a railway then), he could not have set off before the close of *Shabbes* in the evening – if this *Rebbe* lived in *Rozprza*, either he began the *Melave Malka* at a very late hour, or prolonged it far into the night.]

³³ [TN: Hebrew Pentateuch with the basic commentary by the medieval French sage, *Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki*.]

On Hanukkah, treats were given out and they also put a few kopeks into the little packages. A few weeks later, the old Ginsberg died. All the *Talmud-Torah* children marched to the station, waited until the train arrived from abroad and, under a thin, damp snow, accompanied the casket with the prestigious *bar-minon*³⁴.

The City Grows

In 1893, a few ramshackle little houses could already be seen on the road next to the Three Crosses. Houses also emerged on the other side of town, near Blachownia. On the Goats Street, Majer Biczner erected his large "*kamienica*" [tenement house] with a courtyard - a whole *shtetl* with cobblers, tailors, Wolf Kac with an inn, Kize Malarz with a mangle³⁵. At the front was a Chassidic *shtiebel* and, on the second floor, the lame cobbler recited some bit from a play by Goldfaden. There was another large building on the Potters Street, just across from Drewniak's pub, whose first apartment was decorated by Izka's Marjam. This apartment is of importance due to a later story about Lipa Goldbaum. Another new edifice was built on the Potters Street - the dwelling of Kasriel "*Stodoła*" [Barn], the first refuge for our future heroes - Jakow-Ber Zilber ("*The Lame Staluch*"³⁶), Icek Lewi, Josef-Hersz Grajcer, Szaja Glezer, the lame Kopl [and me,] Chaim-Lajbe'le Szwarc.

The *Nowy Rynek* [New Market] saw the appearance of old clothes dealers, shoemakers, fruit sellers, [and] grains and herring shops. Szyja's son Herszl still had his good, honest name, as did Kasriel Szenker³⁷ and Majer-Lajb Helman. Henech Lapides, immediately after his wedding, opened a book business. His competitor was Emanuel Bajgele. Both of them supplied the Jewish readers with reading materials, which usually consisted of tales such as *The Twelve Robbers*, *The Deceived Bride*, *The Wounded Groom* and so on.

On the corner of the Meat-market Street, in front of the "*Tymme*"³⁸, stood the lemonade vendors – the Kopels³⁹, dressed in white clothes with the tall caps on their heads; Szaja "*Stopa*" [Foot] with *kvass*⁴⁰ from the very [St.] Petersburg itself; Nuchem-Jankel Fridman with a barrel on his shoulder, with a long, tall bird over his head, wrapped in a red turban with two golden tassels. Nuchem-Jankel was also an "actor", his best role was "*Hotzmach*"⁴¹. And, in this manner, he would also offer his lemonade, "As I am Hotzmach – may the ghost take me! – buy this lemonade, made by the Bubbe-Yachne⁴² – as I am a Jew!"

Szlojme Kutner, a Jewish gangster-type wearing a Jewish cap with a lacquered visor like the Gentiles, stands next to Nuchem-Jankel and claps to the beat. Welwe'le "*Dziekani*" [The Dean], a town fool, appears on the marketplace stage, raises his stout stick to the heavens, proclaiming, "*I am king of all the rate-drivers⁴³ of Germany... I am the general of the field marshals!*" The beggars by the wall of the "*Tymme*" play their Jasna Góra melodies on fiddles. A second "actor" appears - Hersze'le Bajtom⁴⁴, a diminutive, little Jew with a twisted [walking] stick. He sings a song, dances, snatches up a tossed *grosz*

³⁴ [TN: Aramaic, lit. "removed (be) from us"; euphemistic term for deceased person or any calamity, used in order to distance the evil from the person mentioning it.]

³⁵ [TN: Large roll weighted with stones for pressing water out of laundry.]

³⁶ [TN: At the end of this book, p. LXV, it is explained that he earned this nickname when he broke his knee in childhood, and people began calling him "*The Lame Staluch*" after a well-known lame "*stelmach*" (cartwright) in town. "*Staluch*" was a mutated form of "*stelmach*."]

³⁷ [TN: Although this surname does exist, it was most likely the man's nickname – "*Tavern-keeper*."]

³⁸ [TN: Heb., impurity; term by which religious zealots referred to the church.]

³⁹ [TN: This could be either a surname, thus meaning "the Kopel family," or the given name Kopl with a possessive apostrophe, i.e. "Kopl's family."]

⁴⁰ [TN: *Kvass* is a traditional fermented Slavic beverage commonly made from rye bread.]

⁴¹ [TN: Character in Abraham Goldfaden's play "*The Sorceress*."]

⁴² [TN: *Gossipy Granny*; witch character in the same play.]

⁴³ [TN: In old Germany, a rate-driver was apparently a sort of royal tax or interest collector.]

⁴⁴ [TN: Most probably a misprint, as he appears in the book "*Czenstochov*" (1958) as "*Hersze'le Beatus*"; the Hebrew letters ם (M) and ס (S) look very much alike.]

Leisure Activities on Saturday

It is a wintry *Shabbes* afternoon. The “*Shabbes goyim and goytes*⁴⁹” had kindled the cooking ranges in the morning, tended the fire at lunch time and received their tot of liquor and chunk of *challah* [festive sweetened bread]. The community had finished praying, eating and singing *zmires* [traditional mealtime songs], and were pleasurably taking their *Shabbes* rest.

In some houses, however, such as Jaworski’s or Peczka’s [?], they spent time on Saturdays in a different manner: housemaids, Jewish soldiers and young cavalymen got together there and sang Jewish and Little Russian [viz. Ukrainian] songs. Inside the house was warm. The melting frost, from the window panes, dripped onto the sand on the windowsill. In the sand, there paper cones were stuck, filled with cotton wool and secured with coloured paper. The silk shawls and the [St.] Petersburg galoshes came off and the girls told stories of their opulent [employers], of marital propositions and of their *shtetls* and villages. Naturally, these were poor children from foreign localities. The “Good Boys” had no control over these girls - provided they had somewhere to go.

