



[Memories & Pen-Pictures]

**Abram Rajzen**

## **A Day in Częstochowa<sup>1</sup>** (a fragment from *Episodes From My Life*)

To remain in Kraków, where I was publishing *Dos Yiddishe Wort* [The Yiddish Word], was already hard for me. The leaders of the SS [Zionist-Socialists], Zalman Majzner and Julius Golde, who were visiting Kraków at the time for party reasons, told me what “was going on” in Warsaw, and undertook to lead me across the border<sup>2</sup> through Częstochowa. I immediately decided to travel to Warsaw and, one week after their arrival, all three of us set out on the road from Kraków to Warsaw.

Zalman Majzner gave me money for expenses. He, the financier of the SS publications, wished to have a story by me in a periodical that the SS was then publishing. At the time, Sholem Asch was one of their regular contributors. In one issue of their periodical, *Der Nayer Weg* [The New Way], Sholem Asch already had an article on the Moscow of the forty times forty churches<sup>3</sup>. Right now, I do not know whether he wrote it from his [own] head, or he had already visited the city of Moscow then, due to his drama *Messiah's Era or The Dream of My People*, which [Wiera Fiodorowna] Komissarzewska was to have staged, and later did, in fact, stage at her Drama Theatre in [St] Petersburg. But I do remember that the article was written in a naïve-revolutionary tone. Sholem Asch sang the praises of the Revolution then and sang the new bells that were ringing over Moscow. Zalman Majzner was then a fervent proponent of Asch, firstly, because he was a contributor to his party newspaper and, secondly, well, [it was] Sholem Asch. Nevertheless, he gave me a few compliments, also, but it was only for the sake of appearances. It may be that he was already under the influence of Szmul Niger<sup>4</sup> who, at the time, was still a young lad, but was, already, [even] while still a member of SS, shaping up to be the future critic.

Julius Golde, I think, read little Yiddish and, even if he spoke Yiddish, it was the Yiddish of an intellectual who had “only just now” learned to speak. But he treated me with great deference and even with friendliness. He was generally good by nature during those days in Kraków and on our couple of days’ journey to Częstochowa. He served me as a true friend, both with his inborn politeness and goodness generally and with his special treatment of me.

Before the border, we ended up passing the night in some small German town. Both of them, Zalman Majzner and Julius Golde, were in the best of spirits. As men of the Party, they had the most important plans and the most far-reaching goals. Majzner, with his nickname at the time of “Zalman Bourgeois” due to his father’s opulence, was an utter fantasist. I, for whom the ideals of the SS were distant,

---

<sup>1</sup> [TN: This story is set in 1905.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: At the time, Kraków was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whilst Congress Poland was under the Russian Tsarist rule.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Prior to the revolution of 1917, Moscow was commonly known as “the city of forty times forty churches.”]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: Niger was co-founder of the SS Party in 1904, but later left politics and became an acclaimed Yiddish literary critic.]

looked at them philosophically and, at the time, did not even have a discussion with them. As they were Socialists, what complaints could I have about them? [And] especially when my fate lay in their hands and they had to take me to the border, or to find me either an appropriate agent, or a Jew from Częstochowa who had preferential treatment from the border guard.

I crossed the border without inconvenience, with a *pólpasek*<sup>5</sup>. When I passed through, the soldier only “gently” searched my pockets and let me across first. One could tell that both of them, Zalman Majzner and Julius Golde, were frequent crossers and that they had permanent half-passes. Sure enough, they crossed - even though their journey to Kraków had been for illegal literature. At the time, it was still prohibited to print certain brochures in Russia.

Thus, we arrived in Częstochowa and I felt on safe ground. The welcome that I received there from important personalities, among them a brother of M. Litvakov, whose family or part of his family was living then in Częstochowa, cheered me up and made me forget my “passportlessness”. I spent the night at the house of a wealthy engineer, whose name I have forgotten – but to compensate, I remember in detail the room where they laid out bedding for me, as if for a great guest. In the morning, I ate a magnificent breakfast, and the young, handsome owner, the engineer - in fact an SS member - served me himself.

The impression that the city of Częstochowa made on me was also a strong one. What I enjoyed the most was the main street, a broad and long one that reminded me of ul. Marszałkowska in Warsaw. The bustle in it was half business-like and half holiday-like. There was something of *Chol Ha'Moed*<sup>6</sup> about this street - like when the first [two] days of a holiday have passed, and another holiday is quickly approaching. Young lads of all movements and parties, with all kinds of slogans in their flaming eyes, met one another, greeted each other, stopping and having vigorous discussions. The *rewirowy* [patrolmen] and *pristavs*<sup>7</sup>, which one could not help noticing, looked half confident and half dispirited. They, themselves, did not yet know how great or how small was their power. In any event, I - without a passport, and a freedom fighter to boot - was certainly rather fearful of them, even though I knew that they would not dare stop me in the street and ask me about a pass.

After spending two days in Częstochowa, which was like having a practise session, I became aware that one could also live without a passport. And, already more assured, filled with hope and anticipation, I travelled from Częstochowa, where I had spent a couple of days among dear people, to Warsaw.

And the impressions of Częstochowa - that beloved city with the liveliest of Jewish populations, from which several significant Jewish cultural activists and Socialist spokesmen stemmed - have remained dear and sacred to me to this day and, when I think with agony about the fate of many Jewish cities that were turned to ruins, I also call Częstochowa to mind, and the faith lights up in me that it will be set upright and rebuilt, like all the cities that the foe devastated with such cruelty, and that those who survived and are scattered over the entire globe will yet rejoice in its rebuilding and revival.

---

<sup>5</sup> [TN: Pol. lit. “half-pass,” as follows below in Yiddish; a permit to cross the border and a short stay abroad, granted to residents of the border strip.]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: “Weekdays of the Festival”; the days between the first two and last two holidays of the festivals Sukkos and Peisach, during which not all forms of labour are completely banned as on the holidays themselves, but which are nevertheless days of rest and rejoicing.]

<sup>7</sup> [TN: Rus. “bailiffs/marshals” (приставы).]