

1905 – AND LATER

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translated from the Yiddish by Mindle Crystel Gross

My memories of childhood years begin with 1905. There was much talk in my home about a revolution that stormed through all of Russia and Poland, which, at that time, was a part of the Czarist Empire. The revolutionary wave even reached Kutno.

Since my older sister, Beile, worked in a shop across the third bridge on the avenue, I decided to go to

her, to be close to the sister who loved me very much. In the morning, as soon as I woke, I went to the avenue. As I was on the second bridge, I saw something strange: a long, broad column of arrestees, accompanied by many armed guards of the Russian police and gendarmes. They were taking them in the direction of the magistrate where the

town jail was located. Among them, I recognized my cousin Abraham Szymonowicz, a baker.

I found the shop open, my sister not there. There was not a living soul to be seen anywhere. The store was filled with all kinds of good things. My eyes were teased by all the beautifully packaged chocolates. I quickly forgot the revolution, the arrestees and the police. Even my sister disappeared from my mind. Such a treasure-trove of sweets! I began to stuff the pockets of my pants, of the winter coat. The boxes were big and my pockets could not contain the pressure. They tore. From tiredness and certainly from the overeating of sweets, I remained standing, rooted to the spot, unable to move. Suddenly, my father appeared. Seeing me standing there, he began to laugh – while I was certain that he would be extremely angry and maybe, who knows, also hit me. But my father, with a smile, emptied my pockets. He did this quickly, but to me it felt like an eternity. He ordered me to go home, and I thought – what a good father, never even saying a bad word.

On my way home, I saw groups of people whispering and looking around carefully in all directions. I thought to myself: "...*This is most certainly the revolution!*"

The happiness at the revolution did not last long. After 1905, the detention-houses and jails were filled. People became more cautious, more careful. My childish ears picked up such words as: *reaction, Stolypin, Czar*, but as to their meaning, I had no idea.

THERE IS TRAVEL TO ERETZ ISRAEL

On the Jewish street and other places, the *Poalei Zion* party reminded everyone of their program – Jewish people go to *Eretz Israel*, especially Jewish workers and laborers – and won over many followers.

Among the first to leave from Kutno to *Eretz Israel* were, as I remember, Hersh Monczik, the upper-boot sewer Arbuz and the shoemaker Yosef Maslowicz (in later years, when he returned from *Eretz Israel*, he could be seen working at his shoemaker's bench in the cellar of Rasz's house in the marketplace). He was tall and thin and there was talk that the military conscription commission had sent him to serve in Moscow.

Arbuz and Maslowicz arrived in *Eretz Israel* and settled in the city of Gaza and worked at their trades. Tel Aviv did not even exist. However, in Gaza, the living conditions for two Jewish artisans from Kutno were so difficult that after a while, they returned to Poland. They spoke little about their trip, but everyone knew that they were not disappointed in the Zionist ideology...

On a summer's day in 1913, I, along with many other Jews of Kutno, accompanied the Lamski family to the train. These were industrious people, early on working the land. The town accompanied them with blessings and yearnings, as well as with envy, that they were going to *Eretz Israel*. They settled into a village and did their work, while at the same time, their sons worked in town. When

WWI broke out, and Turkey demanded that the *Eretz Israel* pioneers become Turkish citizens, the Lamski family did not want to do this and returned to Kutno.

AFTER WWI

In 1916, while the Germans occupied Kutno, the first signs of the many-branched and widely spread community and party life could already be felt, which took on such momentum after Poland's independence in 1918.



Eizyk's land-based economy training farm

In Kutno, there developed the *HeChalutz*¹ and other Zionist groups which both practical and realistically began to prepare the youth for aliya. Hundreds of boys and girls attended evening courses where they learned Hebrew. Older people too, artisans, who dreamed of settling in *Eretz Israel*, also became students of these courses, participating actively in the activities of the Zionist parties.

The *HeChalutz*, from a small group, grew and became a large a strong realistic movement. The gathering of national funds, most especially for *Bank HaPoalim* exhibits about *Eretz Israel*, pictures, movies about the *Eretz Israel* way of life, the culture, exceptional possibility, sports and the like – attracted dozens of youths to the Zionist ideals.

The first training area was not far from Kutno. Later, we moved to a rich Jewish landowner in Konin, until the *HeChalutz* in Warsaw requested us to send the candidates for training and aliya to its own training farms and areas. At that time, the Jewish press in Poland wrote a lot about Kutno Jewish youth and its accomplishment for Zionism.

TO THE MEMORY OF FRIENDS

Many of the friends of the Zionist youth organization who, through certificates or illegal means, came to *Eretz Israel*, contributed to the building of the country and also knew to defend the land with ammunition in their hands. They worked, created and fought in kibbutzim, moshavim and the city.

I see before me now one of the first pioneers and immigrants, Meshulam Landau who, after a serious illness, was taken away from us in 1961.

It is impossible to forget such dear and devoted activists as: Turbowicz, Klingbajl, Płockier, Arbuz, Pietrikowski, Chaim Singer, David Kleczewski, Eizyk and others.

¹ TN: Hebrew, "The Pioneers".

I remember the mobilization of the friends on a *flower day* for the *Keren Kayemet*, or for other Zionist funds, and how much enthusiasm and effort to surpass others in the collection was demonstrated at that time by the friends. The monetary punishment for not participating in the *flower day* was almost never implemented. Everybody participated.

Comrade [Katriel] Eizyk², of blessed memory, as a farm economist, studied abroad in an agronomy school, and devoted much time to the pioneers in broadening their knowledge in working the land, especially with flower-raising. Several years ago, he came to Israel – broken because of the demise of the entire family. Within a short time, he died. Honor his memory.

² TN: 24 December 1893, Golub-Dobrzyń – 18 September 1957, Ganei Yehuda near Petah Tikva. His brother Aron stayed in Poland where he died in 1979.