

HISTORY OF THE JEWS

HISTORY OF THE JEWS

BY HEINRICH GRAETZ

VOL. V

From the Chmielnicki Persecution of the Jews in Poland (1648 C. E.) to the Period of Emancipation in Central Europe (c. 1870 C. E.)

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HISTORY OF THE JEWS

CHAPTER I.

CHMIELNICKI AND THE PERSECUTION OF THE JEWS OF POLAND BY THE COSSACKS.

Condition of the Jews in Poland before the Outbreak of Persecution—
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1648–1656 C. E.

Poland ceased to be a haven for the sons of Judah, when its short-sighted kings summoned the Jesuits to supervise the training of the young nobles and the clergy and crush the spirit of the Polish dissidents. These originators of disunion, to whom the frequent partition of Poland must be attributed, sought to undermine the unobtrusive power which the Jews, through their money and prudence, exercised over the nobles, and they combined with their other foes, German workmen and tradespeople, members of the guilds, to restrict and oppress them. After that time there were repeated persecutions of Jews in Poland; sometimes the German guild members, sometimes the disciples of

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the Jesuits, raised a hue and cry against them. Still, in the calamities of the Thirty Years' War, fugitive Jews sought Poland, because the canonical laws against Jews were not applied there with strictness. The high nobility continued to be dependent on Jews, who in a measure counterbalanced the national defects. Polish flightiness, levity, unsteadiness, extravagance, and recklessness were compensated for by Jewish prudence, sagacity, economy, and cautiousness. The Jew was more than a financier to the Polish nobleman; he was his help in embarrassment, his prudent adviser, his all-in-all. Especially did the nobility make use of Jews in developing recently established colonies, for which they had neither the necessary perseverance nor the ability. Colonies had gradually been formed on the lower Dnieper and the northern shore of the Black Sea, by runaway Polish serfs, criminals, adventurers from every province, peasants, and nobles, who felt themselves cramped and endangered in their homes. These outcasts formed the root of the Cossack race at the waterfalls of the

Dnieper (Za-Porogi), whence the Cossacks obtained the name of Zaporogians. To maintain themselves, they took to plundering the neighboring Tartars. They became inured to war, and with every success their courage and independent spirit increased.

The kings, who needed the Cossacks in military undertakings and to ward off the inroads of Tartars and Turks, granted them some independence in the Ukraine and Little Russia, and appointed a chieftain over them from their own midst, an Attaman, or Hetman, with special marks of dignity. But the bigoted temper of King Sigismund III and the Jesuits made the Cossacks, who might have become an element of strength for Poland, the source of endless discontent and rebellion. The Zaporogians for the most part were adherents of the Greek Church, the Greek Catholic confession being predominant

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in southern Poland. After the popes by means of the Jesuits had weakened and oppressed the Polish dissidents, they labored to unite the Greek Catholics with the Romish Church or to extirpate them. With the warlike spirit of the Cossacks this change was not easy; hence a regular system of enslavement was employed against them. Three noble houses, the Koniecpolski, Vishnioviecki, and Potocki, had control of colonization in the Ukraine and Little Russia, and they transferred to their Jewish business agents the farming of the oppressive imposts falling on the Cossacks. Thus Jewish communities gradually spread in the Ukraine, Little Russia, and even beyond these provinces. The Cossacks, for instance, had to pay a tax at the birth of a child and on every marriage. That there might be no evasion, the Jewish revenue farmers had the keys of the Greek churches, and when the clergyman wished to perform a baptism or a marriage, he was obliged to ask them for the key. In general, the position of the Jews in districts where none but Poles dwelt was better than in those which besides Polish inhabitants contained a German population, as was the case in the large cities, Posen, Cracow, Lublin, and Lemberg.

By reason of their great number, their importance, and their compact union, the Jews in Poland formed a state within a state. The general synod, which assembled twice a year at Lublin and Jaroslaw, formed a legislative and judicial parliament from which there was no appeal. At first called the Synod of the Three Countries, it became in the first quarter of the seventeenth century the Synod of the Four Countries (Vaad Arba Arazoth). An elective president (Parnes di Arba Arazoth) was at the head, and conducted public affairs. The communities and rabbis had civil, and, to a certain extent, criminal, jurisdiction, at least against informers and traitors. Hence no Jew ventured to bring

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an accusation against one of his race before the authorities of the country, fearing to expose himself to disgrace and contempt from public opinion, which would have embittered his life, or even entailed death. Almost every community had its college of judges, a rabbi with two assessors, before whom every complaint was brought, but the final decision rested with the synod. The synod also concerned itself about honesty in dealing and conduct, and in weight and measure, wherever Jews were affected.

