

NEW MESSIAH

No one knew what was happening, for it was impossible to tell what was what, perhaps the world was ending. Someone shouted out, "An infant there," but the marauder, joined by a colleague with a shaven head who had a thin ponytail hanging down his neck, moved towards the pile of wrecked household goods and seized a girl instead of saving anyone, if salvation had ever been his intention in this confusion; both forced the young thing, almost a child, to lie down; they spread her legs. The pile was burning.

There was no way to tell what was going on, for the gendarmerie had suddenly come to the village, taking swipes at them on horseback; they dismounted to chase men and women down the street; a door stopped them, they broke it down, they climbed through a window. An old woman held an infant wrapped in a shawl; she fell under the hoofs. A man was shoved out of his doorway into the street to be whipped; his screams seemed to increase their strength; protest was ludicrous, they did not think to stop - he ceased making noise by a lapse into unconsciousness. The hunters fell to the houses that lined the road, taking straw mattresses, heaving everything in the mud.

"That's it," smiled Captain Bogdan, who sat on his horse surveying the disaster that the men had wrought.

A husky fellow who was known in his division for mercy watched the rape with small black intelligent eyes; he licked his bottom lip. His name was Carl; he was a theology student and an Athlete for the Heavenly Throne: second in command.

The captain spat.

Carl the Athlete maintained that half of the battle's pleasure lies in its own reward. "I'm pleased with our progress today. Let me bless the men, sir."

Carl walked his horse to where the girl was being pinioned by the men. Many had joined in the unholy act. They stood in line in an orderly fashion. The girl looked like a plucked chicken, not, alas, with skin as white as a swan's feathers. It reminded Carl of a ballad that he only half-remembered. Dismounting he spoke to her, but she spoke his language so poorly, all the while shrieking and gasping, that he had to stop. Carl the Athlete for the Heavenly Throne wiped his lips; it was a sign of disgust.

"When the times are bad," said a villager. His lips had been split open, his face contained cuts that he had bandaged up as good as it went . "When the times are bad, we have to keep our heads low."

"No. A man doesn't know his own bad luck. So he bleats for his life. He bleats, 'Mercy!', in his sleep; yet he can't awaken from his nightmare." The stranger hesitated; although he had only been in town a few days, his demeanor, the way that he was attired had attracted much attention: he was a head taller than the villagers, wore a saber at his side and a cassock that reached to his knees, and had on a black sable hat. "My signs are here."

A man from the village sighed: "Maybe the earth will speak up?"

They had gathered a crowd around the water well, men, women, children. The stranger gestured to his daughter Eva. She said, "Father, make these people who're deaf hear."

"The only street in the village that matters is the one that I've walked on. I've conversed with the powerful. Don't be fooled. I'm the one who'll redeem the promise that's been made a thousand times before, and a thousand misspent words are my pattern of proof." He placed his hand on the villager's shoulder.

"A man has to live from something – you with your big ideas. Redemption!"

The man who had come to the village from God knows where stood up straight. "I'm in contact with the grand vizier. What more do you want? Long live the Turk!" A few villagers repeated the phrase as an imprecation, others murmured it like a prayer. The stranger surveyed the faces. "Now you know what I can offer. The choice is yours. Why continue this?" A few shook their heads. "Misery of exile? No one's safe. Do you call it something, this life that you're leading? We know that you have time to study law, sure, you're busy pleasing someone, trying to make ends meet. Desperate until you disappear." He raised his arms, the saber swung at his belt; sewn on his red cassock was golden brocade: on its cuffs, hem, and collar was an elaborate pattern of intertwining lions with outstretched claws. "If you forbid a cripple from using his cane to club off vicious hounds, the first and last will never be saved." There was a small upcry among those gathered.

"To Turkey!"

Why there? The border was a few miles away, across the river. Was Podolia still Russian? It had been Turkish, it had belonged to Poland afterwards; rumor had it that next year it would be Austrian. It was apparent only when the tax collectors came. War in the area was frequent.

"You're in contact with high persons?"

The outsider took off a gold ring and showed them its jewels. "This was a gift from the sultan. He said that I would get it on condition that I return with believers in the prophet. The Sultan loves me like a son."

In Bucharest some years ago, he told them, he had begun his way as a young man by dealing in precious stones, cloth, in anything that one could deal with. Buying, selling, he had gone through many lands; in Salonika he had joined a sect and had learned its rites. He displayed a paper written in a foreign script with an imperial seal of a half-moon on it. "You'll only give up what you have now."