Afterwards, they began dancing. The girls sang:

*Who compelled you then? –
You drove yourself crazy,
tra-la-la, tra-la-la
Na prawo! (To the right!)*

*Who told you to get married? –
You buried your own face,
tra-la-la, tra-la-la
Na lewo! (To the left!)*

Tired out, they restored themselves with a sweet or some other titbit that the girls had brought with them. Then, they began dancing the “*Broyges Tantz*⁵⁰”:

*You are angry with me –
I do not know why –
you go around all day long with your nose pointing down!*

And:

*Perhaps you desire a kiss from me –
one, two, three, four...
For another, yes, but for you – no!
La-la-la-la-la...*

⁴⁹ [TN: Gentile men and women who perform tasks for Jews on *Shabbes* which the Jews themselves are prohibited from doing. The Jew is not allowed to tell them explicitly what needs to be done, nor may he offer direct payment – thus the arrangement with the food and drink, as follows.]

⁵⁰ [TN: Traditional Jewish “Dance of Anger (and Reconciliation)” performed at weddings.]

And on they sang:

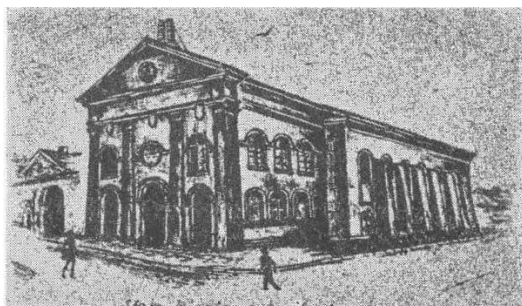
*Where is that boy who desired me,
who promised me a handkerchief with gold?
There he stands, behind the wall –
holding the handkerchief in his hand...”*

[Before] heading home, they danced a polka, a *csárdás* [Hungarian folk dance], and a *rach, czach, czach*⁵¹. These Saturday leisure activities continued until a fortnight before *Peisach*, when people started baking *matzos* at Elchune the headstone engraver's, Szamper's and others. Young and old, lads and girls - everyone worked at the *matzos*. The majority were rollers; a smaller number were flour mixers, kneaders, *redlers*⁵², oven loaders [and] carriers. They worked from six in the morning to eleven at night, and, sometimes, IN addition, a whole night through - with which they paid for their *Peisach* expenses. sometimes there was even a bit left for a new calico dress or a hat.

The Cholera

The rays of the setting sun, on a day at the end of summer, fall upon the Synagogue with the [adjacent] Study-hall by the River Warta, and light up the huge Stars of David in the stained glass windows, which radiate out to the world - "*From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised...*" [Psalm 113:3] But, in the streets encircling the Synagogue, there is darkness. Cholera has been devouring the souls of great and small over a whole summer. So great was the number of victims, especially in the hovels, on the hay mattresses with the stale, vermin-infested straw that the black casket [for transporting the dead during the funeral] in the Synagogue courtyard was left alone and the dead were taken to the Kucelin cemetery on ordinary carts.

The cholera of 1894 was actually combated with better means than the cholera of the 1870's. At that



The Old Synagogue

time, Majer Biczner - who was still a young man - along with a couple of *Chevra Kadisha* members, donned [white] burial garments, [and] rode around the city on white horses, waving swords at the heavens, [and] shouting, "*Angel of Death – be gone from our city!*" Now the city is larger, with more Jewish doctors, who are quite content with one or two *gulden* from a poor person and, many times, come absolutely free of charge and even leave a rouble for medicines. The Russian policemen - the fat "*Wachmistrz*" (*Wachtmeister*⁵³) Garbarski and the tall, lanky Bobrowski - go around the city, telling people to whitewash the gutters with lime and not to give the sick any unboiled

water to drink.

On ul. Warszawska, facing the government offices, stands a white house. This is the Jewish hospital. Inside [are] clean beds draped in white, [and] every little corner [is] sprinkled with carbolic acid. Languishing lips drink sterilised water and bless the Town Elders, who set p the Jewish hospital in an expeditious manner. These are Gajsler, Markusfeld, Ginsberg, Majer-Lajb Helman from the Old Market, Awreme'le Suberda from the New Market, Neufeld, [and] Imich. Those working there are the physicians Doctors Rus and Wassertal, a couple of *felczers* [parmedics], who do their work for free,

⁵¹ [TN: Refrain from the traditional Polish song "*Kapala sia Kasia w morzu*" (*Kasia was bathing in the sea*); presumably, there was a dance named for this tune.]

⁵² [TN: Those who make little holes in the finished *matzos* with a rolling perforator before being put in the oven, to prevent them from rising and swelling.]

⁵³ [TN: A military rank in cavalry and military police corresponding to a sergeant of other troops.]

and a poor girl [named] Gitla Zygas, who helped with the hospital's first patient - her father, Mendel Zygas - and remained there to care for the sick.

Nevertheless, there was enough work left for Majer Biczner to do – to go to the houses and give his condolences to the mourners.

The cholera, however, did not bring the work in the small Jewish factories to a halt. In Godl Wajnberg's ten-grosz clock factory on ul. Warszawska, in a large, dark room, they work from six in the morning until ten at night. The older girls, who are already brides-to-be, work at the presses. Their arduous life is poured out in the tearful melody of a folk song:

*I go out onto the balcony
To look over the shtete'le;
Up comes a little birdie flying,
And bows to me.*

The other manufacturer is Mordche "Dreksler" [lathe-turner"⁵⁴, also on ul. Warszawska, across from Kotlicki's - a short, little Jew with a beard down to his navel. His craft is casting lead chickens. He tries to find a way to make at least a hundred chickens in one casting. His son helps him at work and his mum (the "Mutter"⁵⁵ is how she wished to be addressed) says that he has the head of a minister. The "Mutter", who was the workshop's supervisor, was so fat, that they made a special soft bench for her. Five girls sat around her, decorating the little trumpets, rattles and silver bells. Her mouth never closes - she incessantly pours tea into herself. She is probably already at her thirtieth glass - it is a remedy against the cholera. She tells the girls, who are working, to wait until the night so that, when they go home, they are to boil a large kettle of water and, if they have no lemons or tartaric acid, they should use vinegar.

Koniarski's factory in Golda's building in the *Stary Rynek* [Old Market] is a bit more decent - he pays his employees a full 60 kopeks a week.

The street is astir. A *shikzeh* [non-Jewish woman] has collapsed in front of Smolak's bakery - one, two - and she was dead. Across the street, the publican at Federman's tavern - a healthy, young, tall Jew - lay himself down and never got up again. A rumour surfaced to the effect that he had been buried while still alive, due to the fact that his grave had split open. People went out to the cemetery, tore up graves and begged for forgiveness.

A red-haired *maggid* [itinerant preacher] came to town, [and] delivered a sermon in the Study-Hall to the effect that the cholera was a punishment for sin, [so that] they needed to repent, recite psalms and marry off orphans. They seized an orphan who had one burnt cheek and paired him with an orphaned girl. Women gathered flour, eggs, meat, [etc.] and they celebrated a town wedding in order to chase away the cholera.

