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## An Easterly Streak (A Poetic Chapter)

### A

An Easterly Streak across from the hills of Judea,  
Ignited a lust amid the youths and girls  
To wander off to Palestine.  
They tore themselves from their *shtetl* homes,  
To become pioneers, to become *Shomrim*<sup>\*1</sup>.  
They switched from the Polish "*Do widzenia*"<sup>\*2</sup>  
To the Hebrew "*Shalom!*"  
[They] grew into Germans<sup>\*3</sup> with pince-nez on the nose,  
And called, roused, and talked  
About "some Herzl" and "some Jewish State."  
True, the meaning thereof was unknown,  
Therefore, in postcards Herzl was seen  
Leaning, half the sun in the background,  
On the Basel bridge by the Danube.  
And this pulled more than words, than books.  
One could literally see the red rising East,  
Over Mount Canaan, over Mount Zion,  
And Herzl's beard flamed with the sun,  
Like the eyes that were dreaming thereof.

Hell stirred the *shtetl*'s ground  
On the sunny *Shabbosim*, on the calm Sundays.  
*Shabbes* – they went off to the hot fields;  
Girls in white blouses, with blue skirts;  
Men's socks, men's shoes, haircuts like men –  
And lightly they sauntered, lightly discussed  
In their ringing half-Polish-half-Hebrew.  
*Shabbes* – to the scorching fields went  
Young lads in shorts, with bare, hairy knees,  
With their shirt collars turned down;  
The thick manes over the eyes.  
They only hoped and waited,  
To learn how to walk after the plough,  
Just like in the picture of the pioneer in the Society –  
Or to actually travel off somewhere, to learn to break stones.  
One way or another – the hands were prepared,  
Even if they were as yet whitish and slight.  
One way or another – they would meanwhile see the world.

And what about the calm, sunny Sundays?  
Why, yes! Girls spring towards you laughing,

And stick in your lapel a playful flower.  
Those with beards and caftans recoil from them with a –  
"Well!"  
"How the libertines delude themselves!"  
"Some sort of impure dream, which is no dream at all."  
"Look at that! Who is going to bring the Messiah?"  
"They need to be hounded until they're destroyed!"

### B

This precisely strengthened the stubbornness for Zion!  
Every sunny Sunday, gangs of youngsters travelled off.  
Only the parents make it difficult for them –  
They look each other tearfully in the eyes the whole while;  
They fall on one another's shoulders.  
"After all, we're not travelling to Palestine yet, Mother!"  
But the mothers?  
Such soaked eyes follow long down the road;  
Who else can thus feel a child in parts unknown?  
Here, at the station, they still have Mother's milk –  
But as soon as the train starts moving,  
The first night they get the taste of a cold plank,  
Then they will know what big cities are.  
One travels only to Częstochowa to become a pioneer.  
A bed, a postcard with a ship, and bread await there;  
Such an ideal, which is stronger than need!

What home? Who, home?  
They swore by Zion, the holy banner;  
Walking in the Częstochowa fields,  
In half-mud, in half-lime,  
After the plough, after the horse –  
And singing of sweat, the song of the sun.  
The soil is uneven, the soil is thick –  
The strands of hair on the forehead sing along.  
And what if the blistered hands burn,  
[And] the peeling shoulders glow under the sky?  
They had, after all, travelled to train –  
Not just for the sun, not just for the soil,  
But for plagues, fires, for prickly plants,  
Clashes with robbers, and attacking guns.

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\*1 [TN: Jewish Scouts]

\*2 [TN: See you later!]

\*3 [TN: Viz. secular, enlightened Jews.]

Częstochowa –  
 It is hard of these things to write to a mother.  
 The bit of baking from home is all finished,  
 [As is] the bit of clean clothes – the starched shirts;  
 And I'm left without a towel, without a pair of socks.  
 Our wages meagre, we live on the little that is distributed to us –  
 But we shall soon be in Palestine for it!  
 That is why all the youths from Rzeszów came here:  
 Sanne the Black, the locksmith Majer, and Sruliek,  
 Who crossed the difficult waters  
 Of the Wisłok in Rzeszów, up onto the Lemberg [Lwów<sup>\*1</sup>] bridge.  
 No, we shall not return from Częstochowa!  
 A pioneer needs to learn everything that may come to pass  
 On the sandy Palestinian soil.

