

Szlomo Waga

The Blood of the Annihilated Screams from the Ground...

(Pages of Remembrance from Those Horrific Days)

A.



It was during those days when the decree to wear, on the right arm, the white band with the Star of David had been supposedly annulled for a short time. Every Jew from the labour camp, or from the Craftsmen's House at *Aleja 14*, now received a tin number, which he was required to wear on the front, on the right-hand side of his coat. This tin number made every Jew really feel as if he was a criminal. It became even harder than before; all Jews were now **racial slaves**. It was not long before that the *Hauptmann* [Captain], again, issued orders that the Jews were to continue, as before, to wear the white arm-bands with the Star of David, even during work. The *Hauptmann* had realised that, without the armbands, it was easier for the

Jews to sometimes go out of the lines, while they were being led outside the ghetto - [and to escape] to the Aryan streets. This was a bit too good for Jews.

Residents were not allowed to leave the Craftsmen's House, except for when someone had fallen seriously ill - then, the sufferer would apply to the Jewish "Chief of Relief" of the police who, by the way, also lived in the Craftsmen's House, to be granted permission to visit the doctor at the labour camp. A Jewish constable would then escort the patient, take him to the doctor and bring him back home, to the Craftsmen's House.

Every Sunday, during the course of the day, each one at the Craftsmen's House was permitted to visit his relatives or acquaintances in the labour camp. Following such a visit, on the free day of Sunday, everyone would return sick and depressed. Nevertheless, I had the strong desire to visit the labour camp, although I felt, in advance, that I would not gain anything much from such a visit. I joined a group of Jews [of] some ten people and, on a Sunday, we went to examine the labour camp.

A Jewish policeman led us. We had to stride in rows of two. We walked in the middle of the road, like the horses do, and plodded in the mud. Poles stop [and] stare at us with indifferent gazes. Gentile acquaintances recognise us, but do not greet us. Some Poles laugh aloud vociferously and, in addition, shout disgusting words [and] derisions at us. We see how they rejoice at our appearance. Polish hoodlums run after us, yelling and clamouring, insulting us, as well as at the Jewish policeman. Our "guard", the Jewish constable, remains silent and does not respond to them.

We pass through the Jewish streets. The windows of the houses are open. The window-panes of some are smashed - as like following a pogrom. The frames of the windows hang on their half-torn-out, broken hinges. The wind blows and the window-frames sway, telling of our misfortune. In some houses, the curtains still hang. The wind blows them [far inside the rooms]. Doors open by themselves and are slammed [shut] - they then open again, as if in a storm. A storm also rages within myself. The tears choke [me, looking at] what they, the murderers, had done to the Jewish houses! I see pieces of furniture lying in the courtyards [together with] photographs and portraits, which are surely the pictures which once decorated the walls of Jewish homes - portraits of those close and our own. And here, we pass through a street where [religious] books, *chumoshim**, [tractates of the] Talmud, prayer-

* [TN: Pl. of Chumash; Heb., lit. "one fifth," viz. an individual book of the five contained in the Pentateuch.]

books, torn prayer-shawls, discarded phylacteries [and their] straps lay. They are strewn about in the water after the rain. Here, we see, above the gate of a building, a portrait of an old, respected Jew, with a long, grey beard. The portrait is splattered with blood. This is how the “great heroes”, the murderers, chose to amuse themselves with the fine countenance of that Jew. I clenched my fists as I strode. Oh God, wreak Your vengeance upon the murderers! And here, I see a pram in front of a Jewish house. The pram is empty. A little doll is lying next to the pram’s wheels. Drops of rain run down from all [its] sides, as if the pram was weeping with tears for the infant who was snatched away and killed somewhere. Not far from the pram, I see pots, plates and other kitchen utensils strewn about.

