

“Toughs”

Just as in any other city, in Częstochowa too, there were “toughs” whom the people feared. There were different such types, namely in the political and financial arena. The “toughs” in politics were individuals with an ideal, who were prepared to sacrifice their lives in the struggle against oppression. To these belonged the revolutionary Icek “Shlize”¹ [The Slippery], from the times of the revolution in 1905 in the fight against the Tsarism of old.

During the [anti-Jewish] riots instigated by hooligans and *Endecja* members, the attackers always avoided the neighbourhoods where the “toughs” resided, because there they could receive what was coming to them.

The “toughs” in the financial arena were people who had their own interests in mind and displayed their power in business and commerce, casting fear upon the population. In the forefront were the *całkownicy* [wholesalers] Jankew “Wamp” [Yid., Tripe], Szmil the Red and others.

A few years before the War, the financial situation of the Jewish middle-class, merchants and craftsmen severely worsened. This caused many [unpaid] bills of exchange to be protested, as a result of which requisitions also ensued. The “toughs” performed the role of buyers or, for a proper sum, would not let the requisitions go through. Quarrels would also happen amongst the “toughs” themselves and, more than once, they would come to blows, which invariably ended with a little glass of liquor at Luzer *Hunchback’s* or at Mancze’s.

Characteristic, noteworthy types were Jankel “Dzióber”², Lajb “Trask”³ (*Decker*⁴), Nuchem “Ajsew’s”⁵, Gawrisz⁶, Godl Chanina’s, Lajbel “Kraków”, Mojsze “Kokl”⁷, Perecl Pintowicz [sic Funtowicz], “Geller” Sru⁸, “Geller” Awrum, Szyja’s Muty, Herszl Pitrek [?], Herszl Zajdman, Mancie “Schnellzug” [Express Train] and others.

For the most part, the “toughs” had nicknames, which characterised their origins or distinguishing qualities.

¹ [TN: As we mentioned above in a footnote to the chapter “Shamoshim” (p.360), the author retracted this statement in 1958, contending that Icek “Shlize” had in fact been nothing but a common gangster.]

² [TN: As “dziób” in Polish means “beak” and can also be used colloquially to denote “nose”, we may surmise that this nickname was the equivalent of “Big Nose”.]

³ [TN: Yid., resounding crash/crack/knock.]

⁴ [TN: It is unclear whether this was his surname – which is highly unlikely as there are just a handful of examples thereof in the official records, and none at all in the Częstochowa area – or a second nickname; in either case, the name is derived from the Ger. verb “decken”, which is to cover/guard/protect.]

⁵ [TN: As unlikely as it may seem, this nickname probably means “Son of Esau”; the biblical Esau – whose name is pronounced “Ajsew” in Polish Yiddish, and after whom no Jew would ever have been actually named – was the Patriarch Jacob’s “evil twin brother” and is considered by religious Jews to be the antithesis of all that Judaism stands for.]

⁶ [TN: Apparently diminutive form of Gawryl (Gabriel).]

⁷ [TN: Possibly from the word “kok”, which means coke (as in the coal-based fuel) in Yiddish.]

⁸ [TN: Although Geller is also a surname, in this case it is most likely a nickname meaning “Yellow”, or blond.]