The study of the Talmud in Poland, established by Shachna, Solomon Lurya, and Moses Isserles, reached a pitch attained at no previous time, nor in any other country. The demand for copies of the Talmud was so great that in less than twenty years three editions had to be printed, no doubt in thousands of copies. The study of the Talmud was a greater necessity in Poland than in the rest of Europe. The rabbis, as has been already said, had jurisdiction of their own, and decided according to Talmudical and Rabbinical laws. The great number of Jews in Poland, and their fondness for litigation, gave occasion to intricate law cases. The rabbi-judges were obliged to go back to the source of law, the Talmud, to seek points of support for such cases. The contending parties being themselves well informed and acute, the reasoning of the rabbis had to be flawless to escape criticism. Hence Rabbinical civil law in Poland met with extraordinary cultivation and

extension, to adapt it to all cases and make it available for the learned litigants. Thus the ever-growing subtlety of the method of Talmud study depended on current conditions and wants, and on the circumstance that each Talmudist wished to surpass all others in ingenuity.

It would be tedious to enumerate the Rabbinical authors of Poland in the first half of the seventeenth century. The cultivation of a single faculty, that of

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hair-splitting judgment, at the cost of the rest, narrowed the imagination, hence not a single literary product appeared in Poland deserving the name of poetry. All the productions of the Polish school bore the Talmudical stamp, as the school regarded everything from the Talmudical point of view. The disciples of this school looked down almost with contempt on Scripture and its simple grandeur, or rather it did not exist for them. How, indeed, could they have found time to occupy themselves with it? And what could they do with these children's stories, which did not admit the application of intellectual subtlety? They knew something of the Bible from the extracts read in the synagogues, and those occasionally quoted in the Talmud. The faculty for appreciating the sublimity of biblical doctrines and characters, as well as simplicity and elevation in general, was denied them. A love of twisting, distorting, ingenious quibbling, and a foregone antipathy to what did not lie within their field of vision, constituted the character of the Polish Jews. Pride in their knowledge of the Talmud and a spirit of dogmatism attached even to the best rabbis, and undermined their moral sense. The Polish Jews of course were extraordinarily pious, but even their piety rested on sophistry and boastfulness. Each wished to surpass the other in knowledge of what the Code prescribed for one case or another. Thus religion sank, not merely, as among Jews of other countries, to a mechanical, unintelligent ceremonial, but to a subtle art of interpretation. To know better was everything to them; but to act according to acknowledged principles of religious purity, and

exemplify them in a moral life, occurred to but few. Integrity and right-mindedness they had lost as completely as simplicity and the sense of truth. The vulgar acquired the quibbling method of the schools, and employed it to outwit the less cunning. They found pleasure and

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a sort of triumphant delight in deception and cheating. Against members of their own race cunning could not well be employed, because they were sharp-witted; but the non-Jewish world with which they came into contact experienced to its disadvantage the superiority of the Talmudical spirit of the Polish Jews. The Polish sons of the Talmud paid little attention to the fact, that the Talmud and the great teachers of Judaism object even more strongly to taking advantage of members of a different faith than of those of their own race.

The corruption of the Polish Jews was avenged upon them in a terrible way, and the result was, that the rest of the Jews in Europe were for a time infected with it. With fatal blindness Polish Jews offered the nobility and the Jesuits a helping hand in oppressing the Zaporogian Cossacks in the Ukraine and Little Russia. The magnates wished to make profitable serfs of the Cossacks, the Jesuits hoped to convert the Greek heretics into Roman Catholics, the Jews settled in the district expected to enrich themselves and play the lord over these pariahs. They advised the possessors of the Cossack colonies how most completely to humiliate, oppress, torment, and ill-use them; they usurped the office of judges over them, and vexed them in their ecclesiastical affairs. No wonder that the enslaved Cossacks hated the Jews, with whom their relations were closest, almost more than their noble and clerical foes. The Jews were not without warning what would be their lot, if these embittered enemies once got the upper hand. In an insurrection of the Zaporogians under their Hetman in about 1638, despite its brief duration, they slew 200 Jews, and destroyed several synagogues. Nevertheless, Jews lent a hand, when in consequence of the insurrection the further enslavement of the sufferers was

determined upon. In the year 1648, fixed by that lying book, the Zohar, they expected the coming of

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the Messiah and the time of redemption, when they would be in power, and, therefore, they were more reckless and careless than was their custom at other times. Bloody retribution was not long delayed, and struck the innocent with the guilty, perhaps the former more severely than the latter.

