

Dave Horowitz-Larochette

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTES TO

### Index of Names Mentioned in the Book *Czenstochover Yidn*

The index for *Czenstochover Yidn* taxed my faculties to the utmost. There are several reasons why this work proved to be so difficult.

The index was compiled by Motl Berkowicz, who was born in Częstochowa in 1919. All I could find out about him is that, at some point, he arrived in America and that he wrote the article on p. 32 of our current book titled "*A Jewish House in Częstochowa*". I don't know whether he was a Holocaust survivor or if he made it to America before the War. The reason I say this is because the amount and, more so, the very nature of the mistakes he made in this index *actually seem intentional* – which I realise is inconceivable.

But, as his article ("*A Jewish House in Częstochowa*" in *Czenstochov*, p.32) proves, he was proficient in Yiddish and he certainly had a very distinct sense of humour. That article stands out as the only truly comical account in the whole *Yizkor* book. And, if you read it closely, you will note he actually has a rather malevolent streak, as he pokes fun at all the people he describes in his article. All this makes me think he may have had some hidden agenda. Possibly, he had some quarrel with the Book Committee - maybe he was disgruntled because he wanted more of his writings to be published.

Be that as it may, these are just *some* of the different types of errors/difficulties that I encountered:

- 1) It is apparent that he wrote the list by hand, as there are many typical mistakes one makes when misreading Hebrew handwriting, such as confusing *Daled* for *Tzadik* and the *End Fey* for the *End Tzadik*.
- 2) There are several nicknames that he took for surnames, such as father and son Icze-Ber and Alter Rotbard, whose family was nicknamed "*Stodola*". So he has listed them both twice - once as Rotbard and a second time as "*Stodola*" - despite the fact that *Czenstochover Yidn* gives both their surname and nickname in the same paragraph.
- 3) Sometimes, he renders the names of several individuals as being one person. One such instance is his cryptic entry: "Benny, Harry - 317". When you look on p. 317 you find it says: "Benny, Harry, and Morris **Kuperman**". He has a separate entry just for Kuperman, Morris, but he's turned the other two (brothers?) into one Harry whose surname is Benny!
- 4) He confuses or fails to identify famous people. In one case, he simply enters "Aleksander". But, when you look at the individual pages, you see that once it is a reference to Tsar Aleksander II of Russia and another refers to King Aleksander I Jagiellon. A similar entry is: "Żymierski, Rollo – 231", which I now know refers to Field Marshall Michał Rola-Żymierski.
- 5) There is a testimony from a Holocaust survivor in *Czenstochover Yidn* which was given by one A. B., which the book identifies as Aron Brandes in the following quirky manner: "A(haron) B(brandes)". What you find in the index are *two* entries: "(Haron), A. – III" and "Randes, B. – III".

- 6) One entry reads: "Krist, A. – 78". Incredibly, what it actually says on p. 78 is: "... *an experienced professor, a Christian*". "A Krist", of course, means "a Christian" in Yiddish.
- 7) Very often, Hebrew words and expressions are used in Yiddish. One such case is the term for "eyewitnesses", used on p. 402 – "*edei-reiah*". In the index, we find: "Reiah, Eddy – 402". I had to rub my eyes several times when I saw that one. I thought my mind was already playing tricks on me.
- 8) You may be familiar with the abbreviation ***Shlit''a***, which is added to the names of famous, living rabbis. It is short for "may he live to [see the] light of good, long days". People habitually say, "I spoke with the *Rebbe Shlit''a*" – it's very common. To my amazement, there is an entry for one "Szalit, A. – 104"!!

I think these examples suffice. Sadly, the whole index is riddled with dozens and dozens of such crazy entries.

We cannot say that Motl Berkowicz did not understand Yiddish or the Hebrew expressions used in it well - he was a writer! Unless he was in an extremely confused or troubled state of mind, he could not have possibly made such horrible mistakes.

Despite all the obstacles, I believe the index makes a lot of sense - now that I've practically rewritten it – and, as such, may be reliably used. One issue though – you can imagine that I did not have the time to check every single page mentioned in the index, to verify whether the page numbers are all correct. I did find several incorrect page numbers which I, of course, corrected.

Despite all the eyesores in this document, the majority of the names are actually quite meticulously rendered. There are clear distinctions between very similar names, such as Jakow, Jakub and Jacob or Morris, Moryc and Maurycy - and likewise with the different spellings of surnames. Any name or surname which my custom dictionary did not recognise had to be looked up first in *Czenstochover Yidn* to see if it was not a misprint and then in the archives or other historical sources to find the historical spelling. Where [?] appears next to a certain surname/name, this does not necessarily mean that I was unable to decipher the original, but rather that the surname either does not exist at all, or is extremely infrequent. In some cases, I have suggested potential alternative surnames, also in brackets.