

ABYSS OF DESPAIR

(YEVEN METZULAH)

THE FAMOUS 17th CENTURY CHRONICLE
DEPICTING JEWISH LIFE IN RUSSIA AND
POLAND DURING THE CHMIELNICKI
MASSACRES OF 1648-49

BY
RABBI NATHAN HANOVER

TRANSLATED FROM THE HEBREW BY
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With an introduction, biographical sketch of the
author, and explanatory notes by the translator

PREFACE BY
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רבי דובי הכהן מברעזאנא ונשיא מדינת פולין
 מרבינו דודא אשר אבן סעור היום לא נפלה חוט ספק ולא דחק דואו כדכתיב
 אלהי הרבה מאד בעד וכלבך לעשותו ימים ימים עליו רחמי אשר יורק ועל דמיו
 אשר יאמרו לו העשה לא חסר כן הרבה אשר יעשו לו ימים ושנים ימים

*Traditional Drawing of the MAHARSHA
 (Rabbi Samuel Edels)
 Head of the Yeshivah of Ostrog*

THE LIFE AND WORK OF NATHAN HANOVER

Nathan Hanover, the author of the chronicle *Yeven Metzulah*, was born in Ostrog, Volhynia in the early twenties of the seventeenth century. His parents emigrated from Germany to the Ukraine. They probably lived in Hanover because it was a common practice for Jews to adopt the name of the community from which they hailed. It is presumed that they left Hanover at the end of the sixteenth century when all Jews were expelled from that city.

Many Jews emigrated from Germany during the sixteenth century, where they suffered unprecedented persecution and oppression. The Ukraine was especially inviting because the Jews there enjoyed some measure of peace and economic freedom. They were free to travel through the land and pursued their business unmolested. Hanover's family, it can be surmised, left Germany at this time and settled in the Ukraine. We have no information about Hanover's early years. It can be presumed that he received a Jewish education typical of that which he describes in the concluding chapter of his chronicle "*Yeven Metzulah*." He grew up amidst the scholars and Talmudists of his city and imbibed the teachings of his masters. Ostrog was the great metropolis of Volhynia and had a large Jewish population. It was famous not only as a great business

center but even more so as a seat of learning and culture. The most prominent Rabbis and teachers of the age resided there, among them were such great notables as Rabbi Solomon Luria, better known as the Maharshal, Rabbi Samuel Edels, the Maharsha, Rabbi David Halevi, popularly known as the Taz (Ture Zahav), and others.

Nathan's father was evidently a learned man and it is quite possible that he served in the capacity of Rabbi. Nathan frequently refers to him by the title Rabbi. In all likelihood he received his early training from his father and later in the Ostrog Yeshivah which was under the guidance of Maharsha. The study of the Talmud and its commentaries, apparently, was not sufficient to gratify his restless and searching spirit. He, therefore, turned to the Kabbalah and probed into its mystic teachings. He became particularly fascinated by the Lurianic Kabbalah, which had already established itself in Poland and was gradually finding adherents in the Ukraine. The followers of the famous Kabbalist, Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, better known as the Ari, were carrying on a vigorous campaign to spread their master's teachings everywhere. Israel Sarug, and his son-in-law, Solomon Schloemel Dresnitz visited many Jewish communities and sought to indoctrinate the Jews with the Ari's mystic philosophy. Luria's Kabbalah found ready adherents first in Italy and later also in Germany and in Holland whence it penetrated into Poland and where it cultivated enthusiastic supporters. When the Kabbalah spread to the Ukraine, Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, the author of the Kabbalistic and

ethical work Shene Luchoth Haberith, or "Shela," who for a short time served as Rabbi in Ostrog, became one of its chief devotees. Rabbi Samson of Ostropolie, who was martyred in Polannoe during the Chmielnicki revolt, was another of its followers. Nathan Hanover too, became enamoured of this mystic lore, and applied himself diligently to master it. His sermons and Pentateuchal discourses were often based upon Kabbalistic texts and interpretations.

He married the daughter of Abraham of Zaslaw and later removed to reside with his father-in-law. There he occupied himself with preaching. Occasionally he visited other communities and preached to them. Two daughters were born to him in Zaslaw. It is not known whether he had other children. His life during these early years, it can be surmised, was untroubled and peaceful.

The Cossack uprising of 1648 which destroyed so many communities and which almost completely wiped out Ukrainian Jewry brought to an end Nathan's tranquility and caused him to become a wanderer. 1648 was a year of unusual events. It brought peace to central Europe and freedom to England. It was the year in which, according to English millenarians, such as Pierre de la Fons, Jesus was to reappear. It was also the year in which, according to the Zohar, the Messiah was to come. But above all the year 1648 is better known for the rebellion initiated by the Cossack chieftain, Bogdan Chmielnicki which caused untold suffering to the Jewish people.

The city of Zaslaw where Nathan Hanover resided

was devastated by the Cossacks and most of its Jews were murdered. Among the martyred Jews was the father of Nathan, Rabbi Moses Hanover of Ostrog. Nathan fled from the city before it was attacked. After leaving the city of Zaslav, together with his large family, he started wandering to elude the infuriated Ukrainian mobs. We do not know the circumstances under which he succeeded in his escape from the Cossacks. Hanover, generally, omits personal references in his chronicle which describes these events. He focuses his attention on the whole picture. After making good his escape we find him in Germany where he subsisted on meager earnings from itinerant preaching. Thanks to his oratorical ability and wide range of knowledge he acquired many followers. The sermons preached in Germany during this period he collected into a book called "N'ta Sha-ashuim." This book, however, was never published.

From Germany he proceeded to Holland where he published his sermon "Ta-Ame Succah" which he had preached in Cracow in 1646. He did not remain in Holland very long and proceeded to Italy which had become an important Kabbalah center at that time. Here he hoped to find solace for his troubled soul. The study of Kabbalah was to help him forget the nightmare of the past. Hanover had always been inclined toward asceticism and the impact of the tragic events in Poland drove him closer into the lap of Kabbalistic speculation. Having visited many ravished communities and having talked to the refugees who escaped the carnage, he had accumulated valuable information on

the Ukrainian massacres. He now had an opportunity to organize his material for publication.

In 1652 we find Hanover in the city of Venice where he published his chronicle "Ye'ven Metzulah." In 1653 he became the rabbi of Leghorn and spent one year in the Beth Hamidrash of the physician David Valensin, who supported him generously. There he met Hayim Hacoheh of Aleppo, a disciple of Rabbi Hayim Vital, the pupil and later successor to Isaac Luria. The two spent much time together studying the Lurianic Kabbalah. Rabbi Hayim Hacoheh revealed to him many new and hitherto unpublished teachings of Vital. There he also became acquainted with Nathan Shapira of Jerusalem who was visiting the city and together with him proceeded to Venice where he spent two years in the Yeshivah of the brothers, Abraham and Daniel Mugnon. They befriended and sustained him. In the company of such Kabbalistic exponents as Samuel Abohab, Moses Zacuto and Benjamin Halevi of Safed, he found peace and solitude and devoted himself to diligent studies in mysticism. He received additional material aid from the fellowship "Talmud Torah" of Venice.

After two years in Venice, he proceeded to Wallachia and became Rabbi, first in the city of Jassy and later also in Focsani. The reasons why he left Venice are not known. It is possible that he could not get accustomed to living on charity. The burden of providing for a large family might have impelled him to seek a more profitable occupation elsewhere. He spent a long time in Wallachia and devoted himself to literary

endeavors. He succeeded in issuing two works of practical use. One was a dictionary in four languages called "Safa Berurah" (Clear Speech) and the other "Sha-are Zion" (Gates of Zion), an anthology of prayers.

In the '70s of the 17th century, we find him in Ungarisch-Brod, a city in Moravia where he occupied the position of Dayan (Judge) and preacher. His reputation as a Dayan and his excellent sermons gained for him much honor from the members of his community. In this city, too, both of his daughters were married. The fact that he was able to write two books on the Kabbalah during this period shows that he, at last, had attained peace of mind.

Evidently Hanover was not destined to complete his years in tranquility. He who had suffered so much and barely escaped death in the Ukraine had to experience the misery of new massacres. The war between Turkey and Austria had broken out. The Turkish army invaded Hungary and proceeded on the way to Vienna. The Hungarian Count, Emeric Tekelli, an avowed enemy of Austria, joined the Turks. Tekelli's army broke into Moravia and the first victim was the city of Brod which was completely without defense. Tekelli's bands attacked the Jews of the city most of whom were at that time gathered in the synagogue for morning prayers. Nathan Hanover was a victim of this attack. His last wish was that he be buried in the Jewish cemetery. His wish was fulfilled. A tombstone bearing his name with appropriate laudatory inscription stands upon his grave.

According to various legends Hanover's burial place

is supposed to be in Focsani, Wallachia. Photographs of a tombstone in Focsani, purported to bear his name, are frequently reprinted and claimed to be that of Hanover. However, there is no evidence that the photograph of the tombstone is that of Hanover. The inscription is so worn that the letters can not be deciphered. There is no doubt that Nathan Hanover, having lived the last years of his life in Ungarisch-Brod, was murdered there during the massacre in 1683. The following is the inscription of the tombstone on the cemetery in that city:

"Our holy rabbi, Israel's desire

The sacred vessel, the luminary pure,

The spokesman for Torah was taken by ruthless death
Blessed is he whose soul departed from his chaste body,
Who completed his life by proclaiming the unity of
the Creator's Name.