The city was buzzing with religiousness. *Mezuzahs*⁵⁶ were checked, *tzitzis*⁵⁷ were counted, [and women] were not allowed to go outside without [a special] apron⁵⁸. Members of the *Shomrei*

⁵⁴ [TN: According to the *Who's Who* section at the end of the book, p. XCIX, this manufacturer's surname was Szaja.]

⁵⁵ [TN: Formal form of "Mother," instead of the "Mamme" habitually used in Yiddish.]

⁵⁶ [TN: Text from Scripture written on parchment which is placed inside a special casing and affixed to the doorpost; if the writing is incorrect or has deteriorated, the mezuzah is not kosher.]

⁵⁷ [TN: Ritual tassels on four-cornered garments with knots that are tied in a specific manner according to a Kabbalistic numerical system.]

⁵⁸ [TN: For increased modesty.]

*Shabbes*⁵⁹ Society rampaged on the *Aleje*, breaking poor housemaids' umbrellas⁶⁰ and youngsters pulled rubber combs from the girls' heads⁶¹. This went on until the High Holidays.

Apostates, *Dybbukim*⁶²

There was also a stir in town due to two new converts to Christianity. One of them was Chaim-Lajzer (Eliezer), a burgher with a wife and a grown daughter, who became an employee at Kohn's factory on ul. Teatralna. His wife sees him early every morning kneeling and crossing himself. Afterwards, he snatches up his prayer-shawl and phylacteries, prays, kisses the *mezuzah* and rushes off to work. The second one is Kopl, Mojsze Lerer's [son], a teacher who runs to church every day and weeps with bitter tears over the fact that he will never be given a Jewish burial. People in town said that he was the victim of a romance with a Christian woman.

Zelkowicz, who stands every day in the marketplace selling pork meat, is an apostate of a completely different character. He is a "Cantonist" – [viz.] he was abducted as a child and was sacrificed to become a soldier of [Tsar] Nikolay⁶³. He could not take the torments [in the army] and succumbed to conversion. But Szmul Zygas and the old Kelbeman, both Cantonists, chose to sanctify God's name [instead]. They had both preferred to die, rather than convert – they came back home as Jews.

In town, there are also two *dybbukim* [possessed persons]. One is Golda "*Dybbuk*". Some Ludwig speaks out from inside her. *Dybbuk* Ludwig shouts, "*The Jews, the Jews - they want to kill me!*" Golda soothes Ludwig, "Don't be anxious, Ludwig". She reminds him of the beer-halls in Hamburg, where they drank beer, *Kümmelschnaps*⁶⁴ and Bordeaux wine together. A broad smile sets itself upon Golda's features, and Ludwig says, "*Ja*, that time has passed... *Ach*, the girl at the beer-hall... Blue eyes... Golden hair... Sings and plays... I had myself baptised... *I am not a Jew – no! I am not a Jew!*" The only one who was able to placate Golda's *dybbuk* was Wigdor *Brukarz* [paver⁶⁵]. He would take her by the hand and yell, "*Calm, Ludwig!*", whereupon Golda would swear to be quiet.

Wigdor *Brukarz* recounted that during the sixteen years he had been in Germany, he had had a good friend Ludwig, who had fallen in love with a Christian maiden, the daughter of a beer-hall proprietor. For her sake, he had converted to Christianity. Golda "*Dybbuk*" had lived in the same courtyard as Ludwig and had apparently been in love with him. Following her marriage to her husband, Aba Sarwer, she suffered a nervous breakdown and convinced herself that Ludwig's *dybbuk* had possessed her.

The second one was Majer, with the two *dybbukim*. One *dybbuk* was a cantorial type, who would sing out, from within him, all the cantorial pieces from the liturgy of *Shabbes* and the holidays. The second *dybbuk* inside him was a Russian guard, who would give orders and curse in Russian.

Majte the baker-woman was Wigdor *Brukarz's* close neighbour. The aroma of the bread with caraway seeds, which she leavened, kneaded and put into the oven, wafted around the neighbouring buildings. Icyk-*Szpitzik* [Pointy], Majte the baker-woman's little son, would chase after beetles and cut the buttons off boys' breeches. Wigdor demanded of Icyk that he return the buttons – or else he would be sent to his father in America.

⁵⁹ [TN: "*Upholders of the Sabbath*"; religious vigilante group who enforced strict Halachic observance of the Sabbath.]

⁶⁰ [TN: Halacha forbids the opening, and indeed use, of umbrellas on *Shabbes* due to several reasons – but under regular circumstances, this would not have been considered a serious transgression.]

⁶¹ [TN: Combing one's hair is also forbidden on *Shabbes*.]

⁶² [TN: A *dybbuk* (pron. "dybbyk" by Pol. Jews) is a spirit or demon that supposedly possesses a person, causing mental or physical illness, requiring exorcism.]

⁶³ [TN: These abducted children were brought up as military cadets, and went on to serve for a compulsory 25 years in the Tsar's army.]

⁶⁴ [TN: Colourless distilled liquor flavoured with caraway seeds.]

⁶⁵ [TN: This is the author's own father, Awigdor Szwarc, who was a "*brukarz*," or paver, by trade.]

The High Holidays

The High Holidays were approaching. The *Getzevizne* (Częstochowa neighbourhood) was silent. The *Talmud-Torah* and the *cheders* were closed. Only the voice of Hendel *Melamed* on the top floor pours down, in a manner befitting *Rosh Hashana* - "The origin of man is dust, his end is dust..."⁶⁶

At the other end of the Jewish part of the city, at the very edge of Town Hall, a great many preparations are being made in Reb Szaja Szliten's dilapidated little building on the Goats alleyway. Folks make themselves up - they quarrel. The [holiday] guests are unable to divide the places amongst themselves - who will go to the *shtieblech*, who to the Synagogue and who to the Study-hall - to beg. In the meantime, they rehearse how to groan and cry "oy!", how to make themselves hunchbacks, [and] how to be blind and sing, "My eyes are closed, it is dark for me day and night..."

A guest has arrived – Icyk "Shlize", just out of the Piotrków prison. "Shlize's" number two is Josl "Japcok" who, in honour of *Rosh Hashana*, roughed up his father Nuchem the Cobbler and threw him out of bed. Josl "Japcok" is the terror of the Jewish streets, because he has the strength of a lion and no one can match him. Outside, girls who come to serve [as maids] in Częstochowa, are forced to pay him a fee.

