

ABOUT OUR SPIRITUAL FIGURES

In setting up a spiritual memorial for our tragically cut-off community, we should at least to a small extent pay our moral debt to a significant portion of the martyrs, killed by the murderer's hand, or who lost their lives during their wanderings.

The personalities we hereby briefly describe have for years awakened and encouraged the spirit, heart and soul of our town's Jews; they exalted and developed, prepared for a beautiful and better life. They were the voices of different layers, among the effervescent Jewish life in the town.

The Comber brothers

The Comber brothers were doing their social work with business dedication and creative style. They were raised in an atmosphere of pure spirituality and holy worship by their father, R' Yaakov, who until his last breath was an employee of the Jewish community. He headed the vital records department and was the religious trustee in court, when Jewish citizens were involved in all kinds of trials. He led them through the ceremony of taking the oath.

He gave his children a religious and secular education, leading his sons to the level of excellent middle school teachers, with high pedagogical qualifications.

In the years 1919-1920, the Jewish-social life formed. Political parties were emerging. Among others, also the People's Party, founded by Noah Prylucki, H. D. Nomberg and Hillel Zeitlin. The eldest son, Zundel Comber, became the party's leader in town. For many years he was their representative in town and community.

Boldly and proudly, he defended the rights of the Jews of Kutno – for national and cultural practice. He recklessly repulsed any antisemitic attack on a public tribune.

He was a worthy representative in protecting the interests of our Kutno Jews.

The younger brother, Lipman, was born in 1895. He graduated from a trade school in Kutno and later became a teacher.

Immediately after the First World War, through social activism and creative stubbornness, many prominent cultural positions were created, among them the Yiddish school in Poland. Lipman argued that the "Renaissance" movement should have a powerful response in Kutno as well.

Indeed, through his initiative and with the help of certain cultural institutions and individuals, a school was opened in a short time, named for Y. L. Percec.

Lipman Comber worked as a teacher and manager. With his cheerfulness, cleverness and loving smile, he won over enthusiastic supporters and friends and created a warm atmosphere around the school.

Remarkable: although virtually all of the school work was on his shoulders, he nevertheless found time for his historical research. As a result, he eventually moved to Warsaw. There, he entered the university and with great perseverance prepared his dissertation work. He received his doctorate in History. At the same time, he was active in a circle of young researchers and history writers, who had gathered around the publications "Young Historian" and "Pages for History", led by later martyr Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum.

It was there that he published serious research, such as: "The Relation of Prussian Power to the Jews in Poland from the Second to the Third Partition – 1793-1795"; "A Picture of Jewish Cultural Life in a Polish City, Early 19th Century".

His historical creations in the 1930s were a documentary proof, a historical testimony against the antisemitic theory that Jews were recent settlers, in Poland. And when fate locked him up with all the Warsaw Jews in the ghetto, he became the leader of an educational institution for young children there. When the executioners forced him to hand over the children to their perdition, he went with them as a faithful father.

These few short words should serve as an *amen* to a *Yitgadal v'Yitkadash*¹, which must be said at least annually on the unknown tomb of ashes of the Comber brothers.

Abraham Pasirsztajn²

If Shalom Asz introduced into artistic pantheon of unforgettable prose our urban Jews, their way of life, environment and landscape, in poetry, this was done thanks to Abraham Pasirsztajn.

He was descendant of poor, pious parents. The father was a Jewish scholar. In addition to a small watchmaker's workshop, his father had a large closet with books. The rich library in his dad's home served him to

¹ TN: Hebrew, (lit. "Magnified and sanctified"), the first words of the *Kaddish* prayer.

² TN: (1895, Kutno – 1955, USA).

perfect his poetic instrument and ripen his talent. That talent was immediately apparent in his poems. At the very beginning of his poetic debut, he wrote:

*In the struggle for bread, in the house of a pious man,
I've uncovered this love-secret in old, silent books.*

It is the old traditional image of the Jewish home, where learning goes hand in hand with the struggle for its existence, the struggle with poverty. This poverty-stricken environment, with which the slender young man with the darkly handsome face and bright blue eyes became so attached in his formative years, is artistically-emotionally reflected in a number of ways in his book of poems "Struggling Melodies: Poems". We must remain thankful to him after the reading and amazed at the sparkling colors and perfect tones.

The eruption of Nazi hell was taking place in Western Europe. Together with his wife and daughter, he managed to escape from Hitler's gas and ovens and reached the shores of the United States. Here, all the sounds of his creative talent unfolded in him. He published poems and essays in "Future", "Free Workers' Voice", in "New York Weekly" and, together with N. Summer, he edited the literary magazine "Oyfsnay"³.

Driven by a spiritual unrest, as if to pretend that his life was short, he endeavored as quickly as possible in his lyrical ballads to find an artistic redeeming for the mass destruction of his immediate surroundings.

In the mid-fifties, his body ruined by the tragic experiences, the gentle lyricist broke down, but his spiritual heritage will be equal to that of other Kutner writers, such as Shalom Asz and Beinish Zylbersztajn⁴, shimmering colorfully for us on our spiritual life-path.