## C

This was certainly not Grandfather's dream,  
 Who went off to die in the Land of Israel!  
 But what the Easterly Streak did have,  
 Was something that awoke one  
 To build and to break;  
 It was something like being away from home.  
 Like leaving a father, a mother, a sister.  
 Girls – such as Bajlka, Cyrla, Szajndla;  
 Girls – such as Hudes, as Choma, as Chajka,  
 Will never see Rzeszów again!  
 They had at the station sworn by Zion,  
 Not to return to the soil of the *shetet!*

Towards the red Easterly Streak the train set off,  
 With their songs, with their mothers' tears –  
 And the Polish darkness swarmed before the window.  
 Ach, how they wished to see Częstochowa already,  
 To see in which manner begins Palestine!  
 Of course, they knew of the resounding  
 Jezreel Valley, the Sea of Galilee, Mount Carmel, or Ein Harod;  
 Of those blue skies and sulphur [yellow] stars;  
 Of the rocky hills, of sandy thickets;  
 Of the weathered asses and camels –  
 On Mojsze Amkraut's Happy [Jewish] New Year's cards,  
 These were depicted.

## D

Those went from boyhood on into desire;  
 Now, when it came to the *turnister*<sup>\*2</sup>,  
 Donning all the weaponry in face of distant perils,  
 The bit of ground under the two feet did burn.  
 You thought not of Good, of Evil;  
 Young, such was the ardour to travel to inherit the Land!  
 Day in, day out, soaking in muds, in downpours;  
 They learn on the fields of Częstochowa  
 How the Land of Israel is to grow.

True, not all could endure it:  
 Some fled homewards at once,  
 The shamed eyes they could not raise –  
 But most stuck to the plough,  
 Flung themselves into the pioneering force.  
 If one adapts to Częstochowa,  
 One must sing the nights away  
 With the "Longing for Zion"...

It is unbecoming to let a tear down for home!  
 The heart must become as hard as a board,  
 For this is just the start of the bitter cities.  
 There...the nights, the caves, the valleys;  
 There...the knife under the shirt;  
 There...a pioneer is – a commune;  
 There...a commune is – a pioneer.

## E

Because it was not easy abroad,  
 Many in fact returned home,  
 And told of the poverty suffered.  
 They did not come back like those from Berlin,  
 With lacquered shoes, striped trousers with turn-ups,  
 Fine chains, and amber cigarette holders,  
 And haughtily bragged to the world.  
 Those who from Częstochowa returned,  
 Looked as black as the field there.  
 The delighted in everything familiar to them –  
 Even if you drove them out, they would never leave Rzeszów  
 again;  
 One time they felt the taste of the foreign;  
 They will value the chunk of bread, on Shabbes the shirt.  
 No, they will from Rzeszów budge never again –  
 Except to a place one comes to on holiday,  
 Like those to Antwerp, to Vienna, to Paris,  
 Who later return on a day that was set.

Yes, a dream is beautiful while one's still at home.  
 But those who in such dreams had no desire,  
 Indeed swapped Rzeszów for Częstochowa.  
 For it was from there that this [all] began:  
 That on Sundays they swore in the fields,  
 On winter nights in the societies they read,  
 And by withstanding – they learnt!  
 Youths – such as Chaskel, as Srul, as Sanne;  
 Youths – such as Szmul, Lajbcze, Janek,  
 Will never see Rzeszów again!  
 Would the Palestinian nights fall hard?  
 A pioneer there was not like in the Rzeszów field,  
 Where in the summer they learnt to be Shomrim.  
 They had the gymnazjum left for Zion –  
 Perhaps that was why the fire in them remained fresh.  
 They had never yet been from their houses away;  
 Never yet travelled on trains,

<sup>\*1</sup> [TN: As Rzeszów and Lwów are not near each other at all, the reference is presumably to a bridge on the road leading to Lwów.]

