

For Alkona Chrobolovsky's 70th Birthday



How can I write about Comrade Chrobolovsky on his 70th birthday, if I have only actually known him for twelve years in America? How can one evaluate a man whose blossoming years lay in the legendary past of bygone, revolutionary, Jewish Poland, when today one sees before one an older man with the furrows of profound experiences on his countenance?

I am holding, in my hands, the third issue of *Unser Weg*, the central organ of the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party (*Vereinigte*) in Poland. The copy is from 6th December 1918 and, among the contributors to the journal, there also appears the name "A. Chrobolovsky". That is to say that he already belongs to the venerable past of that tempestuous, freedom movement and all he can do now is to remember, with agony and love, the thirty-seven years which lie between then and today.

[Then,] there is the impressive volume *Czenstochover Yidn*, which was published not long ago in New York, thanks to the active participation of A. Chrobolovsky. You turn its pages with respectful awe and, in its innumerable names, pictures and memories, you once more see the figure of the vanished, ardent centre Częstochowa, where our friend's youth sprouted to its full growth. Once again - the past, to which one is bound with a cord of sorrow and loyalty.

And one may receive the impression that the man Chrobolovsky and Comrade Alkona already belong to the **history** of our creative generation and that, with their names, one can only feel blessed, but no longer expect anything of them for the today and for the future of our people. If this seems so, it is an absolutely, erroneous impression which does not convey the picture of this man and [that of] the face of our epoch. He is not "*a brand plucked out of the fire*" [Zechariah 3:2] - that burnt piece of wood, which has remained after the revolutionary fire of that grand era. He is, on the contrary, the living continuation of that period - the spiritual toiler, who does not allow the fire of an annihilated blaze to go out.

This power of endurance of Chrobolovsky's, into his seventies, is truly a wonder, because - precisely due to the fact that, through all his days, he has been sincere in his beliefs - he was to experience, not once but thrice, the pain of disappointment. Did he not, with his own eyes, see how bit-by-bit the mighty dream of the Russian Revolution dwindled away? Did he not experience, with deep agony from afar, the unbelievable annihilation of his Jewish people in Poland^{*}?

Nevertheless, [despite] carrying this triple disappointment in his heart, he has never expressly succumbed to despair. On the contrary - his voice rings out in Jewish America's faint air with a particular clarity and trustworthiness.

Within him resides an amalgamation of an acute realism regarding reality and of a lofty vision regarding the future. He does not let himself be fooled by the supposed achievements of the Jews all

^{*2} [TN: Isaac Nachman Steinberg was the editor of the "Afn Shvel" [At the Threshold] magazine which is quoted several times in this article.]

^{*} [TN: As the author only enumerates two disappointments, we may surmise that the primary disappointment which he does not name is that of ageing itself.]

around [viz. Zionists and Israel] - his realistic sense of sight warns him [against] this. He does not let himself be overcome by the forces of cynicism, indifference and independence - his sense of imagination warns him [against] this. This twofold nature of Chrobolovsky's spiritual character is manifest in all the realms of his social interest. He perceives, first of all, with a sharp eye, the maladies and falsities of today's global Socialism and, yet, he is a staunch believer in its aspirations, promises and dreams. His attention is primarily and continuously [focused] on the Socialists - to the Jewish people's working men. He is not just a Territorialist, but an outspoken **Socialist** Territorialist.

In *A Bit of Soul-Searching*, which he published in *Afn Shvel* (March 1954), he relates:

Already as a child, I had an outstanding love for nature and an aversion to all dead and dry things. With great tumult, they had to drag me to cheder for the first time. But it was there that I first began to yearn for the orchards, for the river and the green meadows of my shtetl. It was this same yearning for a freer world with orchards, rivers and fields which later drove me to the Socialist Movement.

In his older years also, our friend has not renounced this yearning - hence his intrinsic devotion to *Freiland* [Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation]. But his heart is not solely set on the dream of a future, because, [as] he writes:

*Never did my vision of a free and broad Jewish life tear me away from the Jewish reality. Our striving for a Jewish Freeland, formerly and currently, does by no means imply renouncing Jewish life here. In America, the waves of the surrounding assimilation are much stronger than in the vanished communities of Europe. We must, therefore, multiply these two elements - guarding ourselves from the waves of assimilation and striving for a Jewish Freeland – **tenfold**, if we are to ensure our existence as a nation among the nations.*

Is the dream of a Freeland the only safeguard the nation has against all these perils? And what about the bloodstained present? Chrobolovsky answers this with extremely clear words:

*A Jewish Freeland does not start from tomorrow, but from today - with each day of our lives. The road to a Territorialist Jewish Freeland runs through the **Jewish Freelands**, which we are now already creating where we live, because there is no tomorrow without a today. In our striving for a Freeland, we put the emphasis on the Jewish People and not on the land - which is, for us, only a means and not an end goal.*