And here is *Rosh Hashana* already. The Meat-Market [*Jatke*] Street and the Old Market [*Stary Rynek*] have been cleaned, but the smell that lets itself be felt here tells us that yesterday old fish, rotten *yengelkes* [⁶⁷], putrid plums and wormy apples were sold here. The peasants from the neighbouring villages know that it is a sacred day for the Jews and they do not come to town with their rural produce. Only one Gentile idly roams about in the street - this is Metzner "Pijak" [Drunkard], who would have starved to death were it not for the Jews.

The apostate Zelkowicz who, today, is not standing in the marketplace with pork meat, walks around on the Synagogue Street. His heart, he used to say, draws him to the Holy Ark and he sees his parents in dreams. He was nine years old when he was taken from them.

The barrel organ in Szaja Szliten's courtyard, with the bird that picks out the good fortune notes, is resting. The shutters in Moryc's "little house" [viz. brothel], near the river, are closed. The officers will not flog the girls with *spitzruten* today, the "Good Boys" will not beat them and the girls will not wink at the passers-by from the balconies. Uncle Moryc, a short, dark-skinned, little Jew in dark clothes with a golden chain dangling on his fat belly, holds his prayer-shawl pouch tightly, with a large prayer-book under his arm, and marches to ul. Krakowska, to the Faktor⁶⁸ *shtiebel*.

The *Rosh Hashana* sun warmed the little Jewish streets. Men with faded, well-worn black robes – some of which are still an inheritance from their grandfather's wedding clothes – rush to synagogues and *shtieblech*. Boys and their fathers are dressed in cloth⁶⁹ robes. The [married] women wear *Rosh Hashana* ribbons on their wigs, with padded busts and little cushions from behind⁷⁰; the older ones wear headbands – heirlooms from mothers and grandmothers – and in black dresses.

⁶⁶ [TN: From the "Unesanneh Tokef" prayer recited on the High Holidays.]

⁶⁷ [TN: Type of fruit; see similar names below, p. 45: "węgierkes, leżelkes, papierówkes."]

⁶⁸ [TN: See *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. I, col. 530 regarding this synagogue.]

⁶⁹ [TN: Many Chassidim are careful not to wear woollen clothes for fear of violating the law against mixing linen and wool.]

⁷⁰ [TN: Presumably for sitting on during the long hours of the prayer services.]

The women of the *Aleje* and the New Market [*Nowy Rynek*] dress in a very different manner - long



The Old Market [Stary Rynek]

gold chains around their necks, pearls, brooches with diamonds, jewelled earrings, rings with diamonds, and thick golden bracelets on their arms. The “sayers”⁷¹ carried large prayer-books and supplications⁷² to recite for those who did not know Hebrew.

Icyk “*Kikele*”⁷³ is also already going, decked out in a pair of trousers from which he falls out – a present from Fat Wolenberg – and a pair of shoes from which his feet protrude. His left eye is bound with a coloured rag. Urchins chase after Icyk, twanging out, “*Happy holiday, Icyk – may your prayers for a good year be accepted!*”

The Synagogue is lit up with hundreds of candles. Long threads of water [molten wax?] stream down the walls. The fine burghers, with the gold and silver *atures*⁷⁴, occupy [the places] from the Holy Ark to the middle of the Synagogue. Closer to the anteroom sit the simple Jews - those who haul sacks and chests, factory workers, bakers, tailors, cobblers, [etc.]. Outside, in front of the Synagogue, around the [Russian] *Ulan* [soldiers] - Mojsze “*Patze*” [Blunderer], Hersz-Lajb “*Dem Yumete’s*”, Abram-Ber Murzyn, Abram-Wolf Jankel’s, the “*Schnellzugen*” [Express Trains], the Boms lads and their devotees roamed about in an arrogant manner.

These same fellows are now the heroes of the Jewish street. They pocket a fee from the market stallholders, they take extortion money, but they also often protect the Jews from Gentile assailants, from attacks by hooligans and they dispense beatings when necessary. Sometimes, cleavers, butcher knives and the shafts of carts are also put in motion.

The City Becomes Larger and More Beautiful

The days are short and bleak. The deep mud is covered with thin ice. In the Jewish houses, the talk is of the death of [Tsar] Aleksander III [d.1894]. The public does not read the Russian and Polish newspapers from Warsaw and [St.] Petersburg. Apart from the Hebrew *Ha’Melitz* [The Intercessor], there are as yet no Jewish newspapers. The telephone is only used by a few large manufacturers, the Gradsztajns, and the governmental bank. Nevertheless, the news of Aleksander III’s death spread quickly, arousing sorrow and fear in Jewish hearts. People said that Tsar Aleksander had been good to Jews and who knew what the new king would be like? They consoled themselves with the fact that perhaps Nikolai II would be good to Jews after all, due to the fact that he had a Jewish lover - and what a lover she was⁷⁵!

⁷¹ [TN: Women prompting prayers to female worshippers.]

⁷² [TN: Viz. individual prayer-sheets.]

⁷³ [TN: As this surname was extremely rare, it is our opinion that it was a nickname. The word had different meanings in Yiddish dialects, among which are “tiny man” and “round bread,” but here it may have a connection to the fact that he was one-eyed, as “kiken” means “to look.”]

⁷⁴ [TN: “Crowns”; long strips of embroidered material, often with precious metals, which mark the part of the prayer-shawl which covers one’s head (orthodox Jews cover their whole body and head with a large prayer-shawl).]

⁷⁵ [TN: Apparently, a beautiful opera singer.]

In that same period, a soldier, who had shot a sergeant, was sentenced to death in Częstochowa. On Saturday morning, the whole city ran to see him shot. But, after his corpse had already been laid in the grave, a telegram arrived to the effect that the Tsar had revoked his death sentence.

In 1895, the Jews swore allegiance to Nikolai II in the municipal synagogues. The city had expanded greatly during that period. On the First *Aleja*, Pankowski constructed a new building with stuccoed ceilings, [and] large tiled⁷⁶ ovens, decorated with ornaments. New houses were also built by Kaliński on ul. Teatralna, Winer on the Station Street, Kruger in the *Blich*⁷⁷, Nomberg from Będzin on ul. Ogrodowa, [and] Drewniak on ul. Garncarska.