There is none greater than our master, the rabbi Nathan Natta, the son of Moses of Ostrog
His soul ascended on high adorned with the crown of
Torah

Twenty days in Tamuz, the month that was turned
into mourning and distress

May his soul be bound up in the bond of life."

Thus ended the career of Nathan Hanover. His was a life filled with misery, pain and suffering but also rich and meaningful. His fame was far reaching and his literary achievements are a fitting monument to his memory.

Nathan Hanover wrote many valuable books. Although not a professional historian, he had a realistic approach to history. In his chronicle, "Yeven Metzulah" he appears as an able and competent historian. He was also a linguist and mastered a number of languages, among them Polish, German, Latin and Italian. His linguistic skill is admirably shown by his four language dictionary.

Among the books Hanover wrote, the following may be noted: (1) "Ta-ame Succah," a sermon on the significance of the Feast of Tabernacles and interpretations of the prayers peculiar to the festival. The sermon was delivered in Crakow in 1646 and was published later in Amsterdam in 1652. It contains all Talmudic references pertaining to the festival of Succoth. These Hanover interpreted allegorically. Many of his interpretations are based on the teachings of the Zohar, and show the remarkable influence the Kabbalah had on him in his early years. (2) "Yeven Metzulah," an historic chronicle in which the massacres of 1648-1652 are described. This book was first published in Venice in 1653. It has been translated into French, German, Polish, Russian and Yiddish. (3) "Safa Berurah," a lexicon in four languages, Hebrew, Yiddish, Latin and Italian. The book contains twenty chapters and is divided according to category concepts. The book was of practical benefit to the uprooted Jews of the Ukraine who wandered in countries whose languages were strange to them. It was first published in 1660 in Prague. Another edition appeared in Amsterdam in

1771 with additions of a column in French. (4) "Sha-are Zion" an anthology of prayers for fasts and feasts, Tikkun Chatzoth, etc. This book is composed of seven chapters. The prayers are of a Kabbalistic nature. They were mostly composed by the disciples of Luria. It became a popular prayer book for the Jews of his time. Many of the prayers have also been included in the prayer books still in use today. The prayer, Ribbono Shel Olam, recited prior to the removal of the Torah from the Ark and the Yehi Ratzon, following the priestly benediction are taken from Hanover's anthology.

Sha-are-Zion was first published in Prague in 1662.

Nathan Hanover had also written a number of works which were not published. His collection of sermons on the Pentateuch and festivals known as "Neta Shaa-shuim" which is mentioned in his introduction to the "Yeven Metzulah" was never published. Neta Ne-eman, a commentary on the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria, remained in manuscript. Another book which never saw the light of publication was Tokef Yayin, a Kabbalistic interpretation of the festival of Purim. Also "Yefe Nof," a commentary on the book of psalms based on the Kabbalah was not published.

It is indeed amazing that despite his being exposed to continuous misfortune, aimless wandering and insecurity, Nathan Hanover managed to accumulate such an imposing literary output. One is impressed by his strength of character and profound faith which

kept him from disintegrating in the face of all his misery. He, no doubt, found consolation in dedicating himself to these spiritual tasks. Despite his rich literary legacy, however, he is known best for his chronicle, "Yeven Metzulah."

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

"I am the man that hath seen the affliction by the rod of His wrath,"¹ when God smote His people Israel, His first-born. From heaven unto earth He cast down the beautiful and glorious land of Poland, "oh fair in situation, the joy of the whole earth."² "The Lord hath swallowed up unsparingly the habitations of Jacob,"³ the lot of His inheritance,⁴ and hath not remembered His footstool in the day of His anger.⁵

All this was foreseen by King David (peace be unto him), when he prophesied the joining of the Tartars and the Greeks⁶ to destroy His chosen Israel, in the year ZOTH⁷ of the era of creation. The "Greeks," in their typical manner, offered the following ultimatum to the Jews: He that wishes to remain alive must change his faith and publicly renounce Israel and his God. The Jews, however, heeded not their words, but stretched out their necks to be slaughtered for the sanctification of His Holy Name. Among them were the land's leading scholars as well as the men, women and children; the whole community. May the God of vengeance avenge them and return us to His land.

This tragedy was forewarned by King David (peace be unto him), in Psalm 32, where it is said: "For this (AL "ZOTH") let everyone that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found." (L'ETH

M'TZO) etc.⁸ so that no evil may come to pass. The letters of the words L'ETH M'TZO (in a time when Thou mayest be found), have the same numerical value as those of YAVAN V'KEDAR YACHDAV CHUBARU ("Greek" and Tartar joined together). The dog and the cat made an alliance to uproot the people of Israel, which is likened to a straying lamb. This occurred in the year (408) of the era of creation (ZOTH) omitting the first numeral. Psalm 69 also speaks of this tragic event.

There it is said: "Save me O God, for the waters are come in even unto the soul. I AM SUNK IN DEEP MIRE WHERE THERE IS NO STANDING. I am come into deep waters and the flood overwhelmed me . . . etc." ⁹ TAVATI B'YEVEN M'TZULAH (I am sunk in the deep mire), is of the same numerical value as CHMIEL VKEDAR B'YAVAN YACHDAV CHUBARU (CHMIEL and the Tartars joined together with the "Greeks"), the combined virus of a scorpion and a wasp.¹⁰ "SHIBBOLETH" (the flood) is numerically equal to CHMIELECKI, HAYAVAN V'KEDAR (Chmielecki, the "Greeks" and the Tartars). SHETAFATNI SHETEF (anger and wrath overwhelmed me), for in the Polish language the name Chmielecki is associated with nobility, while the Russians referred to him as Chmiel.

Rabbi Jechiel Michael, chief of the Jewish community, and head of the academy of the holy congregation of Nemirow, whose soul departed in purity, for the glorification of His Name, referred to the name Chmiel, as representing the first letters of the phrase

CHEVLE MASHIACH YAVI L'OLAM (he will usher in the pangs of the Messiah). And after him will come the feet of the messenger.

I named my book YEVEN M'TZULAH (THE DEEP MIRE), because the words of the Psalmist allude to these terrible events, and speak of the oppressors, the Tartars and the Ukrainians as well as of the arch-enemy, Chmiel, may his name be blotted out, may God send a curse upon him. This book may thus be a chronicle to serve future generations.

I dwelt at length on the causes which led to this great catastrophe, when the Ukrainians and the Tartars united to revolt against Poland, although the two had always been enemies. I recorded all the major and minor encounters, as well as the evil decrees and persecutions; also the days on which those cruelties occurred, so that everyone might be able to calculate the day on which his kin died, and observe the memorial properly. In addition, I have also described the customs and practices of Polish Jewry which followed the path of goodness and righteousness. All this I did with a deep reverence for God. I based these upon the six pillars which support the world.¹¹ I have written it in a lucid and intelligible style, and printed it on smooth and clear paper.¹²

Therefore, buy ye this book at once. Do not spare your money, so that I may be enabled to publish the book "N'ta Shaashuim" (Plant of Delights), containing homilies on the Pentateuch which I have authored.¹² For this benevolence the Almighty God will keep you from all evil and distress, and will hasten the com-

ing of the Messiah. Amen, so may it be the will of Him Who dwelleth in splendor.

These are the words of the author Nathan Natta the son of the martyred Rabbi Moses Hanover Ashkenazi (may the memory of the righteous be a blessing, may God avenge his blood) who dwelled in the holy community of Zaslaw, near the holy community of Ostrog in the province of Volhynia, in the land of Russia.¹³

IV

THE BRUTAL OPPRESSIONS OF CHMIEL

Now I shall begin to record the brutal oppressions caused by Chmiel (may his name be blotted out), in the lands of [Little] Russia, Lithuania and Poland, in the years '408, '409, '410, '411, '412,¹ according to the minor reckoning.

In the year '408,² according to the minor reckoning, the sixteenth year of the reign of King Wladislaw, there lived a Cossack in the town of Czehiryń,³ and his name in Russian was Chmiel (may his name be blotted out), while in Polish he was called Chmielecki.⁴ He was one of the officers of the hundreds of the Cossacks. He was very rich, possessing sheep and oxen, a very large multitude of cattle. He was wise to do evil; a man of sinister designs, and mighty in war. His place of residence was Czehiryń, which was under the rule of General Koniecpolski. The general was aware of this man and of his manner of speech. For, while he was soft spoken, he had "seven abominations in his heart;"⁵ a man plotting iniquity, in the manner of all the Ukrainians, who at first appear to the Jews as friends, and speak to them pleasant and comforting words, beguiling them with soft and kind speech, while they lie with their tongues and are deceitful and untrustworthy.

