

Dr Zvi Kantor z''l

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 *Ran*¹, or would have even completed [the tractate] *Chullin*!

The *Keser Torah yeshivah* stood like a fortress in Częstochowa, with its deans Reb Michał Szwarbaum 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 Hirsberg, 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 Duwid'l of Lelów!



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!