"Give up?"

The stranger sighed. "Give up."

"I'm a simple fellow. When you talk about these things, sultans and viziers, my head spins," said an old man.

"I don't know more."

"I suppose that you don't know the empress?"

Laughter.

The stranger's eyes filled up with tears.

"I didn't know that you were so sensitive. I'm sorry."

"I'm an ignoramus. Punish me for it. But my cause is just." Wiping his cheeks, he sniffled, blew his hawkish nose; in another man of his size and strength, he would have looked ludicrous weeping -- and with his pretensions -- but he blew his nose again, forcefully, to prove that he had lost none of his earnestness.

"An ignoramus?"

"I read the signs in numbers and letters. Eva, come here." He gripped the girl around the waist. She gazed downward at the toes of her boots. "My daughter. Isn't she beautiful? She reads plants, the moon; I read the water patterns of seas and the sun. When I went to other parts, I became more than what I was. I was a businessman." He had been a notorious Bucharest gang leader. "Then I discovered the Holy Book. I learned the difficult alphabet of the Torah and nature. Once I was a fool, now I am knowledgeable, for I am a changed man. I understand numbers." He surveyed the crowd. One boy was leading a cow by a tattered rope. The beast mooed.

Eva had long hair, dark heavy eyes, as her father had; his gestures were forceful while hers were gentle: she seemed to be holding something back, which lent her grace. Her father appeared to be withholding something too, but perhaps such family traits were deceiving.

"Where're you from?" a youngster pressed. He was barefooted.

"Here. From Kolomea. I was born in the saddle: like the horsemen were," the stranger smiled. The man waved, wearily, at the muddy bloody road. "I went far away -- they won't give up quickly; they'll be back."

One of the people standing in the crowd raised a point: "But your accent isn't from here."

"When I was ten, my father sent me away to a rich merchant in Bucharest." He remembered pranks of long ago; many still amused him; he wanted to smile but he had to keep himself under control. "Does anyone know the city?" An ancient woman in an old-fashioned bonnet nodded. She remembered Bucharest of fifty years ago. "Country mama," reflected the stranger, "what does she know of anything?" "I learned to sell there," he began again, "gold was offered to the heathens. I was big and strong and rich until I saw the light." He stroked his mustache. Pointing at several men, he barked, "You should line up in a single file." They obeyed. He inspected their postures, their heights. "I need a tailor."

A man with wounded fingers stepped towards him. "I'm a tailor."

"You, here's the design." He chose twenty men out of the people surrounding him. "The tallest are best; these will do." The clothes maker counted on his fingers how much cloth that he would need as the man chose his nine. "Is there a money changer here?"

"There's Yankel, sir, in the next village."

The stranger looked at the main road; all the doors here were in need of repair; habitations were formed out of logs, they had rickety porches and straw roofs; he saw gaps from times where, long before, rows of houses had stood, where the ground was charred; ruins.

The stranger walked the next day six miles, alone, to the next hamlet, carrying a heavy sack on his back.

In front of the shop was a sign with a deer, next to the animal was a pair of scales; the stranger stepped inside, his eyes did not see in the dimness; then he spied something glittering. An old man was wearing thick wire spectacles that were formed of silver. The outsider plunked his sack down on the counter.

They were silent while the money was counted. Coins were separated into piles; they clinked.

Yankel, when he had done, shrugged. He did not break the stillness. The stranger thought, "A good candidate for the treasurer's office and a learned man. I'll ask him a question."

"When a man is shortly to be hanged, does he question God about what's in the Talmud? With a rope around his neck, should he make scholarly speculations according to the Talmud and the authorities about whether he should breathe through his nose instead of his mouth?"

Yankel looked up. He was afraid. He realized that the stranger would not have spoken to just anyone in that way. "I don't get many customers." Books were strewn on the counter. The shop's walls appeared gray in the dull glimmer that was made from a single candle on the counter, but the walls were actually whitewashed; it was lit only where the two men stood; on the floor were finely polished floorboards. The stranger had exchanged Turkish for Polish currency. "I had a dream last night": Yankel cleared his throat.