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The general was always apprehensive about this man and frequently spoke of him to his officers and counsellors. "I am fearful that out of this man will come misfortune to the kingdom of Poland." He often sought some pretext to kill him, but found none. For Chmiel was a very sly man and was aware of the thing. He was very cautious in warfare not to be suspected. When the general was about to die he instructed his son in all matters of warfare. The latter was at this time a "choronzhy," which is the Polish name for the King's banner bearer in time of war. Hence, he was called Choronzhy to this day. And thus spoke the general of Chmiel, may his name be blotted out, and he said: "You know this man Chmiel and his evil designs. Therefore, you must devise some pretext so that you will be able to remove him from the world."

One day, as the noble Choronzhy was comforted after the death of his father, he married a woman of noble descent, the sister of the nobleman Zamojsky. He lavished upon her much money, gold and silver, above his means (as this is the practice in the kingdom of Poland, both among Jews and Gentiles: When a marriage is arranged, one who possesses only one thousand gold pieces mortgages his property, and borrows additional money, so that he will be able to spend two thousand gold pieces). After the Choronzhy married this woman and spent all his money, he decided to take his wife on a journey beyond the Dnieper River, where the Cossacks lived, to be favored for her sake, and to receive many gifts from the people in honor of their marriage. Afterwards, he planned to have the

Cossacks join him in a sudden attack upon the Tartars, where he would find an abundance of booty. This was their customary practice from days immemorial. And thus he did. Assembling his whole army, chariots and riders, he and his wife set forth on the journey to his possessions beyond the Dnieper. When the nobleman and his wife arrived in Czehiryn they received an enthusiastic welcome and were favored with many gifts. In that city lived the Jew Zechariah Sobilenki who was its governor and administrator. He was the nobleman's tax farmer, as was the customary occupation of most Jews in the kingdom of [Little] Russia. For they ruled in every part of [Little] Russia, a condition which aroused the jealousy of the peasants, and which was the cause for the massacres.

And so, the nobleman nonchalantly asked the Jew: "You are the governor of the city, pray, tell me, who are among the wealthy of this city?" His intention was to find a pretext to make them give him much money. The Jew Zechariah replied: "These and these are the rich" and he included also the oppressor Chmiel, who was very rich and possessed sheep and cattle, a very large flock. When the nobleman heard this he recalled his father's exhortation regarding this treacherous man: "Whence came to him all this wealth?" he thought. "Surely it was robbed from my serfs, the people of my estate. Hence, it is all mine." The noble Choronzhy, therefore, appropriated one shed containing many hundred heads of cattle which amounted to about half of Chmiel's stock. The oppressor Chmiel, however, remained silent, so that the nobleman might

not become suspicious of him; also he would not dare to dictate to the nobleman what to do when the latter is regarded in his province as a King in his kingdom. But Chmiel subsequently proceeded to avenge himself on the nobleman. He informed the Tartars in writing as follows: "Be on guard, for our noble, the Choronzhy, together with his troops are about to attack you." The Tartars had been living tranquilly, unaware of the approaching attack. As soon as they heard of this they armed themselves with swords and with bows and went out to meet him. Realizing that his plans had been revealed and aware of his small number of troops as compared with those of the Tartars, the nobleman and his detachment retreated to his land in great shame. It was not known to him who was responsible for the evil that befell him.

It happened once that Chmiel and his friends, the Cossacks, sat together drinking wine at the inn of the Jew who was governor of the city. When they became intoxicated ("The secret goes out when the wine comes in") Chmiel boasted to his friends: "I took vengeance upon the nobleman, who expropriated my flocks," and he proceeded to relate the whole story. At the same time, the Jew, seated at another table busying himself with his accounts, heard the story. Forthwith he informed the nobleman, and Chmiel was put in iron chains and placed in prison awaiting his death. But, there lived another Jew in that city whose name was Jacob Sobilenski, a close friend of Chmiel who counselled the latter to have his friends bail him out of prison, so that he would subsequently appear before

the nobleman in the church and on bended knees plead for his life; he should state that the Jew had spoken a falsehood because of his enmity toward him; that his friends would testify to the truth of his words. This he did and he succeeded. The nobleman released him this time.

After a thorough investigation of the case, the nobleman came to the conclusion that the Jewish governor had spoken the truth, and he placed Chmiel into prison a second time. After this the nobleman and his wife left the city and proceeded to his principal city of Brody, in Little Poland. He had instructed the officer of the thousand of that city, to decapitate Chmiel and to deliver his head to him. Should he fail to do so, his own life would be taken. What did the oppressor Chmiel do? When his friends, the officers of the hundreds, came to visit him in prison, he said to them: "Why are you keeping silent? Know that the people of Poland are becoming more haughty each day. They enslave our people with hard work. Not only are the nobles our masters but even the lowliest of all nations rule over us. Today this is being done to me; tomorrow they will do it to you. Afterwards they will plow the field with our people as one plows with oxen. If you heed my counsel, you will approach the officer of the thousand and plead with him to release me in your custody, on the occasion of their festival of baptism, which is to be held tomorrow. At night you and I will escape, together with our belongings, by way of the ferry boats behind the Dnieper. There we will take counsel together as to what to do against the Polish

people." This they did. All the officers of the hundreds approached the officer of the thousand to have Chmiel removed from prison on their guarantee. At night all of them escaped behind the Dnieper to the wilderness. From there they dispatched letters to the settlements where the Ukrainians dwelt, urging them to join the rebels. The Ukrainians responded and some twenty thousand hoodlums joined them.

When the King and the nobles heard of this, they dismissed it with laughter, for they said: "They will fall into our hands again as they did in their previous attempts." Subsequently, two Polish generals, Potocki and Kalinowsky, together with a thousand trained troops, proceeded to the city of Korsun, where they prepared for battle. They encamped there to protect the river crossings, so that the enemy would not be able to cross to the other side. The beginning of the rebellion took place before Purim '408. There, behind the Dnieper Falls, Chmiel conferred with his troops. He said to his people: "You know well that the Poles are mightier than we. They have the strength of lions and leopards; their faces are aflame. Who ever succeeded in a rebellion against them? Therefore, give heed, my people, to my counsel. Come, let us make peace with our enemies, the Tartars, and together we will make war upon them." And they replied to him: "We will do as you say." Chmiel, forthwith went to the King of the Tartars, together with all his troops, and made peace with him. They made a covenant together to wage war upon the Kingdom of Poland. They also made a pact between them to divide the booty. The

Tartars were to appropriate the spoil in men and the prey in cattle,⁸ and the Cossacks were to take all the booty, such as gold, silver and clothes. (Midian and Moab made peace between themselves because of their hatred for Israel.)⁹ And the two went together,¹⁰ the Tartars and the Ukrainians. And they came by way of the desert, and by the way of forests, until they reached the Polish camp. One day preceding their arrival, they dispatched scouts to the Polish camp to discover the strength and the number of the Polish troops. The spies saw that the Poles were few in number; that they were encamped upon a hill, eating and drinking with abandon to the accompaniment of drums and dances. The scouts reported what they saw and said to them: "We should go up and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it. They are encamped securely and are unaware of us."¹¹ The scouts were ordered to dig pits and ditches and other obstacles on the hill and in the valley to prevent a possible escape for the enemy.

And it came to pass on Tuesday, the fourth day of the month of Sivan, '408,¹² that the Tartars and the Ukrainians attacked by way of the forests, from two sides. The Tartars attacked from one side and the Ukrainians from the other. When the Poles realized that evil had been determined against them; that they were also being attacked by the Tartars; that they were few in number compared with the Tartars and Ukrainians who numbered more than sixty thousand, they attempted to escape through the forest, the hill and the valley, but they fell into the ditches which were

dug for them. The Tartars and the Ukrainians had completely surrounded them. The Polish generals then implored them not to spill their blood on the earth but to take them captive. The Tartars granted their request and took captive the whole Polish army together with its two generals. They tortured them and placed iron chains upon the feet of the two generals, Potocki and Kalinowski.

When many of the Polish magnates became aware of Chmiel's success, and that his plans held out promise for future successes, they too, rebelled against the Kingdom of Poland, and made an alliance with Chmiel. They vowed to serve him as faithfully as they had served the King of Poland. Among them was the Choronzhy's captain who had been instructed to behead Chmiel. Chmiel appointed him captain over his own troops. Also the personal secretary and scribe to general Koniecpolski, who had since died, became the scribe of Chmiel. This scribe was a very clever man. He had knowledge of all the war strategy of the Kingdom of Poland. Thus he, together with other Polish nobles, now became the advisers of Chmiel. These became the foes of the Kingdom of Poland. "From the very forest itself comes the handle of the axe that fells it."¹³ The same day on which the Polish army and its two generals were captured, also brought the evil tidings that King Wladislaw died, and the whole Kingdom of Poland became as sheep which have no shepherd. When the dukes and the nobles heard that their king had died, and that all the Polish nobles, the mighty warriors, and also the two generals were

captured, they became disheartened. The hearts of the Jews melted like wax before the fire, for fear of the enemy. All the nobles, who governed the provinces beyond the Dnieper, and west of the Dnieper up to the City of Polannoe, fled for their lives. Had not God spared us one, all Jews would have perished as did the city of Sodom. In the midst of all the confusion Duke Wisniowiecki, of blessed memory, with his army were stationed beyond the Dnieper. He was a friend of Israel, and unsurpassed as a war hero. He and his people escaped by way of Lithuania, and with him escaped some five hundred Jewish citizens; each one with his wife and children. He carried them as on the wings of eagles until they were brought to their destination. If danger lurked behind them, he instructed them to proceed ahead; and if the danger was in front, he went before them as a shield and a buckler, and they followed him.