In the mid-1890s, electric lighting began to be installed. An electrical station was built across from the Russian church, behind the *koza* (prison⁷⁸). The first excavations were dug in the *Nowy Rynek* [New Market]. It was then that it was first discovered that the *Nowy Rynek* had once been a large cemetery, due to the fact that a large number of human skulls and bones were dug up. The small wall in front of the church, of which tales were told that in the olden days it had been a castle of King Zygmunt and that it had an underground passage leading to the church, also turned out to be a crypt.

The painting of the first pole for the electric lighting, in front of Imich's paint shop, was like a great performance. People gathered round to see the great wonder – who would climb up so high to the top of the pole and holding paint and brush to boot? This undertaking was carried out by the thirteen-year-old Chaim-Lajbe'le. The assembled crowd acclaimed him with laudatory applause.

Preparations were being made for the coronation of Nikolai II. The facades of the houses were painted and whitewashed, the gutters cleaned out [and] criminals released from the prisons. Those who took the greatest part in the holiday were the custodians. They lit up the gutters with lanterns and kerosene wicks. The more intellectual [members of the] public did not partake in the festivities. The Jews had not yet forgotten the pogroms in Ukraine, following the assassination of Aleksander II. In Częstochowa, too, the song of the Kiev pogrom was sung - "*The savage katsaps*⁷⁹ *with their paws - they have spoilt everything...*"

The coronation grounds⁸⁰ were dominated by drunken outcasts - brawls took place. Drunken officers staggered about in the streets, including Von Ehrlich, the police commissioner.

Immediately following the coronation, Częstochowa's Town Elders resolved to introduce a sewerage system into the city.

Theatre, Literature, Films

That same summer, *Małka Szwarcenkopf*⁸¹ was presented at the summer theatre on ul. Teatralna. Our Jewish lads used to sneak inside there on Saturday evenings. Those who did not have a ticket were content to at least peer in through the cracks in the fence surrounding the theatre. The piece was performed in Polish, but one scene in a Jewish *cheder* was enacted in Yiddish. A song that had been sung there also spread through the Jewish streets. This was,

⁷⁶ [TN: קאפליאנע in the original, which does not appear to exist and is therefore likely to be a misprint. The word for "tiled" is almost identical – קאכליאנע.]

⁷⁷ [TN: The name "Blich" appears in many Jewish localities throughout Poland, and it comes from the fact that in the past they used to bleach (blichować) sheets there; we do not know as yet where the "Blich" was located in Częstochowa.]

⁷⁸ [TN: Lit. "goat"; the definition given by the author was a slang word.]

⁷⁹ [TN: Ethnic slur used by Ukrainians in ref. to goatee-bearded Russians.]

⁸⁰ [TN: As Tsar Nikolai II was not crowned in Częstochowa, we may surmise that this refers to a place in town where the coronation was celebrated.]

⁸¹ [TN: 1897 play by Gabriela Zapolska.]

*“Jojne’le, Jojne’le, I want to tell you something
- take yourself a little wife already, but just do not beat her...”*

The little Jewish urchins also used to sometimes sneak into the theatre, where the king was Gege, the one who pasted advertisements. Also, thanks to Madam Szwarc, owner of the florist’s on the Second *Aleja*, a Jewish child could scramble up to the gallery. Sometimes, the “woźny” [custodian] would be slipped a copper ten-piece. The plays staged at the time were *Goście Przychodzą* (Guests are Coming), *Geisha* [and] *Halka*. Here, the little Jewish fellows caught the theatrical bug. Their “Rebbe” was Jakow-Ber Zilber, also known as “The Lame *Staluch*”. He brought the little ones together in Icek Lewi’s old *Talmud-Torah*, and rehearsed theatre there. Icek’s father Mordche’le, a short little Jew with sparkling eyes, and his mother Bajla, always wearing a long apron with a broad smile on her face, would beam with delight at [seeing] their son and the whole theatrical company.

The first performance, *Kuni Lemel*⁸², was put on at the *cheder* of Grojnem the *Melamed* on ul. Warszawska. People stood “on top of each other’s heads”. Everyone came to see their children, grandchildren and cousins performing theatre. People were spared the trouble of buying tickets. How the little fellows managed, without any assistance, without knowledge of any stage techniques, to conduct such a performance - is a wonder of God.

This same piece was staged for a second time on *Purim*, in the evening, at Mordche Korek’s tavern in Markowicz’s building in the Old Market.

A few weeks later, during *Chol Ha’Moed*⁸³ *Peisach*, a troupe of actors arrived from Łódź and put on the pieces [King] *Achashverosh*, *Shulamis*, *Bar Kokhba*, [and] *Beggars and Hungerman*⁸⁴. Renowned actors were part of this troupe - Piurnik, Akselrod [and] Cluwa the Blonde. All four nights, the theatre was packed with people. At the time, it was not allowed to perform in [pure] Yiddish, but only in a germanised form of it. Madam Szwarc came to the rescue, convincing the police commissioner that they were acting in “stage-German”. Von Ehrlich knew perfectly well that this was no German, but he was unable to refuse Madam Szwarc, the city’s beauty.

The Jewish street gained a wealth of new tunes. The fathers absorbed Cantor Zyskind’s beautiful melodies. The girls sang ditties from the theatre. Goldfaden’s songs were very popular at the time, especially those from *Dos Yide’le* [The Little Jew]. The Jewish soldiers, who came on Saturdays to Jewish homes, spread Little Russian [viz. Ukrainian] tunes.



The interest in literature also awoke in the Jewish street. People mostly read Yiddish translations of novels, which arrived from America. Shomer⁸⁵ occupied the foremost position. The youth was already thirsting for real literature. Books by Mendele Moycher Sforim and M. Spektor appeared. *The Mare*⁸⁶ [by the former] was particularly popular. Cobblers’ and tailors’ apprentices delighted in Tolstoy. Translations of Émile Zola appeared. A dawn

of enlightenment (*Haskala*) in general began and the youth thirstily absorbed the new ideas.

⁸² [TN: Protagonist in the operetta by A. Goldfaden, “The Two Kuni Lemels.”]

⁸³ [TN: Weekdays of the festival – days between the first and last holidays of *Peisach* or *Sukkos*.]

⁸⁴ [TN: All four also by A. Goldfaden.]

⁸⁵ [TN: Pseudonym of the writer Nahum Meir Schaikewitz.]

⁸⁶ [TN: In some editions, the title is translated as “The Nag” or “The Dobbin.”]

Częstochowa had begun to become the cultural centre which influenced the entire large surrounding region that was called Zagłębie or the Piotrków *governate*.