Zalman Kirsztajn

It was easy to recognize him – a specific type of Masovian: a round red face, good-natured eyes with a



funny hot gleam in them. A heartfelt person with an attractive character. His language – soft, sonorous, as was the case for his fellow-townsmen. His pace was easy and flexible. Everything about him was proportional. The outer shell was aesthetically pure.

He belonged to the type of freedom-seeking people who possesses unlimited pathos for freedom, against every form of slavery and oppression.

Socialism was for him – purified humanism. But his nature, his being, could not fit into any party frame.

His father, of famous lineage, was immersed, like a sponge, in traditional and secular Jewish knowledge. Still in his sixties, he used to enter the library majestically, calmly, every other day, with a pile of books under his arm, on Królewska Street. Children and adults admired the old man, of aristocratic appearance.

The son, who also possessed those spiritual, fine features, received a modern Jewish and secular education. An accountant by profession and indeed the best in town. He could solve the most complex mathematical calculations.

He has long been the chairman of the Accountants' and Tradesmen's Union. He has also been an active participant in cultural and sporting institutions, chairing the YIVO Circle. He did a great deal for the building and development of Jewish culture and its institutions.

And yet Zalman Kirsztajn, until his untimely death, remained a romantic. His socialism was covered with a bluish veil of dreams. And just as the hero Cezary Baryka in Żeromski's "Spring to Come" dreams of a Poland of glass houses – so did he (by the way, he often liked to talk about the hero).

But he never wanted to get into political action.

In September 1939, as the skies over Poland were covered with dark, leaden clouds, and Hitler's servants sowed death and destruction from the air, Zalman Kirsztajn was mobilized as an officer in the Polish army. He barely made it to Żychlin, where a criminal bullet fired by a military charlatan pierced his human heart.

He was actually the first victim among the Kutner Jews, right at the beginning of World War II.

Activist Workers

It is impossible to list and bring out all the figures of the activists of the Jewish labor movement in our city, to tell in detail about the role that each of them played in his party and movement. I will be content to perpetuate the bright memory of the most active of them, the so-called pillars, which to a large extent shaped and affected their environment.

Herman Kirszbaum stood at the head of "Bund." By trade a shoe-stitcher, he was a wage worker at that time all those years. He rightly could consider himself exploited and therefore devoted his entire free time to the fight against exploitation, for better living conditions for workers. His innate intelligence and later developed intellect enabled him to explain in simple and understandable terms a complicated problem, to explain different achievements of general and Jewish life in a very accessible language.

During World War II, he was a member of the party's underground national council. Until 1944, he and his wife, Eva, managed to survive using Aryan papers.

³ TN: Yiddish, "Renewal".

⁴ TN: Yiddish poet, member of the Communist Party in Kutno.

During the Warsaw Uprising of General Bor-Komarowski in November 1944, Herman Kirszbaum decided to take revenge on the Germans with arms in hand. A treacherous bullet fired by a Polish fascist put an end to his stormy and contentious life.⁵

Y. M. Zylberberg, M. Tiger and L. Kam joined the labor movement, straight from the *Beit Midrash* bench, and zealously dedicated themselves to the new tasks. Zylberberg had been a city councilor and member of the community for many years; L. Kam – a meritorious activist in the community council. On the other hand, M. Tiger had been an official at Kutno Mayor's Office, for some time. A wonderful guy, with a long face, sad-looking eyes and movements – as a *yeshiva* boy. He wanted to get to the root of every question; he read a book like a page of Gemara...

Yaakov Mroz, Lustigman, Kowalski, and Leibish Piotrkowski were enthusiastic and dedicated members of the Society for Left-Wing Evening Courses at Left *Poalei Zion*, helping to establish the "TOZ"⁶ school organization in Kutno. Piotrkowski has been a board member of the Clothes Association for many years, and much is due to the fact that many of the union's actions ended in victory.

Zakrzewski was known as a relentless fighter in the ranks of the illegal Communist Party. He sat for some time in jail. During the war he was in the Soviet Union. There, he mobilized in the Polish Division named for Kościuszko⁷ and fell in a brave action, at the gates of Berlin.

Szor was a teacher at "*Am HaSefer*", a prominent worker of *Hitachdut-Poalei-Zion* and the son-in-law of Kutner Zionist leader, Yehuda Riftin. Szor was a passionate fighter for spreading the Hebrew language among the youth. His lectures at the Ahad HaAm Library distinguished him with originality of thought and preoccupation. He always sought solution from the great philosophers. In the old books and... in his own restless soul. The world of mysticism has always attracted and fascinated him – and there he found peace. He shared the same tragic fate as his countless disciples and admirers.

Nathan MOSZKOWICZ, Herzliya.

⁵ TN: see on the last pages of the article "Our Home", p. 287 of the original book.

⁶ TN: Polish abbreviation of "Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej" – "Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jewish Population".

⁷ TN: Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746 Brest Litovsk, Lithuania – 1817, Switzerland) was a Polish military leader who became a national hero in Poland and in United States, where he participated to the Independence War.