<sup>\*2</sup> [TN: Military rucksack; presumably worn in training.]

## G

But had only dreamed of the great world.  
See, God, that they should not return embittered!

As firmly as Herzl is pinned on their lapel,  
They set confidently out on their first road.  
What matters a mother's tear before such a way?  
A tremor gathers with the longing,  
When one is for months away from home, all alone.  
Then, on one's bed in that darkness,  
Loom forth stern Father, tender Mother;  
The left-behind sisters who envied them  
For having gone out to the world.  
Then, on one's bed in the distant soil,  
Mother's tear slaps you on the cheek,  
And you envy those who envy you –  
But to write home of it, you'd be ashamed!

Well, since I've already travelled – let it be so!  
Blue is a sky, blue is the home.  
And blood is young, and blood is passion;  
We shall carry through the sweat, the dream.  
Of course, piercing winds will come towards us;  
Of course, we shall walk in half-mires;  
Standing in caves, with shovels on us.  
But for that we shall be distant from Rzeszów,  
And not [just] die for nothing, with a straw in the mouth –  
Watching the sun go down over Town Hall,  
On the green clock with its weathered dials.

## F

Who did not see a bit of black from Dad and Mum,  
After their son, their daughter, went away?  
Who did not see the speechlessness of their dread,  
When for months letters did not appear?  
You had not avoided Dad and Mum,  
But they did not wish to look you in the eye!  
They had gone lost, like a stone in a bog.  
About how far is Częstochowa from Rzeszów?  
Nevertheless, it was as if seas stood in the way.  
If only a trace of the child would appear!  
Had they at least travelled somewhere in ships,  
Then it would still be comprehensible.  
What would really happen, across the actual sea?  
How could Mother get her rest,  
If Sanne was somewhere, roaming about?  
Palestine –  
A ruin it had made of her Sanne!  
Was Father then correct,  
In saying to wait for the Messiah<sup>\*1</sup>?

No letters arrive from across the Mediterranean.  
From that sea comes the Easterly Streak!  
Once enflamed the *shtetl* youth,  
They will leave their yearned-for homes,  
To the mountains of Judea, to the fields of Moab;  
To the mountains of Edom, to the sands of the Red Sea –  
And they will go to the Hermon, to the borders of Lebanon.  
There they will conquer, there they will rise,  
On the way splitting the sea, for those yet to come,  
Who will sing the song of the Prophets,  
From their words of castigation – to the Song of Songs.  
Nothing will deter them, nothing will hold them up –  
Not the necessity, not the hunger for bread –  
From following the calling of the oath  
Which in the fields on *Shabbes* they had sworn,  
When they were learning to be *Shomrim* and pioneers!

Here, in the middle of the marketplace, stands Kościuszko<sup>\*2</sup>  
sculpted.  
The stone cloak is green, the sword is blunt.  
Pigeons on his hard head doze;  
Discarded feathers [are] on him the dusters –  
And Kościuszko himself sinks from year to year.  
Here, precisely around *him*, the Jewish State is spoken of –  
Here, precisely around *him*, Rzeszów town becomes repugnant –  
Here, precisely around *him*, Palestine is spoken of –  
Here, precisely around *him*, Home becomes small in one's eyes –  
Here, precisely around *him*, Dad and Mum will not be asked,  
And they will not be stopped by any buckshot, or Death!

## H

Get thee out<sup>\*3</sup> – Not for your sake, Częstochowa,  
Did they leave Father's house,  
But to be a blessing to the Land of Canaan,  
Shall they as pioneers enter the Land of Israel!  
No, not for your sake, Częstochowa,  
Did they flee Rzeszów, as if from a plague!  
The scant youth had anyway torn off to the World,  
Once lands in the head had started to mix.  
A frenzy to travel, as if after a draft,  
Began on carriages, on trains,  
With detached young men, with maidens strong.  
With a strange lust, with a strange desire,  
They went out, as if conscripted, on the long road.  
Sanne the Brown – [he] was the "eldest."  
He gave out commands, behaved as in battle.  
There was a bit of the Parisian courage within him,  
There was a bit of the strength of the peasants within him.  
He shouted and encouraged!  
He encouraged and shouted!

