

Natan Eck*

In the City of Good Hope

We arrived in Częstochowa after midnight. When I went outside the next morning, the ghetto seemed to me like a peaceful place for well-to-do aristocrats, as it were. This impression was not only created by the astounding contrast between yesterday and today – yesterday, I was still in the Warsaw ghetto, where the hands of the Angel of Death were full and today - here in Częstochowa - I could roam the Jewish streets unmolested. There were also other differences between the two ghettos.

In the Częstochowa ghetto, the streets were clean and orderly. Poverty, mould and misery did not peep out from every corner as in Warsaw but, instead, a certain sense of wellbeing and liberty was felt here. A section of the high street, which is named “Aleja Najświętszej Maryi Panny” and is the city’s pride, passes through the Częstochowa ghetto and, here, no walls or barbed wire are visible to the eye. Signs are set at the ghetto’s border points stating that here begin the Jewish living quarters, but nothing more.

On that first day in Częstochowa, I saw something that I found absolutely incredible - I saw three Polish peasant-women, dressed in colourful dresses, casually strolling down the street, peering into Jewish shops and deliberating whether to enter them or not, glancing to the sides, as if fearful of something or somebody. “What does this mean?” I wondered. It was later explained to me that, in Częstochowa, Christians were allowed to pass through the ghetto - to pass through, but not to tarry there and, needless to say, not to enter Jewish shops. This regulation, which was meant to facilitate the transit of Christians in the city, perhaps brought even greater alleviation to Jews, for once the Gentiles were permitted to enter the ghetto, even if only to pass through, the Jews had the opportunity to come into contact with them and conduct business. Occasionally, a policeman would catch a Gentile in his “transgression”, as he exited a Jewish house or a Jewish shop, upon which the offender was fined.

I was in a strange city where I knew no one (that’s what I thought that morning), and I also did not have much money. I was therefore quite understandably agitated and confused. But who are those who dared to say jokingly that “One can only do one thing in the company of [other] Jews – eat *kygel*¹...”? I’ve heard this “clever” jibe more than once, but it is nothing but a lie and a fabrication. True, it is good to be together with Jews when times are good, but in times of trouble, a Jew literally cannot survive without another Jew.

I already found one acquaintance that same day - Dr Emanuel Anisfeld. In times of peace, he was the headmaster of the Jewish high school in Częstochowa. There was no high school now, obviously, and the primary schools were also closed to Jewish children. Dr Anisfeld now conducted crafts courses (the Germans allowed no other studies). And there, they actually also taught other subjects.

Dr Anisfeld was an interesting man and I wish to dedicate a few words to him. He lived in the same neighbourhood as Kopiński, Chairman of the *Judenrat* - ulica Garibaldiiego. The latter had great esteem for him and appointed him as a member of the *Judenrat*. Dr Anisfeld was from Kraków and, as all the enlightened Jews in his hometown who had been educated in the Polish language and

* From his book “Wandering in the Path of Death” [Hebrew].

¹ [TN: Traditional Jewish pudding or casserole, most commonly made from egg noodles or potato.]

culture, he spoke no Yiddish at all, although he knew Hebrew well. As a student, he had joined the Zionist movement and had thoroughly learnt the language. Dr Anisfeld was talented and well-educated. He was particularly interested in philosophy and published articles and essays in Polish philosophical periodicals. Together with this, he was also a man of action, well-versed in organisational work.

We had not seen each other for a number of years. Now that we met, we were glad to see each other and we spoke of various matters which were close to our hearts - until we came to the subject of the Land of Israel.

"I've been planning *Aliyah* for quite a long time", Dr Anisfeld told me, "and I've always postponed it, not wishing to travel there empty-handed. But I shall emigrate as soon as the War is over, I'll wait no longer."

I did not wish to ask him with what his hands would be fuller after the War than before it, but he read my unspoken thoughts. He went to his cupboard and, after some rummaging, he took out a large parcel wrapped in yellow paper and said, "With this, I plan to travel to the Land of Israel.", beginning to unwrap the parcel slowly, as was his wont. I was naturally intrigued as to what treasure it may contain. As it turned out, he was holding a thick manuscript in his hands - a philosophical work of his own. This was the contribution he intended to bring to the Land of Israel when he emigrated there.

