

B.O.

The Bygone Jewish Life

I

Jewish settlement in Częstochowa was established in the 18th century.

The first Jewish *kehilla* was formed in 1799 and, in 1834, the community numbered several hundred souls. As the number of Jews grew, Jewish communal institutions of a religious and charitable character were concurrently built.

In the economic life, Jews developed the metal, haberdashery and toy industries, as well as craftsmanship and commerce.

During the times of the Tsarist occupation, the government's attitude towards the Jewish populace was a negative one, but the Jews were nevertheless suppliers of various articles for the Russian army and engaged in industry, commerce, export and import, thereby making a great deal of money.

In the place of vacant lots, large Jewish factories, commercial establishments, shops and residential houses arose.

The Emperor of the French, Napoleon, affected a victorious march across Europe. In 1812, with his army, he marched into Poland and arrived in Częstochowa, where he stayed as a guest of the Jewish populace¹.

Napoleon determined that the Jewish people were an element for the fight for freedom and, in gratitude for the festive welcome that was held for him at the time, he bestowed upon the Jewish populace of Częstochowa a gift, which consisted of a red cloak [embroidered] with a Polish eagle².

This gift was carefully kept both in the times of the Tsarist and the German occupations (First World War).

In the times of Polish independence, the cloak with the eagle was displayed in a public place during the days of the Polish national holidays.

During the Second World War, when the Nazi forces occupied Poland, destroying millions of Jewish lives, all the cultural values and spiritual creations, Napoleon's gift was, in all probability, also robbed or destroyed by the Nazis - as the cloak with the eagle vanished without a trace.

The spiritual currents in the world exercise their influence, and both the humanistic and the liberal teachings anchor themselves in Częstochowa's Jewish life. Circles of Maskilim³, Zionists and Socialists are formed.

With the official establishment of Zionism and the Bund in 1897 as

in Częstochowa

world organisations, communal life blossoms in Częstochowa. Parties, organisations for adults, women and youth, libraries, sporting associations and charitable institutions arise.

Jewish life is modernised even in its religious aspects, and a progressive synagogue called "The German *Shul*" is established. Częstochowa is also in contact with American Jewry, and a Crafts School is founded by the JCA (Jewish Colonisation Association).

On 4th August 1914, the First World War breaks out. The Germans rule Poland, including the city of Częstochowa. The wartime phenomena are not long in coming - a typhus epidemic, hunger, industry and commerce are paralysed, as well as communal life. Częstochowa Jewry aids itself by conducting a food smuggling trade and receives a little support from the American institutions. An entire array of relief organisations arise, to feed the schoolchildren and the Jewish population suffering hunger. With time, communal and cultural life develop in all areas.

As a result of the political changes in Germany, the German occupation forces retreat and Poland becomes independent. Józef Piłsudski's former legions are restructured into a regular army.

II

In the years 1918-1920, Poland fights a war against Soviet Russia, and demoralised formations of [General Józef] Haller and [Symon] Petlura appear on the horizon, with the intention of perpetrating pogroms and robbing Jewish property.

Pogroms upon the Jewish population have an entire history behind them. The first pogrom [in Częstochowa] already took place at the end of the 19th century⁴. It happened on the day when the Russian military, the 78th Dragoons regiment (cavalry), went off on manoeuvres. The pogrom was prepared by Poles from the underworld. It began under the following circumstances: a Polish lady came in the Old Market [Stary Rynek] to the *calownik*⁵ (fruit sellers) to buy "*hudies*"⁶ and provoked a conflict, whereupon the bands set upon the Jewish merchants, beat them, upset the stalls, and robbed and destroyed Jewish property and goods.

A second pogrom took place in 1919, because a murdered Polish soldier was found not far from the train station. The pogrom cost seven Jewish lives, and Jewish property and goods were partially robbed and partially destroyed.

During the Polish-Soviet War, in 1918-1920, Haller's followers and the Posen [Poznań] antisemites, under various pretexts, affected

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¹ [TN: Napoleon Bonaparte himself was said to have spent the night in the inn at the Old Market Square on his way to Moscow. (Source: www.polskieszlaki.pl/stary-rynek-w-czestochowie.htm)]

² [TN: This is most likely a ref. to the flag whose photograph is featured in "Sefer Częstochowa", Vol. I, col. 37, with the caption "The flag of the Polish regiment that returned from Napoleon's war in Russia. This flag later served as a curtain for the ark in the New Synagogue in Częstochowa."]

³ [TN: Heb., followers of Haskala, or the Jewish Enlightenment movement.]

⁴ [TN: The exact date of this pogrom was Monday, 11th August 1902 ("Czenstochover Yidn", "The Rabunek").]

⁵ [TN: Pol., lit., "peasants".]

⁶ [TN: "הודיעים" in the original Yiddish; we have as yet been unable to ascertain to which fruit this name corresponds, but in "Czenstochover Yidn", p. 45, it is clearly stated that the quarrel arose over plums.]