In 1898, the Jewish street was shaken up by the Dreyfus trial. The most popular literature became *Captain Dreyfus* [by Meir Jacob Freid], which was published in booklets. Antisemitism in Poland began showing its teeth.

That same summer, a Jew appeared in the Old Market with a box on his midriff – four, white, rubber tubes extended from this box. For three kopeks, Jews placed the tubes to their ears and heard singing. Posters appeared in the Aleje to the effect that, at the theatre, the world's greatest wonder would be shown. The wonders were a chest with a large trumpet on the stage, which sang “*Боже царя храни*” [God Save the Tsar] and other songs. Then, suddenly, the entire hall went dark and a white sheet appeared on the stage - two children in two little beds were throwing pillows at each other - feathers were flying, [and] groups of people, policemen, [and] firefighters were racing about.

People could not conceive of all these wonders and they took them to be black magic or conjuring tricks. However, the lads of the Jewish street had already read about Edison in the American publications and they knew that the box in the New Market and the chest with the big trumpet on the stage were gramophones and the witchcraft on the sheet was called “*żywe obrazy*” (living pictures⁸⁷).

In the square where the coronation [celebration] had been held, behind the [Russian] church, new streets were cut all the way up to Częstochówka. Not far from that church, a new post office building was erected with a large, wide courtyard, where the higher Russian authorities lived. In the days of spring and summer, this place was charged with the fragrance of the greenery of the trees and, from the open window, one could hear pianos playing the music of Tchaikovsky, Mozart and Schubert. It is no wonder that, when a child from the Jewish street sometimes wandered over there and, in his mind, compared everything that he saw and heard with the suffocating poverty of the poor street that sold milk from a farmer for a three-piece coin, chicory for a *kopek* (they knew nothing of coffee), and two sugar cubes for one *grosz* - strange thoughts awoke in his head.

The “*Lame Staluch*” (Jakow-Ber Zilber) felt he was ready to dramatise a new piece himself and to also act in it. This was *Simche Plachte* [a comedy by Jacob Prager]. The show was held on Purim, at the *Kupiecki* [Merchants'] Hall on *Tylina* [Rear⁸⁸] Street. Chaim-Lajbe'le made the decorations. After this performance, the little fellows began rehearsing *Uriel Acosta*⁸⁹. The banker Gradsztajn's daughter imitated the children of the Jewish street and founded a theatrical club for the rich children. The troupe put on one-act Polish plays.

Częstochowa expanded as if on yeast. In *Ostatni Grosz*, the Jewish apostate Hantke began covering up the mires with dirt and building an ironworks. In that same period, Lajbel Garbinski bought a large house on *Tylina* Street. Garbinski, who won a large sum of money from Hantke at cards, later founded a pawnshop, where poor people pawned their rings, watches and overcoats.

In 1899, *A World With Little Worlds*⁹⁰ appeared in Częstochowa. This little book spread like a flame of fire. It fell amongst the *yeshiva* students, causing veritable devastation.

New Winds

⁸⁷ [TN: “*Żywe obrazy*”, or living pictures, is the art form known as “*tableaux vivants*.” However, it is obvious from the context that the author is referring to motion pictures, or film.]

⁸⁸ [TN: *Ul. Strażacka*; the same hall was later renamed “*New World*.”]

⁸⁹ [TN: *Classic early Yiddish theatre piece, later adapted by A. Goldfaden.*]

⁹⁰ [TN: *Book by the Jewish iconoclast Mordechai Spektor, published in 1886.*]

In 1900, the great Calel [surname] from Piotrków, Harsze'le the Baker from Łódź, Mordche the Baker [and] Kopl the Lame came to Częstochowa, bringing with them new plays and new tunes. A new star arrived - Lipa Goldbaum, a turner from Łódź who took lodgings with Miriam Izka's or Wolf Boms. Lipa was the first teacher of science and political instruction in the circle to which belonged Chaim-Lajbe'le, Josef-Hersz Grajcer, the "Lame *Staluch*" [and] Kasriel Rotbard ("*Stodoła*"). In the circle, we discussed Parliamentarianism, Tsarist rule and natural sciences. That same year, Werde from the needle factory bought the aged care home in Ostatni Grosz. During that same period, the Częstochowa coachmen and porters brought a [new] Torah scroll into the synagogue, with music, torches and dancing in the streets, as is the custom.

In the month of Tammuz of that year [July 1900], three *Częstochowers* - Chaim-Lajbe'le, Josef-Hersz Grajcer and Jakow-Ber Zilber - set out to wander the world. [They] stole across the Austrian border, came to the town of Trzebinia [and] rented a pub for two *gulden* to perform "theatre" in the evening. But, instead of an audience, a mass of children came with *kreuzer* [1/60 of a *gulden*⁹¹]. The proceeds in the cashbox were one *gulden* and 75 *kreuzer*. The "actors" jumped out the window with this money and set out on the road once more.

From Trzebinia, the lads travelled on foot to Kraków, from Kraków to Chrzanów and Oświęcim and, from there, back across the border near Olkusz. For *Rosh Hashana*, they were back, once more, in Częstochowa.

New winds were blowing. It was the time of the ascent of Zionism. Dr Herzl's name gained renown far and wide. The Tsarist government did not hamper the Zionist activity. The Zionist *maggidim* preached in the synagogues that Redemption was nigh and that the Land of Israel was about to be purchased from the Turks. Zionism especially seized the middle class and the youth, who felt that the ground was sinking under their feet. Young men and women held Zionist balls, poor burgers saved up and bought a [Zionist] *shekel*⁹².

Antagonism to Zionism came from two sides - apart from the Polonised Jews of the "higher" society and a part of the middle class, who had completely distanced themselves from Jewish life. The religious Jews – *Chassidim* and rabbis – moved worlds and preached in the synagogues that only the Messiah could redeem the Jews from exile. From the other direction, the Socialist agitation on part of the first little circles in Warsaw, Łódź, Wilno, [and] Białystok had already reached Częstochowa. The Socialist Labour Movement, which preached fraternity and liberation through struggle and revolution, had begun.

Others gradually began to be drawn into the Socialist Movement, among others, the religious youth also. The [political] enlightenment influenced the *yeshiva* students most of all.

Fathers and mothers mocked - and some even beat - their children, who wished to topple [Tsar] Nikolai. But there were also such fathers, and even entire families, who worked together with the Movement.