The stranger ignored him. "When I was in Turkey, I looked back here with longing. My homeland -- can one call it that? A ravaged, miserable place." The stranger had seen to it, yesterday, that his wishes were fulfilled: he had sent his daughter to fetch the red cloth from his trunk with the help of the servant of the inn; the tailor was to make twenty cassocks. He inspected Yankel's black coat. "What you need is a new task." He pulled a cassock out of the sack; when Yankel tried it on, it went past his knees to mid-calf. It, too, had fine brocade with lions on it -- but sewn in silver thread. "I said when I was away that I'd find someone, an assistant -- you suit me as that person."

"My dream," Yankel said, "I'd lent money to this customer, an aristocrat here in the area, never mind his name -- my livelihood, by the way, depends on these people, the whim of whomever's ruling. In the dream, he didn't speak to me. The count has a beard, turned into a giant bearded hare; and an eagle swooped down from the sky, right through my open roof -- although my roof isn't open of course -- so that an eagle eats out the hare's eyes that it held fast in its bare talons, right in mid-air --"

"You'll be my treasurer and second-in-command."

Yankel did not reply, he turned the pages of a book. "For twenty years, Podolia was Turkish." He blushed. "This area was an outpost of the Ottoman Empire. Do you understand? I'm writing something now, it's about man's duty to do good on the earth in conjunction with the Law." The money lender smoothed out the sleeves of the cassock. "It's called 'The Well-Built House.'"

"The 'Double-Edged Sword,' that suits you. And us. Now you have to find what I call the Great Portal." Wolf pulled a small flask out of his coat pocket. "Drink this." Yankel drank. "Do you see the door? There where light shines. My friend, look!"

Yankel's neck and shoulders burned. "But -- where's the door?"

"The door's open."

"Take me inside."

"Don't look at me when I'm blessing you." Yankel hesitated to move, bowed his head. The stranger recited something in an undertone, standing close to him, which always worked when he converted a soul. "The deed is done. I vouchsafe your arrival in

our holy temple." He took Yankel by the arm; they walked across the shop; Yankel opened the door, and it appeared as though he had entered a great chamber of light where one worshipped at an altar. So much light. Was it a church? A mosque? Had he been given a drug by Wolf, secretly? He felt faint and he had to sit down. After awhile Wolf pulled him up and led him to the door. It was open, and they could view the street where the sun shone on the dirt and wooden slats of buildings. The road here was as forlorn and muddy as the one in the neighboring village. "Open your eyes. Do you see? We've returned to the village. Go to the well. Gather my men."

It was getting dark. Yankel had hardly perceived the leader's last words. He locked up his shop and followed the stranger to Kolomea, with the sack of money. During the journey the man complained about a sore tooth; Yankel thought at first that he was being allegorical, that it was high-minded talk, but the leader had in fact a sore tooth. Yankel recommended a local barber who had once pulled his rotten molar. The stranger refused to go to the barber.

They arrived at the inn. Twine got wrapped around the painful tooth and the door handle, and the fellow withheld the slamming of the door. He did not speak but spat out blood. In the stranger's room was one large bed; a trunk with dresses in which the odds and ends of a young woman's toiletry, a box full of ribbons lay. Next to it was a trunk with hooks on its sides in which a male's clothes were carefully folded. Yankel assumed that they were personal things of the master. There was a third trunk that was locked.

"Go to the well, Yankel. Gather my men."

The whole month, after he had gotten a chamber next to the leader, Yankel marched the young men in red cassocks. Right in the middle of the road, the village witnessed the leader's strength; the mud stuck to black boots; they learned to care for the scarlet coats; they trekked back and forth in the dirt and sand, stood motionless in line in front of Yankel, shouldering thick wooden poles. "When the holy master comes, when he comes, you're to be silent; the law ceases to be in effect, he'll help us out of the impasse, we'll be redeemed from our misery." Village children skipped around them. Women, old people gaped. There was one person among them who observed everything and took notes about what he had seen; perhaps the stranger was not careful enough; it was a police matter, eventually.

As long as the training took, the master rarely appeared. After thirty days he stood again in front of his believers and raised his hands with outstretched fingers: "He saw me every night in my dreams, I swear." They asked themselves who had seen him. "He had white hair. He failed to tell me what to do with an army of believers. He blessed me." The

young fellows waved their thick sticks about. "If we march with so few, we'll be lost. Where's the tailor?"

