

Chaim Landau

## Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair

*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* occupied quite a prominent position in the communal life of Jewish Częstochowa. This Jewish youth movement arose in a few of the larger cities of western Poland at the beginning of the First World War. Under the influence of the German *Wandervogel* [Wandering Bird] movement, of the Polish Scouting Movement and of *Ha'Shomer*<sup>1</sup> in the Land of Israel, youth began to gather and organise into scout groups which, over the course of time, developed and became ideologically crystallised. Driven by a yearning to live out their lives independently and to be activated – and as a reaction to the hitherto one-sided, solely spiritual education of Jewish youth - this Jewish youth movement adopted the scouting form. These Jewish scouts groups arose almost simultaneously in several of Poland's larger cities.

The Częstochowa group belonged among to these first scouting organisations. It was founded by young *gymnazjum* students, labourers and commercial employees. In the first years, when the movement still bore a distinct scouting character, it was welcomed into Zionist circles with great sympathy. It found a patron in the renowned Częstochowa public activist Henryk Markusfeld, who put comfortable quarters at the disposal of the organisation - a large place in his building on ul. Kosciuszko (later Aleja Wolności).



*A Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair group*

A short time after it was founded, a large part of the Częstochowa Jewish youth [already] belonged to the scouting organisation.

In 1917, the first convention of the scouting organisations in Poland took place in Częstochowa. The representatives of the Jewish scouting organisations of Warsaw, Łódź, Będzin and other cities gathered there - which later passed over to the Jewish Gymnastics-Sporting Association. Here, it was decided to form a general countrywide organisation, to call a constitutional convention, and to

propose that it should adopt the name "Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair" [The Young Guard].

In the later years leading up to the Second World War, *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* occupies an important place in the life of the Jewish youth in Częstochowa. Its members stand out for their special scouting attires. Every year, on *Lag Ba'Omer*<sup>2</sup>, *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* parades - marching in close formation under their banners and to the tune of their own "field orchestra". From time to time, it appears publically with well-organised evenings [and] amateur presentations. But these external manifestations are only a by-product of the intensive work which is carried out on a daily basis at the

<sup>1</sup> [TN: "The Watchman"; Jewish defence organisation in Palestine founded in April 1909.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: Jewish holiday on which it is accustomed to light bonfires and to go out to the forest and shoot bows and arrows – the type of activities that the Scouting Movement would certainly have endorsed.]

*ken* (*ken* - nest<sup>3</sup> [in Hebrew]; that is what the organisation's premises is called). Here, in the *ken*, it is bubbling with life. Youths between the ages of twelve and twenty gather here every day. Groups upon groups perform different physical or scouting exercises or sit and study. Important educational work is conducted here in the physical and spiritual realms. Here, the character of that Jewish generation is being forged - that [same] generation which produced the builders of the Land of Israel and the ghetto fighters. Here, the youth builds up its world views. Here, the youth seeks its path in life.

Here, *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* forms that type of Jewish intellectual youngster, to whom no spiritual creation is foreign, who cannot be indifferent to social problems [and] who needs to be active - they were to be found in the ranks of all the progressive movements. Yermijahu [Jeremjasz] Gitler, who stood at the head<sup>4</sup> of the Częstochowa Jews in the last tragic years - the ghetto years - was one of the builders of Częstochowa *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*.

This, however, is not the main thing. Over the course of the years, *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* crystallised and adopted concrete goals - to raise the new Jew, the young Jewish generation, by building a normal Jewish life in the Land of Israel. The concrete educational goal was to realise the Zionist and Socialist ideals in a *kibbutz* in the Land of Israel - and [indeed], from the first years of its existence, there was a steady [stream of] *Aliyah* of *Shomrim*<sup>5</sup> to the Land of Israel and into *kibbutzim*.

Here, in the Land of Israel, you can find them everywhere - and first and foremost in *kibbutzim*. There are Częstochowa *Shomrim* in the following *kibbutzim*: Beit Alfa, Mishmar Ha'Emek, Ein Ha'Horesh, Ein Shemer, Gan Shmuel, Mesilot, Negba, Ein Ha'Shofet, Mitzpeh Ha'Yam and in the young *kibbutz* Gal'on near Ness Ziona<sup>6</sup>. Besides the aforementioned *kibbutzim* of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*, there is also a group in [*kibbutz*] Beit Oren of *Ha'Kibbutz Ha'Meuchad*<sup>7</sup>. [There was] a long chain of *Aliyah* from 1920 to 1939.

Apart from the intensive educational work, the *ken* also actively participated in various broader communal movements and undertakings.

The *ken* distinguished itself in its work for *Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel* [Jewish National Fund]. It stood in first place for many years. Let us also mention here the name of Szmul Horowicz ("Kotz" [Heb., Thorn]) who, for many years, led the work for the KKL - to the last minute in the ghetto. The *ken* was active in the Tarbut<sup>8</sup> Movement. Here, in the *ken*, we lived in a Land-of-Israel-like atmosphere - here, the tones of a living Hebrew language rang out. *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* took an active part in all of Tarbut's undertakings.

