

George Klein

In Memory of My Parents, Who Perished in Sanctification of [God's] Name

The author of this article, George Klein, was one of the founders of the Czenstochover [and Vicinity] Aid Society of Montreal. He was President of the Society. During the entire period, he devotedly dedicated time, strength, efforts and financial means in benefit of the Cześćochower Landsmannschaft.

Despite the fact that the author writes memories of his parents, this article nevertheless bears a general character and is of communal interest, because it gives expression to an event in which everyone shared the same fate - the gruesome events of the destruction of the Cześćochowa Jewry.

Concurrently, we must note that, with this article, the author, George Klein, fulfils a very great commandment – that of “Honour thy father and thy mother.” [Exodus 20:12]

The Editor

I was not there during the gruesome years of the Nazi barbarism. I was in Canada, in Montreal. [Yet,] in my mind, thoughts and soul, I was indeed there. My heart raged against the Nazi destroyers and my soul shuddered for the fate of my dear parents, brothers, sisters, friends and acquaintances, and for the fate of the entire Jewish people.



Mrs Rywka Klajner RIP



Reb Mojsze-Mordche Klajner RIP

In my mind, in my thoughts, I saw my parents - Reb Mojsze-Mordche Klajner and my mother Rywka *née* Zylberszac, may they rest in peace. Did I remember and did I, for one minute, forget my father? Those, who knew him, know that he was a most characteristic personality - a strictly observant Jew, an Aleksander *chussid*¹, a scholarly Jew with great knowledge, who was well-versed in [religious] books and was, at the same time, [also] enlightened. He represented strict religiosity along with modern worldliness.

¹ [TN: Follower of a Chassidic court.]

He was of average stature and his *hadras punim*², with his fine, elegantly combed beard, elicited great deference and respect. He was always smartly dressed and the alpaca gabardine would shine down from him. At the Aleksander *shtiebel*³ where he worshipped, on ul. Krakowska [7], in [Reb Zajnwel] Świderski's building, he was called "the elegant *chussid*". In his bookcases, with religious books, one could also find works of Haskala⁴.

Due to his elegance, profound religiosity and general knowledge, he became a son-in-law of the prestigious and respected Zylberszac family⁵, marrying Rywka Zylberszac. My parents were given the agency, for Częstochowa, of the great H. Kagan⁶ petrol firm in Baku (Russia) and they were in this business for long years.

In communal life, my father gained a very favourable reputation. He was close friends with the spiritual personalities of Częstochowa Jewry, namely the *Maggid* [Heb., Preacher] Reb Szmul [sic Josef-Szymon] Koblenz, Mojsze Asz (the son of the City Rabbi), Reb Mojsze Halter and an entire array of others. Chaim Weksler, Szmul Goldsztajn and Jakow-Szymon Blechszajn would meet with my father very frequently, because they wished him to join the *Mizrachi* [religious Zionist] movement, and they wanted him to appear on the candidates' list to be elected councillor on the Jewish *Kehilla*. My father turned down their proposal, thanking them for the honour.

He was a great specialist in settling quarrels and was one of the most prestigious arbitrators in town. Before he began to contemplate a dispute, both sides had to sign that they would abide by his ruling. With his sharp mind, he would delve into the given matter to such an extent, that both parties would be satisfied with the ruling.

In the 1930s, when the *Endekes* and *Narowtzes*⁷ led an antisemitic campaign against the Jewish populace, attacking Jews, beating, robbing and murdering, my late father, who had never wished to appear on the lists to be elected to the *Kehilla*, nevertheless this time acquiesced to lead a group of *Chassidim* to intervene with the Polish Prime Minister – and this came to pass. At that time, he travelled, with a delegation of *Chassidim*, to Warsaw, where they were admitted by the Prime Minister of Poland, General [Felicjan] Sławoj Składkowski. The Prime Minister listened attentively to the delegation and declared to them that he would support the Jews and be at their service – "*Ja zawsze będę służył wam*" [I shall always serve you].

Upon returning from Warsaw, my late father was strongly encouraged by the intervention, and he formed an organisation under the name *Umparteische Chassidim Chareidim* [Non-Partisan Chassidim (&) Ultra-Orthodox]. This was an actual [political] party which, in the Polish language, was called "*Organizacja Bezpartyjnych Żydów w Polsce*" [Organisation of Non-Partisan Jews in Poland]. It even issues its own list of candidates for the elections to the Sejm.

² [TN: Heb., lit. "glory of the face", viz. majestic bearded countenance, from the Talmud Bavli, tractate Shabbes, p.152a: "The glory of the face is the beard."]

³ [TN: Yid., "little house/room"; house of prayer of the followers of a particular Chassidic court. See, regarding this *shtiebel* on ul. Krakowska 7, in "Sefer Częstochowa", Vol. I, chapter "The Shtiebel of Aleksander Chassidim", where Reb Mojsze-Mordche Klajner is also mentioned.]

⁴ [TN: The Jewish Enlightenment movement, with which the Chassidic movement was always at war.]

⁵ [TN: See regarding this family also in "Sefer Częstochowa", Vol. I, in the chapter "Old Families of Częstochowa".]

⁶ [TN: Ref. to businessman Chaim Kahan (see "The Kahans from Baku: A Family Saga" by Verena Dohrn).]

⁷ [TN: Yid. nicknames for the members of the Polish nationalist *Endecja* (Narodowa Demokracja – National Democracy) and *ONR* (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny – National Radical Camp) political parties.]

Several years later, when the Second World Inferno spread its horrific flames across the whole of Europe and Nazism embarked upon its barbaric deeds, they chose Poland as the primary location for their concentration camps and factories of death. This was due to the fact that Poland was drenched, through and through, with a deep hatred, animosity and antisemitism. During this period, all dreams and aspirations were dashed. The hopes that a Polish-Jewish understanding could exist and that Poles would protect the Jews from the murderous Nazi hands turned out to be completely invalid.

Immediately upon the first day of the events under the Nazi occupation, the Jews felt their bitter fate. On “Bloody Monday”, with a large number of other Jews, my late father was driven into the church at the New Market Square [Nowy Rynek], where they were held for long hours. Killings by the Nazi sadists intensified with each day, until Yom Kippur of 1942 arrived. Then the total liquidation of Częstochowa Jewry commenced. In the “resettlement *akcja*” of *Chol Ha’Moed*⁸ *Sukkos*, my parents were sent to Treblinka, where they were annihilated by the barbaric Nazis. They perished on the altar of Jewish death, for the sanctification of the Name [of God] and the People [of Israel].

During the period of the “resettlements”, my two brothers, Jakow and Jechiel, were barracked in the *Metalurgia* factory on ul. Krótka. A selection took place there, and they were sent away to die at the same Treblinka death camp, where their young lives were forever extinguished.

These sorrowful facts were related to me by my brother Harry and my two sisters Mania Konarski and Madzia Rozenberg, whom I brought to Canada, and who were eyewitnesses to the destruction and death during the time of the Nazi tyranny.

The memory of my annihilated parents and two younger brothers, who shared the same fate as a third of our people, who perished in religious and national martyrdom, will be sacred to me evermore. At the same time, I shall never forgive the Nazi beasts, who destroyed six million Jewish martyrs.

⁸ [TN: Heb., “Weekdays of the Festival”; days between the first and last holidays of Pesach or Sukkos.]