The clothes maker shuffled to the front of the crowd. His name was Tobol. On the spot, he was made a general by the master. Tobol limped, had a bandaged right hand, a protruding Adam's apple, hollow cheeks.

"You're third-in-command. Go and get us more soldiers," the stranger ordered.

"What's with the uniforms?"

"I have enough cloth in my trunk to outfit a thousand. Get me the flesh and bones to go inside."

Tobol praised the leader's perspicacity in choosing underlings; he meant only himself, and he was so obvious that everyone laughed, even the recruits.

The holy master retired to his room. Yankel knocked on the door.

"I'll win favor in his eyes," the money changer thought. "There's going to be a lot of rivalry now that everyone's joining up." "Holy master," he began, "have you --"

"I'll make their lives miserable," the stranger interrupted him. He broke into Yankel's question by a wave of his hand and he followed the gesture by pulling something wrapped in satin out of his coat pocket -- a book in which he began reading. He was silent. Yankel stood still. The cheeks of the man jittered. "What do you think?"

"I think about nothing. Why should I think? Do I get paid for it?"

"Think for once. Just once."

"Maybe, boss, the lions are waiting outside."

"Maybe. But don't be dumb."

"You're right."

The stranger cogitated. "The book that you were scribbling at. 'The two-edged sword,' scraping both ways, that's how it goes." He whirled the scabbard of the saber on the floor so that it made a snap. "I'll show them who we are. They'll see what it is, trying to make fools of us. Did we attack them?"

Fog lay over the roofs of the hamlet. The horses were fastened by their reins to door handles of abandoned houses, to posts. Oats had to be scrounged up and delivered to Bogdan's supply company. The supply people were angry. There was so little to be had in this village, they complained – neither for horse nor man.

The captain was roaming around the village; it was twilight. This morning when he had come with his gendarmerie, the hamlet had numbered four hundred, now it was empty. Purge in Podolia. He had let most of the houses alone. The captain left open the question of whether taking captives was necessary: forced migration was the main matter. No one needed the inhabitants' loyalty; what one desired was empty houses.

When Bogdan strolled past one wooden house, he heard laughter and groans. In this habitation with its low door and straw roof, he had seen his men enter two hours ago; Carl the Athlete for the Heavenly Throne had called them together in order to demonstrate the strength of the bladder of a seventy-seven-year-old man. The horsemen had obeyed the order and forced a hard cork up the man's member; the captain had left at that point.

That was it, he speculated; for years afterwards they would talk about their time in his service.

He had spied Carl's husky silhouette in front of him standing against the wall of an adjacent house. The street was strewn with splintered tables, beds, so that Bogdan had to walk in a zigzag; he stooped in order to retrieve a porcelain pitcher; he threw it in Carl's direction, the pitcher shattered against the wall. Until now, it had been quiet; the silence had only intermittently been broken by the pathetic whinnying of an animal. When the pitcher broke, Carl looked up, startled.

A scream from the house was followed by hilarity.

A police informant arrived to make a report to Bogdan; in a nearby village, there was an uprising in store -- a fresh attempt at villainy. The insurrectionist was a man named "Wolf"; his troop numbered fifty, a hundred; they wore red cassocks, hats made out of fine saber, and their chests were tattooed. Their forelocks were sprinkled with gold dust. Additionally each bandit carried two loaded pistols. Wolf claimed, said the spy, that his cause was just.

"They won't dare tread on our accomplishments," remarked Carl.

"We'll find ways," the captain said. They rounded up those who had fled, people whom they had seized hiding in the nearby woods. That was the captain's idea. "They're all cousins of one another," he opined.

The next day, forced towards Kolomea, what they had organized looked, with the whines and whips, like a march of flagellants. The road was much traveled; it was market day, they were ogled at; farmers went toward the bound ones in order to stick food scraps in their mouths; they had not been given nourishment. After awhile, Bogdan had lost

patience with Carl the Athlete's mercy; but only the slowest were left by the roadside. Whips were used to speed things up.

The spy was one of the local people, potentially someone to be driven away, but the captain knew that he was loyal for gold; Bogdan gave the informant a letter with a red wax seal and signature, it was supposed to be left in Yankel's chamber for the leader to discover. The spy had bribed a kitchen maid to let him inside the room and by pressing his ear to the wall had overheard the following dialogue:

"They say that the holy master will conquer Podolia and make us all kings. I'd like to own an island in the Black Sea; he's promised it to me. We don't need to be Turkish." At the word, "Turkish," the informant's pen went into his hand to scribble onto paper what he had heard. The interlocutors were two local merchants, travelers, which showed how vast the robber's reputation had grown.

