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Young Jewish Writers in the Yizkor Book *Czenstochov*

The book *Czenstochov*, apart from its historical worth, possesses another great virtue. An array of gifted, young writers, saved from Hitler's destruction, participated in it. They personally lived through all the Nazi atrocities and, personally, waged the two-fold war against the barbaric Germans from the outside and the *Judenrat* members from the inside.

They miraculously emerged alive from that valley of death, which took the form of slave camps, and fought their way to America, where they continue to be communally active in their *Landsmannschaften* and in Jewish social and cultural life. They are, in the order in which they appear in the book *Czenstochov* - **Dr Benjamin Orenstein, Zvi Rosenvein, Szlojme Waga, M. Soski, A.L. Bomba, Dr Wolf Gliksman, Chonon Kiel and Motl Berkowicz.**

I am aware that, as far as the Holocaust themes, which our young writers have published are concerned, some of us say,

- 1) "Leave us in peace with the Holocaust themes. Let us live [our lives] - we have already had enough Holocaust";
- 2) "We have already read about many of these topics. Why continue publishing them?"

Nevertheless, we remember that, after the First World War, which pales in comparison with the Jewish Holocaust, people at the time also wished to forget about the horrors of the global war and the concentration camps, where people (on that occasion mainly non-Jews) died like flies. Thus, people forgot - until the advent of Hitler's destruction which, in large measure, was a result of the First World War.

We also know that, for several thousand years without interruption, generations of Jews and Jewish poets have never ceased weeping for the destruction of the Temple. They pour out their tears every year [on its anniversary] with the Book of Lamentations:

"Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens." [Lamentations 5:1-2]

Every *Shabbes*, Jews recited, along with the [festive] *Shabbes* prayers, the *Av Ho'Rachamim* [Merciful Father¹], in which they prayed for the souls of

"... the holy congregations, who gave up their lives in sanctification of the Name [of God], who were loved and valued in their lives and who, in their deaths, have not departed."

¹ [TN: This prayer, by an unknown author, was composed in memory of the martyrs massacred in Germany during the First Crusade. It is first known from a prayer book dated 1290. (Jewish Virtual Library)]

And now, how large - oh, how large— the number of the annihilated millions is, which death, the destruction, has not separated from us - and what a sacred obligation it is for us to always commemorate them!

Let us hereby briefly mention who these young authors are, and upon what subjects they have written:

Dr Benjamin Orenstein worked, under the Nazi regime, in a HASAG munitions camp, which was actually in Częstochowa. During this period, he collected materials regarding the Nazi slayings in the camp, wrote them down on bits of paper and hid them in a straw mattress. Following the liberation from the German camps, he published a book in Latin characters entitled "*Churban Czenstochow*". This book played an important role in the trials in Germany, where the German murderers were tried. In the book *Czenstochov*, he is represented with five pieces:

- 1) *Częstochowa Jews During the Nazi Era*;
- 2) *Częstochowa Townspeople in the DP Camps in Germany*;
- 3) *Częstochowa Folklore During the Nazi Period*;
- 4) *Dr Jakub Szacki's Contribution to the History of the Jews in Częstochowa*; and
- 5) *The Activity of the Częstochower Landsmannschaft in Montreal*.

We must note here, that these works by Dr Benjamin Orenstein are not only staple contributions to the history of the Częstochowa Holocaust, but to the literature of the Holocaust as a whole.

Zvi Rosenvein [Cwi Rozenwajn] was one of the most active *Poalei Zion* members in the city. During the Nazi occupation, he was involved in the clandestine *Arbeiterrat* [Workers Council] and headed the struggles of the slave labourers. His chapter *The Hunger Strike in the Częstochowa Ghetto*, about the *Arbeiterrat* in Częstochowa, contains historical documents, which markedly and acutely illustrate the fight of the Jewish slave workers against the *Judenrat* members and, it is sad to say, the "privileged classes" surrounding them.

Szlojme Waga's descriptions² of the destroyed Jewish houses and streets following the deportation of the Jews to the Treblinka gas chambers, occupy a special place. The image of the deceased Jewish maiden on the cart with the slain, with the harmonious shape of her arms, her open black eyes, "little, sculpted, slightly curved Jewish nose" and open mouth, which communicates, in a deaf-mute language, with the Jewish policeman escorting the cart. This image is such a horrific picture, that it begs to be immortalised by a painter on canvas.

The other chapters on the Holocaust by **J. Soski** (*The Mobilisation*) and **A.L. Bomba** (*My Escape from Treblinka*) document the heroism and fighting spirit of the Jewish youth in the shadow of death and destruction.