The Jews on this side of the Dnieper were informed of these dreadful events on the first day of the festival of Shabuoth.¹⁴ All of them took flight on that day, unmindful of their gold and silver. They ran for their lives. All those in the province of Ostrog, as well as those over which Ostrog¹⁵ had jurisdiction, such as Biala Cerkiew, Pawolocz, Cudnow, and Lubartow, and also the communities over which they had jurisdiction—all of them fled. Some ran to Polannoe, some to Zaslaw, some to Ostrog, the Capital, and Sary Konstantynow, for these were fortified cities. All the provinces of the city of Lwów, in the Kingdom of [Little] Russia, and the communities belonging to them such

as the environs of Nemirow, escaped to Nemirow, and those of the environs of Tulczyn fled to Tulczyn, and those of the environs of Bar, such as Winnice and Sarygrod, and Krasne together with the communities adjacent to them, fled to the city of Bar. Whoever failed to escape or was unable to flee was killed. Many communities beyond the Dnieper, and close to the battlefield, such as Pereyaslaw, Baryszowka, Piratyn, and Boryspole, Lubin and Lachowce and their neighbors, who were unable to escape, perished for the sanctification of His Name. These persons died cruel and bitter deaths. Some were skinned alive and their flesh was thrown to the dogs; some had their hands and limbs chopped off, and their bodies thrown on the highway only to be trampled by wagons and crushed by horses; some had wounds inflicted upon them, and thrown on the street to die a slow death; they writhed in their blood until they breathed their last; others were buried alive. The enemy slaughtered infants in the laps of their mothers. They were sliced into pieces like fish. They slashed the bellies of pregnant women, removed their infants and tossed them in their faces. Some women had their bellies torn open and live cats placed in them. The bellies were then sewed up with the live cats remaining within. They chopped off the hands of the victims so that they would not be able to remove the cats from the bellies. The infants were hung on the breasts of their mothers. Some children were pierced with spears, roasted on the fire and then brought to their mothers to be eaten. Many times they used the bodies of Jewish children as improvised bridges upon

which they later crossed. There was no cruel device of murder in the whole world that was not perpetrated by the enemies. All the four death penalties; stoning, burning, beheading and strangling¹⁶ were meted out to the Jews. Many were taken by the Tartars into captivity. Women and virgins were ravished. They lay with the women in the presence of their husbands. They seized comely women as handmaids and housekeepers, some as wives and concubines. Similar atrocities were perpetrated in all the settlements through which they passed. Also against the Polish people, these cruelties were perpetrated, especially against the priests and bishops. Thus, westward of the Dnieper several thousand Jewish persons perished and several hundred were forced to change their faith. Scrolls of the Law were torn to pieces, and turned into boots and shoes for their feet; the straps of the phylacteries served as laces around their feet. The leather boxes of the phylacteries were cast into the streets. Other sacred books served to pave the streets. Some were used for kindling purposes, and others to stuff the barrels of their guns. The ears ring at the hearing of this.

When the Jews of Pogrobiszcz, of Zywtow, of Baziowka and Tetjew and their surroundings heard of what the Ukrainians perpetrated against our brethren beyond the Dnieper; that the Tartars and the Ukrainians surrounded them, the Tartars on one side of the city and the Ukrainians on the other, they said: "If we wait until the Ukrainians invade the city we will all either perish or we will be forced into baptism

(God forbid). It is preferable that we fall captive to the Tartars. For, we know that our brethren in Constantinople and in other Turkish communities, are very compassionate and they will ransom us." This they did. The four above mentioned communities, surrendered to the Tartars, men, women and children, some three thousand souls. Among them there was a cantor, Reb Hirsh of Zywtow. When the Tartars came into the city, he began to chant mournfully the Memorial prayer, El Maleh Rachamim (O God full of compassion) on behalf of our slaughtered brethren of the house of Israel. All the people burst forth with intense weeping. Apparently, their cries ascended on high, for the compassion of their captors was stirred. They consoled them with expressions of sympathy and said to them: "Do not despair, and do not deny yourselves food or drink. There are ritual slaughterers among you; let them kill an abundance of sheep and oxen for your need, and forthwith we will bring you to your brethren in Constantinople to be ransomed." The Tartars kept their promise. Our brethren in Constantinople, the Lord preserve them, redeemed them, together with other Polish captives, numbering approximately twenty thousand souls. They expended vast sums of money, all that was asked of them. They provided food and shelter for them to the present day; they favored them with many services without limit. The entire land of Turkey manifested such generosity, especially the people of the city of Salonica, may the Lord preserve them. They ransomed a large number of captives. The renowned city of Venice, the crown

city of Rome, and the beloved and laudable city of Livorno, as well as other holy communities of Italy contributed many thousands and tens of thousands of gold pieces which were forwarded to greater Constantinople (the Lord shield her) for the ransoming of the captives. The Lord recompense these good people for the kindness shown to our brethren of the house of Israel, and keep them from evil until the coming of the Redeemer.

Following these events, the Tartars returned to their land with all their prize, and the oppressor Chmiel, together with his Cossack troops and many thousands of Tartars, who had remained with him, went to his city of Czehivyn. They approached the city with triumphant fanfare. All the people of the city came out to welcome him with timbrels and dancing and with great rejoicing. They blessed him and hailed him as prince and leader over them and their children after them. And they said to him: "You are a prince of God ¹⁷ and our liberator. You have redeemed us from the Polish nobles who oppressed us with hard labor."

And it came to pass when the oppressor Chmiel, reposed in his home, he addressed himself to his servants, ministers and advisers, and said to them: "Come let us take counsel together, so that we will not be regarded with shame and derision by our enemies, for we are abhorred by the inhabitants of the land of Poland, and when the Catholic kings will hear of the evil we have perpetrated they will make war upon us, and we are but few in number." And they replied to him: "This is the counsel we offer; that you send letters to

the Polish nobles and dukes, words of peace and truth,¹⁸ words of comfort and sympathy. Tell them that you regret all you have done; that all was imperative in order to save yourself. This you must do so that they will not mobilize troops against us speedily. Meanwhile, send messengers to the King of the Tartars to supply you with additional troops. Also, send letters to all Ukrainians in the Kingdom of Poland to be prepared for the appointed time to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to avenge themselves on their enemies, the nobles and the Jews." This he did. He sent secret messages to all the provinces, and to every place where groups of the Ukrainian people lived to be prepared for the appointed time, to gather themselves together and to stand for their lives,¹⁹ to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all the Jews, and all the army of Poland that would assault them; their little ones and their women, and to take their spoil for a prey. When the thing became known to the Jews through their friendly Ukrainian neighbors, and also through their own spies who had been placed in all their settlements, they notified their lords, the nobles. Immediately messages were sent forth from community to community by means of horse riders, informing the Jews and the nobles of daily developments. In recognition of this the nobles befriended the Jews exceedingly and became united with them in one band, like one soul. For the Holy One blessed be He, sends the cure before the plague. Had it not been for this action there would have been no escape for the remnant of Israel

(God forbid). And in every province whithersoever the oppressor's command and his decree came ²⁰ there was great rejoicing among the Ukrainians, and great mourning among the nobles and Jews, and fasting and weeping and a bitter cry, and repentance and prayer and charity. All this notwithstanding, His anger did not abate and the oppressor's hand yet remained outstretched. The Lord have compassion upon them.

Meanwhile Chmiel sent messages to the dukes and nobles, words of peace. He wrote to them words of comfort and sympathy. Everything that he had done had been inevitable in order to save those who were condemned to death. "If one comes to slay thee, forstall and slay him," ²¹ and "The persecuted are not accountable for their deeds." ²² He also advised the nobles to return to their homes, and he would return their estates to them. But the nobles paid no heed to his messages, for they understood that all this was falsehood and deceit; that he was merely seeking to ensnare them. They instinctively felt that all this was misrepresentation and deception; that it would be a "dark peace," indeed. For while he was offering them peace, he proceeded to put all of [Little] Russia under his rule and he received taxes from all the estates that formerly belonged to the nobles. They also recalled his deeds beyond the Dnieper against the Jews and the nobles; how he destroyed their churches and slew their priests. All this he did after capturing the Polish army. Consequently, they did not believe his words. They sent letters to the Archbishop, or as he was known in Italian, the Cardinal, whose seat was in Gniezno, and who was

regent because of the King's death so that Poland should not be without a government. "But for the fear of it man would swallow each other alive." ²³ At this time the Cardinal of Gniezno was one Casimir, may His glory increase, who caused his enemies to fall under him. All the dukes and nobles notified him that they had unanimously agreed that he be appointed commander, so that the Kingdom of Poland will not be like sheep without a shepherd. Immediately Cardinal Casimir handed the ruler's wand, which is called in Polish Bulawa into the hands of Duke Wladislaw Dominick, may His glory increase, the Archduke of Zaslav. This duke brought additional distress to Israel, and to the Kingdom of Poland. He was famed for his great wealth but was never experienced in warfare. For he was fearful and faint hearted, and only because of his tremendous wealth did the Cardinal appoint him as general. "When the shepherd is wroth with the sheep he blinds their leader." ²⁴ This was the case in Poland (because of our many sins). The Cardinal also announced, under threat of punishment, throughout Poland, that all nobles should mobilize to wreak vengeance on their enemies. Unfortunately, they assembled very slowly, as was characteristic of the Kingdom of Poland. Whenever they engaged in war they always proceeded slowly and without dispatch. The contrary is the case with the Tartars and the Ukrainians. They proceed with haste, not with indolence.