His dream never materialised. Several months passed and, one day, the Germans took the members of the *Judenrat*, Dr Anisfeld among them, outside the city and shot them. I heard that when they were about to be executed, the murderers were angry with them, as it were, and accused them of sucking the blood of their brethren like leeches - which was the reason they had been detained.

With Leizer Geller

After I had committed my sick daughter to the hospital, my young and tempestuous friend Leizer Geller, leader of "Gordonia" and one of the future heroes of the rebellion in the Warsaw ghetto, approached me and asked, "*Nu*, Comrade Eck, are you free now?" By which he meant, that now he was already entitled to demand of me to become involved a little in public affairs and especially those of his organisation.

I, too, saw myself as being already "free". Although I did run several times a day to the hospital, it never even entered my mind to sit all day by the girl's bedside, as I surely would have done in the past. Indeed, with time, a person becomes accustomed to hardships and hardens his heart.

We reached the general conclusion that we needed to meet with the head of the *Judenrat*, and perhaps with the entire council - for it was obvious that, in Czestochowa, they did not fully comprehend what was actually happening in Warsaw. Our obligation, therefore, was to first of all bear testimony to all that our eyes had seen. I suggested to Geller that he turn to Dr Anisfeld so that, with his aid, he should be put in contact with the Chairman of the *Judenrat*. But he rejected this proposal of mine. He replied that he could go by himself to the Chairman of the *Judenrat*, without middlemen. "What is this? Are we asking a favour of them? On the contrary, *they* are the ones who need to ask *us* to come tell them what we know."

I admitted that I saw the sense in his words and he went out. After some time, he returned bearing the good news that everything had been arranged - Kopiński, Chairman of the *Judenrat*, would hold

a meeting tomorrow at his home with the important members of the council and that we would deliver a report on Warsaw.

In the meantime, I found out that I had been mistaken in thinking that I had no acquaintances in Częstochowa. On the contrary, there were many people from Łódź then living in Częstochowa. They had escaped or had been transferred there at the beginning of the War and, among them, were quite a few of my own acquaintances. Once they had heard that I had arrived, some of them were quickly able to find me. From my conversation with them, I gleaned that, although some rumours had been smuggled in about events in Warsaw, they did not properly understand what was happening there. Besides, they also expressed their hopes that it would not happen in Częstochowa, and if, Heaven forbid, something *did* happen, that it would just be something minor and pass by swiftly

“Take the ghetto decree, for instance”, they would say. “Of course, it *has* been affected in Częstochowa too. But look how this decree was carried out in Łódź and Warsaw, and how here! Or take the labour camps - in other cities, thousands of Jews are taken away, who suffer inside the camps or return from there half-dead, or never return at all – it’s not like that in Częstochowa. True, there *is* a forced labour law that applies to all the Jews but, in Częstochowa, this law is implemented in a completely different manner. The work is arranged by the *Judenrat* and the Jews work where they live. We therefore hope that even if the “deportations” *are* a general decree – and this is not yet clear – that it will pass us by lightly.”

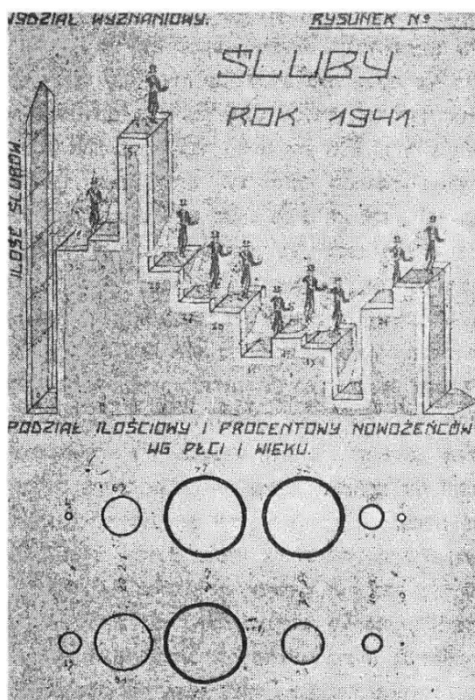
I heard this same opinion from many Jews, some of whom gave details, but it was impossible to verify their accuracy. Thus, they told, among other things, that one of the Germans, with whom the Częstochowa Jews had a good connection, was Himmler’s brother-in-law, and that he had been “bought” with gifts.