<sup>\*1</sup> [TN: The anti-Zionist ultraorthodox factions argued that Jews were neither entitled nor allowed to settle the Land of Israel before the coming of the Messiah.]

<sup>\*2</sup> [TN: Polish military leader and hero (b.1746-d.1817), who fought in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's struggles against Russia and Prussia.]

<sup>\*3</sup> [TN: Genesis 12:1: "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:" ]

Sanne – where had he learnt to conduct himself in such a soldierly fashion?  
 Just on his own, on the ground between trees and fields,  
 When boys went out there on *Lag Ba'Omer*<sup>\*1</sup> with little rifles!  
 He had always been pulled towards green pastures and trains.  
 He had at Father's tavern always lived among knives,  
 The perils of Gentiles never had held him up.  
 In the winter, through far snows from *cheder* he walked,  
 With the lantern pinned on his breast,  
 As if led by God.  
 Of course his heart tossed amid the white dread,  
 But, carrying the *Chumash*<sup>\*2</sup>, the [weekly] section would for him  
 intervene,  
 If he rehearsed what he had learnt in *Vayigash*<sup>\*3</sup> today:  
 "And Israel took his journey with all that he had,  
 and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices...  
 And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night,  
 and said, Jacob, Jacob!  
 And he said, Here am I!  
 I am [God,] the God of thy father,  
 Fear not to go down into Egypt..."

I

With such conviction did Sanne  
 Leave Częstochowa for Palestine.  
 He was followed by the voice<sup>\*4</sup> of *Vayigash*,  
 By those snows, by the peril of Gentiles.

Now he takes his *Chumash* on the road,  
 Like the others travelling with him.  
 Whether students or craftsmen they may be,  
 The *Sidder*<sup>\*5</sup>, the *Chumash*, lay on the heart.  
 In one's mind clamoured the white *Seider*<sup>\*6</sup>,  
 Which is different from all nights of the year.  
 Along followed the yellow *Haggadah*, sodden  
 With the wine that had been sprinkled: *DeTzaCh, ADaSh,*  
*BeAChA*<sup>\*7</sup>.  
 Yes, one wept during "We were slaves";  
 One was warned to remember the Temple;  
 One was stirred by *Pour out thy wrath*<sup>\*8</sup>.  
 Afterwards, the door became easier,  
 Easier the whole home.  
 Elijah the Prophet had from Mount Carmel  
 To Rzeszów descended.

Sanne with all the boys,  
 Had for Elijah opened that door –  
 They were now from Częstochowa travelling to him.  
 No, the seas would not turn their ships up!  
 They would not – instead of to Palestine –  
 Travel to alien America or distant Argentina.  
 Sanne had sworn, simple as he was,  
 To take up two handfuls of the Land of Israel,  
 And, like his mother, in heightened tones,  
 He made a blessing over the whole Land!

\*1 [TN: Festivity between Pesach and Shavuot on which bonfires are lit.]

\*2 [TN: Individual book of the Pentateuch, in this case Genesis, studied by boys in cheder.]

\*3 [TN: "Then (Judah) came near"; the 11<sup>th</sup> weekly Torah portion, constituting Genesis 44:18–47:27. The subsequent quotes are from said portion.]

\*4 [TN: Cheder study is conducted out loud, in a sing-song manner.]

\*5 [TN: Prayer-book.]

\*6 [TN: It could sometimes have been snowy in Poland on the nights of Pesach, or perhaps the reference is to the white robe the person conducting the seder wears.]

\*7 [TN: Hebrew acronyms for the Ten Plagues: blood, frogs, lice, beasts, pestilence, boils, hail, locust, darkness, first-born. For each plague, one drop of wine is sprinkled. The subsequent quotes are also to be found in the Pesach Haggadah. ]

\*8 [TN: Psalm 79:6: "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name."]