

They Were Three Brothers (The Perished Wilczyński Brothers)



The three Wilczyński brothers, who perished in the great destruction of Polish Jewry, were well-known in Częstochowa. They always put their communal activity, which was bound up with their ideological life, at the service of the Jewish proletarian man. But besides this, they were also united in one great passion - their devotion to Jewish culture.

The three Wilczyński brothers, whose lives were clean and honest, wrote a fine page in the golden book of our community of Częstochowa.

Therefore, in order to illustrate their activity, we shall acquaint our townsfolk, as well as the regular Jewish reader, with their life and may their biographies be remembered by all with the same love that these three brothers showed for our beloved hometown and to our Jewish life, which was severed during the great Jewish destruction in the days of Hitler, may his name and memory be obliterated.

Jechezkel [Chaskiel]



Jechezkel Wilczyński

Jechezkel was the oldest brother in the Wilczyński family. Born in 1893, already in the years of his youth, when he was still learning at the Częstochowa Crafts School, one could discern his character and his great thirst for knowledge. But what drew everyone's attention, above all, was his treatment of friends and peers and to people in general, which manifested itself in friendship and affection. He deepened this same quality in himself to an even greater degree once he completed the Wawelberg [Mechanical-]Technical Secondary School in Warsaw, which opened the way for his subsequent studies. In the years before the First World War, while studying mechanical engineering at the Berlin University, and later, as a good engineer, he comes into contact, for the first time, with the issues of social equity and injustice. There, in Berlin, he approaches the ideals of Socialism, with which he remained all his life.

At the beginning of 1919, Jechezkel Wilczyński returns to Częstochowa and soon throws himself into communal work. He becomes active in the Bund, in the Jewish Professional Movement, etc. During that period, he is a lecturer in history and literature at the Jewish Professional Union's House of Culture. He then also begins his literary activity. He publishes his first work, [which was] about Romain Rolland, in the *Arbeiter Zeitung* [Workers Newspaper], in which he later becomes a respected contributor. In his weekly column, *From the Table of Books*, he presents overviews of Jewish and Polish literature, and of almost all new books. He also contributes to *Der Proletariat*. He writes articles about contemporary social issues, mainly in the realms of literature and history, in the editorial [boards] of the *Częstochower Wecker* [alarm-clock], the *Piotrkówer Wecker* and in numerous publications of the Bund's provincial press.

In 1927, Jechezkel becomes Director of the ORT Vocational School in Piotrków, which he transforms into a model school, in which Jewish youth find a friendly [helping] hand. The crafts school helps

them become productive. He works there until 1930, when he returns, once again, to Częstochowa where he makes attempts in the field of metal manufacturing.

In 1933 he again leaves Częstochowa and settles in Warsaw, where he is active in the Bund's Jewish Production Cooperatives and, simultaneously, he finds time for cultural work among the toiling, Jewish masses. During that period, he is occupied with two important works. In Warsaw, he publishes [articles] in *Folks-Cajtung* [People's Newspaper (Polish spelling)], *Faroy's* [Onward], *Literarische Blätter* and *Bücher Welt* [World of Books]. Part of his work [was] *Yiddish-Polish Translations*, which also contains a large bibliographical list of works from the Jewish literature which have been translated to Polish.

When operations begin in 1932 to create the *Częstochower Pinkes* [Ledger], we see Jechezkel Wilczyński as the secretary of the committee. He does not concern himself, however, with the social aspect of the publication, but delves deeply in the old Częstochowa ledgers instead, seeking material for his important work *On the History of the Jewish Settlement in Częstochowa*, parts of which he publishes in the *Częstochower Zeitung* and other publications.

