

This is How Częstochowa Looks Now^{*}

(Impressions From a Visit in Autumn 1957)

A



As we approached Częstochowa, the landscape of poor Polish villages began to change. The straw-roofed, moss-covered huts gradually gave way to sturdy houses with roofs of tin or red clay slate. Here and there, the high chimneys of ovens and brick factories, whose number has expanded conspicuously of late, rose into sight between the houses.

Purple-red smoke curled upward from the chimneys in thick balls over the grey, wintry horizon to settle low above the naked trees of field and garden at the village edge.

We passed more and more old-fashioned, one-horse, peasant wagons, incongruously rolling on automobile wheels. The wagons were loaded with the chalk-rock which Częstochowa supplies to the local chalk ovens.

In the stillness of early evening, all that could be heard was the rhythmic clop-clop of horseshoes on the road or, from time to time, the wild cackling of the flocks of black crows suddenly rising in their thousands from the ploughed fields.

In the last light of the setting sun, the outlines of Częstochowa came shimmering into view. Night fell quickly over the factories and houses. Suddenly, a bright red light flashed on and off through the darkness - the dark intervals were tied together by the monotonous pealing of heavy bells.

The flashing light and the pealing bells issued from the monastery on the "Bright Mountain" (Jasna Góra) - the holiest place in Poland. Here, millions of pilgrims stream from all over the country in winter and summer to offer prayers in front of the picture of the dark-skinned Madonna of Częstochowa.

As we entered the city, another high point in Częstochowa was shedding a far stronger light. Seemingly suspended in mid-air, huge letters spelt out the steel-combine, named after Bolesław Bierut, the dead leader of the Polish Communist Party. Behind the illuminated name, six cannon-mouthed chimneys belched out fiery smoke toward the slender Gothic towers of the monastery on Jasna Góra, which is entwined with legends of miracles in the old and new history of the Polish people.

In these two brilliant peaks of the city of Częstochowa I saw a physical statement of the present battle in Poland between the Communist regime and the mighty Catholic Church, around which the overwhelming majority of the Polish populace rally.

^{*} [TN: Some parts of this article were subsequently published in a condensed and adapted form in the author's 1959 book, "The Warsaw Heresy", in the chapter "The Black Madonna and the Red Star", pp.181-194. This work is not a translation, but was written by the author himself in English, wherever the original Yiddish text has allowed us to do so, we have incorporated the later English version. In some cases, the author added words in the later version which lend depth and meaning to our present text. These we have included in brackets.]

Here, in this city of barely 160,000 inhabitants, more than anywhere else in Poland, this battle is most evident and where the damage done to the Polish people by the struggle between these two great forces is most perceptible. A temporary armistice has been declared, but the underground war continues and its hidden volcanic power is nowhere as apparent as in Częstochowa.

The Jewish chapter, too, in Częstochowa differs from the rest of Polish cities. In Częstochowa, the Jews felt, much earlier, that there was no longer a place for them between these two worlds because, at the smallest clash, they would be the first victims.

This, in fact, explains why the Jewish exodus from Poland began in Częstochowa earlier than anywhere else and also ended there first. This occurred despite the fact that the possibilities for economic welfare were, in Częstochowa, better than in any other city in Poland.

However, from the very beginning, the Częstochowa Jews were filled with a feeling of dread for their future, a dread which, among other [things], also came from the "Bright Mountain". Almost one year after the October Revolution [viz. Polish October or Gomułka's thaw], on 9th June 1957, during Sunday worship, at 12:30pm, from the pulpit beneath the sacred image the following words fell:

It is already time for the Holy Ghost to come and cast out the entire idolatrous, Bolshevik, Jewish, Communist plague. They have already amply shown what they are capable of. We have had enough of their rules. To what bitter need they have driven the people, with their Communist, Bolshevik planning! What is happening? Have we not our own Polish intellect? Spiritual life will not develop, unless we put the economy in order."

This was not the harangue of some provincial priest. This was not an incitement of the masses against the "unbelieving Judas". It was a distinctly, political speech about the current Polish reality under the Communist regime, but with the traditional antisemitic accents, in the well-known spirit of bellicose, Polish nationalism which had, for centuries, drawn its inspiration from Jasna Góra in Częstochowa.

To the Polish people, the monastery on Częstochowa's Jasna Góra is much more than a religious centre to which fanatical, believing-masses swarm for a cure. Częstochowa is for the Polish People much more than the French Lourdes, for example, where "the blind become able to see and the lame suddenly start walking".

The Madonna of Częstochowa is credited with many more miracles for the liberation of Poland, than for the healing of her faithful, little sheep. Częstochowa has become, for the Polish nation, the symbol of resistance against its conquerors. From the white Polish eagle, which is even now the emblem of the Polish state, the Communist regime has removed its regal crown*. But this same crown still remains on the head of the dark-skinned Madonna in Częstochowa and, in the prayer books which are sold to the millions of pilgrims, the Madonna is referred to as "Queen of the Polish Crown" [Królową Korony Polskiej].

Tradition has it that the picture of the Częstochowa Madonna was painted by the Apostle Luke, the patron of artists in the Catholic Church. The holy painting has gone through various adventures - it has been stolen, won back, as well as having been saved from fire and destruction time and again.

It achieved the high point of its fame among Catholics in 1665, when the Swedish Army, consisting of 14,000 well-armed soldiers with heavy artillery, besieged the fortress of the Częstochowa church.

* [TN: The coat of arms of the Polish People's Republic (1955-1990) was devoid of the traditional crown.]

