

Godl Frajtag

## The “*Tomchei Ani'im*” [Supporters of the Poor] Society

Every city has its specific public figures, who are very often crowned with the title “obsessed with one matter”, due to their self-sacrificing work for something sacred to them.

There was also such a Jew in Częstochowa – his name was Emanuel Wajcenblat. This Jew could not accept the idea that, in such a Jewish city as Częstochowa, Jews could be found who had no *challes* [traditional loaves of special bread] for *Shabbes* and he took action. He took the great *mitzvah* [religious precept; good deed] upon himself and began collecting *challes* and even [ordinary] bread, and distributed them amongst the poor and needy Jews.

Over the course of time, there were a few other Jews in the city who wished to participate in this great *mitzvah* and they began helping him to gather the *challes*.

The need in the Jewish street grew consistently and it was necessary to base the matter on wider and stronger foundations.

At the initiative of the editor B. Bocian, the “*Tomchei Ani'im*” Society was founded, which was licensed by the authorities and, in a short time, became a large, branched relief institution.

Every *Shabbes*, at lunchtime, up to 260 portions were handed out at the “*Tomchei Ani'im*” locale, which contained not only *challes*, but also various other products for *Shabbes* needs.

The portions were divided in three categories - for larger and smaller families, as well as for couples.

As well as this, packages were sent with special couriers to the homes of forty families who had fallen from [former] glory.

And thus, every *Shabbes*, simple Jews, who worked hard all week for their livelihoods, went out and, sacrificing their *Shabbes* rest for the *mitzvah* of “*that thy brother may live with thee*” [Leviticus 25:36], carried the heavy baskets around all the streets, where Jewish home-owners were waiting for them - the so-called “*Git-Shabbes Yingelech*” [Yid.; “Good *Shabbes*” Boys] - at their doors and windows, filling their baskets with *challes* and different Sabbatical foodstuffs for the city’s poor Jewish families.

For *Pesach*, the “*Tomchei Ani'im*” organised a special campaign for four hundred families.

In honour of *Pesach*, besides the *matzes* and eggs, they sent each family a monetary allocation for the purchase of whatever they deemed most necessary.

The most active Emanuel Wajcenblat, Berl Bocian, Jonatan Izraelowicz, Bajnus Woznica and Krauzkopf.

(Bajnus Woznica was still able to emigrate to the Land of Israel and died in Rehovot).

In 1937, being in my hometown Częstochowa, I was able to see with my own eyes what the activists of *"Tomchei Ani'im"* did for the needy, dignified, poor Jews and all – *"without the expectation of receiving a reward"* [see Avot 1, mishna 3] and with fraternal heartiness.

(But, who could think that, just two-three years later, both the activists and the ones in need would no longer be on God's earth and that murderous hands would kill them all!)