It proceeded from a man who understood how to make use of the increasing hatred of the Cossacks for his purposes, and who was regarded by his countrymen as their ideal. Bogdan Chmielnicki (Russian Chmel), born about 1595, died 1657, before whom all Poland trembled for several years, gave Russia the first opportunity of interfering in the Polish republic, and was a frightful scourge for the Jews. Chmielnicki, brave in war and artful in the execution of his plans, impenetrable in his schemes, at once cruel and hypocritical, had been vexed by Jews, when he held the subordinate position of camp secretary (Pisar) of the Cossacks subject to the house of Koniecpolski. A Jew, Zachariah Sabilenki, had played him a trick, by which he was robbed of his wife and property. Another had betrayed him when he had come to an understanding with the Tartars. Besides injuries which his race had sustained from Jewish tax farmers in the Ukraine, he, therefore, had personal wrongs to avenge. His remark to the Cossacks, "The Poles have delivered us as slaves to the cursed breed of Jews," was enough to excite them. Vengeance-breathing Zaporogians and booty-loving Tartars in a short time put the Polish troops to flight by successful manœuvres (May 18, 1648). Potocki, the lieutenant-general, and 8,000 Poles, according to agreement, were delivered to the Tartars. After the victory the wild troops went eastward from the Dnieper, between Kiev and Pultava, plundering and murdering, especially the Jews who had not taken flight; the number of the murdered reached several thousand. Hundreds underwent baptism

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in the Greek Church, and pretended to be Christians, in order

to save themselves. Fortunate were those who fell into captivity with the Tartars; they were transported to the Crimea, and ransomed by Turkish Jews. Four Jewish communities (Porobischa and others) of about 3,000 souls resolved to escape massacre by surrendering to the Tartars with all their property. They were well treated, and sold into Turkey, where they were ransomed in a brotherly manner by those of their own race. The Constantinople community sent a deputy to Holland to collect money from the rich communities for the ransom of captives.

Unfortunately for the Poles and Jews, King Vladislav, for whom Chmielnicki had shown some respect, was removed by death. During the inter-regnum of several months, from May to October, 1648, the usual Polish dissension occurred, which crippled every attempt at resistance. At first Chmielnicki drew back, apparently inclined to negotiate with the crown, but he gave his creatures full power to ravage the Polish provinces. Regular troops of murderers, called Haidamaks (the Tartar word for partisans), were formed under brutal leaders who cared not a straw for human life, and who reveled in the death-struggles of their Polish and Jewish foes. In the name of religion they were urged by the Greek popes to murder Catholics and Jews. The commander of each troop had his own method of exercising cruelty. One had thongs slung round the necks of Catholic and Jewish women, by which they were dragged along; this he called "presenting them with a red ribbon." A few weeks after the first victory of the Cossacks, a troop under another of these chiefs advanced against the stronghold of Nemirov, where 6,000 Jews, inhabitants and fugitives from the neighborhood, had assembled; they were in possession of the fortress, and closed the gates. But the Cossacks

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had an understanding with the Greek Christians in the town, and put on Polish uniforms in order to be taken for Poles. The Christian inhabitants urged the Jews to open the gates for their friends. They did so, and were suddenly attacked by the Cossacks and the inhabitants of the town, and almost entirely cut down amid

frightful tortures (Siwan 20—June 10, 1648).

Another Haidamak troop under Kryvonoss attacked the town of Tulczyn, where about 600 Christians and 2,000 Jews had taken refuge in the fortress. There were brave Jews among them, or necessity had made them brave, and they would not die without resistance. Nobles and Jews swore to defend the town and fortress to the last man. As the Cossack peasants understood nothing of the art of siege, and had repeatedly suffered severely from the sorties of Jews and Poles, they resorted to a trick. They assured the nobles that their rage was directed only against the Jews, their deadly foes; if these were delivered up, they would withdraw. The infatuated nobles, forgetful of their oath, proposed that the Jews should deliver up their arms to them. The Jews at first thought of turning on the Poles for their treachery, as they exceeded them in numbers. But the rabbi of Tulczyn warned them against attacking the Poles, who would inflict bloody vengeance, and all Poland would be excited against the Jews, who would be exterminated. He implored them to sacrifice themselves for their brethren in the whole country; perhaps the Cossacks would accept their property as ransom. The Jews consented, and delivered up their arms, the Poles thereupon admitting the troops into the town. After the latter had taken everything from the Jews, they set before them the choice of death or baptism. Not one of them would purchase life at that price; about 1,500 were tortured and executed before the eyes of the Polish nobles (Tamuz 4—June 24). The