VII

THE MASSACRES OF THE HOLY COMMUNITY OF POLANNOE

And it came to pass on Tuesday, the first day of the month of Av,¹ that the Tartars and the Ukrainians besieged the city of Polannoe. They prepared the attack against this city in which were nobles and Jews. The sentries on the wall, however, shot at them and they were unable to come close to the city, for there were among the defenders some two thousand Polish nobles, seasoned warriors, and some twelve thousand Jews who were also mighty fighters. This city, in which the nobles and the Jews took refuge, was fortified strongly with a double wall, and a moat surrounded it. Hence, there was no need to guard it except from that side which was adjacent to two settlements inhabited by some Ukrainians. The nobles, therefore, placed their strongest serfs to guard the side which needed most protection against the enemy. "The protectors of the city, however, became the destroyers of the city,"² for among the serfs of the nobles who stood guard on the wall were also Ukrainians. They were known in the Polish language as Haiduki (mercenaries) and they turned traitors.

On Wednesday, the second day of Av, the enemy

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captured the two settlements which were inhabited by Ukrainians. These agreed to lend their assistance in the attack against the fortified city of the nobles and the Jews. The attack lasted all that Wednesday. On Thursday, the enemy called to the serfs of the nobles who were standing guard on the wall: "Behold we are brothers. Why are you aiding the nobles to fight against us? Is it not to your advantage to serve us than to serve those who are not of our people?" Subsequently, the serfs rebelled and only pretended to fight against them but permitted the Ukrainians to place ladders on the wall. Thus on Thursday the fortified city was captured. At once thousands of Ukrainians with drawn swords entered the city and began to massacre the people. When the nobles and the Jews saw that there was evil determined against them, and that the city was captured, those nobles who were horseriders fled to one side but the unfortunate Jews guarding the city were not permitted to escape, and they were killed for the glorification of the Name. Some ten thousand souls perished by the most terrible deaths the world has ever witnessed. They stretched their necks to the slaughter. A single Ukrainian invading a dwelling which housed several hundred Jewish persons would kill all of them and would meet no resistance.

Among them was a wise and understanding and divinely inspired Kabbalist whose name was, Our Teacher and Master Rabbi Samson of the holy community of Ostropole.³ An angel would appear to him every day to teach him the mysteries of the Torah. This mystic composed a commentary on the Zohar

based upon the Kabbalah of the Ari,⁴ of blessed memory, but it was never published. The angel had told him prior to the massacre, to indulge in sincere repentance so that the evil decree will not come to pass. He preached frequently in the synagogue and exhorted the people to repent so that the evil would not come to pass. Accordingly all the communities repented sincerely but it did not avail, for the evil decree had already been sealed.

When the enemies and the oppressors invaded the city, the above mentioned mystic and three hundred of the most prominent citizens, all dressed in shrouds, with prayer shawls over their heads, entered the synagogue and engaged in fervent prayer. When the enemies arrived they killed all of them upon the sacred ground of the synagogue, may God avenge their blood. Many hundreds who managed to survive were forced to change their faith and many hundreds were taken captive by the Tartars.

We were informed in the holy city of Zaslav that the Tartars and the Ukrainians were besieging the holy community of Polannoe. For, a messenger would be sent daily to observe the developments there. On that Tuesday he was unable to reach the city because of the besieging enemy. On Wednesday the messenger returned to us with the evil tidings that the enemies were besieging the holy community of Polannoe. And Zaslav was only six miles from Polannoe. On that Thursday, whoever was able to flee, fled. We abandoned our homes which were filled with all sorts of valuables such as merchandise and books, and other

good things. We did not spare our possessions. We only thought of saving ourselves and our sons and daughters. Some escaped to the capital city of Ostrog which was the metropolis of [Little] Russia; a city famed for its scholars and scribes; one which combined scholarship and wealth. I, and my family and my father-in-law, his honor, the master, Rabbi Abraham of the holy community of Zaslav, together with his family and relatives, fled to the holy community of Miedzyrzecze, two thousand els distance from Ostrog the capital. In the community of Ostrog and its adjacent community Miedzyrzecze lived more than ten thousand householders, each with his family. We wanted to tarry there for Sabbath Hazon⁵ so that in the interim we would be informed of the situation in Polannoe, how things stood. When on Friday afternoon we arrived in Miedzyrzecze, a messenger came to us and related that the Duke of Zaslav, General Dominik, is expected to arrive on that day, together with a large army, to aid Duke Wiśniowiecki in Polannoe against the besieging enemies. And thus it was. The Duke and one thousand warriors arrived. The great hero Laszcz and the rest of his army followed behind him. There was great rejoicing among us. After Sabbath Hazon we would return to our homes, we thought, for, we were only four miles distance from the holy community of Zaslav. We also thought that he would be able to free our brethren, of the house of Israel, in the holy community of Polannoe, of their troubles.

On Sabbath eve we were stunned by the evil tidings

which reached us through the noble Wiszowaty, who was the governor of Polannoe. He and many other nobles had fled. He said: "Polannoe has been captured. All the nobles and the Jews therein were murdered and the enemy's onslaught is reaching Zaslav. Duke Wiśniowiecki, together with his troops, fled to Konstantynow, and the Tartars and the Ukrainians are pursuing them. Some of them are marching toward Ostrog and Miedzyrzecze."

Then were the chiefs of Edom affrighted⁶ and a great fear fell upon the Jews. No one was able to summon courage. Everyone's eyes were directed toward the general, Duke Dominik. What will he do?

And it came to pass in the middle of the night that the general Duke Dominik retreated through the very gate by which he arrived from Poland, for he feared to go through the main road to Konstantynow by way of Zaslav because a large army of Tartars and Ukrainians were there while his men were few in number. He, therefore, followed a circuitous route and went to Krzemieniec, a distance of nine miles, by way of the woods. There he waited to be reinforced by additional Polish troops, in order to go to the city of Konstantynow. The mass of people, however, were under the impression that the general escaped to the Kingdom of Poland. They all said: "If a flame among the cedars fall, what avails the lichen on the wall?"⁷ in other words, if the general flees, what is left for us to do? The heads of the community of Ostrog announced that no Jew should dare to remain in that community, nor

for that matter, in the community of Miedzyrzecze, for the enemy is only two miles distant from us. We cannot put any trust in the inhabitants of the city who are Ukrainians, that they themselves would not harm us. All the people fled in accordance with the announcement. Whoever had a horse and cart traveled in it. Those who did not possess a horse and cart, even though they had sufficient money to buy them, would not wait, but took wife and children by the hand and fled on foot, casting away all belongings. Also, he who possessed a horse and wagon but was burdened with a heavy load of articles, books or other valuables, unloaded them from the wagon at the inn and handed them to the innkeeper in order to be able to travel lightly.

On that Sabbath Hazon three rows of horses and carts, moved along one next to the other in width, and for a stretch of seven miles, the entire distance between Ostrog and the holy Community of Dubno in length, the road was cluttered up with horses and carts, one behind the other and innumerable pedestrians. Within two hours on that Sabbath Hazon, three horseriders, one Jew whose name was Moses Tzoref of Ostrog, together with two nobles, ran after us. They said to us: "Why are you marching so slowly? Behold, the enemy is close behind us. They are now in Miedzyrzecze. We escaped with difficulty." Immediately there was such confusion and panic among our brethren of the house of Israel that it is indescribable. Everyone threw from his cart silver and gold, vessels, books,

pillows and bed covers in order to be able to escape more quickly, to save the lives of his family. The field was cluttered with gold, silver and clothes, and no Jew paused to take them. This time the admonishing words of the Prophet came true: "They shall cast their silver in the streets."⁸ Some cast away everything; horse and cart and all that was in it, and with only wife and children fled for their lives into the woods. Many women and men who had led their children by the hands, released them when this panic seized them, and ran for their lives into the woods and into the pits. This time the verse of Leviticus came true "And ye shall flee when none pursueth you,"⁹ for it was all a falsehood; the enemies, the Tartars, did not pursue us. The fear, however, was so great upon all of us that Sabbath Hazon that everyone thought the Ukrainians were pursuing him.

On the Sunday following Sabbath Hazon the truth became known to us. The general had not fled to Poland, but only journeyed to the city of Krzemieniec. Then the anxiety was relieved, and from that day on everyone slackened his pace. We walked from place to place through cities and villages, sleeping in the streets. And even then we found no rest for our weary souls. We were robbed and crushed, despised and hated. The admonishing verses of the Scripture: "And among these nations shalt thou have no repose, and there shall be no rest for the sole of thy feet,"¹⁰ etc . . ." and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear night and day and shalt have no assurance of thy life," for every night that we spent in

a Ukrainian inn we feared that the innkeeper would kill us in the night, because they were all rebels. When we arose in the morning alive we recited the prayer, "Blessed art Thou who quickenest the dead."