As far as our obligation to dedicate ourselves less to the Holocaust and more to the life and creation of our destroyed communities is concerned, **A. Menes** published an article on this topic in *Forverts*, dated 30th November of this year). Also in this field, our young writers did not hold back. **Dr Wolf Gliksman** described *Częstochowa's Street*. **Motl Berkowicz**, a pupil of

² [TN: In the chapter "The Blood of the Annihilated Screams from the Ground", "*Czenstochov*", pp. 52-56.]

the I.L. Peretz School in Częstochowa, talentedly depicted *A Jewish House in Częstochowa*, which is a living picture of a Jewish building with its tenants, its joys and sorrows, as well as its lights and shadows. An altogether special mention must be given to **Chonon Kiel**, a teacher at the Sholem Aleichem Schools, who writes successful short stories and verses for children. He is represented in the book with three poems: *To The Warta*, *The Old Synagogue* and *I Seek*, as well as with the depictions of two well-known Częstochowa characters: *Tzimmes* and *Riwe'le*. Let us also mention the short, but well-written essay by **Harry Dziubas**, *America Has Lifted Me Up*.

Of the newly-arrived [*landsleit*], the renowned communal activist **Bernard Fajtek** participates in the book³.

Let us mention here, with special reverential awe, the very important work of the leading researcher of the Holocaust era, the late **Dr Phillip Friedman**, on the subject *Destruction and Resistance of the Częstochowa Jews During the Nazi Occupation (a bibliographical overview)*.

In the book, a large number of authors are represented, who have gained a very prominent place in our essay writing and literature. I shall suffice with listing their names. They are **Dr Zvi Cohen**, **Ephim Jeshurin**, **Mojżesz Dłużnowski**, **Chaim-Leib Fuchs**, **Dawid Najmark**, **Lotty Malach**, **Z. Turkow**, **I.Sz. Herc**, **Berisz Wajnsztajn**, **S.D. Singer**, **Dr I.L. [sic I.N.] Steinberg**⁴, **Szoszana Częstochowska** (Israel) and **Sz.L. Sznajderman**.

Many of the older *Częstochower landsleit* have participated in the Yiddish press in Częstochowa and America. Those featured in the book are **L. [sic R.] Federman**, **Abram Litman**, **A. Wincz [sic. Wilcz⁵]**, **Liber Brener**, **Mojsze Lederman** (currently lives in Częstochowa), the late **Chaim-Lajb Szwarc**, **Morris Sztern**, **Josef Kaufman**, **M. Goldberg**, **R. Luks** (Detroit), **Abram Gotlib** (Israel), **Dawid Tanski**, **Emza Bern** (Argentina), **Herszl Epszajn**, **Ch. [sic H.] Grauman**, **Josl Berliner**, **Jetta Grey**⁶, **Lea Szwarc**, **A. Chrobolovsky** (Los Angeles), **Dawid Wrocławski** and **Dr Leib Kurland** (Paris).

I would also wish to mention here my own modest contribution to the book *Czenstochov*. I am proud of the words written to me by Dr Benjamin Orenstein in a letter dated 25th November 1958: "Your memoirs are of a very considerable value, as they reflect an epoch of active Jewish creation, life and struggle."

The book *Czenstochov* also contains a long report on the seventieth birthday of **Dr Josef Kruk** - a brilliant personality, who was one of the pioneers of the Socialist Movement in Częstochowa and who currently participates in the Hebrew and Yiddish press in Israel. The report of his anniversary, in which Israel's most respected personalities and leaders participated, from President of the nation [Yitzchak] Ben-Zvi to the late Rabbi Binyamin⁷, is an important historical document, well worth reading.

³ [TN: Although Bernard Fajtek is briefly mentioned in "Czenstochov", the book does not contain any piece under his name.]

⁴ [TN: Isaac Nachman Steinberg was the editor of the "Afn Shvel" (At the Threshold) magazine.]

⁵ [TN: Aka Chaskiel Wilczyński.]

⁶ [TN: Although Jetta Grey (Jecza Grylak) née Pakuła from Los Angeles, Ca. is mentioned in "Czenstochov", nothing in it appears as written by her.]

⁷ [TN: Rabbi Binyamin (pseudonym of Yehoshua Redler-Feldman) was one of the founders of the Brit Shalom movement, which sought peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Jews, to be achieved by renunciation of the Zionist aim of creating an exclusively Jewish state, and the establishment of a binational state for Arabs and Jews instead.]

The book also includes the *To Eternal Memory* sections, with a large quantity of photographs and names of relatives, parents, brothers and sisters who perished, a *Personal Album* [of brief biographies], and indexes of the names mentioned in the books *Czenstochover Yidn* and *Czenstochov*. All in all, this book belongs among the most important Yizkor Books and is a significant historical-literary work.

The editor of the book is **S.D. Singer**. The Editorial Board consisted of **Raphael Federman**, **Alkona Chrobolovsky**, **Zvi Rosenvein**, **Dr Benjamin Orenstein** and **Harry Zygas**.