The fortress resisted, though defended by only 160 Polish soldiers and 70 monks, headed by the priest August Kordecki, [Prior of the Paulist Order].

The siege lasted from 18th November until 25th December 1655, when the Swedes withdrew from the city with heavy losses. This remarkable victory was naturally ascribed to the wonder-working Madonna. This heroic battle has been immortalised in the work by Henryk Sienkiewicz, *With Fire and Sword*^{**}.

In the years after, Jasna Góra of Częstochowa was the focal point for patriotic demonstrations, especially during the period of Poland's decline and its partition amongst its three neighbouring states - Russia, Prussia and Austria.

The leaders of the *Polish War for Independence* invoked the magic in the name of Częstochowa to mobilise the Polish people in resistance against their oppressors, particularly Tsarist Russia, just like Częstochowa is now the centre of [spiritual] resistance to Communist Moscow.

Częstochowa has captured the imagination of leading Polish writers, including the national poet, Adam Mickiewicz, who eternalised Jasna Góra in one of his poems^{***}. Besides these, a wealth of plays, novels and poems have dealt with the various miracles of Częstochowa. Even the [atheist] Polish Socialists realised that they could not ignore the extraordinary influence that the Catholic Church exerts on the people of Poland and, in particular, through the Częstochowa monastery.

This approach was also supported by such radical writers as Stanisław Brzozowski and Stefan Żeromski, not to mention the latter-day Nobel Prize winner Władysław Reymont who, in fact, personally went on a pilgrimage to Częstochowa and, in one of his writings [*Pielgrzymka do Jasnej Góry*], described his experience with great piety.

Even Stalin appreciated the importance of Częstochowa and tried to win the hearts of the Polish people through the Holy Madonna. According to official Soviet propaganda, it was the Red Army which saved the monastery on Jasna Góra and the Holy Madonna. This accomplishment was attributed to the Red Army commander who liberated Częstochowa, Marshal Ivan S. Konev and his Commissar for Culture, the Jewish-[?]Soviet writer Boris Polevoy.

One spring day in 1945, just before the collapse of Nazi Germany, [the story goes that] Marshal Konev called Polevoy to him and entrusted him with the important mission of saving the holy Catholic objects of Częstochowa. [It seems that] the Marshal's intelligence division had learned that the Nazis had laid 250 kilograms of dynamite under the fortress church on Jasna Góra prior to withdrawing from the city. Polevoy was ordered to do everything in his power to save the church and, above all, the picture of the Holy Madonna. Immediately, Polevoy went to Częstochowa with a platoon of Soviet sappers and soldiers and entered the church to carry out his delicate mission.

Naturally, the monks were taken aback at the sight of the Soviet soldiers and fearful lest the Red Army might remove the holy icon. They did not begin to breathe more freely until the soldiers had located the hidden dynamite. The removal of the dynamite took several days. Boris Polevoy, together with a colonel of the Red Army, a certain Solomatyn, remained at the monastery and befriended the monks.

Whether the Pauline monks of the Częstochowa monastery - who had diligently set down every miracle connected with the Madonna - would consider her having been saved by the Red Army also

^{**} [TN: The battle is described at the end of *The Deluge*, the second book of Sienkiewicz's trilogy, of which *With Fire and Sword* is the first.]

^{***} [TN: At the beginning of his epic poem, *Pan Tadeusz*.]

as a miracle, is not at all certain. But it is a fact that, for his rescue of the Catholic holy objects in Częstochowa, Boris Polevoy received a high Soviet honour - the Order of the Red Flag.

The saviour of the Madonna of Częstochowa is, incidentally, the same Boris Polevoy, Secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers who, during a visit to New York in 1955, three years after the murdering of the [thirteen] Jewish writers in Soviet Russia, shamelessly repeated the Moscow lies, to the effect that the story of the murder of the writers was no more than a fabrication.

Whether the Częstochowa Madonna was actually rescued in the manner put forward Soviet propaganda, or whether the whole incident was staged, is hard to establish. It is noteworthy, however, that just a few months ago, Polevoy resurrected his story in an interview with the most widely-read Polish magazine, in which he took pains to stress that he was "happy to have succeeded in saving a picture so sacred to the Polish people".



On the long, handsome, main street of Częstochowa, which is named after the Holy Mary, stands a monument to the soldiers of the Red Army who liberated the city and saved the historic church on Jasna Góra and its relics. The monument consists of a bronzed tank resting on a high platform of green sandstone from the famous Częstochowa quarries. Above the tank hangs a huge, red banner bearing the words, "The Soviet Union Is the Conqueror of Fascism".

Similar banners and placards, with antiquated Soviet shibboleths, no longer visible elsewhere in Poland nowadays, hang from every wall in every street of Częstochowa. In no other city in Poland did I see so heavy a concentration of Communist propaganda as I saw in the centre of Polish Catholicism. The battle between these two opposing worlds rages on here, despite the peace that Gomułka made with Cardinal Wyszyński.

B

The Underground Empire in Communist Częstochowa

Częstochowa is the city with the strongest conflicts and greatest contradictions in present-day Poland. It is a prosperous city, over which the centralised economic machine of the Communist regime has barely any control. Częstochowa has its own unique, economic order. Side by side with state industry and commerce, a network of underground private enterprises flourishes, made possible by [widespread] graft. The Party and administrative apparatus of the growing industrial city is [also] involved in this same, capitalistic, profit-economy.