*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* occupies an important position in *Ha'Chalutz*<sup>9</sup>. In 1923, the "*bogrim*" [graduates] (the older group, aged 18-20) joined *Ha'Chalutz*. Soon, *Ha'Chalutz* is revived in Częstochowa. *Shomrim* stand at the head of this work. The case is the same for the League for the Working Land of Israel<sup>10</sup>.

*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* and TOZ are on good terms. The people's health society finds, in *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*, a trusted friend. Fundraisers are conducted by *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*. The value of a healthy

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Although "nest" is the literal meaning of "ken," in this context the word is usually translated as "cell."]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: Gitler was a member of the Częstochowa Judenrat; he perished at the hands of the Nazis.]

<sup>5</sup> [TN: "Guards"; nickname for both the members and the movement as a whole.]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: Town in Central Israel; in October 1946, the kibbutz moved to its current location in Southern Israel.]

<sup>7</sup> [TN: "The United Kibbutz"; union of several kibbutz bodies affiliated with Poalei Zion.]

<sup>8</sup> [TN: "Culture"; network of Hebrew-language educational institutions established in newly independent Poland during the inter-War period.]

<sup>9</sup> [TN: "The Pioneer"; Jewish youth movement that trained young people for agricultural settlement in the Land of Israel.]

<sup>10</sup> [TN: Aka "League for Labour Palestine"; an organisation whose aim was to create workplaces for Jews in Palestine.]

body is well appreciated in *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*. Every year, the *Shomrim* go to their summer camps in the countryside - with the support of the TOZ.

We find *Shomrim* workers in the professional unions, [and] at the workers' library (run by the Independent Socialist Labour Party, under the leadership of Dawid Lypszic). The Częstochowa *ken* also actively participates in the tempestuous national and global movement.

From the aforementioned preconference in 1917 to active combat in the ghetto war, the Częstochowa *Shomrim* actively participated in various major events of the nationwide movement. This is a list of several members from Częstochowa: Jszajewicz (or Yishai, in Tel-Aviv), Yermijahu Gitler, Josef Hajman, Bolek Fajglowicz (now in Gan Shmuel), Szymon Wajntraub (now in Beit Alfa), Chaim Landau (now in Mesilot), Mojsze Klarman (now in the Jewish Brigade<sup>11</sup>, a member of *kibbutz* Mitzpeh Ha'Yam) and others.

Częstochowa was also the centre of the Kielce-Zagłębie *galil*<sup>12</sup> (region). The comrades mentioned above were in charge of the work. Regional conferences and meetings were held there.

From 1928, when the Częstochowa Horticultural Farm passes over to the *Shomrim* World Movement, Częstochowa becomes a focal point for the general *Shomrim* movement. *Shomrim*, from different areas in Poland and Galicia, concentrate here for *hachshara* (training). In the *Chag Ha'Katzir* (The Harvest Festival<sup>13</sup>) [celebrations] of 1928, the *Hanhaga Ha'Rashit* (National Centre) of Poland [and] of Galicia, the *Hanhaga Ha'Elionah* (High Leadership of the Global Movement), Izaak Grünbaum [and] Abram Harzfeld, a representative of the press, take part. From time to time, the *Hanhaga Ha'Elionah* (Central Committee) comes here for meetings. The farm also becomes a central location for the *ken*. This is where the Częstochowa *Shomrim* meet with the *Shomrim* from other regions in Poland. The *Shomrim* from Lithuania and from the borderlands (Kresy<sup>14</sup>) influenced the Częstochowa *Shomrim*, bringing in great liveliness [and] strengthening the feeling of belonging to one large family.

Starting from 1932, a *hachshara-kibbutz* is concentrated on the farm, which penetrates into various workplaces in town [and] in factories. Comrades from the farm are active in the city and in the *ken*.

The *hachshara-kibbutz* awakens sympathies in the best of circles. *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* is seen here in its realisation - a type of miniature of a *kibbutz* in the Land of Israel. Visitors from different circles are swept along, seeing the new Jewish type. I recall two [such] occasions. Dr [Cemach] Szabad, a non-Zionist activist from Wilno, visits Częstochowa as a guest of the CISZO. He also visits the farm. In the evening, during his lecture arranged by the Yiddish School Organisation, he tells of the great impression that the *Shomrim* at the farm had made on him.

In *Peisach* 1934, the farm is visited by Dr Józef Kruk of the Independent Workers [sic Socialist] Party - then not yet a Zionist. He, too, is impressed by the lively collective of the *Shomrim* youth and, from then on, is a friend of the *Shomrim* farm.

And, in the last tragic and heroic years, the Częstochowa *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* continued its work. In the first ghetto years, before the utter annihilation, it brings to the youth the belief in an ideal which does not allow the youth to doubt, [or] to become depressed, hardening their character and making them fit for resistance.

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<sup>11</sup> [TN: The Jewish Infantry Brigade Group; military formation of the British Army in the Second World War.]

<sup>12</sup> [TN: This Hebrew word is used in the original, with the translation to Yiddish in parentheses.]

<sup>13</sup> [TN: Biblical name for the festival of Shavuot.]

<sup>14</sup> [TN: Pol., Borderlands; eastern part of the Second Polish Republic during the interwar period, largely coterminous with the "Russian Pale".]

A heroic chapter, which will yet need to be written, are these last days of the ghetto. Here, too, the *Shomrim* are in the first rank.