Here, I pass by the home of my good friend, Mojsze Nusenbaum. I see the window at which I would often stop and ask if Mojsze was home. But the curtains in the open, empty window flutter in the wind and tell me of the black tidings, that there is no one, no one, home there anymore! My good friend Mojsze is no longer here and nor are his family. The family was, together with him, torn away by the murderers, along with hundreds of other innocent, Częstochowa Jews! And yet my friend Mojsze was such a believer, a true optimist! He was an officer in the Polish Army. He was loyal to his country, despite the antisemites. He comforted each of us, saying that the War would not last long and that Hitler, may his name be obliterated, would suffer a hideous defeat. He would stop short at his wild, hate speeches! Only not long ago, he said here, in the days before *Yom Kippur*, that the Nazis had their hands full. Things were going for them, the murderers, with the buttered [side] down! His wife Miryam was less assured of Hitler’s end and she sent their twelve-year-old son away from home, to her sister at the Craftsmen’s House. The boy had survived for now. My friend and his wife, on the day after *Yom Kippur*, were sent away to Treblinka.

We trudge onwards. In front of us, appear ever more and more houses with doors ajar, shops, too - robbed, looted, with empty shelves. The Poles had done their part! [They] robbed had Jewish property and goods and had left nothing of the small amount of accumulated, Jewish belongings, as if they, the thieves, had been sure that the banished Jews would never again return.

We approach the well-known *Metalurgja*, the factory which was supposed to save, by way of the purpose-built “shops”, thousands of Jews from falling into the Nazi hands! But the *Stadthauptmann* [Captain (Degenhardt)] had actually managed to fool the Jew, and had taken away their jewellery [and] money in the millions of *złoty*, after which he had everyone sent away to Treblinka. Here, too, the dozens of machines, which had been seized from the Jewish craftsmen, are still being removed from the *Metalurgja*.

We march on, with downcast heads. What is going on here? We see how the Gentile part of the city of Częstochowa has not changed much. The Gentile streets are full of life. People walk freely on the streets. Only we see no Jews, besides ourselves - prisoners driven on like sheep! And, here, the Jewish constable leads us to the little “Warsaw Market” [Rynek Warszawski]. Here too, just like on ul. Krótka, everything all around was deserted and empty. Empty houses, without Jews! And, here, we already see the fences of the “labour camp” from afar. The small marketplace was the *de facto* forecourt of the labour camp. [Now] we already stand at the gate of that place of slaves. One, a German, shows himself, in an officer’s uniform - a tall German, as fat as a pig, overstuffed and as red as a beetroot. He shouts out, “Who are these loafers?” (by which he means us layabouts). The Jewish constable informs him that he is conducting us from the Craftsmen’s House to the doctor. We find out that this German is the chief of the labour camp. He lets us through the large, open gate. We find ourselves in the couple of small, short and narrow streets around the camp. I meet a Jewish policeman I know. He eyes me suspiciously and whispers a secret to me - I am to be cautious and not to wander about here in the alleys in the middle of the day, as it is forbidden to go about in them between the hours of six in the morning and five in the evening. During these hours, one must work. Only the Jews who work at night are allowed to be on the little streets in the daytime and these Jews wear special white bands bearing

the inscription "Night Shift". If a Jew, who is not working, is found in the alleys during the day, he is shot on the spot. The policeman tells me that the *Hauptmann* Degenhardt, himself, comes here very frequently in the daytime to the alleys, searching for Jewish layabouts. He is not lazy in entering the houses to look for Jews. Just recently, he found two young Jewish men in a house. One of them was working in the night shift - him, he did not bother. But the other young man, who was too ill to be able to work, he had taken to the police station and, there, in the yard of the "*Deutscher Wache*" [German Guard], the young man was stripped completely naked and two bullets were shot into him. The ailing young man fell dead in the blink of an eye.



I shudder from all these stories. From where does one get the strength to bear all this? It is now three o'clock in the day. My acquaintance, the Jewish constable, takes me home to his house. He lives in the building which is allocated to the Jewish policemen. They all live here with their wives and children. The more distinguished of them live in two rooms and the minor policemen in single rooms. I see Jewish children in this house, many of whom were left there, with the Jewish policemen, by their father and mother, before they themselves were sent away to Treblinka. The fate of these strangers' children, and even that of their own children, is uncertain. The concern is great, as everyone knows that small children will not be allowed to remain here for long. And people try to think of how to rescue them as soon as possible, to hide them on the "Aryan side", in friendly Polish-Aryan homes. Not only will *Hauptmann* Degenhardt not allow the children to live, but he will not allow even the Jews, slaving here for the Germans, to live long. No one believes in this whole "labour camp". It is just a ruse to get as many Jews as possible captured here in these narrow little streets, and to hold them, as if under arrest, sentenced, as it were, to die - sooner or later.