Meeting with the *Judenrat*

The meeting was called at the house of Mr Kopiński, Chairman of the *Judenrat*, for three o’clock in the afternoon. I came exactly on time and was the first one there. Someone opened the door and led me into the parlour, where I was to await the owner’s arrival. In the meantime, I stood by the bookcase, looking at its contents. The books on the shelves gave me an insight into the owner’s character.

Kopiński entered the room soundlessly and stood next to me in front of the bookcase, contemplating the books in silence. He was a tall, thin, quiet man - a man of few words, who valued every utterance and silence doubly so. In the city, he had a name for being an intelligent Jew, as well as a fair and blameless individual. During the seven weeks I spent in Częstochowa, until the destruction of the Jewish community there, never once did I hear anyone speak badly of him. Quite to the contrary, I heard good things of him. In peacetime, he had been a respected merchant. It was whispered that, in his youth, he had been a teacher, a Hebrew teacher, if I’m not mistaken. In whispers - not because this was shameful in any way, but because there was no great praise in this either, for a wealthy man who was involved in commerce. Be that as it may, it was a known fact that he took an interest in education and culture. Before the War, he had been the Chairman of the Public Committee for the Jewish high school which, with his assistance, had built itself a fine building.

Bit by bit, the other invitees assembled. First came my friend, Leizer Geller. The prominent members of the *Judenrat* followed - the lawyer Pohoryles, a man from Galicia who had settled in Częstochowa years before [and] a second lawyer named Girtler, a gentle young man who had been a member of



Number of marriages in 1941

Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair and was still in contact with that organisation. After them, an old man named Tempel entered. I had been acquainted with his brother in Warsaw.

One more person participated in the meeting – an educated and courteous man whose name I've unfortunately forgotten. I was told that, in the past, he had been a prominent member of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and was one of its activists, but that over the course of time, he had become closer to the Jewish public. My friend Dr Anisfeld was not invited to the meeting. He was probably not considered one of the *Judenrat's* more prominent members.

The Chairman opened the session in a low voice, with a few almost inaudible words and then I was given the floor. I delivered a report on the events in the Warsaw ghetto. I had planned to speak for only about a quarter of an hour, but their intense attention and the many questions they put before me in the midst of my speech forced me to go into the smallest details. I therefore

spoke for over an hour. Geller completed my report.

The questions which they asked us, both during our talks as well as after we had finished our story, proved to us that, until then, they had not had correct information regarding events in Warsaw. They had a foggy concept of some of the facts, but other facts were altogether unknown to them. What I found most shocking of all was that they did not seem all that concerned.

Here, I should mention that at the time (end of August, 1942), I too was not yet convinced that it had been decreed to exterminate the entire Jewish population and that, sooner or later, what had happened already in Lublin and Warsaw would happen in each and every community. Nevertheless, I wondered at their level-headedness, their being so calm and composed. I soon came to understand that that hope - the hope that the decree would not apply to the entire population - was much stronger among them than with myself. In addition, it may be that they perceived some good chances for the Jews of Częstochowa in particular. On the other hand, no small measure of submission and acceptance of the inevitable were apparent in them. This is how one of them defined this attitude - "Either way, if this is not a decree which affects each and every city, then we have good grounds for hope that it will leave us unscathed. But if this catastrophe falls upon the entire Jewish population and cannot be averted, then all our talking is in vain".

What made the heaviest impression on them was when we described the workshops that had been set up in the Warsaw ghetto - and how Jews were taken from there, even during work, and transported to an "unknown location". When we had only mentioned this subject, those present immediately began exchanging alarmed glances. They then showered us with a barrage of different questions, desiring to fully comprehend the implications of this issue. In the course of this conversation, I learnt that a gigantic workshop was then being set up in the city, under the auspices and supervision of the city's German *Stadthauptmann*. And they hung their hopes on it, that it would provide security for many Jews.