Częstochowa is an important centre for the Polish metallurgic industry. The Bolesław Bierut Steel Foundry in Częstochowa is the second largest in Poland. The Lenin Steelworks in the new Communist model city of Nowa Huta [New Steelworks], near Kraków, is the first. Besides mines and factories which produce building materials, Częstochowa has a large number of textile factories.

Częstochowa's economic prosperity, which makes it an exception amongst Polish cities, flows from this multitude of private shops, where religious articles are made [by hand] - crucifixes, amulets, icons, beads, candlesticks, candles, prayer books and Christmas tree decorations, which are exported abroad, especially for the Poles in the United States. Locally, these articles are bought by the millions of pilgrims.

In the same small cellars and garrets, where for generations the citizens of Częstochowa have been sitting at workbenches near beds and cribs, various kinds of toys, cheap ornaments and decorative trifles for domestic use, as well as solid items made out of metal, leather, plastic, wood and stone are still being crafted.

Częstochowa is the “Polish Nürnberg” and has been famous over the centuries for its production of religious articles and toys. But, nowadays, it is almost as if forgotten that, at the end of the 19th century, Częstochowa was called the “Jewish Nürnberg”, due to the fact that the Jews had actually been the initiators of the Częstochowa toy industry. This industry’s pioneer was a religious Jew, Reb Szaja, a turner by trade, but a talented artist at heart. Reb Szaja started out by carving wooden medallions depicting the Madonna of Częstochowa. These medallions were quickly snatched up and many Częstochowa Jews - and especially the religious orthodox at that - took to manufacturing Christian devotional objects. But this did not last long, as the Church issued a ban on the Jewish artefacts.

The prohibition, however, was only on the Jewish manufacturers and not on the trade in sacred items, which continued to remain in Jewish hands. At this point, the Częstochowa Jews went over to a widely ramified toy industry. Częstochowa Jewish craftsmen often travelled to Nürnberg in order to acquaint themselves with the newest inventions in the toy industry field which, in many cases, they improved upon.

Consequently, the production of toys and the trade in religious artefacts were mainly in Jewish hands. Things remained thus until the outbreak of the War. Even on Częstochowa’s main boulevard, along which processions to Jasna Góra passed, the majority of the shops belonged to Jews. This street, which is named the “Avenue of the Holy Mary” [*aleja Najświętszej Maryi Panny*], was called simply the *Aleja* [“Avenue”] by the Jews and they divided it into three parts, according to their own “Jewish” topography - the First *Aleja*, Second *Alej*, and Third *Aleja*. Jews living on these avenues actually wrote the addresses in this manner and the Polish Post acknowledged the Jewish “changing” of this street.

The more than five thousand Jews, who returned to Częstochowa following liberation in 1945 from the surrounding slave-camps, did not make even the slightest attempt to take back their shops. They went to work in the state factories and cooperatives and also in the offices.

The surviving Częstochowa Jews correctly assessed that, especially under the Communist regime, dealing in religious articles is a matter that smells of fire, due to the fact that the Church has become the symbol of struggle against the regime in which Jewish Communists occupy leading positions. The Częstochowa Jews have, therefore, no longer come anywhere near the trade in religious artefacts, not to mention the [actual] production of Christian sacred objects. Now, in Częstochowa, there is only one Jew - an apostate - who has a small factory which produced expensive, silver crucifixes.

Even during the years of total Communist state monopoly in the trade and industry sectors, private shops and workshops of religious articles and toys existed in Częstochowa. To secure the necessary raw materials, such as metal, leather, rubber, dyes and other chemicals which are under state control, the owners of the workshops have had to resort to smuggling and theft. The result has been that underworld and criminal elements have attached themselves to the “religion industry” and, for handsome fees, they undertake to provide the necessary, raw materials.

Only the small factories of the pro-Moscow Catholic movement, *Pax*, whose leader is the former fascist and racist Bolesław Piasecki, received, and continue to receive, enough raw material.

However, *Pax* factories represent only one-third of the private religious articles industry in Częstochowa.

Due to an increase in the number of cases of dissolute living and crime among the *nouveaux riches*, the mushrooming, underground industry could not escape public view. Numerous scandals, often quite intriguing, involved high officials in the local administration and Party functionaries.

The cases revealed an unbelievable network of persons, who were willing to go to any lengths to favour their families - an abyss of nepotism. State prosecutors consistently ignored charges against relatives who were engaged in illegal enterprises or who were smuggling steel and leather. A judge would issue a verdict to release a cousin of his, who had embezzled state funds. And thus, there is a entire chain of mutual support within the city's administrative and juridical apparatus. They were all members of good-standing in the Communist Party, into the bargain.

The Częstochowa journalist Jan Kucharski who, in 1955, began publishing a series of reportages about the underground "empire" in his hometown, received a very sharp reproach from the Party's Control Commission. The motive behind this reproach was that, by unmasking these people, the Party would be besmirched. In other words, this meant that these individuals were, politically, completely in order and that their commercial and financial swindles were, therefore, of scant significance.

The protagonist in Kucharski's reportages was the Częstochowa "Iron King" Kalkusiński. But the scandal around Kalkusiński's smuggling deals and swindles [worth] millions was so great, that it did in fact come to a trial and Kalkusiński was handed six years in prison. However, the Supreme Court repealed the verdict and released the accused. Shortly afterwards, the journalist Kucharski was murderously beaten up. The wounded journalist then went to the Częstochowa Party Committee and gave up his membership card.

So long as Stalinist censorship was in control of Poland, news about corruption in Częstochowa was suppressed - though it was spread throughout all the bars and coffee houses by word of mouth.