As I sit, thus, in the constable's home, I hear a faint noise behind the door. The policeman's wife enters with a young man. I hear the wife say to him, "Well, alright, your father can stay here". The young man is one of the ten Jews with whom I arrived today. The young man waits awhile and an elderly Jew* appears - clean-shaven. He enters by a different door, which leads to the house's cellar. I gaze upon this Jew with the clean-shaven face. To make him look younger, the grey hair is dyed black. This Jew seems somewhat familiar to me. Yes, I [now] realise who he is. This is Pinkus Zilberman, formerly the Vice-Chairman of the Częstochowa Jewish *Kehilla*. He used to be a fine, respected Jew, with a long beard. Reb Pinkus once had a large haberdashery-goods business. He was an opulent Jew! Now, it is frightening to behold him. Tears come to my eyes as I look at him. Here is what the villains have done to our finest, most prominent Jews in town! He seems shrunken and slumped! We speak to one another and I hear one horrific tale after another. And here Reb Pinkus appears with his wife**. They have already been hiding in the cellar for a good couple of weeks. The policeman's wife is his daughter. All are in a great shock. Who knows how long they will manage to hold out here? The daughter weeps as her father speaks. I am also eager to see Reb Pinkus' wife, but I must wait till the evening. We must guard ourselves, even from our own Jewish acquaintances. That is what the daughter says to me.

In the evening, I see her. Reb Pinkus' wife immediately recognises, but I her – barely, barely. I examine her face closely, until I recognise the once stately, high-class, aristocratic, beautiful woman. Now, she is a broken shard - a tormented [person], who can hardly stand on her feet. She has already renounced everything. She does not wish to live any longer. Both, Reb Pinkus and his wife, weep like small children and their crying tears at my heart. I hear their words through the tears, "It would have been

* [TN: It appears from the rest of this account that this old man was not the young man's father. The young man and his father are no longer mentioned in this story, and their fate is unknown. In an almost identical (yet different) account, which the same author presents in *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. II, col.149-150, this young man is not mentioned at all.]

** [TN: It is evident from the continuation of the narrative that the father only told the author that his wife was there, but he did not actually meet her until the evening. This is also corroborated by the aforementioned version in *Sefer Częstochowa*.]

better to have gone along with all the Jews to Treblinka". I find out that the son-in-law, my acquaintance the Jewish constable, did everything to save the father and mother-in-law. Earlier, he had concealed them in attics, transferred them from one place to another, risked his own life and bought off Nazi gendarmes - and for what? Until he brought them here, to the new ghetto. A dwelling allocated for them, as they are elderly folk. They are here illegally. They have no numbers, so they must conceal themselves. Some of the policemen know about it, but they turn a blind eye. Yet the worry is great. The thief, with his helpers, will eventually attack everyone here and shoot them all.

I try to console them. The War will not continue for long now. The villains are losing and are being battered at the Russian Front. This is the only consolation which I am able to give them. Although I, myself, doubt in my heart whether we shall live to experience that glorious day – the victory over the dark, Nazi barbarians



Jews remove the tombstones with which the Nazi villains flagged the pavements



Living barracks at HASAG



A fragment of the destroyed "Small Ghetto"

B.

The Nazi *Hauptmann*, Degenhardt, the sanguine commander of the commando for the extermination of Jews in Częstochowa, ordered [Jewish labourers] to remove the corpses of those who had been annihilated by his aides. This was during the tearful *akcja* which that this same hangman had conducted in the city, when sending the Jews away to the gas [chambers and] ovens¹ of Treblinka.

They were shown a plot of ground on ul. Kawia which, in the past, had always been tilled. "You will dump all the rubbish in a pit right here", he said.