X

THE MASSACRE OF THE KINGDOM OF
LITHUANIA

The people of Lithuania¹ fled to Wilno and to Great Grodno, where the enemies did not appear. Many communities, however, where thousands of Jews had taken refuge, were destroyed and the Jews therein were killed. Thus, in the city of Homel countless thousands were martyred for the glorification of the Name. From there the enemies proceeded to Starodub where they caused a great slaughter among the Jews. Similar slaughters were perpetrated in Czernigow, in Brahlin, and in Wlodawa, where many Jews had assembled. Approximately ten thousand persons perished there by all sorts of terrible deaths. In the remaining large Lithuanian communities Jews were killed in thousands and tens of thousands. May the Lord avenge their blood.

Of the people in the cities of Sluck, Pinsk, Brest-Litovsk, some escaped to greater Poland, and others by waterway, to Danzig, on the river Vistula. The hapless ones who remained in Brest-Litovsk, and in Pinsk were martyred in the hundreds, for the glorification of His Name. The enemies pursued many hundreds of wagons of fleeing Jews on the open field near Pinsk

overtaking them in the narrow paths, and killing large numbers of them.

The Polish troops, however, avenged themselves on the Ukrainians of Pinsk. When the general, Duke Radziwil, in charge of the Kingdom of Lithuania, heard that the people of Pinsk rebelled and permitted the scoundrels to enter the city, he and several thousand Polish troops besieged the city and set fire to it on its four sides. The scoundrels within the city tried to escape in boats and all of them were drowned. Some were burned and killed. Thus the Jews were avenged.

The people of the city of Sluck were also avenged. The inhabitants of the city notified the scoundrels to hasten to come, assuring them that many Jews and nobles were hiding there and they would deliver them to the Ukrainians. But there were no Jews in Sluck; they had already fled. They did not trust the local people to fight the foe. When the scoundrels approached the city they were met with cannon fire from the wall and from the gate. They suffered heavy losses. As they fled, the local people pursued them, and they smote them to utter destruction.²

XIV

THE MASSACRES OF THE HOLY COMMUNITY OF ZAMOŚĆ

From there the oppressor Chmiel, together with all of his army of Tartars and Ukrainians, a great multitude, like the sand of the sea, journeyed onward and laid siege to the city of Zamość, a city with which none can be compared in strength. It possessed a double wall and a moat surrounded it. As soon as the enemies arrived there, the town folk burned all the houses near the wall so that the enemies would not be able to hide in them. They did not permit the enemy to come within one half mile of the city. Thus they held out for many days.

Meanwhile the enemy dispersed throughout the surrounding communities and caused horrible slaughters, in Tomaszow, in Szczepieszyn, in Turbiń, in Hrubieszow, in Tarnigrod, in Bilgoraj, in Gora, in Krasnyk. In all of these cities they massacred thousands and tens of thousands of Jews. Also in the Province of Wolhynia; in Włodzimierz-Wolynski in Lubomla, in Luck, and in Krzemieniec, and their environs they caused horrible slaughters, killing thousands of Jews. In the city of Krzemieniec one hoodlum obtained a slaughtering knife, and slaughtered several hundred

Jewish children, and asked his comrade, in mockery, whether they were "kosher" or "trefah." He replied: "They are trefah." He then threw them to the dogs. Afterwards he took one of the slain children and slashed its throat open and asked: "Is this kosher?" And the comrade replied: "Yes, it is kosher." He inspected the entrails, as one does with goats and sheep,¹ and he then carried it on a spear through the streets of the city and called: "Who wishes to buy goats and sheep?" The Lord avenge their blood.

Also in the narrow paths near Biechow, the scoundrels overtook several hundred carts of Jews and they killed all of them. Similar slaughters took place in many other communities, the fury of which cannot be recorded. Thus they devastated more than seven hundred communities, all the cities and settlements up to the Vistula River. Though they besieged the city of Zamość many days they were unable to conquer it, for a German general by the name of Weiher, together with six thousand trained German troops, defended the city. They released cannon fire from the wall and killed many of the enemy. Yet thousands of Jews died of starvation and of the plague which broke out in the city.

And it came to pass when they had been there a long time,² that the enemy contrived a scheme. By the use of witchcraft they let a viper soar in the sky, and they took unto themselves as a sign: "If the viper will turn his face toward the city, we will subdue it before us, and if he will turn his face toward us we will flee before them. And it came to pass at midnight, when they saw

the viper ascending skyward, and he remained suspended for about a half hour with his face toward the city. After that he turned toward the camp of the Cossacks and the Tartars. They realized that this was an evil omen for them and that evil was before their faces. They forthwith dispatched a message to the inhabitants of the city and said to them: "Is it not better for you to compromise with us, as did the capital city of Lwow than to die of starvation?" When the people of the city heard this they readily agreed and compromised with them to pay twenty thousand gold pieces. After this the Tartars and the Ukrainians drew near the wall and brought with them many prisoners to be ransomed. The Jews of the city ransomed several hundred prisoners. May the Lord recompense them for their kindness.

The oppressor, Chmiel, together with his Ukrainian and Tartar forces journeyed onward, and turned toward the Metropolis of Lublin, one of the four great communities in the Kingdom of Poland; a city unequaled in scholarship, worldly affairs, and loving kindness. The townspeople had fled from this city to take refuge beyond the Vistula River, leaving behind them several hundred citizens of the poorer class. They supplied them with sufficient money to provide for the indigent of the city, especially the refugees who came from other places. In the meantime all the nobles and the dukes of the Kingdom of Poland had gathered in Cracow, Poland's metropolis, to elect a king for themselves, so that the Kingdom will not be like sheep without a shepherd. The nobles and dukes deliberated but could not reach an agreement among them as to

who shall rule over them. Some preferred Casimir, may his glory increase, the Cardinal of Gniezno. Others preferred his brother, Carlos, and still others preferred the Lord of Siebenbürgen in the Kingdom of Hungary, whose name was Rakoczy.

When the oppressor Chmiel heard about this he sent emissaries to the dukes and nobles in Cracow, saying: "If they will elect Casimir, the Cardinal of Gniezno, as king he will withdraw and will no longer wage war against them."

When the dukes and the nobles heard of this, it found favor in their eyes and they elected Casimir, the second son of King Sigismund, as king.

And it came to pass in the year 5409, in the month of Cheshvan, that our Lord, King Casimir, may his glory increase, was crowned.³ May his Kingdom grow and may he cause his enemies to fall under him and behold seed, and be blessed with length of days. For he is a just King, a God-fearing man and a friend of Israel. He took unto himself the wife of his deceased brother, Wladislaw, for a wife.

After the King sat securely on the throne of his Kingdom, he dispatched letters to the oppressor, Chmiel, to return to his home, together with his army; that all his grievances against the Kingdom of Poland would be settled by mutual agreement.

The oppressor Chmiel, together with his forces, were on the way to capture the city of Lublin. When they were only four miles away from the city, the King's letter advising him to return home, reached him. He welcomed the King's letter with joy and im-

mediately returned home. All that winter the land rested from war. Surely the merit of the people of Lublin, who dealt kindly with their brethren of the House of Israel who had escaped the sword; with the living as well as with the dead, was great. This kindness stood in their good stead, and saved them from the enemy's sword. However, throughout the period of the siege by the enemies, the city of Lublin was shut and closed. No one went out or came in. And there was a great plague in the city, and more than ten thousand Jewish souls perished.

Among those Jews who had escaped across the Vistula River a terrible plague broke out. They cast their dead on the cemetery in the darkness of the night, so that their unfriendly neighbors might not notice them and delight when they beheld a new grave. The plague was different from any other plague (God spare us). They were stricken with high fever, as a result of the trying journey and the fright. Many poor people whom the Gentiles did not permit entry in their homes had to sleep in the streets and they died of starvation and exposure. No man offered aid to his brother, and no father took pity on his child. More than one hundred thousand Jews perished of this disease (may the Lord preserve and save us). And the Jews became impoverished. The balance of silver and gold and garments which they managed to retain, they sold for half their value, silk and other garments, for one third of the value. Books were worthless, for there was no buyer. The Torah lay in a deserted corner, for the Gentiles bought only silver and gold and garments.

When the Jews heard that the enemies returned home, and that the nobles were following their example and were also returning to their homes and to their estates, they, too, made their way back to all those places where Polish nobles were present—up to the city of Zaslaw. From there eastward, there was not to be found at that time a single nobleman or Jew. For all those places were still occupied by many scoundrels and the nobles were afraid to travel there. Approximately two thousand soldiers, remnants of the forces of Duke Dominik, and of Duke Korecki, were in charge of Ostrog, Zaslaw and Korec. The Jews there placed their trust first in God and then in them, thinking that they might find refuge for themselves and their families. They also hoped that the townspeople would repay them the debts they owed them.

