

KUTNO, MY HOMETOWN

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translated from the Yiddish by Murray Citron

Hometown mine, and of R' Yehoshie'le Kutner,
Of Shalom Asz, and Y. Y. Trunk,
Of martyrs Herman Kirszbaum and Eva his wife —
With a peacock's colors you were alive...

You taught me much learning, the wisdom of sages:
From Herzl to Marx, Tolstoy and the Rambam,
From quarrels of peoples, the wisdom of ages,
And bearing the yoke of my people and city.

Your song was a comfort to me when afar,
A companion, a friend, when alone and abroad,
Over continents, oceans, in moments of time —
It provisioned me always for the road...

Your youth, our hope, our happiness promised
Held back with its confidence sorrow and need,
For a bright morning they planted the seed —
Now all is frozen and wasted in death...

No Jewish children, no Yiddish song,
No Berel the porter, no Yankel the smith,
No Jewish shops, Żelichowski's mill gone,
At sunset no small groups of Jews by the shul...

No sacred writings, not one Yiddish book,
No Jews of Shabbes, no Jews of the week,
No candles, no hymns, no *Kiddush*, no wine —
Over all hovers the pity of loss.

I stand a mourner, my head bent down,
For you my home, for Kutno, my town.
For Warsaw, Włocławek, Łęczyca, Gąbin —
For hundreds of *shtetlech* that suffered the same...

For me your sky will always be gray,
Your sun without light, your grass without dew,
Cut off at the root, can there come a day
When my town will be once again new?

Hometown Kutno, *shtetl* of Poland,
With Jewish sadness and light from Baal-Shem —
On my shoulders I carry your grief and your horrors
And light and destruction for *Kiddush HaShem*...

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Shtetele mine, with light from the dawning,
Full once of Jews, *shtetl* mine,
Now your fate is a call for mourning —
Shtetele mine, you are *Judenrein*...

For a moment on a grey afternoon,
I heard your painful sorrowful tune.
And I wept inside myself, *shtetele* mine —
Kutno, my home, you are *Judenrein*...

Streets all lonesome, dust and debris,
Abandoned houses, no bird on a tree.
The orphaned schoolyard stares at the fence —
No Jewish children with pencils and pens.

My *shtetele*, my home, with light from the dawn,
You are rootless forever and *Judenrein*.
Your joys are not to be found, they are gone...
May your name be forever a blessing, a sign.