"But what does the current Jewish [people] today look like in America?", Chrobolovsky asks, and he spares no words in his anguish. Take, for example, the Jewish schools in cellars. He says (*Afn Shvel*, February 1955):

*But the Jewish school in the cellar is more than an isolated case - it is the teary symbol of Jewish America. These schools have lately emerged from the cellars and attics, but they have all been confined to the **cellar of lowness**. And, together with them in the cellar - if not lower, is already our Yiddish Theatre, the Yiddish book – the entire Yiddish cultural life in America. The great spokesmen of ours, who occupy the forefront of the Press, are also, to a great extent, answerable and are partly to blame for this. Their punishment shall be the "eternity of the cellar".*

Chrobolovsky is not prepared to lower his hands. He does not just blame others, but himself also. And his self-reproach is, at the same time, a call to action. He says (*Afn Shvel*, June 1953):

My great culpability can be laid on [all of] us - the Socialists of our time. We have lost our fighting spirit and let lowered our hands, almost as if collapsed under the dreadful downfall which we have suffered through Hitler's destruction.

But it does not need to be so. We can raise ourselves up from under the leaden burden, if we so wish! And see with what enthusiasm, from those Cześćochowa years, he calls to our thinkers (*Afn Shvel*, October 1955):

Come, dear Zionists and non-Zionists, come Jewish writers in your still large numbers - keinehora - to the living Jewish world, with your suffering and joy, with your tragedy and humour. Come to your own selves, to your own golden youth, when you loved, hated, believed [and] created values, when you protested against every wrongdoing perpetrated against life and against people. Bring the people consolation, a little festiveness, merriment [and] joy, for it is gloomy and cold everywhere – it is late in the night.

This same spiritual enthusiasm which he demands of others, he has recently displayed before our eyes, in its full force, upon publishing the large *David Edelstadt Memorial Book*. In preparing this book, he invested much more than organisational skills - he helped to build it like a spiritual building of our time and, in each brick of this building, he inserted his deep faith in the people's future, his unadulterated Socialist belief [and] his profound deference for the Jewish poet and thinker. He, together with others, demonstrated that anything can be accomplished, even in our disturbed times, when one is carried with the impetus of a juvenile dream and an adult maturity. I should like to conclude the salutation to my friend Chrobolovsky with his own words. He said them in his brochure *Folk oder Sheyvet* [People or Tribe]:

Neither Hebraist-Zionist tribes nor sovereignty can compare with the concept of a People, because the People is the mighty force which has passed through seven infernos and survived; a force which has built Poland and Lithuania, Israel and Jewish America, [and] which has created both the Sacred Tongue and Yiddish. The People are the rainbow which appears in the sky after every deluge and which gives one the strengths not to fall into despair, not to become tired, to continue carrying the flag, to once more build and create.*

Let us, today, congratulate the flag-carrier and fearless believer in Our People, Comrade Chrobolovsky.

**Congratulations from the State of Israel
on Alkona Chrobolovsky's 70th Birthday
(from Dr Józef Kruk, and A. Gotlib – Secretary of the
Cześćochower landsleit in the State of Israel)**



***Alkona Chrobolovsky
and his wife Helen***



***Alkona Chrobolovsky's only
daughter Chawa'le, with her
husband and two children***

My beloved and esteemed Alkona,

I had always been convinced that you were younger than me. Now, it emerges that you even out-distance me. On my part, I shall now run galloping to send over to you my heartiest congratulations and the warmest feelings from the depths of my soul.

I wish to say to you, today, that you were one of the closest people, friends and comrades that I had in Poland and particularly in our dear Cześćochowa. I still remember how I became acquainted with you

* [TN: Biblical and rabbinical Hebrew, as opposed to the newly created modern Hebrew.]

during the heroic period prior to the First World War, during which the greatest ideals and courageous struggles were revived. In Częstochowa, soon after the First World War, I knew that you were one of the people upon whom one could rely with absolute trust, for you would not be frightened by any difficulties, sacrifices and persecutions in your noble endeavour to realise the ideals of all humanity and of the Jews as a people.

I have known and **recognised**, during my life, many people, among them, the greatest personalities and fighters of our generation. And I also know how to evaluate them. I have come to the conclusion that talent is not enough for a person to be of worth. First and foremost, the person's *character* is necessary. You, as well as many other comrades, were so dear to me precisely due to your character - with the commitment to the ideal, with respect towards the worth of a person [and] with love to the people and to mankind's humanistic aspirations of freedom.

With brotherly greetings, your devoted

Józef Kruk

(Jerusalem, 3rd October 1956)

To our friend Alkona Chrobolovsky,

The courageous fighter for human rights [and] indefatigable activist for Jewish culture - on his 70th birthday, our heartiest blessings!

We wish you many more long years of continuing your useful creative, cultural and social activity.

Secretariat of the Organisation of Częstochowa Jews in Israel

A. Gotlib – Sec.