XV

THE SECOND MASSACRE OF OSTROG

The townspeople of Ostrog dealt slyly with the Jews. At first they were kind to them. They wrote to the Jews of the surrounding places who had been inhabitants of Ostrog, inviting them to return, not to fear the Cossacks, because the King had made peace with them. The poor Jews rejoiced exceedingly, believing that this was the truth. Some three hundred persons returned to Ostrog. After tarrying there three weeks, from the first of Adar to Tuesday, the eighteenth of Adar, '409,¹ the townspeople informed the Cossacks in the vicinity, to hasten there because many Jews and nobles were in their midst, and they assured them of their aid against the nobles and the Jews.

And it came to pass at midnight of the 19th of the aforementioned month of Adar, that many thousands of Cossacks came into the city of Ostrog and slew all the nobles and the Jews in their beds. Only three Jews and one officer of the nobles with eighty of his troops escaped. The Cossacks pursued them, and the nobles continued to flee ahead of them until several thousand Ukrainians had followed them from the city. Then the nobles turned their faces toward their pursuers and killed many among them, leaving only a few who escaped into the city.

When the nobles and the Jews of Zaslaw, and of the other communities near Ostrog heard of this they fled for their lives. Some escaped to Great Dubno and Olyka, and others to Krzemieniec.

And it came to pass that King Casimir, may his glory increase, and the princes heard that the Ukrainians were still rebellious, that he appointed as general, Prince Firley and equipped him with an army of thirty thousand men to wage war against the Ukrainians. General Firley, together with his army, attacked the city of Ostrog and avenged himself upon the people of the city and wrought among them great judgments.

From there he proceeded to the city of Zaslaw where he waged a great battle against the Ukrainians, near the new place of the city of Zaslaw, adjacent to the fortress, and he wrought many vengeful deeds among the people of the city. Several hundred Jewish men of strength, of the poor folk, joined him and they also proceeded to avenge themselves on their enemies. General Firley also sent a detachment of several thousand Polish troops and several hundred Jews to the neighboring places where some of the rebelling Ukrainians were still to be found, and they waged war against them and inflicted heavy losses upon them, and captured all the cities. They succeeded in all their efforts. Also Lanckoronski, the Voyevoda of Kamieniec, a great warrior, together with several thousand seasoned troops, took command of the city of Ozogowce, nine miles from Zaslaw. And he too, inflicted a heavy blow upon the Ukrainians, from another side. Throughout

their encounter at Zaslaw they were victorious. The battle lasted twelve weeks and they wrought great vengeance upon the Ukrainians. As the Ukrainians had done, so were they repaid.

General Firley and his army travelled on from Zaslaw to join with Voyevoda Lanckoronski and his army, and he and all his army journeyed to the city of Czehanski Kamien. There, Lanckoronski and his army joined him, and they prepared for a major battle.²

When Chmiel heard that the Poles had made war upon him, and that they had devastated many Ukrainian cities and inflicted great blows upon them, he bided his time for about three months. In the interim he assembled all his troops and invited the Tartar King and army to join him.

When General Firley heard that the Ukrainians and the Tartars were mobilizing for the third time, he sent letters to King Casimir, may his glory increase, to issue a decree throughout the Kingdom of Poland, that all nobles must enlist to aid their brethren in the war. The King complied and announced throughout the provinces of his Kingdom: "All officers whose names appear in the Royal Registry must either themselves go to war, or send their servants in their place. Failure to comply with the King's decree will result in the loss of rank." And the princes were slow with their vehicles, as was their habit, while the Tartars and Ukrainians, who were many, like the sand of the sea, marched with dispatch. As the Ukrainians approached the Polish army, the Poles moved six more miles to the cities of Burmucz and Zbaraz. There Duke

Wiśniowiecki and his brother-in-law, the General Choronzhy³ together with several thousand veteran soldiers from Lwow, joined them. And the Polish army prepared for battle in the city of Zbaraz. They fortified the city strongly and they made water obstacles all around the city.

And it came to pass on the New Moon of the Month of Ab '409, that Czar Khan, the King of the Tartars, together with a multitude of people, like the sand of the sea, and the oppressor Chmiel, and his Ukrainian people, also, a large multitude, like the sand of the sea, encircled the Polish army from a distance and besieged it. They were unable to come close to the camp because of the persistent cannon fire from the wall of the fort, which killed among them in the tens of thousands. Thus the siege on the Polish army lasted seven weeks and many nobles died of starvation. Also General Firley died in this engagement.

Duke Wiśniowiecki however strengthened the hearts of the people by deceiving them with false messages, supposedly written by the King, that he and a large army of Poles were coming to his aid. But this never happened. For no one ever left the camp, nor did anyone enter it. He did this only to encourage the people. Were it not for this they would have surrendered to the enemy, because of the severe hunger in the Polish camp. They ate the horses and the dogs because of the hunger. Occasionally Duke Wiśniowiecki and his brother-in-law, the Choronzhy with their armies, would leave their fort through a tunnel which they had dug, and attack the Ukrainian and the Tartar

army suddenly, killing tens of thousands. The Duke marched at the head of his men to encourage them so that their hearts would not become faint.

When King Casimir, may his glory increase, heard that the Polish army was in distress and besieged by the Ukrainians and the Tartars, he made ready his chariot, and the King himself in his glory, together with twenty thousand seasoned troops, went to war. All the nobles of Poland mobilized to follow him. But he did not wait for them and marched with his twenty thousand to aid his people in distress.

When the king came near the besieging Ukrainians and Tartars, several hundred thousand of them encircled him and his army. And the whole Polish army trembled and their hearts melted within them, and not one of them dared to unsheathe his sword. "And the King looked this way and that way and when he saw that there was no man brave to fight"⁴ he was very wroth at his people and his anger burned in him.⁵ And the Tartars almost captured the King alive. When the King saw that there was evil determined against him,⁶ he decided to turn with his army toward the city of Zborow. And the King said to his people: "Let us escape thither; it is small and nearby and we shall be saved."⁷ The King and his army found refuge there, and he waged a battle against the Ukrainians and the Tartars from the city of Zborow for about two days. In the interim the King sent forth his aide, the Nobleman Ossolinski, to the Tartar King to compromise with him and to make peace, then the oppressor Chmiel would be compelled to give his consent. The

fight against the King ceased immediately and Czar Khan, the King of the Tartars, together with several hundred of his men, proceeded to the city of Zborow to speak with the King personally and to discuss with him the terms of the truce. They agreed that the King, may his glory increase, pay him two hundred thousand gold pieces, a debt due him by a previous agreement, which stipulated that a definite sum annually be paid to him as a tribute, but by which the King failed to abide. Another condition agreed upon was that the two generals in the Czar's custody be returned to the King for a ransom of one hundred thousand gold pieces. The King let him have several high ranking Polish nobles as surety, until the money will be paid.

When the oppressor, Chmiel heard that the Tartars made a truce with the King he became fearful for his life and he also went to the city of Zborow and he fell at the King's feet, and with tears beseeched him saying: "All that he had perpetrated was caused by the nobles themselves." He discussed many matters which have never been revealed to any man. But the King was too proud to converse with him, and he spoke through an interpreter. He finally compromised with him that he and his army return home, and that the King would then send five high ranking officers as commissioners to discuss the terms of the truce between the Ukrainians and the Polish people. For Chmiel had requested that thirty thousand Cossacks be exempt from taxes, as in the past; and that he should have the right to select these thirty thousand from any of the provinces

that will please him, be they from those which are under the King's rule or from those which are under the rule of the nobles, and that the city of Czehiryn and its environs shall belong to him and to his seed after him, forever; also, that one of the Cossack leaders shall be one of the seven Voyevodas selected to serve in the King's Assembly; and that the King should order the Jews not to take up residence in those places where any of these thirty thousand Cossacks will reside; and many other conditions which were beyond consideration. But the King persuaded him this time to return to his home and that the five commissioners would negotiate with him.

And it came to pass after these things that the Tartars and the Ukrainians returned home. On the way, the Tartars wrought great vengeance on the Ukrainians, in the towns and in the villages, which had rebelled against the King. Some people report that the King had given them permission to destroy those places which harbored rebels. They set fire to the city of Ostrog and its environs, to Zaslaw and its environs, to Krzemieniec and its environs, to Bazilia and its environs, and to the city of Satanow and its environs up to Kamieniec-Podolski. All cities over a distance of twenty square miles were devastated and burned, and of its Ukrainian inhabitants, some were slain by the sword, and tens of thousands were taken captive by the Tartars. Only those who hid in the woods and in the swamps remained alive. And the Lord avenged on them the vengeance of the people of Israel. They themselves accepted it as a just punishment. And the land had

respite from war the whole year of '410, and the year '411, according to the minor reckoning, until the feast of Passover.⁸

After the feast of Tabernacles, '410,⁹ according to the minor reckoning, the Polish nobles returned to their homes and to their estates. Also the remnant of Israel, "orphans of orphans" returned. They were destitute and poor, and they found no respite even there because prices were high and food was scarce. For, of the Ukrainian people, thousands and tens of thousands perished from starvation. And the famine for bread was not so great as the lack of money. For the Cossacks and the Tartars had robbed them of all their money and treasures. Of the wealthy Ukrainians, some fled across the Dnieper, because they feared the retribution of the nobles, while others buried their money and pretended poverty. The wretched Jews, however, though indigent and destitute, appeared in the eyes of the multitude and of the nobles as rich people. And everyone cried: "Give, give." The King and the nobles demanded taxes and the Jews were penniless, and they were compelled to give a portion of what was left to them in silver and gold and clothing. They would give it away for half the value. Then came additional levies, such as the maintenance of the army and the like. They were compelled to give exorbitant tithes, so that nothing remained in their hands, and their poverty grew worse from day to day.