At the close of the meeting, Pohoryles, the sharp-witted lawyer, summarised our discussion with the following words:

- 1) *True, the Germans are killing many Jews, but we cannot yet fully come to the conclusion that they will affect a massacre in each and every city without exception.*
- 2) *As we've heard already, the workshops in the Warsaw ghetto did not afford the Jews security but, from the report, we gleaned that there is nevertheless a great difference between the fates of the Jews working in the workshops and the other Jews. While other Jews are all "deported", those working in the workshops are only subject to sporadic raids. This means that, in any case, the chances for survival as a worker in the workshops are much greater than the chances of other Jews. It is therefore imperative to complete the establishment of the workshop in Częstochowa with all haste.*
- 3) *From what we've heard, in Warsaw, before the deportation which started on 22nd July, quite a few incidents occurred that served, or should have served, as signs of the ensuing catastrophe. Our obligation in Częstochowa is to therefore open our eyes widely and observe all that is happening, to recognise any foreboding sign. But for now, - and here he searched his colleagues' eyes for approval - no such signs are manifest in Częstochowa, thanks God.*

As the meeting adjourned, he began a hushed parley with his colleagues. It was not difficult to guess what the secret was - he [probably] said that it was necessary to "feel the pulse" of those Germans they were in contact with. This assumption gave me an idea.

"You've surely heard", I said, "that these last few days, *deportations* of Jews from Kielce and Radom have taken place. Some say only 10% of the Jews in those cities were deported and others say the opposite - that 90% were deported and only 10% have remained. What news has reached you of this?"

To that, they sheepishly replied that they knew nothing at all. I recall that, upon hearing this answer, I was very angry. Nevertheless, I said quietly, "If this is the case, I propose that you immediately put a mechanism in motion to gather information on events in the other communities. Częstochowa is now the last remaining large community in Poland. Therefore, a great responsibility lies upon you and, before anything else, you must gain knowledge of what is happening in the country. Tomorrow you must send, without delay, emissaries to Radom and Kielce."

Here, Geller intervened and declared that, if the community paid the travel expenses, the [Zionist] pioneering organisations would provide people willing to go and bring news. His proposal was accepted and, on the following day, emissaries left for Kielce and Radom.

Under the Government of the *Judenrat*

As all Jewish Councils in Hitler's time, the Częstochowa *Judenrat* was a "power" unto itself. Apart from the regular *Kehilla* leadership duties, it was now tasked with an array of municipal and governmental duties. It collected State and municipal taxes. It had jurisdiction over the ghetto's buildings and flats. It had its own post-office, a telegraph office and a telephone, a Jewish militia under its command, and so on and so forth.

One of its most important departments was the Department of Labour. The law imposed forced labour on the Jews. The implementation of this law, the organisation of work, the recruitment of workers, etc. were all put in the hands of the *Judenrat*. The councils, therefore, established departments or sections for labour affairs. In Częstochowa, the workers were organised into groups called "brigades", some large and others small - according to workplace needs. The "brigade" was

habitually headed by a young man who was called “brigadier”. Among his duties, he was required to conduct his group every morning to their workplace outside the ghetto and to bring them back to the ghetto in the afternoon. Every day, the “brigadier” listed the names of those present at work and those missing.

The vast majority of the Jewish labourers worked outside the ghetto. They did all kinds of jobs - they worked in factories, dug ditches, hauled sacks of coal and other cargoes at the train station, performed various tasks in the German military units, etc. Every Jew had a personal card with his name and workplace.

One group of labourers deserves a short mention due to its unusual characteristics - and this is the street-sweepers’ brigade. These workers were almost exclusively all teachers. Every morning, they would go outside the ghetto, as a group, to sweep the streets there. Not everyone had the privilege of being admitted to this brigade. The work here was not heavy and it was done only in the morning hours - in the afternoons, the workers were free. The teachers were happy with this arrangement as, in the afternoon, they could engage in teaching – mainly giving lessons in private homes.

When I first came to Częstochowa, the *Judenrat’s* offices were in a fine building on the high street, the Aleja Najświętszej Maryi Panny. At the front and back of this building, in the street and the courtyard, a multitude of Jews gathered at almost all hours of the day, which is unsurprising - as a Jew needed the *Judenrat’s* aid in practically every issue. And because the gathering of Jews in this place was justified and tolerated, Jews came there to meet acquaintances and hear news.

One day after our meeting at Kopiński’s house, the *Judenrat* received orders from the Germans to vacate the premises on the Aleja and to move its offices to the Jewish Crafts School’s rundown building on the filthy ulica Nadrzeczna.

The Jews Divert the Course of a River

Once I had become a Częstochowa resident, I needed to join one of the work brigades. This was required by law and also, as I believed at the time, for my own “safety”. Jewish work was supervised by the German Ministry of Labour, which stamped and distributed the working cards to Jews.