However, nowadays, the Polish press is full of articles and reports about Częstochowa's role as a "centre of the economic underground", as a city of sin.

The city is always swarming with newspapermen from the capital and from all other places in Poland where the press is active. But the Częstochowa speculators laugh at this. They [openly] go about their black market business, nonchalantly concluding transactions in brightly-lit bars and restaurants, and toasting their million-*złoty* affairs in liquor.

Even when police terror was at its height in Poland, the Communist regime could do nothing about Częstochowa, for a variety of reasons that put this city outside the framework of the regime's usual economic, judicial or even policing regulations.

[In the first place,] the religious objects industry, which yields a annual income of billions of *złoty*, is closely linked with Catholic Church activities and the Communist regime does not want to provoke the Church. Częstochowa is always teeming with pilgrims from all over the country and any police action [with an anti-religious tinge] could have serious consequences - something which the regime is anxious to avoid. This has placed Częstochowa in a special situation and has resulted in developments unparalleled in any other city in Poland.

Thus, Częstochowa is one of the few Polish cities with a population larger now than before the War. In 1939, there were 137,000 inhabitants, of whom about 30,000 were Jews. Now, it has more than 160,000, among them [live] barely 60 Jewish families.

[Also,] before the October Revolution of 1956, private initiative in handicrafts and commerce had almost been wiped out in Poland. However, there were still 795 workshops in Częstochowa. One year after the October Revolution, the number of workshops that were officially registered had climbed to 1,442. There are, in reality, many, many more, because every man who owns a legal workshop to produce religious objects or toys gives out work to several other craftsmen who work at home. These [home-workers] are the so-called "*chałupniks*" and they are fearfully exploited. Since these craftsmen cannot obtain their own raw material and work as independents, they have to accept the slave wages laid down by their contractors, who get the material from state factories via a well-organised smuggling racket.

There are whole families working day and night in the narrow, dark quarters of the Częstochowa poor. You see several generations working in the same room - grandmothers and grandchildren toiling side by side. In these squalid home-workshops, tin, stolen from state factories or from canned goods containers in which food was sent by American relatives, are turned into charms and medallions. Using primitive hand-presses, the workers stamp the image of the Holy Mother of Częstochowa and other saints of the Catholic Church [onto the tin]. There are numerous photographic studios in Częstochowa which prepare reproductions of various scenes from the New Testament. Częstochowa men and women pose within these reproductions and are readily recognisable to the city's inhabitants, despite their studied dramatic expressions and [Biblical] costumes.

The picture cards, thus reproduced, are sold in huge quantities to the pilgrims, whose number during the summer alone is estimated at 1.5 million. The pilgrims sleep in corridors and doorways, where the Częstochowa natives rent them beds for 10 *złoty* a night. They charge even for a glass of water. In this manner, Częstochowa earns several hundred million *złoty* a year just from the pilgrims, whose average visit in town lasts several days.

[During the pilgrimage season,] life in Częstochowa is completely disorganised. The streets and avenues are flooded with visitors. Almost every house in Częstochowa is a hotel, a public kitchen or a hostel, and the money flows in like the water of the city's four rivers - the Warta, with its tributaries - the Stradomka, Kucelinka, and Konopka.

[The season is not restricted to the summer only.] Pilgrims, in their thousands, visit the holy city during the winter and weekends throughout the year. These are the more affluent guests, who can afford to stay at the better hotels.

The rest of Częstochowa's income derives from the factories and the mines in Golden Mountain [Złota Góra]. The minerals dug out are used in the production of steel, sugar and artificial fertilisers. Złota Góra also yields precious white and coloured sandstone, much sought after for building purposes, now that the limitations on private construction have been eased.

The sandstone from Częstochowa's Złota Góra is sold throughout Poland for the private villas of the directors of state factories and trade centres, for writers, actors, artists and, above all, for the new millionaires, who have made their money in private industry and commerce. The stone quarries on Złota Góra belong to the state. Consequently, their yield is included in the black market smuggling in exchange for dollars or Swiss watches, which have become a kind of foreign currency in Częstochowa.

But, in the final analysis, the true treasure of Częstochowa remains Jasna Góra, home of the famed Madonna. There is no bargaining there. The millions of pilgrims pay full price for the amulets and prayer books, for the crucifixes and beads, also adding generous contributions to the omnipresent charity boxes.

C

What Remains of Jewish Częstochowa?

When I arrived at the Hotel Polonia in Częstochowa one Saturday night and asked for a room, I was told that everything was taken. As soon as I showed my American passport, the hotel clerk immediately put a smile on his sour face and, personally, escorted me to a large room, tastefully furnished with modern comforts rarely to be found even in the best hotels in Warsaw. Although the Polonia is under state control, this for me was more proof that Częstochowa was situated in a world far removed from the usual, desultory, Communist economy.

I noticed the same thing in the Polonia Hotel restaurant. The menu was richer and more elaborate than any to be found in a Warsaw hotel. Though the restaurant was filled, one did not have to wait for service here, as was necessary even in the best restaurants in Warsaw. The same was true of the dozens of other restaurants and bars in Częstochowa that Saturday night. They were all crowded and there were thousands of people strolling in the streets outside the gaily lit movie-houses. The Avenue of the Holy Mary, with its bustling and its blinding light, reminded me of our [own] New York Broadway.

