

A Courtyard on Ulica Warszawska

Warszawska 5 was the property of the Gryczmański family, who belonged to the Polish nobility (the *Szlachta*). The husband was no longer alive, just the widow without children - they had died in their youth. It was one of the largest buildings in town, and it bordered ulica Ogrodowa. This Christian-owned building housed Jewish tenants almost exclusively who, amongst themselves, made up practically an entire all-encompassing little *shtetl*- merchants, artisans, stallholders, public activists and men of Torah. Several families of musicians also lived in this house, among them the Szmulewicz family and one always heard music being played there - although it rattled the ears more often than not. This was, on the one hand, also the social aid "centre" for the poorer sections of the population, for there, also lived the renowned Zionist activist Mr Natan Gerichter, who was also very active in the management of "*Dobroczynność*" and who, to the poorer residents, would hand out "coupons" for different products and the monetary stipends.

Every morning, the courtyard became the meeting-point for the Jewish poor, who [all] waited for Natan Gerichter.

His home was also the venue for secret Zionist meetings, during the times when Zionist activity was conducted very clandestinely.

Natan Gerichter, a great flour and grain merchant, was the most intellectual tenant in the building, and his dwelling was also the cultural corner for literary meetings of old and young *Maskilim*. Natan Gerichter, who was a delegate to several Zionist congresses, often reported and lectured in his home about Zionist problems, as well as delivering reports on the congresses and other Zionist conferences. All factions supported him, including his political opponents.

On the other hand, this same courtyard was the centre of Torah study and the Chassidic music of the *Gerer* and *Radomsker* dynasties. The representatives of these two Chassidic "courts" constituted, on one side, the apartment of my grandfather Reb Józef Szaja Wargon and his children, who were exceptional in Chassidism and great singers as well, Reb Józef Szaja serving as leader at the [High Holidays] morning prayer service and blowing the *shoifar* at the *Radomsko shtiebel* and, [on the other,] Reb Manasza Margulies, who leaded the *Mysef* service at the *Gerer shtiebel*. When the month of Elul¹ came, the courtyard echoed with the beautiful Chassidic melodies sung by the two choirs.

One also heard the building's Chassidic tenants' constant sing-song of Torah study. I remember how Rabbi Bencion Wdowinski² (a son of the Rabbi of Radzymin and a son-in-law of Reb Mojsze Margulies, a great scholar who studied with young Torah students) would often be visited by the Rabbi Reb Wolwisz Borensztajn (the young prodigy from Sochaczew) and Reb Wowczy Piotrkowski (the son-in-law of the renowned *Gerer chassid* Reb Chaskel Fiszel), and all three scholars would walk around the two courtyards for hours on end, immersed in Torah conversations.

(Such was the life of the tenants at ulica Warszawska #5, until the terrifying "operations" of the Nazi murderers.)

¹ [TN: The month preceding the High Holidays, on which the choirs would have practised their repertoires.]

² [TN: Also mentioned above, p.272. In the records appears as Bencijen Wysokinski.]