"There are no islands in the Black Sea; besides that, it's true that the district's ungovernable, what we need are rules, not his promises: they aren't rules. Everyone can't do what they want, many'll have to do as they're told."

Yankel carried the letter addressed to the "messiah" into the next room. The rebel leader Wolf read the letter in which it was stated that under the auspices of Captain Bogdan, officiated by the ecclesiastical administrator of Halisz, the messiah was summoned to a discussion – the discussion would take place in the city of Halisz, on neutral ground. "Your cause is just," called Yankel, and Wolf believed that no one would be smart enough to out-trick him.

When the messiah arrived at Halisz with his troop, he sought the cathedral. As he stood below its towers, the leader asked himself: had he been given an order, was it a sign of recognition, or a trick? Had he given in? "My way is foreordained," he said to himself.

Before mass began, a missive to the congregation was read aloud. Many noblemen holding fur hats in their hands stood in the nave listening, peasants stood in the back. On the next afternoon a Franciscan monk arrived in the city who would officiate at the debate. Joseph Wolf snuck into the church disguised as a Polish farmer; he saw that beside the monk, he would have to face Carl the Athlete for the Heavenly Throne. Scholars from the Podolian Jewish community had also been ordered into the city to take part in the discussion.

On the sabbath before the dispute between the religions, Yankel had a change of mind. He had been sitting in his room studying the group's finances, which looked good,

although Yankel himself did not know where the money came from, when he heard knocking and the sound of steps. He opened the door to the next room; the holy master held Eva clasped in an amorous grip. "We don't have time," she hissed.

"I want you now," he said.

He pinioned her backwards. Father and daughter -- but they had never been father and daughter; in reality she was his lover; she was an ordinary person whom he had presented as his daughter -- were locked into one, and with abrupt thrusts she was being whipped against the wall.

"The district police are on to you, Joseph. Give up, go away --"

The second-in-command had seen enough; he got away from the inn and went to where he was -- with skepticism -- welcomed. Carl remarked: "It's how they all are, since Judas." The monk Czarnicki was dressed in white and golden robes.

"We'll bend over backwards to be fair," claimed the monk and smiled at Yankel.

"I don't want him harmed."

The priest agreed.

At ten o'clock the next day the dispute was to begin.

They had seven theses to discuss. The second one was that the messiah was the true deity who took on human form in order to save mankind. Thirdly, that sacrifices and ceremonies previously performed had ceased to have meaning since the arrival of the messiah. Fourth, that the cross was the symbol of the holy trinity, the seal of the savior. Fifth, that everyone should follow the messiah's precepts; for in them lay salvation. Sixth, that belief in the messiah and king was obtained by baptism. Seventh, that the written doctrines by which the Podolian scholars lived made the use of blood mandatory for ritual. The first thesis was that every one of the prophecies made by the prophets had been fulfilled.

The Halisz administrator Czarnicki had ordered the police to cordon off the cathedral, and the local nobility and wealthy citizens had paid money to attend. Czarnicki sat on a throne in the chancel; next to him sat the seminarian Carl. The cloisters and orders of Poland were represented. Outside, a huge crowd followed events. The spectators stood shoulder to shoulder in front of Czarnicki. There was a podium where the triad of contenders was waiting: the monks, the Podolian Jews, the new messiah's group. Five minutes after the official beginning, he entered in his red cassock, shuffling through the crowd under the shrines and paintings, and stepped up to the raised platform. "What'll we say to defend ourselves?" whispered the Podolians and gesticulated at the stipulated theses, which they had just been given. The sectarian did not answer.

They discussed matters, each group differently; it was tiring, particularly for the Podolians. One fainted as the last hour commenced. The old men did not know what they should reply. Debating openly could cost them plenty, so they allowed themselves to be seemingly defeated. A messenger came to them at this hour, he said, "The land is a good land, gentlemen, the fields outside the city are being gilded by the setting sun; the soil is soft, oily, fruity --"

"How can we attend to a landscape when everything is at stake?" the chief scholar from Mogilev asked. Just then, as if the messenger had made him lose his concentration unintentionally, Czarnicki queried the scholar about the expulsion from Egyptian captivity. "In ancient times, we wandered around, we humbly gained insight; our leader knew that when our ways were challenged, we couldn't be taken away; we couldn't rid of our oppressors immediately, er -- excuse me, in order to lead us out of captivity. It took years to do it." The learned man spoke through an interpreter. "He got lost."