Dark and dead, however, were the streets where the several dozen Jewish families live in Częstochowa and where the half closed-down Jewish institutions still remain. The Jewish club on ul. Jasnogórska 36 was closed. This had [once] been the private villa of the Jewish textile manufacturer and owner of the Gnaszyn factory, Zygmunt Markowicz, whose widow now lives in America. After standing a long while in the garden that surrounds the villa, by the weak light of the lantern in the empty street, I saw the little sign with the Yiddish writing of the Social-Cultural Association and I also noted the original architecture of the tasteful little palace, but which is now already quite neglected.

This house is the only meeting place for the remaining Częstochowa Jews. Until one year ago, cultural undertakings were still held here every Saturday night. Lately, however, these undertakings have become increasingly rare and the club's secretary, M. Lederman, a former Bundist activist, is about to [emigrate to] Israel together with his family. Only a group of 10-12 Jewish children still gather here in the afternoon hours and a few mothers give [them] classes in Yiddish.

In the building of the pre-War Jewish I. L. Peretz School at ul. Krótka 17, which was built in the 1920's with funds from the Czenstochover Relief in America, there are now two cooperatives - a tailors' cooperative and a shoemakers' cooperative - in which there is already not even one single Jew. For certain juridical reasons, listed as owners of this building are members of the School Committee, the representatives of the organisations in Częstochowa, which belonged to the Jewish Secular School Movement in Poland, the CISZO [*Centralna Żydowska Organizacja Szkolna* - Central Jewish Scholastic Organisation]. Of these, only one has remained alive - the veteran of Jewish communal life in Częstochowa, Raphael Federman, who lives now in America and is the driving force behind the various activities conducted by Częstochowa *landsleit* in America and in other countries. When I met the Częstochowa Jews, their first question was precisely about Raphael Federman.

There is no trace of the Old Synagogue of Częstochowa on ul. Nadrzeczna. Of the large [New] Synagogue on ul. Wały [TN: It is actually on ul. Wilsona.], which was built by the Częstochowa

nouveaux riches at the end of the 19th century, only the walled skeleton remains. Even in its ruined state, traces can still be seen of the once magnificent temple-like building, with marble Greek columns at the entrance.

On the evening of 24th December 1939, when preparations were being made on Jasna Góra to commence the festive Christmas mass, Częstochowa *Volksdeutsch* [Ethnic Germans], with the aid of Polish hooligans, set fire to the [New] Synagogue, which was famed for its scope and opulence, as well as for its long-serving cantor, the great composer of liturgical music and wondrous singer, Abram Ber Birenbaum. In the property surrounding the ruined synagogue, heaps of construction materials lie and, according to what I've been told, the synagogue is being rebuilt as a concert hall.

The Jewish Cemetery has also remained. [It is] near the steel mill named after Bolesław Bierut, which is an expansion of the old [Huta (Steelworks)] Hantke factory. When the factory was being renovated, the planners at the state headquarters in Warsaw had intended to include the grounds of the Jewish Cemetery, in which the headstones of the Częstochowa Jewish industrial pioneers can be found. The communist planners even proposed to dig up the bones and reinter them elsewhere. But the leaders of the Jewish Community in Częstochowa put up a resistance and the Jewish Cemetery was not touched.

On ul. Garibaldiego, there is the old Częstochowa *Kehilla* building, which was [once] known as a poorhouse. In this single-storey house, wandering beggars often used to spend the night. The [only] one who lives there now is the *shoichet*, A. Landsman.

Here and there, the remains of ruins were visible, with new houses next to them. I then found myself in the area where, two hundred years earlier, Jewish settlement had [first] been established. These were the streets ul. Nadrzeczna (the Jews used to call it "*Rzeczka* [River] Street"), ul. Garncarska (Potters' Street), the *Stary Rynek* [Old Market Square], the *Nowy Rynek* [New Market Square], ul. Mirowska and other ruined streets where, under Nazi occupation, the ghetto had been located.

Into these same alleys, with the little, slumped wooden houses, the Nazis had, in April 1940 [sic 1941], rounded up the 29,000 Częstochowa Jews [and] about 20,000 from the surrounding towns - from Działoszyn, Radomsko, Janów, Kamyk and from other communities.

I wandered about along the dark, empty ul. Warszawska, in Częstochowa's old quarter, which the Jews used to call the *gubernia*. In the stillness of the night, I heard the murmur of the Warta River, at whose banks the first Częstochowa Jews had lived in little wooden houses which would, in the spring, be flooded by the raging river.

As a settlement, Częstochowa already existed in the 13th century. It was a tiny, little village at the foot of Jasna Góra and its church. Only in 1717 were the foundations laid for the New Częstochowa, in which the first Jews also settled. These were craftsmen, merchants and owners of taverns.

The city's industrial blooming dates from the year 1845, when the first train [began] to pass through Częstochowa on the Vienna-Warsaw line. At the end of the 19th century, in 1899, the Warsaw iron manufacturer Bernard Hantke, a Jewish apostate, built a large steel factory in Częstochowa, which has [now] been swallowed up by the new steel combine. Following the successful launch of the Hantke factory, others were established - Lenczer's chicory factory, Grosman's chalk ovens, the Kon Bros. furniture factory, and the first wallpaper factory - that of Henryk Markusfeld which, in Częstochowa, was called the "*Farbiarnia*". Poland's first watch factory was also established in

Częstochowa. Its owner, Chanina Goldberg, came up with a series of important inventions and his patents were bought by Swiss watchmakers.

Częstochowa was among the most respected Jewish communities in Poland and, in many fields of financial, social and political life, Częstochowa was at the forefront of medium-sized communities. Only insignificant traces have remained of Częstochowa's colourful, rich Jewish life.

