

IN LIBERATED KUTNO
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translated from the Hebrew by Thia Persoff z"l

The day of Kutno's liberation, by the Red Army and the Polish army, was a day of joy and victory for me. The town of my birth was liberated! In those days, I was staying in Warsaw, where I was attached to the Polish Army headquarters. Suddenly I received an order to leave for Łódź where I was appointed city officer. On my way to Łódź, I made a short visit in my town Kutno. I knew what I might expect there, after the murdering Nazis' rule, but the shock of seeing it was much worse!

All around was only waste, destruction, and ruins, death was still in the air. My childhood's streets, where I played and grew up, where I took my first steps on the Polish soil – were full of ruins, grief, and mourning. My childhood world erased without a trace, the world of Jews who lived on the land generation after generation – nothing was left of it. "A stone will cry out from the wall"¹! Silence all around, but the walls are still soaked with indescribable sorrow, agony, and suffering, such was the lot of the Jewish population.

Now Kutno was left without her Jews, but death has not left her. She is still full of Jewish mothers and fathers moaning, trying to shield their children.

Kutno without Jews!

When I passed by Bromberg's house, where the Skierniewice chassidim's synagogue was, I stopped and, in my imagination, I waited for the Jews to come out after prayers. One more moment, the first of the men will be seen, their prayer shawls under their arms, in their black garb, walking two by two, continuing the discussion they started in the synagogue. But in vain! Jews will not be praying in Kutno anymore. The gates of heaven have been locked against the voices of their prayers. Their prayers were not accepted, only their sighs are still floating in the air of our town. The bell in the town hall was ringing at that time, its ring sounds as if it is mourning for the slaughter and horrible death that befell the Jews of my home town. Although, seemingly, nothing has changed in my town. In Królewska Street the Jewish shops are open just like they always were. Here are the stores of Rabbe, of Walter and the others. The

¹ TN: From the book of the prophet Habakkuk 2:11 "For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond."

tables are standing in their places, the shelves are hanging on the walls, the stores are full of cloth as in the days of their Jewish owners, but those owners do not exist anymore! They were murdered, burned, and their property stolen by others. No! In Królewska Street, the street where we lived for many years, there are no more Jews. In my parents' store not a thing is changed, all is as it was before the slaughter. However, my parents are no more. It is the same in all the Jewish streets, in all the Jewish houses, the Jewish stores, and so it is in all of Jewish Kutno! As I roamed in my town I arrived in *Stary Rinek* [Old Market], there I discovered a hair-raising sight; the market plaza and its streets were paved with the gravestones from the Jewish cemetery! The engraving facing up, and the names of the deceased can still be read! And people and animals walk on them. Indeed, there is no limit to the villainy of the Goyim! Another grain of salt on our bleeding sores.



People honoring a casket with the ashes of the martyrs

I arrived at the house of our house janitor. I wanted to hear from her some details about Jewish families, or individuals that were saved from the slaughter. At my question why she did not hide the daughter of Abraham Mroz and the daughters of the Kuper family, those whose father was Ari, she replied that after all the Jews were deported to a ghetto, Jozef Żawicki hid Ita Mroz during the war, but towards its end he himself handed her over to the Gestapo. After the liberation, the Polish police had sentenced him to death.

With the Jews, the Grim Reaper did not miss out their houses of worship. A synagogue was turned into a parking place for farmers' wagons, when they came to town on market days. The house of religious studies, a place for Torah studies of the town's rabbis, led by Reb Yehoshe'le Kutner, was turned into the firefighter's station and all its contents went up in smoke together with the students.

My last stop was in *Konstancja* – the famous ghetto of the Kutno Jews. Before the First World War, a sugar factory was standing there, but it stopped functioning at the start of the war and only ruined buildings stood there, roofless, without windows and doors. The Nazis, after fencing the area, concentrated all the town's Jews in it and turned it into a ghetto. The living conditions here were most horrible; the crowding was terrible, beyond all that the human imagination could describe for itself. There was

nothing left for me but to photograph the place of the suffering and sorrow of Kutno's Jews, and with aching, weeping heart I left this hell.

My second visit in Kutno was made on the occasion of bringing the ashes of our town's martyrs, who were burned and murdered in Chełmno camp, to be buried. We wanted to erect a memorial on the grave of the ashes, but to the Polish antisemites even this last kindness was like barbs in their eyes. Upon my return to Łódź, I received a notice that the erected memorial was destroyed by them. After some time, I received a notice from the national police of Kutno, according to it, they blamed the destruction of the monument on a Russian army unit that passed by, but the Russian town-major put the blame for this act of vandalism on the Polish fascists...

The repatriates from Kutno

Out of 360 Jewish families from Kutno that are now in Israel, some had arrived before the Second World War. Most of them were conscientious Zionists. The others arrived in the country after the establishment of the state.



The symbolic funeral

Many of them were not Zionists, and even opposed the Zionist solution to the Jewish problem. However, after the war they realized that to live as Jews, they could do so only in Israel. As a result, they accepted the validity of the Zionist idea and immigrated to Israel. In Poland, which became a graveyard, they could not live, nor did they want to anymore. Then, after their wandering, passing through Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Germany, they arrived at a haven of safety – in Israel. The second wave of immigration to arrive in Israel came after the political changes which took place in Poland, when Gomulka became the leader in 1956.

Those immigrants were helped greatly by our town's people who had settled in the country long ago, with additional help from the country's government, as it does for all new immigrants. The assistance from the families of A. Sh. Elberg, M. Wigdorowicz and Nordberg should be noted; they received all the immigrants with open arms and helped them as much as they could, so that their town's people would be able to rebuild their homes in the land of Israel.