The fight between the religious Jews and the "*Achdusnikes*"⁹³ flared up. A fabricated story was spread throughout the city that, in Łódź, the "*Achdusnikes*" had dressed up a dog in a prayer-shawl and phylacteries, and had paraded him through the streets. "*Achdusnikes*" became a pejorative term. The

⁹¹ [TN: By 1900, the Gulden had already been replaced by the Krone, but perhaps people still used the old name.]

⁹² [TN: The Zionist "shekel" was a membership fee paid by adherents to the movement.]

⁹³ [TN: According to the yet untranslated Yizkor Book "Gqbin – The Life and Destruction of a Jewish Town in Poland" (p.170), these were members of an early secret society named "Achdus" (Unity), that had close ties with the Bund, and which was comprised of young atheist-revolutionaries.]

fights and scuffles between the leaders of the Freedom Movement and the “Good Boys” became more frequent and more embittered.

In 1901, the arrival of a new and fresh current, which tore into the poor Jewish streets with a rare momentum, was already felt strongly. Many new publications from America appeared. In the winter, new fashions appeared amongst women. The long gowns that trailed in the mud disappeared, [and] the little [padded] cushions lay strewn in the street. The shorter dresses, the high button shoes, the little, low hats over the crossed braids, the red pelerines and the short parasols added much charm to the young Jewish female workers. [So] the lads also began to dress up. The caftans became shorter, the caps smaller. They put on paper collars, with stiff paper shirtfronts and paper cuffs. But the trouble with them was that the shirtfronts slipped out from one’s waistcoat right in the middle of a “chat”, the cuffs had a propensity to fall off one’s wrists, the “*spinkes*” (cufflinks) broke and the collars opened up.

In the evenings, we went out to the First and Second *Aleje* and held discussions. The favourite topic was still: what is the sky, the stars, how large and how distant is the sun, what are thunder and lightning, and so forth. We also talked about politics. Jewish love songs and traditional tunes, that had hitherto been sung on *Shabbes* in the little, squat houses, were now being sung on the benches in the *Aleje*, and many new songs arrived - *Ha’Tikva*, *Dort Wo Die Zeder*⁹⁴, [etc.] One beloved folksong was:

*The clock has already struck twelve,
Take me home, take me home.
What excuse will I give
My mother back at home?
The first excuse you should give:
You worked late, you worked late.
The second excuse you should give:
You got lost on the way.*

Kopl the Lame brought a new song from Łódź, written on a little piece of paper:

*It was snowing and raining,
It is sorrowful in the street.
I met a little girl,
Poor, naked, and pale.*

We did not yet know that this poem [or song?] had been written by Morris Rozenfeld. Moncz [Mancia?] Biber brought a workshop poem back from London:

*The machines are running, the wheels are clanging;
In the workshop it is dirty and hot.
The head becomes confused,
The eyes go dark;
Dark from the tears and sweat.*

Things began to stir in the small factory, where adults and children worked. The words “bourgeois” and “proletariat” quietly crept into the workers’ mouths.

⁹⁴ [TN: “*There Where the Cedars (Are)*”; old Zionist anthem by Leon Kalisz.]

The young bunch gained new friends - students and intellectuals. The first were Markus Goldberg, Markus Cymerman, Goldsztajn from the First *Aleja*, [and] several girls. A clandestine meeting was held in the attic in Godl Wajnberg's courtyard on ul. Warszawska.

In 1902, in the month of Shvat [Jan-Feb], all Częstochowa was on wheels [viz. astir]. One man – a baker – had led astray a girl named Chana'le. He gave her abortion drops and the girl had died. Chaim-Lajbe'le wrote a song at the time, entitled "*Chana'le's Death*". Henech Lapidés bought this song for five roubles, and gave it to be printed in a little book. This song, in the Yiddish of those days, reads thus:

*In the afternoon at three o'clock,
Whoever was in front of the Shames' house;
The sombre funeral cortege began,
For those who had seen this misfortune.
A rush, a scream, a commotion;
A cry amongst sisters and brothers.
The mother with a choked voice:
Chana'le, where are you being taken?
Oh, dear God, what has befallen me?
Chana'le, I shall never see you again...”, and so on.*

The song, *Chana'le's Death*, spread not only throughout Częstochowa, but also in many cities in Poland. Girlish eyes filled with tears while singing this song and housemaids poured out their bitter hearts with it.

The Pogrom

The approaching High Holidays were already felt in the air. More so than on all other Thursdays, the marketplace became ever fuller. Seasonal fruits were displayed - *węgielkes*⁹⁵, *leżelkes*⁹⁶, *papierówkes*⁹⁷ - as well as vegetables that were brought in from the surrounding rural villages. Knowing that the women, on Thursday, need to shop for *Shabbes*, the peasants bring in chickens, eggs, ducks, [etc.] The fishermen put out the *sondak*⁹⁸ [and] the long pikes in basins of water with carp, not long from the Warta, swimming. The ladies with their maidservants, the *balebostes*⁹⁹ with their apprentices, and many, many, poor women with baskets will soon descend upon them.

Next to the fishermen stand the second-hand clothes sellers with their stands - trousers, jackets, shirts and coloured kerchiefs. The coachmen and porters are waiting to make a few *grosz* for *Shabbes*. Sacks of groats, beans, chickpeas, broad beans, oats, coarse salt, [and] soaps, and barrels of herring are set out in the shop-fronts. The rich purchase *schmaltz*¹⁰⁰ herrings and roe; the poor - little herrings with lots of milt (*mleczakes*¹⁰¹), to have something to chop up together with onions and vinegar, for after the *Shabbes* [morning] prayers.

⁹⁵ [TN: "*Śliwka Węgierka*" in Polish meaning "Hungarian plum" or common purple plum.]

⁹⁶ [TN: The book "*The Community of Żarki*" (1959) explains on p.42 that "*leżelkes*" (from the Polish word "*leżeć*," which means to lie recumbent), are a variety of pear that is harvested green, and then kept in straw until ripening.]

⁹⁷ [TN: Variety of apple called "*Papierówka*," or "paper thin" in Polish and "White Transparent" in English.]

⁹⁸ [TN: Plural form of "*sondak*"; possibly ref. to the fish "*Sander lucioperca*" of the perch family, which is called "*sandacz*" in Polish, and which was a very common freshwater species in Eastern Europe.]

⁹⁹ [TN: The wives of middle-class merchants and craftsmen.]

¹⁰⁰ [TN: Yid., fat; "*fat herrings*" are caught just before spawning, when the fish's fat is at its peak.]

¹⁰¹ [TN: Yid.; from the Polish "*mlecz*," or milt, i.e., the semen of the male fish.]