In the spring of 1945, when throughout the ruined Jewish settlement in Poland the bloodied curtain was raised, Częstochowa emerged as the largest Jewish community in Poland, after Łódź and Wrocław. The over 5,000 Jews, who returned from the camps and from underground hiding-places, in proportional terms, constituted the largest number of Jewish survivors of any other Jewish community. There were far more Jews in Częstochowa than in Warsaw.

For the returning Jews, the local authorities vacated those *Kehilla* buildings still remaining. The I. L. Peretz School was, once again, revived. A cultural club and a drama circle were created, and a series of Jewish cooperatives were set up. However, all this did not last very long. Częstochowa soon became a critical centre in the titanic contest between the two extreme forces in Poland - the Communist regime with its mighty police apparatus, and the Catholic Church, which possesses a far mightier weapon - the faith of the overwhelming majority of the Polish population.

Much earlier and quicker than in any other of the newly revived communities in Poland, the Jews of Częstochowa began to wander away. Of the more than 5,000 Jews in 1945, ten years later, at the end of the police regime, barely 500 Jews remained. Of these, over one-third left following the turbulent "October Days", when Gomułka came to power and the Polish populace began using their new liberties, first of all, against the Jews.



The first house which I visited in Częstochowa was, for me, the saddest illustration of the downfall of this glorious Jewish community. I had clambered up the dark stairs of several houses, where I had the addresses of Częstochowa Jews, but no-one answered my knocking and ringing. The first door which opened to me was that of Chaim Segal's home, at ul. Gałczyńskiego 8, flat 11.

A young girl of around 16 opened, who explained to me that her father was not at home and that he would only return late that night. When I was already about to go away, a feeble, nervous voice carried from inside, which called, "Come in, come in".

This was Chaim Segal's ailing wife, Dora, who had already been bedridden for more than two years. However, this emaciated, pale woman with her teary, glowing eyes, showed an exceptional alertness and even a highly refined intelligence.

At my request, Mrs Segal made several telephone calls and, within half an hour, several activists from the Social-Cultural Association had gathered. Among them was also the secretary, Mojsze Lederman, who lives in the same building.

The chat continued till long after midnight and I was bombarded with questions about America and Israel. Each time I tried steering the conversation towards Jewish Częstochowa, the reply was, "There is nothing to tell. The Jewish chapter of Częstochowa is at its end". Against these pessimistic attestations, only the sick lady protested, "These are [people who] see [everything] black, these are defeatists!"

The assembled Częstochowa Jews really did not have much to tell, but what they did tell [only] affirmed their pessimism. All the surviving Częstochowa Jews are convinced that there is no longer any future for them in Poland even though, in these last few months, the antisemitism has actually decreased and friendlier relations have begun to be established with the Polish populace. As an example, they mentioned Dr Arnold Rozenblum, who recently emigrated to Israel. His many Polish patients literally wept when they bade him farewell.

Among the sixty remaining Jewish families in town, the majority are mixed couples and it is actually the Christian women who urge their husbands to travel to Israel. They are isolated [and] lonely and wish to depart as soon as possible.

The greater part of the several dozen Jews in Częstochowa is employed in the state factories, mostly in high administrative positions. There are [some] ten Jewish craftsmen. Several Jews are directors of factories and cooperatives, among whom is Chaim Segal, in fact. Of the professional Jewish intelligentsia in Częstochowa, only one doctor and one lawyer have remained.

Of late, sixteen Jewish families have returned from Soviet Russia. They were immediately given good flats in new buildings. Some of them have brought valuable items with them, including cars. These Jewish returnees have plunged into commerce and they are doing quite well.

Among the repatriates in Częstochowa is Mrs Segal's uncle, Szmul Szwarcbaum who, for sixteen years, slaved away in the Siberian gold mines. Szwarcbaum brought back with him a letter from the Soviet Government in which he asked forgiveness for the "gratuitous accusations" which had been cast upon him. He was also granted a monetary reward for the gold with which he had enriched the Soviet state coffers.

But Szwarcbaum had not wished to remain in Częstochowa any longer. He immediately left for Israel and even took his sick niece's little eight-year-old daughter with him.

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On Jasna Góra – With the Heroes of the Resistance in Poznań

On Sunday morning, I was awakened at dawn by a din in the hotel and the continuous sound of rapid footsteps on the street outside. Pious Catholic pilgrims were hurrying to the first mass at the church on Jasna Góra. The day began in its customary way. The last drunks were thrown out of the closing bars. Their place was taken by pale, sleepy-faced men and women drinking a watery cocoa and munching dry, breakfast rolls. "The fresh rolls have all been grabbed up or sold in the back of the shop", an old Pole confided to me bitterly.

In the milk bar, there was a fast turnover of early morning customers. They were mostly natives of Częstochowa - skilled and unskilled workers. The vast majority of them were from a crowded suburb with the odd name of Ostatni Grosz, meaning the "last *grosz*" [penny], which was the name of an old tavern situated in that area more than a century before. It was so-called because, there, the peasants spent their last *grosz* on drink.

Now, the poorest workers live in that quarter. Most of them are weavers, earning from 800 to 1,000 *złoty* a month, barely enough to feed a small family. They meet their other expenses by "side work". In most cases, this means stealing hanks of wool out of the factories to take home. There, the women knit socks or sweaters and sell them for low prices to the craftsmen who have permits for

self-employment. This is how the organised Polish city workers are drawn into the network of wholesale theft, upon which Częstochowa's economic underground depends for its raw material. The old Częstochowa workers who, without any reticence, told me about this system, used the euphemism "taking", instead of "stealing", as if it were a natural part of the new Communist way of life.