In the morning, I went to the appointed workplace. This was a spacious courtyard, in which I already found about one-hundred Jews, young and old. All the time, new Jews arrived - some were exhausted and groggy with sleep.

The young “brigadier” told me at once that my name was in his list. He was from Łódź and knew me. The entire time, he shouted and raged at the latecomers or at those who hadn’t the patience to stand in line properly. He was extremely nervous, constantly checking his watch to know if he could wait any longer for late arrivals or if he needed to leave already. He wanted the majority of stragglers to be able to join the lines in time, for it was impossible, for whoever arrived after the group had left, to make his way on his own to the workplace outside the ghetto.

The march to work took about three-quarters of an hour. There were several hundred workers in our group. Our “brigadier” would get angry on the way, making all possible efforts to keep the marchers in an orderly formation and begging them not to give the *Goyim* [Gentiles] any justification for mocking the passing Jews.

Upon our arrival, the project manager, a corpulent Ukrainian, was already waiting for us and, standing next to him, were his office personnel and a group of supervisors, or Polish foremen.

The “brigadier” handed over the list of those present. The Ukrainian verified the list’s authenticity by reading some names out loud, to ascertain whether those enlisted were indeed present. Following this check, the taskforce was divided into small units, and each was assigned to a Polish supervisor.

Our assignment was to dig a channel - a new course for a local stream. The section of the channel that had already been dug was quite long. From where I was stationed to dig, I could see neither the channel’s beginning nor the furthest point it had already reached. The task of the workers in my group was to make the channel wider and deeper. The soil was loose and not particularly difficult to dig in, but the scorching sun was exhausting and, above all, standing bent over for prolonged periods was crippling. Almost all the workers were stripped down to their waists, with their trousers rolled up to their knees, because we were standing and working in pools of water. The Polish supervisors were not particularly demanding. They strained their eyes to notice from afar if the project manager suddenly came along. When they saw him approaching, they would start prompting the workers and urging them on.

The supervisors sold the workers bottles of strongly-coloured lemonade, which they kept under the puddles in the channel so as to conserve some of the coolness. If one of the foremen acted overbearingly, harassing the men and pressuring them to work harder, the Jews would penalise him - they would buy no lemonade from him.

The people in our group, of course, had never before worked as channel-diggers. The majority had not done any physical labour at all in peacetime. Now, too, many of them engaged in commerce when they returned home in the evening, for it was impossible to live on the meagre wages from work. There were people in our group who came only very infrequently to work, or never at all. But, since every worker needed, at certain times, to have his working card stamped as proof he had completed the stipulated quota of labour, they would send “substitutes” who worked in their senders’ names - for much higher wages than the modest official working honorarium. Needless to say, this stratagem was only made possible with the knowledge and consent of the *Judenrat’s* Department of Labour - and this was not for free. Whoever sent out a “substitute” had an account - he knew it cost money to arrange the matter.

The physical labour outdoors, for 8-9 hours a day, half-naked, fortified my health. In subsequent days, I more than once thought that, had I not absorbed all that sunshine and fresh air while digging the channel and later when I worked at the airport, as is later told, I would never have had all the energy and decisiveness which I needed in my severe tribulations. But, just like all the other labourers, I too looked forward to the end of the day’s work and returning to the ghetto. Firstly, almost every day I had something to attend to, either with the *Kehilla* [i.e., *Judenrat*] or elsewhere. Secondly, and more importantly, I was very keen to hear news from Warsaw, other cities, and Częstochowa itself - for the situation in town became more tense day after day and the outlook for the Jews of Częstochowa - more dire.

About an hour before the whistle signalling the end of the working day was blown, I was in the habit of laying my spade aside and sitting down in a corner, to rest and to ponder on some particular issue. The Polish foreman, to whom I was entrusted, would see this from his place, but he never reacted. Once, I saw him approaching towards me. Fearing a reprimand, I began formulating an excuse. But no, he began conversing on a different subject. I soon discovered that he was an intelligent and kind-hearted man, with a sound understanding of political affairs. When I inquired, he replied that, in pre-War times, he had been a member of the Polish Socialist Party. I made out that he had good sources of “news” and, in any case, I realised that he perceived and comprehended our plight and outlook in a much clearer manner than 95% of the Jews working there.