The “Good Boys,” pickpockets, [and] knifers, loiter about near the carts and fruit sellers.

Among the fruit merchants, the quiet, modest Dawid Oderberg also stands, with plums. At nine o’clock in the morning, the Polish woman Teofila comes to him with a basket and tells him to measure out several quarts of plums for her. Once the plums are already in the basket, she suddenly starts yelling that Oderberg should give her the money back - she does not want the rotten Jewish plums. Dawid looks at her in astonishment and says, “*Pani* [Madam], but you have not paid me for the plums”. Teofila then began screaming loudly, “*Paskudny Żyd!* [Nasty Jew!] *Give me my money back!*” The plums spilled out of her basket. Hooligans arise as if from beneath the earth. [They] upset the racks with fruit, turned over the stalls and began hitting people. Coachmen and fishermen rose up against them with whips and staffs, butchers arrived from the Meat-market Street. Nuchem-Jankel Fridman, Hersz-Lajb “*Dem Yumete’s*”, Majer “*Riz*”¹⁰², [and] Majlich Kutner got themselves involved in the fray - they brought shafts from the wagons and returned blows. But so many hooligans arrived, that it was impossible to fight back against them.

The crazed mob rampaged across ul. Warszawska and ul. Krakowska, looting shops and smashing window panes. Messengers ran to all the factories to stop work, because Jews were thrashing Christians.

At twelve noon - lunch time - a frenzied multitude poured forth from all the factories. The marketplace was already cleaned up, [and] the shops were closed. There was no longer any Jew to be seen in the street. The rabble-rousers, who later arrived from the more distant factories – Hantke’s, Pelcer’s, [and the] Szpagaciarnia - carried out a pogrom in the Jewish streets in the wildest manner, with stones and iron [bars]. They caused the first and greatest destruction on ul. Warszawska. Pinie Kamiński’s barbershop was torn into little pieces.

It is clear that this pogrom had been carefully prepared in advance by Polish antisemites and was formulated to occur when the military were not in the city. The police, too, did not show themselves in the street. There were just a few soldiers in town.

Markusfeld sent several telegrams to Warsaw, [requesting] that the military be sent to Częstochowa, before it came to victims *en masse*. Warsaw notified [him] that the military would be sent at once. In the meantime, the pogrom continued undisturbed, with the [battle] cry “*Bić Żydów!*”¹⁰³ (Beat the Jews!). The streets became covered in broken glass and feathers. Jews lay hidden in cellars, up in attics, [and] many with Christian neighbours.

About one o’clock at night, Markusfeld was still standing in the *Nowy Rynek* [New Market], waiting for the military. The mob then tore into *Tylna* [ul. Strażacka] and ul. Ogrodowa. All of a sudden, the military appeared, marching through the First *Aleja* in a straight line to the “*Tymme*”. The pogrom perpetrators pelted the soldiers with rocks [from] behind the “*Tymme’s*” stone enclosure, yelling, “*Beat the Moskale!*”¹⁰⁴The first fusillade ensued, after which the army marched into the church courtyard. The hooligans ran away. By five o’clock in the morning, the military had already spread throughout the city. At around six o’clock, Gentiles were already being led to the police station with things they had robbed.

That Friday was a frightening one for the Jews. Many Jews fled to the neighbouring towns. People said that the real pogrom would only start on Friday night, in such a manner that not a single Jew would remain from the Three Crosses to the *Getzevizne* [Jewish quarter]. Janów, Myszków, Żarki, [and]

¹⁰² [TN: “*The Giant*”; a porter and synagogue usher, who is described in *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol I, col. 794, as having been diminutive in stature but corpulent and of prodigious strength.]

¹⁰³ [TN: “*Bi Żydów*” in the original.]

¹⁰⁴ [TN: *Muscovites*, viz. the Russian soldiers.]

Kozięłowy had guests for *Shabbes*. A dead stillness reigned in the streets. People were not allowed to sit down in the marketplace and the *Aleje*. Military patrols marched up and down.

Chaim-Lajbe'le, the author of these lines, was in the street that entire day and night - many times in the very middle of the wild multitude. In the morning, he found the Potters Street littered with feathers and down. In many houses, the few pieces of poor furniture were broken. Looted shops were boarded up. When Chaim-Lajbe'le knocked on his parents' door, he heard no answer. Only later did those gathered emerge from their hiding places. On Saturday, he travelled to the small *shtetls*, to set at rest the minds of the Częstochowa Jews there.

The trial against the pogrom perpetrators that was held in mid-winter was a tragic farce. Many were released altogether. Some received a couple of days in jail, and some six weeks - but specifically in the Częstochowa jail, so that they should not lack food and drink, Heaven forbid!

The Polish newspapers in Warsaw wrote that the Jews themselves had arranged the pogrom. The [St] Petersburg *Frajnd* [Friend; Yiddish newspaper], as a formality, printed just a few lines. Chaim-Lajbe'le therefore dedicated a song to the pogrom:

*“Just listen, people, to what has happened,
What in our city has transpired.
A misfortune has found us Jews:
[They] burned, beat and robbed.
There has not yet been such woe
As there was in Częstochowa [when]
In the month of Elul, on the ninth day,
This misfortune happened to us.
At nine in the morning
A Christian woman comes up;
She ordered plums for herself.
All of a sudden, she abruptly shouts, ‘Żyd,
They are not good –
Give me back the money!’
Notes went like telegrams.*

*Into the factories:
‘The moment [the whistle] at twelve blows,
You are to go out to the street.’
The moment twelve blew,
They emerged from the factories
With yelling, force, and clamour;
In the market and streets
[They] pummelled [and] smashed;
Became ever wilder and wilder;
Laid merchandise out, turned counters over,
Tore into houses of the poor.
The hands of the hooligans
Set fire, burned,
Plucked bedding and tore it apart.”*

The Pogrom Song soon spread throughout the city. The Piotrków publisher, Benjume (Benjamin) Libeskind, was to have bought this song, but Henech Lapides beat him to it, paying ten roubles and published two hundred printed copies. Abram “*Hon*” [Cockerel] (Szwarc) went out into the market with this song and sang it loudly.

That same year, Josef-Hersz Grajcer was taken into the army. With his departure, the young group lost one of its leaders.

In 1903, clashes began amongst the various, still small, party groups. The Russo-Japanese War broke out and people fled¹⁰⁵ - the majority to London. The compiler of these memoirs also left his hometown during that period.

¹⁰⁵ [TN: To avoid being sent to the front in the Far East, as happened to many Jews.]