He issues the brochure *Bourgeois and Workers Sport*, which is a new take on the sports problem in the Jewish environs. He later publishes his work *Jews in Polish Literature* in book form, which is very well received by the critics.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Jechezkel is in Warsaw. In the early days, when the situation of the Jews in the provinces becomes clear, he makes efforts to bring his close family to Warsaw. But he fails and, for a certain time, falls into an apathetic mood. Later, however, according to the historian B. Mark, Wilczyński becomes very creative, despite the great need he suffers in the Warsaw Ghetto. During that difficult period, he works on *The Cultural History of the Jews in Poland in the First Half of the 19th Century*. Jechezkel then [also] writes depictions of the ghetto life. Thus we find, in the compilation *Between Life and Death*, which presents materials that were found by digging in the Ringelblum Archive,^{*} Wilczyński's poem of the time *In the Labour Camp*.

The sorrowful, difficult period for Jews becomes ever more bitter and, when the great January *akcja* [operation] of 1943 ensues and thousands of Warsaw Jews are dragged to the *Umschlagplatz* [transshipment point], the gentle Jechezkel is also there. Jechezkel perishes at the bloodied hands of the German murderers.

Anszel

The middle Wilczyński brother, Anszel, always sought to do good. Literally all his life, he was intent on aiding the simple men of the people, whom he strove to elevate.

Anszel believed that only through the implementation of socialism would a new world be built, in which all people would be happy. Anszel gave all his strength to the socialist cause - his knowledge [and] his education, which he had attained with so much hardship.

Anszel was born in Częstochowa in 1900. To the age of thirteen, he studied in *cheder*. The little Anszel already showed his outstanding capabilities in *cheder*. It was apparent that a great scholar among the Jews was growing. But the study of the Talmud and Halachic writers did not satisfy Anszel. He switched to secular studies. Before long, Anszel mastered both languages - Russian and

^{*} [TN: Collection of documents from the Warsaw Ghetto during the Second World War.]

Polish - and he reads many Polish and Russian authors, mainly the classics of Russian and Polish literature.

In his parents' house, there was a lack of a livelihood. Anszel starts working very young, immediately after his *bar-mitzvah*, in fact. He works at a pharmaceutical supplies shop. And there, in that shop, Anszel also finds time to study. It does not take long before Anszel becomes a "completed" chemist.

The years pass. Anszel is required to present himself for service in the Polish Army. Due to his opposition to militarism and his hatred towards Polish antisemitism - which prevailed at the time in the Polish government - he decides to flee Poland. But to Anszel's misfortune, he is apprehended at the border. He is sentenced to sit in prison for some time. However, he manages to extricate himself from imprisonment and, this time, he succeeds in getting himself out of Poland. He arrives in Germany, to his older brother Jechezkel.

Anszel becomes active in the German Socialist Movement. He assiduously takes part in all the street demonstrations. He is frequently arrested by the German police and sentenced to imprisonment. Sitting in gaol damages his health.

Anszel finds out that he is about to be arrested on charges of treason. He hides out with a German peasant, in a village not far from the French border. He spends about six months in this village. He labours there as a simple farm-hand, just for food and a pair of boots. [In the] springtime, Anszel steals across the border into France and comes to the city of Paris.

In Paris, Anszel feels like a new man. Paris, the world-city, was in those days like a *City of Refuge* [see Deuteronomy 19] - an asylum - for political refugees. In Paris, Anszel comes into contact with Jewish workers. He becomes active in the Bund. And Anszel, here, again takes up his old dream - to learn, to study and, with his education, to aid the impoverished masses. He does not come by these studies easily. He works during the day to earn his income and, in the evenings, he studies. Once he masters the French language, he takes an exam at the Parisian *Sorbonne* and is admitted as a student. After years of study, Anszel finishes as a "Doctor of Chemical Sciences".

Anszel attains a position in a large perfume factory and becomes a specialist in his profession. At the same time, however, he does not forget his socialistic ideals - the Jewish Workers Movement, the Bund and the Parisian *Arbeiter Ring* [Workmen's Circle].

Anszel begins to take an interest in theatre. He organises Jewish theatrical performances for Jewish workers in Paris and for Jewish children very much in particular. He starts writing pieces for children's shows and he also translates, from other languages, plays suitable for children. During that period, he writes extensively about French and Jewish theatre in Bundist publications such as *Pariser Wecker*, *Unser Stimme* [Our Voice] and others. He also writes in the French press.