"You stinking carcass. You dare to speak that way about our patriarch?" screamed Czarnicki.

"One has to listen," the new messiah broke in.

"Don't meddle," Czarnicki shouted. "They're heathens."

It was hot in the church. A second Podolian keeled over in a faint.

"Either it's true that the messiah's hour has begun, or it's untrue. If it's true, the savior's arrived. Your written doctrines are wrong about a savior's later arrival." Carl turned to the man on the throne and whispered in his ear.

The monk shook his head, glanced up at the cross.

"Execution? Nature teaches us to have mercy."

The new messiah caught something of the banter. "I can see my foreordained path. I believe as you do in the prophets. It's a law to provide for wine in our rituals. The seminarian apparently thinks that the scholars meant it to be an occasion for bloodshed."

Yankel met with the messenger in a corner. "Tell them that on a high holiday like this one that the little finger's dipped in a glass ten times in memory of the plagues."

The messenger went to a monk who stood next to Carl the Athlete for the Heavenly Throne and explained to him what Yankel had told him; afterwards the monk Marc Svetovput his mouth close to the Wallachian's ear.

"With our blood?" cried Carl.

The church was burning from the twilight summer heat.

The Podolian spokesman hesitated. There were a dozen scholars in the group, but only two were permitted to speak for them.

"The text reads, 'You shall commemorate blood with the like.'"

"We don't have that written down. How can we counter arguments based on translations that are misleading?"

Carl sneered. "The blood of a creature that walks on two feet,' can't refer to birds, can it?"

"An impurity. In the law, there are words referring to things that're ambiguous, that's the nature of the matter: the words have to be interpreted." His tone was ill chosen, as the spokesman recognized, so he added: "With all due respect, we submit to your judgment."

"You deny the messiah's blood because you're -- you're playing with magic." In order that everyone could perceive him, Carl intoned: "We call on the world, the forces that we command, and the court of judgment as witnesses that we've told the truth."

The Podolians were nonplussed.

A holy man of Halisz, a scholar who was revered by the Podolian Jews from afar, spoke up: "Let the new messiah explain it, if he can."

The new messiah had made the decision, however, to convert to Christianity. "My way is foreordained," he thought again that day. He stood in front of Czarnicki and looked at the ceiling, counting the angels there; he crossed himself, kneeled down. "I take this occasion to make an announcement." Yankel pushed his way outside, for it was as though the man had read into his own heart: he had left him for nothing, there had not been anything evil in his erstwhile falling-off – now he would return to his master, who forgave, he would be saved.

Outside, the news spread and was swiftly distorted; rumors lingered about magic being at work.

The new messiah wanted to lead his flock to the baptismal font, his daughter Eva and Tobol the tailor came in front of the throne, but Czarnicki was unable to respond. Carl shoved them away, gave each of them a wafer to swallow, followed by a sip of wine from the pitcher at the altar; they were blessed in a strange manner.

"God have mercy on you," Carl murmured, his eyes widening.

It was in the next few minutes that Carl and the captain seized the leader; Czarnicki stepped aside in order to give the gendarmerie a free hand. They led the messiah outside, with his daughter and Tobol, and the unsympathetic crowd who had heard of his last-minute conversion murmured and cheered; no one protested, and the

town square, foreordained as the spot where judgment would be tested, was graced with a wooden scaffolding on its hard ground; and all around the gallows, poles were planted whose tops had been chopped into fine points jutting outward at a lethal angle, a fence aimed against the mob of spectators who gathered around the execution place. It kept the crowd at safe distance.

The gendarmerie had matters firmly in their grip. One hundred followers of the new messiah could never cope with the armed men; the gaping mob grew uneasy as the three were led to the gallows, yes, it protested; only afterwards, one saw how justice had been served. The captured Podolian Jews, after many hungry days in the Halisz dog kennels, were granted the privilege of return, along with the poor scholarly troop; they were even given provisions by the seminarian, and he blessed them. Yankel had secretly stolen away to a safe haven in Germany, for the messenger had warned him: he dare not remain.