Nevertheless, they offered praise and thanks to the Holy One, Blessed be He, for the peace which they enjoyed. In those places where the Cossacks dwelt,

business was good, for all of them were wealthy as a result of the loot of the Jews and the nobles. But no Jew or noble was permitted to reside there until the compromise had taken effect. They were permitted to establish residence only up to and including the city of Pawolocz and no further. The Cossacks were in control over a stretch of one hundred miles square of the land of [Little] Russia as a security, pending the aforementioned settlement with the nobles.

In those days, the King, may his glory increase, issued an ordinance throughout the provinces of his kingdom, that whoever had been forced to change his faith, may return to his former faith. All the forced converts returned to Judaism, and the Jews continued to reside in all the cities where they had been converted. The Jews now publicly professed their religion in those places where Jews dwelt, and in the places where the Cossacks resided, and where no Jews lived at this time, the forced converts fled, in accordance with the decree of the King. Also the women whom the Cossacks married by force, fled to the cities which were populated by Jews. Thus hundreds of forced converts became Jews again. In the places where severe carnage took place, hundreds of boys and girls and infants, had been converted. The Jews took them back by force from the hands of the Gentiles. After thorough investigation, they provided them with identifying tags giving the names of the families to which they belonged. These were hung on the neck of each child. Many women had become Agunoth,¹⁰ and many widows who had become subject to levirate marriage¹¹ became Agunoth because

the levir had departed from the land. The authorities of the Council of Four Lands,¹² may the Rock and Redeemer preserve them, instituted many appropriate ordinances for their benefit and they instituted a public fast for the whole Kingdom of Poland, to be observed on the twentieth day of Sivan, for generations to come. For on that day the terrible slaughter of Nemirow had occurred, and it had been the first community to submit to the massacre, for the glorification of His Name, may the merit of its martyrs stand us in good stead, and may the Lord avenge their blood.

After these things the King elevated Duke Wiśniowiecki above the other nobles and appointed him Supreme General over the whole Polish army. But he would not accept the appointment unless the honor would be for life. Should the two generals, now held captive by the Tartars, return, they would not replace him in this capacity. Only then would he lead the Polish army beyond the River Dnieper and subjugate the Cossacks, with the help of God, so that everyone would be enabled to return to his possession.

When Chmiel heard of this thing, he feared for his life, lest the King grant his request, for the hearts of all the people were with Duke Wiśniowiecki. He immediately sent a message to the Tartar King to release the two Polish generals from the dungeon; that he would pay the balance of the ransom money due him. Chmiel did this not because of his love for them, but because of his hatred for Duke Wiśniowiecki, to prevent him from becoming the supreme general. The

King of the Tartars thus released the two generals, Potocki and Kalinowsky. The Polish King and his nobles were surprised at the release of the two generals by the King of the Tartars, and they knew not the cause thereof. The King restored them to their former offices.

In those days the oppressor, Chmiel, together with all his army, attacked the provinces of Wallachia and destroyed them because they sheltered many nobles and Jews and because the Wallachians acquired from the Tartars by force hundreds of captives and gave them their freedom. Upon their return from the provinces of Wallachia they brought with them a vast amount of booty and sold much of it to the Jews. But no Jew suffered injury this time because there was peace with the Jews.

In those days the Russians in the province of Moscow also rebelled against the King of Poland. They were joined by a host of riffraff from the Cossacks. The oppressor Chmiel wrote letters to the King not to fear the Moscovite rebellion; that he and his Cossacks would march upon them, engage them in battle and make them subject to the King. But the King in his wisdom understood that Chmiel was merely seeking a pretext and he was compelled to make peace with the Moscovites.

In those days the King of Poland sent a commission of high ranking nobles to make a settlement with the Cossacks but it was unsuccessful. For the Cossacks made many demands which could not be met by the

King and the nobles, and the matter was delayed until the festival of Passover '411, according to the minor reckoning.

And it came to pass prior to the aforementioned Passover that the Tartars and the Ukrainians assembled a fourth time, and on that Passover, the children of Israel drank the "four cups of poison." They slew hundreds of Jews, and hundreds went into captivity to the Tartars. The latter day troubles make one oblivious of those of the past. "And Jacob fled" for the fourth time, and all the children of Israel escaped to the Metropolis of Lwow. And the King himself, may his glory increase, went to fight against them, and with him were three hundred thousand able soldiers of the Polish army, and eighty thousand men composed of Germans, French, and Spanish soldiers, also one thousand Jewish fighters. Three hundred thousand Poles were stationed near Lublin so that the Polish people would not be in one mass, because of the famine. Since the day the Kingdom of Poland was founded unto the present, there were not so many Polish troops gathered together as in those days. The Tartars and the Ukrainians also comprised a vast throng, like the sand of the sea, that cannot be counted for multitude.

The King prepared for a great battle, and he pitched his tent in the Monastery in the city of Sokal, and the rest of the King's army readied itself for battle between the city of Sokal and the city of Beresteczko, and with them were the two generals and Duke Wiśniowiecki. The Tartars and the Ukrainians came upon them suddenly with their accustomed shouts and

savage outcries and said: "Let us attack the Polish people and we will defeat them as we did in our previous attempts." And they knew not that God was with us and with the King, may his glory increase. At first they succeeded and inflicted a blow on the Polish army. But afterwards the hand of the Polish army prevailed and, reinforced by the Germans, they girded themselves with strength, and they struck a severe blow on the Tartars and Ukrainians, and they smote them and pursued them unto destruction. The Tartar King escaped to his land in great embarrassment and with very few of his forces. He took the oppressor Chmiel with him into captivity, because the latter did not inform him of the strength of the King's army, and caused him the embarrassment of being compelled to escape with only a small number of his troops, and to lose most of his forces. All the high ranking officers, among them the nephew of the Tartar King, became the prisoners of the King. The remaining Cossack forces were besieged by the Polish forces for many days. They arose and escaped in the evening, leaving their tents, and horses and carts filled with everything good, the whole camp intact, and they fled for their lives. The King, may his glory increase, together with his nobles and followers, returned to their homes, with great rejoicing and with happy hearts on the seventeenth of Ab, '411, according to the minor reckoning. And the Tartar King sent letters to the King, may his glory increase, to release his nephew in exchange of his foe, the oppressor, who at this time had been his prisoner; he would also return four thousand high

ranking Polish nobles, now in his captivity. But the King refused. He replied with pride to the Tartar King that he may retain the oppressor Chmiel for the present and that he intended to take him later by force. This the King said to impress upon the Tartar King that he and his people intend to make war upon the Tartars. Then the King sent his two generals and Duke Wiśniowiecki, and, with them, one hundred and fifty thousand able bodied warriors, to conquer all the Ukrainian cities in the land of [Little] Russia, and to make war on the Tartars afterwards. This they did. They proceeded and captured the cities in the Land of [Little] Russia one by one.

At this time the nobles became envious of Duke Wiśniowiecki, who had been rising in popularity, and they handed him a deadly poison to drink and Duke Wiśniowiecki died. May his memory be a blessing. He left behind him a sixteen-year-old son who was also an able warrior, and he took his father's place. And it came to pass that the King of the Tartars heard that the hero, the Duke, died and that two generals were preparing to make war on him, he made peace with the oppressor Chmiel. Chmiel paid him a ransom of eighteen million gold pieces, and also supported him. The Tartars and the Ukrainians assembled in a vast multitude, like the sand of the sea, a fifth time, to make war against Poland. The great war thus renewed itself in Poland after the Holy Days, '412, according to the minor reckoning and the war has been continuing to the present day.¹³ Sometimes the enemy prevails, and sometimes, the King prevails. The children of Israel

however, are becoming poorer and poorer. Moreover, a severe epidemic has broken out in the whole Kingdom of Poland. In the city of Cracow, and in other communities, in the Kingdom of Poland, in the summer of '412, according to the minor reckoning, more than twenty thousand persons perished. May the Lord have mercy upon them. Unto the present day throughout the Kingdom of Poland, there reigns the sword, famine and a great pestilence. And these latter troubles make us forget the former. Every day the tragedy is greater than on the day preceeding it. "In the evening they would say; would it were morning, and in the morning they would say; would it were evening."¹⁴ And the verses: "Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of the law, etc . . . And the Lord shall scatter thee among all the peoples, from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth,"¹⁵ have come to pass. What can we say, what can we speak, or how can we justify ourselves? Shall we say we have not sinned? Behold, our iniquities testify against us. For we have sinned, and the Lord found out the iniquity of his servants. Would the Holy One, blessed be He, dispense judgment without justice? But we may say that "He whom God loveth he chastiseth."¹⁶ We may also apply to them the verse: "And begin at my sanctuary."¹⁷ Read not Mimikdoshi (from my sanctuary), but read Mimkudoshai (from my sanctified).¹⁸ For since the day the Holy Temple was destroyed the righteous are seized by death for the iniquities of the generation.