

## XII

### News from Łódź

All of a sudden, new Jewish faces appeared in the street - men and women. Closed *dorożki* quickly drive through the gates of the houses. People alight from them, who are dressed like all others, but they nevertheless have something on them which is a novelty for us in Częstochowa. They wear yellow patches in the shape of a Star of David, sewn onto the breast and shoulder. The colour of these patches is such a loud yellow that they are recognisable from very far off. We soon find out that these yellow patches are worn by the Jews in the city of Łódź.

The city of Łódź does not belong to our "Generalgouvernement" but to the German Reich. Łódź is now called "Litzmannstadt".

The Jews descending from the *dorożki* barely escaped from Łódź with their lives and endured great troubles before arriving here. I have a conversation with one of the *Łódźers*, who tells me the following story:

"There, in the former Polish 'Manchester'<sup>1</sup>, a Jew does not walk in the street as you do here. What you have here is a paradise indeed. With us, in Łódź, there are tens of thousands of *Volksdeutschen*, besides the military men and gendarmes. When a Jew shows himself in the street, he is beaten until bloodied. The same also happens with the women. Every time a German or a grown German child calls, "*Jude, komm!*" [Jew, come!], the Jew has to remain standing and await the beating, and he must do anything that he is ordered. Jews are evicted from their dwellings and the city is being made '*judenrein*' [clean of Jews].

This is being quickly carried out in the following manner. There is a borough in Łódź called Bałuty. This has always been the city's poorest and most neglected neighbourhood. The Jews were ordered to move there and to disappear from the other parts of town. A Jew is only allowed to take a small pack of private linen from his house, whereas the provisions, furniture, clothes and all the belongings must be left behind.

Thus, a hundred thousand *Łódźer* Jews have become destitute with one blow. In Łódź, we always had the country's wealthiest Jews - great industrialists, who employed thousands of workers, owners of the largest wholesale businesses in Europe in the branch of *manufakura* [viz. textile goods, fabrics], which were worth hefty millions, thousands of small manufacturers from the so-called '*Weberstühlen*' [weaving looms] and thousands of owners of smaller, but sufficiently well-to-do businesses.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Both Łódź and Manchester were once world-famous powerhouses of the textile industry.]

At any given moment, tens of thousands of Jews - rich and poor - would be standing, side by side, Łódź's Bałuty. In normal times, Bałuty could hold 10,000 souls, but now 100,000 Jews have been crammed in there. Several families live in one room - the once wealthy and the poor together.

Some Jews still saved a little of their property and possessions, selling the best things almost for free to the 'Aryans', whom they knew well, a few days before the banishment. Others gave their linen, furs and valuables to their Polish acquaintances - now '*Volksdeutschen*' - to 'hide' them 'until the bad times ended', when they would take everything back."

My new friend carried on with his account:

"Jews escape from Łódź, if they can manage to do so. There, they say that, here in Częstochowa, things are still bearable. I did everything in order to come here. And indeed, compared with Łódź, this is a paradise."

He continued:

"The road from Łódź to here is not an easy one. In my lifetime, I have already travelled across dozens of borders, from one country to another, but no journey has been as long as the one from Łódź to Częstochowa. I travelled by train, motorcar and *dorożka*. I walked on foot by day and by night. I bought off Germans, '*Volksdeutschen*' and Poles. I gave away the most valuable possessions that I still had, until I made it here.

Now, I am poor. I went to visit a distant relative here, who still sees me as the wealthy man of old. I am living on the last couple of złoty that the different robbers and blackmailers did not manage to take from me along the way."

Nevertheless, he seemed happy, and exclaimed almost ardently,

"Here, I walk on the pavement! With us, in Łódź, a Jew has to walk in the middle of the road, in the gutter, where the horses travel. The Jews, who are captured here for work, after all, return a few hours later in one piece - whereas there, if a Jew is seized for work, in the best of cases, he returns only several days later a cripple, or he is never seen again."

After that, he went on to give me some details on his journey here from Łódź:

"A Pole, who is now a '*Volksdeutsch*', was employed in my factory as foreman. He worked for me for twenty-five years and lived well off his earnings from me. One evening, this '*Volksdeutsch*' took me out of Łódź. When he accompanied me to the train, and afterwards, when he travelled with me to Koluszki, he kept bleeding me for money. Besides that, he inserted a few of his acquaintances who blackmailed me. 'You are a Jew', they threatened me. 'We will bring a gendarme here at once.' And they extorted money, gold and diamonds from me. This band searched my wife and myself

and robbed us. And my foreman was also not ashamed and did the same. It disgusted me to look at him.

We travelled from Koluszki to Piotrków in a *dorożka*. On the way, we were assailed by scum who shouted, '*Zhyds, give us money!*' They took everything that found from my wife and myself. When we were midway there, the *dorożkarz* [cabman] got off and said that he would travel no further. 'You're giving everyone money', he says, 'and where am I? I'm travelling with you and taking you out of here. Don't I deserve anything?' I saw that, from his standpoint, he was right - why should he have it worse than the other Polish ruffians? Besides that, were he to leave us there, we would be completely lost. We did not have the strength to walk on foot and, besides, who knows who else we could encounter on the road? We took off our wedding rings our fingers and took out the last gold bracelet from a hiding place and gave them to the cabby. After travelling for some two kilometres, our *dorożkarz* stops once again. 'What is it now?', I ask him. He answers that he is feeding the horse. In the interval, two motorcars are coming our way. We hide in a pit next to the road. They drive by without stopping. We then ask the cabman to continue with the journey, but he does not respond. Only when we start begging and shouting for him to drive onwards does he reply that this whole business is not paying off for him. He is afraid of the Germans, he says, should they find him travelling with Jews. They will confiscate his *dorożka* along with the horse and, as we will be shot, there will be no one to pay him for his loss. He therefore demanded that we pay for all of that now. We were forced to once again give him something and he finally moved from the spot. We saw dozens of Jews lying dead on the road.

We had several other quarrels with our cabman, which cost money every time. Even when we drove into the courtyard here, two Polish policemen ran after us to the house of my relative and began asking questions about where we were from and who we were. These inquiries, too, had to be answered with fine gifts."

My acquaintance from Łódź expressed his satisfaction that he had been able to pay off all those robbers with money, and he was hoping that he would be able to live peacefully here in Częstochowa.

I did not wish to rob him of his hope right on the spot, even though I knew he was mistaken. One thing was sure - the robbers would no longer have much to steal from him.