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Cossacks left ten rabbis alive, in order to extort large sums from the communities. The Poles were immediately punished for their treachery. Deprived of the assistance of the Jews, they were attacked by the Cossacks and slain, proving that violators of their word cannot reckon on fidelity towards themselves. This sad event had the good effect that the Poles always sided with the Jews, and were not opposed to them in the course of the long war.

At the same time another Haidamak troop, under a leader

named Hodki, had penetrated into Little Russia, and caused dreadful slaughter in the communities of Homel, Starodub, Czernigov, and other places east and north of Kiev. The Jews of Homel are said to have suffered martyrdom most firmly, on the same day on which the Tulczyn community was annihilated. The leader of the troop had all the Jews of Homel, inhabitants as well as fugitives, stripped outside the town, and surrounded by Cossacks, and called upon them to be baptized or to expect a most frightful death. They all, men, women, and children, to the number of about 1,500, preferred death.

Prince Vishnioviecki, the only heroic figure amongst the Poles at that time, a man of penetration, intrepid courage, and strategic ability, defended the cause of the persecuted Jews with devoted zeal. He took the fugitives under the protecting wings of his small, but brave force, with which he everywhere pursued the Cossack bands to destruction. But, because of his limited power, he could accomplish nothing of lasting import. Through petty jealousy, he was passed over at the election of the commander-in-chief against the Cossack insurrection, and instead of him three were chosen, of a character calculated to help on Chmielnicki to further victories.

Annoyed at the pitiful policy of the regent, the primate of Gnesen, Vishnioviecki followed his own course, but was compelled to retreat before the

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overpowering number of the roving troops and the Greek Catholic population in sympathy with them, and so destruction was brought on the Jews, who had reckoned on his heroic courage. In the fortress of Polonnoie, between Zaslav and Zytomir, 10,000 Jews, partly inhabitants, partly fugitives from the neighborhood, are said to have perished at the hand of the besieging Haidamaks and the traitorous inhabitants (Ab 13—July 22).

The unfortunate issue of the second war between Poles and Cossacks (September, 1648), when the Polish army, more through dread of the Tartars under Tugai Bey and the incapacity of its

generals, than through Chmielnicki's bravery, was scattered in wild flight, and collected only behind the walls of Lemberg, prepared a bloody fate even for Jews who thought themselves safe at a distance from the field of battle. There was no escape from the wild assaults of the Zaporogians, unless they could reach the Wallachian borders. The blood of slaughtered and maltreated Jews marked the vast tract from the southern part of the Ukraine to Lemberg by way of Dubno and Brody; in the town of Bar alone from two to three thousand perished. It scarcely need be said that the brutal cruelty of the regular Cossacks, as well as of the wild Haidamaks, made no distinction between Rabbanites and Karaites. The important community of Lemberg lost many of its members through hunger and pestilence, and its property besides, which it had to pay to the Cossacks as ransom.

In the town of Narol the Zaporogians caused a revolting butchery. It is said that in the beginning of November 45,000 persons, among them 12,000 Jews, were slain there with the cruellest tortures. Among the corpses remained living women and children, who for several days had to feed on human flesh. Meanwhile the Haidamaks roamed about in Volhynia, Podolia, and West Russia, and slaked

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their revenge in the blood of nobles, Catholics, clergy, and Jews, to thousands and tens of thousands. In Crzemieniec an inhuman monster slew hundreds of Jewish children, scornfully examined the corpses as Jews do with cattle, and threw them to the dogs. In many towns Jews, as well as Catholics, armed themselves, and drove the bloodthirsty Cossacks away.

The election of a king, which finally was effected—and, though the Polish state was on the brink of an abyss, it took place amidst fights and commotions—put an end to bloodshed for the moment. Although for the most part in a drunken condition, Chmielnicki retained sobriety enough to dictate, among his conditions of peace, that no Catholic church should be tolerated,

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