Anszel often misses home, Częstochowa. He wishes to see his dear elderly mother. Without telling anyone about his journey, Anszel leaves Paris and comes home to Częstochowa, to his mother.

Anszel does not return to Paris. He remains in Częstochowa with his nearest. The commitment to the family and his love for his own does not allow him to travel back.

Anszel throws himself into the activity for the Jewish Workers Movement in his hometown. He becomes the leader of the Bundist porters-labourers and he frequently writes about workers' issues in the Częstochowa and Piotrków Bundist periodicals, and also in the Polish professional workers' press.

A chapter on its own is Anszel's fight against antisemitic hooligans in Częstochowa. Among these hooligans were to be found many of the city's student Polish intelligentsia from the bourgeois circles. Anszel, as leader of the Jewish porters-labourers, must often go out onto the street in the fight against the young antisemitic bruisers. Anszel protects the Jewish streets from the Polish boycotts. Brawls frequently take place, but Anszel is not shaken. On one occasion, he is in fact seriously wounded in one such clash with Polish hooligans and is bedridden for a long time. But, as soon as Anszel feels better, he is again active in the battle against the Polish antisemites for the rights of the Jewish worker.

His older brother, Jechezkel, is in Warsaw at the time and Anszel decides to be near his brother. He arrives to work in a Warsaw perfume factory. In Warsaw, too, Anszel is active in Jewish communal life, mainly in the Bund's circles.

Anszel marries in Warsaw and his wife, later, gives him a fine, beautiful son.

When the Nazis' war against Poland breaks out, Anszel takes an active part in the workers' brigades which defend the city of Warsaw. Later, Anszel finds himself in the Warsaw Ghetto, where he works in various dirty jobs to somehow feed his wife and child.

He is often caught by the Nazi murderers in order to be deported to Auschwitz, but he escapes from Nazi hands. Anszel joins a resistance group and carries out several operations. He survives until the historical Jewish [Warsaw] Ghetto Uprising, in which he dies as a hero.

In this manner he lived and fell as a hero for the sanctity of the [Jewish] people - Anszel Wilczyński, the middle of the three Wilczyński brothers, the son of an honest Jewish family in Częstochowa.

Jechiel [Chil]

Jechiel, the youngest of the accomplished trio - the Wilczyński brothers - was born in 1902 in Częstochowa. He attended *cheder*. In the beginning, he has better luck than his brothers had, in being able to learn and study. When Jechiel turns thirteen, his mother sends him to study in the city's eight-form Polish *gymnazjum*. The *gymnazjum* had always been Jechiel's greatest aspiration. Jechiel hoped that the *gymnazjum* would open for him a path to the big world.

Jechiel studies at the *gymnazjum* with great zeal but, to his bitter misfortune, just when he completes the seventh form and is about to begin the eighth, an order suddenly arrives from the curator in Warsaw to close down the *gymnazjum*.

Jechiel does not know what to do. He deliberates - maybe [he should] stop studying [altogether] or go to a completely different city, to an unfamiliar place, and continue learning there. It is hard for him to leave home, but his eagerness to learn is stronger and he travels away to study in Nowo Radomsko.

In Nowo Radomsko, one must pay tuition fees, but his mother is unable to pay for him. Jechiel is prepared to suffer, even to starve, if only to study. He leaves Częstochowa without a single *grosz* in his pocket, yet his heart is filled with the hope that he will not fail.

In Nowo Radomsko, Jechiel quickly becomes known as a good student. He tutors children privately and these lessons bring him enough money to pay for his own studies at the municipal school and also enough for him to live on. [Being] good-natured [and] indulgent with people, Jechiel evokes

affection in his pupils and in everyone in the *shtetl*. Nowo Radomsko soon becomes like his second home.