Suddenly, a large group of unusually, well-dressed young men and women appeared at the milk bar. Their appearance contrasted sharply with that of the shabby natives. Some of the newcomers even had cameras dangling from their shoulders and were carrying leather tourist bags.

Unlike the natives, the tourists protested loudly about the hard breakfast rolls. Their leader wore an armband with the letters PTTK [*Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajoznawcze*] (Polish Society for National Excursions). He turned to the manager of the milk bar and, after a sharp exchange of words, fresh rolls made an appearance with butter besides.

It turned out that the newcomers were a group from a large excursion of more than 500 people, who had come to Częstochowa by a special train from Poznań - the city where, in June 1956, the Polish revolt against Moscow actually began.

What seemed incredible to me was the fact, told me by one of the tourists, that all the excursionists were workers or engineers employed in the famous Cegielski Factory. This was the locomotive and motor factory, whose workers were the first to go out on strike against the starvation wages of Communist Poland and who had resisted the attempts of the police to put down the strike with force.

I joined the Poznań tourist group in their trek to Jasna Góra. As we walked, the group gradually grew into a procession, joined by other groups from the Poznań excursion, who were staying at other hotels. They had all come to Częstochowa to visit the historic church.

[To be more exact,] the Cegielski Factory workers told me, as we walked, that they had decided to come to Częstochowa in protest against the Communist Party's refusal to permit a celebration of the first anniversary of the Polish October revolution. Before leaving Poznań, the excursionists had placed wreaths on the graves of their comrades, who had fallen in the events of June 1956.

[Incidentally,] the famous Poznań locomotive factory's [very name is instructive. It] was named in 1946 after the old Polish revolutionary Hipolit Cegielski. However, three years later, in 1949, the name Cegielski was changed to [the] Stalin [Works]. During the bloody events of June 1956, the workers tore down the Stalin sign, smashed the busts of the Soviet dictator and gave the factory back its original name - Cegielski.

I asked whether Communist Party members were included in the excursions and was told that not only Party members, but Party unit secretaries had come along.

"Our Party secretaries", an old worker informed me, "take their children to all the religious [Corpus Christi] processions and even throw flowers at the Madonna's statue. That's what they're like, these new-fangled Communist big shots", he added bitterly. "But they threw me out of the Party." He beat his bony chest with his fist, "I was a member of the Polish Socialist Party for thirty-seven years!"

"Perhaps it was for the best that they called off the anniversary celebration", another worker spoke up. "Who knows, things might have come to bloodshed in Poznań again and, again, for nothing. What good did it do the Warsaw students to demonstrate against the closing down of the *Po Prostu*

[Simply] journal? It hurts to have that militant magazine stopped, but what can anybody do about it? There's no point in bloodshed. You have to look the facts in the eye in Poland."

This was the general opinion among most of the workers to whom I spoke during my two-hour visit to Jasna Góra. The consensus was that the Polish people had to stop their romantic dreaming and to face up to the reality that Poland is in an unhappy, geographic position, [situated as it is, between Soviet Russia and Germany].

The guide to the church gave a detailed history of every doorway, chapel and turret. He lingered over the massive fortress wall with its forged iron gates. The only access to the gates was by a wooden suspension bridge over a deep moat. Every time Częstochowa was besieged by an enemy, the moat was filled with water [and the bridge pulled up].

"At this spot", said the guide, "more than three hundred years ago, the *Miracle of Częstochowa* took place. At this very bastion, a small handful of monks repelled the vast, invading Swedish army".

Some of the younger members of the Poznań excursion passed iconoclastic remarks about the bombastic language the guide had employed in his description of the *Miracle of Częstochowa*. However, a little while later, I came across those same critics, piously crossing themselves as they knelt in the huge church courtyard, where a priest was sprinkling the Cegielski Factory pilgrims with holy water.

I was taking some photographs of this remarkable scene of mass ecstasy, when a young priest suddenly appeared and asked me whether I had a [special] permit to take films. This was the only time during my entire visit to Poland that I was questioned in this way. No one had troubled me at the collective farms or at the factories. The only place, in all Poland, where I was not permitted to take photographs without special permission, was in the church courtyard at Jasna Góra in Częstochowa.

There were 500 workers, technicians and engineers in the Cegielski Factory excursion from Poznań. No more than several dozen [of these class-conscious radicals] stayed outside the cathedral during services. Inside, the picture of the Holy Mother of Częstochowa, holding the infant [Jesus] in her arms, hangs over the richly adorned altar. Besides the originality of the fresco technique, the picture is unusual in church art, because both Madonna and Infant have dark, almost black faces. At special festive services, Madonna and Infant are dressed in stiff, bejewelled clothing and massive gold crowns are set on their heads. In the glow of the mixed light falling on the altar from the tall candelabrum, one has the impression that the Madonna and Infant are alive.

These were the actual remarks which I caught from amongst the workers of the Cegielski factory, who, immediately after the service, joined the long queues standing in front of the numerous confessionals, in order to confess.

Afterward, like thousands of other pilgrims, they walked through the great fair, buying crucifixes, amulets and toys at the hundreds of stalls set out on the immense plaza around the church buildings. It is a kind of primitive Coney Island, where the pilgrims can be photographed holding a picture of the Holy Madonna or speeding through the sky in the latest type of Soviet MIG airplane. Traditional Polish dishes are served, piping hot, under the open sky.

