The Glory and Radiance of Jewish Częstochowa

How dear was this city of my childhood and youth! In the third building from the railway bridge over the Aleja, was our house, to which tens and hundreds used to come to my father, to ask his advice or to read a complicated casuistic essay [before him]. The house was a place to which yeshivah lads would come on Shabbes afternoon to study a page of Talmud or to eat Shabbes fruit.

I did not enjoy promenading on the Aleje. I did not go into the park - neither the new one nor the old. Barring these, I knew every stone and every footpath there. Who is able to encompass, in his thought, the entire splendour and radiance of bygone Jewish Częstochowa?!

There was a Jew in Częstochowa - Reb Leibale Landau was his name. He was a melamed. Who did not study with Reb Leibale Landau? Who, from the last three generations, does not remember his long cheder on ul. Mostowa, with the broom [?] and with the poor legless cripple, who sat in his low, little cart next to the cheder, with his green hat and little toys?

And how could one forget Reb Pinkus Arkusz, the melamed for the children of the wealthy, with whom, besides Torah, one also received a general education with an exam every semester?

Or take, for example, Reb Icze Amstower, with Reb Motl, with whom young lads would already learn a page [of the tractate] Nedarim with Ran¹, or would have even completed [the tractate] Chullin!

The Keser Torah yeshivah stood like a fortress in Częstochowa, with its deans Reb Michal Szwarcbaum and Reb Ruwele [Ruben] Rechtman, with its classes and levels, where half of the city’s young married scholars, present and future Maskilim, high school students and intellectuals, [all] took in an incredible lesson of Talmudic wisdom and sharp-minded casuistry.

And the Jewish gymnasium - the glory and pride of the city, with its directors Prof Bałaban, Prof Prost, and pedagogues Rabbi Prof Hirszberg, Janowski, Lauer and others.

Scholars and Prodigies

A world of disciples, numbering in the thousands, indeed emerged from it [i.e. Częstochowa]! The proudest Jewish city Częstochowa, with its dozens of institutions, all in the service of Jewish society, with its wonderful Kehilla, with the rabbi and prodigy Reb Nuchem Asz, Berl Bocian (the first publisher of the first newspaper), the maggid Reb Mojsze Halter, Mendel Fogel, Szmul Goldsztajn and others.

Who does not remember the youth, the golden youth - from Axer’s gymnasium through to Machzikei Hadas, with Reb Szyja Zeligman (son of Herszel, son of Szyja) at its head? Or [if one could] go back in time to the times of Reb Duwidel’ of Lelów!

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¹ [TN: Commentary by the 14th century rabbi, Rabbi Nissim ben Reuven. These particular studies are considered quite advanced.]
Częstochowa! How beloved and dear was this Jewish city to the Jews. Ulica Kozia, ulica Warszawska, ulica Targowa and the Nowy Rynek (New Market), ulica Krakowska and the Aleje - each and every street, which throbbed with Jewish life and where Jews lived, was close to the heart. Jewish life, Jewish ideas and creations - all were enveloped within the city’s prayer shawl.

Jewish Częstochowa is no more! The city of my birth is in ruins. No other shall rise in its place!