Social problems begin to increasingly interest him. He sees the need of the simple, poverty-stricken Jews in the *shtetl* and he decides to sign up for the juridical faculty at the University of Kraków. Yes, his dream is to become a lawyer. [Only] as a lawyer, he reflects, will he first be able to defend the rights of the workers and to fight for honesty and justice in general.

But there are no means with which to enter the university. The studies would take several years and from where will he get the money?

Jechiel travels back home to Częstochowa and decides to teach himself Law from books and from the hectographed texts the university will send him.

For about two years, Jechiel works as secretary of the Jewish Craftsmen's Union. He later gives lessons at the Craftsmen's [Union's] evening-school. He is able to instruct many young people. He gives almost all his meagre earnings to his mother. He only leaves himself [enough] for the bare essentials. But despite all the hardships, Jechiel is still able to periodically travel to Kraków to take exams. He always receives good marks and he completes university as a lawyer.

Jechiel is forced to serve in the military and, once he is freed from the service, he returns home, marries and opens a lawyer's office in the town Będzin and, later, in Sosnowiec and in Dąbrowa Górnicza. From time to time, he writes articles on political questions and also on Jewish issues in the local Jewish and Polish newspapers. He holds lectures at the "People's University" and gains a reputation as a very good lecturer. And in those years, Jechiel Wilczyński is elected to the Sosnowiec City Council, where he is always the defender of the Jewish and Polish poor.

When the Second World War breaks out and the German Nazi armies occupy the border towns, Jechiel flees back to Częstochowa, where he hides out in order not to fall into the hands of the Gestapo, which is looking around for the former Jewish-Socialist councillor.

When the Germans drive the Częstochowa Jews into the ghetto, Jechiel, too, goes there. He conceals his doctor's title and becomes a common labourer. Those who know him understand why he does this yet, bit by bit, he comes to his senses. He can no longer endure German persecution and the murderous treatment of Jews. Protest also awakens inside him. He cannot bear to see the wrongdoing and he gradually becomes active again. At first, he works in a regular relief committee [and] then as one of the most active fighters against the Germans in the local "Resistance Committee" and in the Bund's underground Executive. He becomes a member of the Connections Committee, which wages war against both the German murderers and the Jewish ghetto toughs. Following the liquidation of the ghetto, Jechiel is sent to the HASAG-Raków labour camp, where he works in the ironworks. The labour there undermines his health. And even though the Jewish workers (and some of the Polish ones) who knew him before the War wish to help him, so that he should not work too hard.— he refuses to avail himself of their assistance, feeling that this will surely take its toll on their own health and perhaps even their lives.

During the hardest days at the camp, Jechiel did not forget his sacred duties. In the most painful hours, Jechiel found a word of comfort and a word of reassurance for everyone. In every time of trouble, his way was to not become despondent. Jechiel encouraged even those who were already standing with one foot in the Other World and who no longer had anything to lose.

Jechiel managed to leave written documents regarding the German atrocities in the HASAG-Raków labour camp. These documents relate the frightful experiences of that group of inmates who were able to escape Treblinka and who, by different ways, later arrived in the HASAG-Raków camp. Jechiel took accurate testimonies from all those who had fled Treblinka and he wrote down everything they recounted in the sufferers' own words, in Yiddish.

When the time for the liquidation of the HASAG camp was nearing and the few surviving slaves began to be deported, Jechiel, with the assistance of Jewish and Polish workers, put all these written documents inside several bottles and buried them in a garden near the camp. All these important materials were later dug up by individuals returning from the camps and they were turned over to the Central Jewish Historical Committee in Warsaw. Let us hope that this sacred document on the HASAG camp and on Treblinka will finally be published in book form.

At the beginning of January 1945, when the camp's last few remaining inmates were led to Germany in the infamous German "Death March", Jechiel perished somewhere along the way. His nameless grave screams to the Heavens the scream of the thousands of Jewish martyrs who were, together with him, killed on the bloodied roads of Hitler's "German Reich".s