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Fragments of Jewish Life

Jewish Częstochowa, alas, is no more. But it lives on in every Jewish heart, not only of the very small number who were saved in the normal manner (by abandoning the Diaspora in time and ascending to the Land of Israel), or even by emigrating to one of the free countries but, above all, of the Surviving Remnant - those who experienced the horrifying inferno of Hitler's barbaric rule, his camps and torture-centres - and survived. They in particular, so strongly desire to immortalise at least something of their memories of their old childhood home, of their suffering and happiness in their dear Częstochowa.

In normal times, Częstochowa had a population of 135,000, of whom about 35,000 were Jews. This racial minority, nevertheless, held the foremost position in the city's financial life. The Jews developed industry, creating employment for many thousands of Christian workers, because the number of Jewish workers in the factories was very small.

In handiworks, however, the Jewish craftsmen were the most important element. This was also the case in small manufacturing. From year to year, Jewish minds and Jewish working hands grew in number. Częstochowa Jews - large and small manufacturers, wholesale merchants and retailers - were famed for their industriousness and diligence and, as a consequence, their undertakings constantly expanded.

Much as the opulent Jews were also "men of the people", who did not "put on airs", separate living areas, as it were, were quite naturally created.

Mainly labourers and poorer craftsmen lived on ulicy Senatorska, Kozia, Garncarska and Nadrzeczna (which were also referred to as "*der Meksyk*" [Mexico]).

Manufacturers, merchants and the wealthier craftsmen lived on the Stary Rynek (Old Market), [from] Warszawska to the end of the First Aleja whereas, in the surrounding streets, lived the extremely rich magnates.

As I have already mentioned, the Jewish manufacturers employed a very small number of Jewish workers. This was not always through any fault of their own. The Polish workers' organisations blocked the way and even prevented Jewish apprentices from learning and becoming qualified in Jewish factories.

And if the Jews, as a rule, made their livelihood mainly from the Christian population and the hundreds of thousands of pious Christian men and women, who thronged to the "Holy Mother" at Jasna Góra from throughout Poland, the fierce hatred of the Polish antisemites who, unmolested, set up pickets by the Jewish shops and prevented any Polish clients from entering, brought great losses to Jewish commerce and craftsmanship.

The ferocious agitation took acute forms, particularly in the last years leading up to the Second World War.

There was some small consolation in the fact that some of the Polish Workers-Socialists had understood what sort of regime the Polish antisemites strived for and some of them conducted a counter-agitation. The Jewish radical youth, in fact, found a way to carry out, together with them, cultural operations among the working youth.

(Jewish life in Częstochowa was fine in all respects, but the greatest Devil of all generations destroyed it all!)