

Dr L. Lazarowicz

Doctors

In my memory, I see before me my birth-town Częstochowa, with its narrow, long streets, which appeared to me then - in the years of my youth - as large as Broadway in New York. Standing, as if alive before me, are the Old and New Markets, which on market days - Tuesdays - were as tumultuous and noisy as Times Square. Here I see, as in reality, the three *Aleje* with trees planted on either side - which are dearer to me than all the avenues in the world, and are no less beautiful than the famous Champs-Élysées in Paris.

And, last but not least, the Częstochowa park - the old [part] which goes to the right, and the new one which protrudes slightly to the left. How dear and close to me it is in my mind, with all the memories of the time that I spent there in my childhood years!

Today, after years of being disconnected from my city of birth, having been first transplanted to Warsaw and then to New York, images of those distant, good times frequently crop up in my memory and, among them, are the personalities and figures of the Jewish doctors in Częstochowa, with whom I was acquainted, and who played such a venerable role in Częstochowa's Jewish life.

How differently doctors were treated in those years! When, in a Jewish home, the floors were washed and yellow sand was spread over the threshold and entrance on a weekday¹. This clearly meant that they were expecting the Doctor there. If you were walking down the street with your father and he [suddenly] pushed you to one side, he was letting you know that you needed to move aside, because ... the Doctor was coming.

Everywhere, the path was cleared for the Doctor - be it in the street or in a shop, in a wagon or at the cinema. In the presence of a doctor, no one dared take a seat, speak loudly or wear a cap on their head. A doctor never put on his own coat - he usually just slid his arms into the sleeves of his coat or fur that someone was holding out for him.

Such doctors were the old [Dr Józef] Russ, who would stroll down the *Aleje* wearing a top hat and with his dog on a leather leash; Dr Wassertal, holding his heavy stick; Dr Edward Kohn, with his golden chain on his ample midriff - the eldest of the Kohn family of doctors, Waclaw and Stefan. The latter saved himself [by fleeing] from Poland to the Land of Israel.

Another, who belonged to this type of doctor was Dr Finkelsztajn, who would never refuse to visit a patient - day or night - and who was partial to stroking his short little beard and his moustache, while mulling over his patients and their ailments, as if this helped him to determine how best to aid the sufferer. Dr Batawja, the throat specialist and Director of the Jewish Hospital in Zawodzie, also occupied an important position in Częstochowa.

In those times, a doctor's success depended on how esteemed was his name. He would not demand payment upfront, write bills, set fees and maintain an office with a secretary. He usually visited his patients himself, and accepted whatever they paid him, or as much as was simply thrust into his hand. "May God, blessed be He, pay you the rest", people would add.

¹ [TN: These practises were otherwise reserved in honour of Shabbes and holidays.]



Mrs Kiak



*Dr [Stefan] Kohn-Kolin
(now in the Land of Israel)*

Those days are long gone. Later, a fresh generation of physicians arose - younger ones - who were already not as assimilated and were closer to the Jewish common masses.

One of them was Dr Koniecpolski, who ran the hospital for contagious diseases, which was very active in the years 1916-1921, when severe epidemics reigned in Częstochowa, claiming many victims. Dr Koniecpolski died of heart trouble not long before the [Second] World War. Dr [Arnold]

Bram, a respected radiologist and leader of the Zionists, also belonged to this group of doctors. During the War, he ended up in Kowel [in modern-day Ukraine], where he worked in a local hospital. I do not know what happened to him afterwards².

At the time, Drs [Julian] Lipinski, Konarski, Broniatowski, and Hipek Gajsler were also active and well-known in Częstochowa. The latter was renowned not only as a physician, but also as the leader of the local craftsmen. In the current war [viz. WWII], he served, at first, as a captain in the Polish Army and was then a POW of the Russians - and what happened to him later is unknown.

The abovementioned physicians differed from their colleagues of the older generation. They were not as haughty and as grand in their own eyes. They made efforts to become close to the common Jewish masses, working alongside them, helping them to organise and speaking to them in their own tongue - in Yiddish.

The next generation of *Częstochower* doctors, from 1920 to 1930, already went one step further. These physicians had already completely integrated with the Jewish common masses and fought together with them - each one in his own field, in accordance to his own ideals. True, there were still a couple of Jewish doctors, here and there, who were known as assimilationists, but their numbers and influence on the Jewish street were very small.

Among the physicians in that period, whom I knew in Częstochowa, I should like to mention [Drs] Frankenberg, Goldman, Lewin, Mokraujer, Wolberg, Nowak, Gutman, Rozen, Lewkowicz, Epsztajn, Helman, Szperling, Glater, Grunwald, Mrs Wajsberg and Torbeczko. Many of them were distinguished doctors with a good reputation amongst Jewish and Christian patients.

Dr Torbeczko deserves a particular mention. To begin with, he had been an excellent *felczer* [paramedic], who worked in the Jewish Hospital. That is where I met him for the first time when, in 1918, I came to the hospital to practise as a medical student. This same fine *felczer* decided to throw away his large practice and to study medicine, in order to become a doctor. He left his wife and two children with his father-in-law - Kiak from ul. Krakowska, also a *felczer* - and travelled off to Warsaw, where he lived in a small room and toiled arduously, working by day to sustain himself and studying medicine at night. Years went by. His children grew up and began studying in university themselves -

² [TN: According to *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. I, col. 686, Dr Arnold Bram perished in the Holocaust.]



Kiak with a few members of his family

until he finally fought his way to his goal and became a medical doctor. Interestingly, he received his diploma at the same time as his eldest son, who caught up with his father in medical studies.

An addition to his medical profession, Dr Torbeczko was also active within the community and, for a time, was a councillor on Częstochowa City Council.

Dr Torbeczko was not the only one among the bygone *felczery*, who excelled in the practice of medicine. Częstochowa possessed an array of old, experienced medics, each of whom was

famed for his own speciality. Who placed suction cups better than Tajchner? Who applied leeches as lightly as Kiak? Who gave enemas as easily and skilfully as Dawid-Josl Epszajn and who could paint [iodine] on the throat³ with a brush as finely and quickly as Herc or Fizman?

These men constituted a distinct caste of uniquely important medical specialists - a generation which gradually disappeared and has had no regrowth.

Besides medical practitioners, Częstochowa also had tooth doctors, or dentists, of whom [the following] come to mind: Artur Broniatowski, the son of the *felczer* Broniatowski and the brother of two doctors; Aron Perec, the respected Bundist Labour activist; [Mordche] Grün, [Ester] Lewkowicz, [Hersz] Lejzerowicz, [Gitla] Ajdelman, Krauskopf, [Anna] Nowak and Muszyńska⁴ - female dentists. They all only first appeared in the later years, and occupied their well-earned position in Częstochowa's communal life.

I see bygone Częstochowa just like in a kaleidoscope.

Jews of Częstochowa! You have not been dispelled from our thoughts! We [shall] remember you day in and day out, night in and night out - for as long as our memory is awake and alive, and for as long as the breath of life keeps us among the living!

³ [TN: It was once the custom to paint the tonsils with iodine for a sore throat; this practice is mentioned in the Eastern European Jewish context in the *Wolkowysk Yizkor Book (1949)*, Vol. II, p.544.]

⁴ [TN: Barring Krauskopf, all the surnames listed here appear in the dentists' section of the *Częstochowa 1929 Business Directory*, from which we have taken their given names. There is no female dentist Muszyńska in said listing, but one Bernard Muszyński does appear.]