On the first day, the young Jewish men and their chief grieved over each dead body [and] talked much about the great tragedy. But, once the first day had ended and several hundred victims had been

¹ [Ed: There were no ovens at Treblinka. The bodies of those killed there were burned in pits dug into the ground.]

hurled by them into the pits, while the number of dead constantly increased, they became accustomed to all that - just as with all the other jobs.

The young men travelled through the ghetto streets with horses and a wagon, loaded the wagon full with corpses and took them away to the new "cemetery" on ul. Kawia.

To one side, right next to the wagon, an armed Jewish constable walked like a soldier, with a rubber baton in his hand - keeping the peace of these silent funerals. He urged his men on, urged the horses with the wagon on and, thus, also indirectly hastened the dead into the ground as quickly as possible. There was no time. The number of corpses became larger by the hour and the work needed to progress swiftly.

The constable soon became accustomed to his work. He also became used to the smell of the dead bodies. He would turn his nostrils into the direction of the wind and thus he fulfilled his tearful task, at the same time, thinking about other things, rather than that which was always before his eyes. Mostly, he thought about bread, for he, too, was hungering.

The dead, which their wagons collected from fields, from courtyards, from dwellings, from cellars, from bunkers and from other places, were far from his gaze. Who, among the living, had the strength to continually look at the killed? Everybody knew that the pockets of the clothes which the dead were wearing had already been emptied by others - one could no longer find anything there.

Nevertheless, the young policeman did observe something - from one of the wagons, the body of a young woman was pushed out. Lying face up and hanging down from the wagon, she looked as if she was alive, as if the young maiden would raise herself up from the strange men's bodies and from their arms.

Her black hair, which reached the ground, was dragged along the bloodied road. The constable's eyes fixed themselves on this image, until an inner feeling awoke in him for the extraordinarily, beautiful face of that girlish cadaver.

Her body, her cheeks, the ears and the mouth were all in wonderful harmony with each other. Her black eyes were open and looking at the young man.

The small, open mouth seemed to scream, although no one could hear her voice. The little, sculpted, slightly curved Jewish nose now stuck out with immeasurable firmness.

The policeman stared at this picture. She was going away to the *Other World*, where all the killed go. Inside himself, he heard her scream. The sight of her white hands, the shape of her well-formed arms - could not ever be lost. The hands seemed to plead, "Take revenge from the murderers!".

The young constable could not avert his eyes from this tragic beauty. And, as in a dream, he conversed with the young maiden:

"What did your eyes see, you beauty, you coerced sacrifice, when your mouth was forced to utter forth its cry of death?"

"Where are you taking me, you, my conductor?", replied the open eyes, the pale cheeks and the shapely mouth, with the white hands. "Have you no compassion for me, you merciless man? Will you not take revenge for my misery, you shameless servant of the sanguine enemy? You vile man. You coward, you fear one stronger than yourself?!"

Your heart trembles, like the heart of a child who is afraid of his master's anger. Gaze, you slave, upon my misery, and upon the misery of my people!"

The deeper that the young man became absorbed in this mute conversation, the deeper his eyes became buried in the eyes of the desecrated girl. He could hear her words, her tragic voice. Looking at her strongly-pointed eyebrows, he seemed to hear her say:

"In the bosom of love, with my mother, like a beautiful rose I grew. All I ever encountered in my life was happiness. Why have you murdered me? Vile murderers! Why? Why?"

Everything all around was calling to wreak revenge on the murderers! Suddenly, there was a shout. A gendarme yells out, "*Schnell fahren* [drive fast]! Take this rubbish away quicker!"

A pull on the reins and a lash from the whip hastened the way to the pit.

The wagon began to wobble. The killed innocents, the martyrs, rolled to all sides and were plunged deeper into the wagon.

The girl's head, too, began to toss. The beautiful hands came closer to the body.

The constable quickened his steps. The wind cooled his enflamed face.

They are already by the open pits, which await the wagons.

The dead are covered with earth.

The tragedies are shrouded.

But the murder lives [on]!

The blood of the innocent victims of the Nazi murderers screams and shall never cease to scream from the ground!