Even those workers from the Cegielski Factory, who had not attended the religious service, explained to me that the visit to Jasna Góra was a deeply emotional experience for them, which they had not expected. They were particularly powerfully influenced by the historic import of the pictures

painted by the great Polish and Italian masters from the time of the early Renaissance to the present. Far more than any other cathedrals in Poland, the church buildings on Jasna Góra are decorated with monumental frescoes of patriotic subjects, dealing with the most dramatic events in the millennial history of the Polish people.

The history of Jasna Góra also includes sad Jewish moments and, around the walls of the Częstochowa monastery, the last episode of the Frankist Movement was played out which, for several decades, had plagued the Jews in Poland, giving rise to blood-libels and to the acute persecution on part of the Catholic Church. This occurred in 1760, when Jakub Frank, follower of the Shabtai Zvi cult, switched over to the Catholic faith. His baptism was celebrated in Warsaw with a great parade and his godfather was none other than King Augustus III [of Poland]. Soon afterwards, a group of clerics brought an accusation before the Church tribunal, that Jakub Frank was still playing the role of Messiah and, thus, was indirectly negating the Christian doctrine of the [Holy] Trinity.

Jakub Frank was imprisoned in the fortified monastery, where he sat for an entire thirteen years. Jakub Frank's followers, whose number was quite large in Poland, came to Częstochowa and made all efforts [possible] to free their leader. They then gave the city a symbolic name - *Ta'ara D'Romi* [Aramaic] (Gate of Rome), hinting at the Talmudic legend regarding the Messiah, who sits as a beggar at the gates of Rome. At the end of 1772, when the Russian General Bibikov took Częstochowa, Frank was released and he left Poland.

I saw the spacious cell in which the false Messiah, Jakub Frank, was held for thirteen years. The long, narrow window in the thick fortress walls barely let in a little daylight. The monk leading the Sunday visitors round the historic part of the monastery, in telling the story of Jakub Frank, repeated the well-known Catholic version - that Jakub Frank had intended to undermine the foundations of Christianity.

When I inquired whether any of Jakub Frank's writings had remained in the monastery archives, the monk replied that there was an entire section of old Hebrew manuscripts and Gutenberg Bibles, but that they were not accessible to any visitor.

The great Jewish historian, Warsaw Ghetto martyr, Professor Majer Bałaban, had also been imprisoned in this same Jewish section of the Częstochowa monastery. Following the First World War, for some time, he was the Director of the Jewish *gymnazjum* [high school] in Częstochowa.

The middle-aged monk, who displayed above-average intelligence, began delicately inquiring of me why it was that I was so interested in the Hebrew section of the monastery's library. From the manner in which he asked me, I gained the impression that on his tongue lay the "delicate" question of whether I was a Jew, but that he would not place me in any embarrassment before the other surrounding people.

I appeased his curiosity and said, out loud, that I was a Jew. A discreet smile appeared on his lips and the surrounding Polish co-visitors stared at me oddly, as if they had just witnessed some great discovery. The monk then asked me whether I was from Częstochowa or a newcomer, as he had heard that there were no longer any Jews in Częstochowa.

On my way back to the city, on the Holy Mary *Aleja*, I encountered a procession of several thousand pilgrims. [Unlike the Cegielski group,] this was a [classic] pilgrimage, consisting of peasants from the surrounding villages, who were carrying holy pictures and piously singing religious hymns that set the boulevard reverberating. Compared with this procession, the placards and banners with their

Communist slogans, which hung all along Częstochowa's same main boulevard, seemed to me to be pale and ineffective.

Celebration of the Bund's 50th Anniversary in Częstochowa, 1947

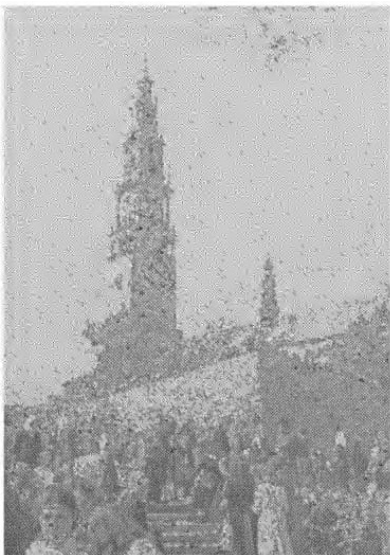
1) The presidium of the Assembly in Częstochowa.



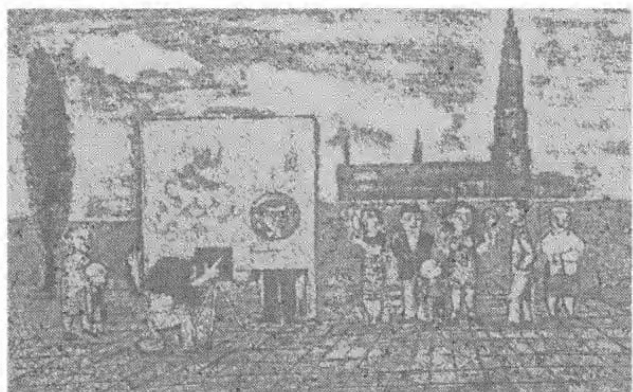
2) Representative of the PPS, member Kazimierz Jurek delivers his greeting.



3) Greeting of the PPR Secretary, Mbr. Kutilo.



A celebration at the Jasna Góra, in 1946



A souvenir from Częstochowa, 1951; painted by L. Mianowski



Functions for Jewish children in 1956, in honour of the liberation from Nazism



Pictures of the years of destruction in Częstochowa, painted by the Częstochowa landsman, L. Kuszniir, now in Israel.

