

wooden boards and start discussions with Noah. I had no idea what they were talking about.

The lame Feivish had a kiosk with newspapers and cigarettes in a corner of the Old Market. He used to sit in



Noah Gurker

the kiosk on a high bench next to the window and sell newspapers. Noah Gurker often used to sit with him in his kiosk and help him sort the newspapers and package them up. Their friendship lasted many years.

JEWISH TYPES IN KUTNO

*translated from Yiddish by Carole Turkeltaub
Borowitz and David Shirman*

Noah Gurker

Noah Gurker was well known as a bailiff for the city council of Kutno. We called him "The Jewish Official". Gurker himself was very proud of his position. He used to walk elegantly down the streets, wearing his uniform with a round crowned hat. From his shoulder tabs dangled two tassels from which hung a little whistle. By his side hung a long sword, and he marched with a military step, wearing his shiny boots... The children were quite delighted when they looked at the dignified "Jewish Commander" with the long sword. The bolder boys even used to stand to attention and salute him. He used to stop next to the children and give their heads a loving caress, offering some kind words. And I myself, like every child, had great respect for him and dreamed of being a commander like him when I grew up. When Noah Gurker stopped, I was also among those surrounding him, stroking his sword, touching the silver buttons of his uniform and asking him to show us the whistle.

Noah Gurker was friendly with my brother Yosef. He used to come to ours to buy wood and charcoal and to keep up with my brother. All the time he was conversing with my brother, I, with great pleasure, played with his sword.

And even more than to others, Noah Gurker showed friendship to Feivish Izbicki. When Noah came to our store, the lame Feivish used to creep forward on his two

The Public Health Sanitary Worker Moshe Leib Żak

Moshe Leib was a sanitary worker in the First World War. He worked in the "steam room" [sauna] in the bathhouse, giving haircuts, disinfecting clothes, and spraying into the houses where there was a case of typhus. The Germans, who had then occupied Poland, had strict sanitary controls over the population. When typhus was diagnosed the whole family had to be isolated, kept away and held in quarantine, near Vaetke's factory. The house was disinfected. A special sanitary team dealt with this and Moshe Leib was appointed head sanitary worker. A German police officer was in charge of the committee, and was in charge to ensure that everything was in order. Same with us, when my brother Chaim David fell ill with typhus, the whole house was disinfected and everyone was held in isolation.

At that time Moshe Leib excelled in his aid work. Some years later, therefore, he obtained from the town council the concession on a kiosk. Indeed, he built a big kiosk in a corner of the Old Market where he sold cigarettes, ice creams, and all sorts of sweets for children.

The Tzaddik of the Village

I do not remember the family name of the village peddler from Bielawy. Everyone called him the *Tzaddik* of the village. He lived in the same house as the Kalman family, in our neighborhood. The *Tzaddik* of the village was a modest, quiet man, with a grey beard, great blue eyes and heavy eyebrows. His face was pale and worried. He clung like a shadow to the walls. Before sunrise, when the sky began to turn light gray and everyone was still asleep, he would go out of his room with his bag on his shoulder and his stick in his hand.

In the winter even in the greatest cold and snow he would go round the villages, trading poultry. In the summertime he would rent a small fruit orchard and stay in one place. While the *Tzaddik* of the village was walking around, he would recite psalms by heart or a prayer for the road. The Christians who met him greeted him and also regarded him as saintly man. Even the village youth did not pester him but showed him respect.

The *Tzaddik* of the village was very religious and lived by himself. In the summer he sat outside in his little orchard, but on Shabbat he would go back home. Even on Shabbat he would pray alone by himself standing in the corner of his room. He used to avoid meeting people in order to not to speak to them, except for those he met through his business.

On Shabbat he used to stand in the corner of his room for a long time, wrapped in his prayer shawl and praying quietly. Sometimes I used to visit him at home, but the eldest daughter of the *Tzaddik* of the village used to prevent me from talking to him because her mother did not feel well. It was a fact that the wife of the *Tzaddik* of the village had not always a clear thought.

As far as I know no one had ever paid attention to this person. He never turned to any one for a favor or advice.

This modest man was living with us in the town for many years, a rare type, a mysterious image – the bygone *Tzaddik* of the village from Bielawy.

Mendel Rak

Everybody knew Mendel Rak. Everyone called him Mendel Sidelock¹. He was a son of Mr. Henech Rak (Henech the sausage maker). He caused Mr. Henech much trouble. Mendel was a different sort of person, a little unusual in the town. He would wear a long coat with a Jewish hat² over his sidelocks. His ritual fringes poked out from under his coat. Summer and winter, he wore cuffed boots. He drifted around the place aimlessly. In the chassidic circles, everyone looked at him unfavorably, he even did not fit in with the modern youngsters. But Mendel was not ashamed to come into workers' meetings in his chassidic outfits. He merely pushed his sidelocks behind his ears. Mendel had his own way, he considered himself to be something of a philosopher. He would come to the Kutno intellectuals for a discussion, to visit the Perec library, the "*Bund*" rally, leftists of *Poalei Zion* and... he saw himself as a communist. He even hid an illegal pamphlet under his coat. He used to sneak into the communist club, but kept his Jewish hat in his pocket.

Mendel Sidelock used to creep about in hidden places, in the fields outside the town. The Poles set the dogs on him and several times they gave him a slap. Very often he used to sit behind the ritual baths, next to Fast's garden, where he used to read booklets. From time to time, he would go to Esther Jachet's candy shop in a basement.

But he never had a single coin in his pocket. The friends in the group used to offer him tea, a biscuit. At first Mendel would wink and refuse but then he would straightaway agree.

People always said that he never knew what he wanted. He liked to talk about Karl Marx's "*Capital*", Darwin's theories, Rambam, and various Greek philosophies.



Mendel Rak ("Sidelock")

My opinion on this subject is that Mendel was a lost soul, who could never be restored. Still, he was a great reader who understood serious work and methods of philosophy. It is possible that he was not understood and that he did not understand himself. Who knows? He took his secret with him. He shared the same fate as the other Kutno martyrs who perished in the Holocaust.

Abraham LUSTIGMAN, Holon

¹ TN: Religious Jews did not cut the hair at the side of the head. The long sidelocks hung down either side of the face, in front of the ears.

² TN: A Jewish hat was a round cap with a small peak in front.