While he was talking - and he spoke not only intelligently, but animatedly as well, probably weary after a full day of silence - I saw two cows some way off, ambling tranquilly with a calf by their side. They roamed along without guard or guide. Their owner surely knew that they would find their own way home. Placidly and serenely, they roamed, with the bells on their necks jingling - a picture of peacefulness and contentedness.

“Why have you fallen silent? Say something!”, the Pole said to me, when he finally ended his stream of words.

“Do you see those cows?” I answered. “I don’t know if you’ll believe me when I say that I envy them with all my heart. If only we could roam about [freely], like them on their way to their byre.”

The man laughed, “There’s nothing new in what you say. Of course, animals have it a thousand times better in this world than people!”

The “Aryan” Neighbours

The house at ul. Przemysłowa 13 was spacious and modern. It belonged to the opulent Goldwasser family - a mother and son. When I arrived there, I found the courtyard full of people. Frantic latecomers, exhausted and sweating, were arriving in the very last moments before curfew. The building’s warden already stood by the gate, ready to lock it. Among the people in the yard, there was obviously someone who knew us, from whom Mrs Goldwasser had learnt of our arrival, for she approached us and began asking us many questions regarding “what had actually happened in Warsaw”. She was a tall lady, a proud provincial woman of means, who was well aware of her own importance and put an emphasis on it.

I went with Mrs Goldwasser into a small hallway, in which there was an open door leading into a large and handsomely furnished room. In the middle of this room was a table, on which I noticed the remains of a meal - half a loaf of white bread, a jar of marmalade and, on the floor, a bowl full of eggs. Mrs Goldwasser hastily closed the door and locked it. She said we could rest in the hallway, and left.

As soon as the landlady had gone away, I began searching every nook and cranny for something to eat. And my efforts paid off. I found a valuable treasure there - a few old, hard bread rolls and several small bags of *matze* [unleavened bread] flour. So I did not hesitate too much, but put the rolls and one bag of *matze* flour into my pockets.

At this point, my wife and daughter came in. The child was in shock and devastated from all the strange experiences. Her mother put her to bed and she fell asleep immediately. Once the girl had awoken, we went down to the yard, found ourselves a secluded corner and revived ourselves with the dry rolls, in which we tasted the taste of delicacies.

In the meantime, the food problem also became graver for many other of the building’s tenants, whose provisions had run out. In the courtyard, I heard of something being done to smuggle in food from the outside. It was whispered that a significant amount of potatoes was to be received from the Polish neighbours.

A tall wall divided us from these neighbours. In the past, there had of course been just a wooden fence between the two yards, but now a brick wall stood here. When the ghetto was implemented in Częstochowa, walls such as this one had been erected as a barrier in all the places where a Jewish yard was adjacent to a non-Jewish one. The wall in our yard was about three metres high.

As we sat in our corner enjoying the rigid rolls, we saw how a young man from our building was standing by one of the windows on the top floor, holding a “conversation” in sign-language with someone in the neighbouring yard. When the lad came downstairs, two young men approached him and he spoke with them in a tone such that others should also hear him. He said he would soon have all the details - “Władek (or Franek) will let me know”.

And, indeed, after a short while, a stone wrapped in paper was thrown from that yard. Our lad rushed to the spot where the stone had landed, picked it up, took the paper off and read what was written on it. Word immediately spread throughout the courtyard that the Christian said in his message that he was willing to supply a certain quantity of potatoes at a certain price, but he demanded that the payment be up-front. He was waiting in his yard to receive a sign - yes, or no. If affirmative, he demanded the bundle of money be thrown over the wall at a specific hour.

The Potato “Deal”

We need not go into all the details, here, of the transaction in all its stages. The important thing is that, when night came, I personally witnessed the last phase of this deal - how the potatoes were delivered to the buyers.

It happened at midnight. I was stood in the courtyard, leaning on the wall of the building, observing, listening, musing and worrying. The yard appeared to be empty yet, in reality, this was not the case. In every corner, in every crevice and crack that one could only cram oneself into for concealment, figures of people stood glued to the walls – listening, in expectation, like myself. Then a strong thud was heard, and immediately another. I shuddered! I thought that I recognised the implication of these dull thuds. Surely someone had jumped from a top floor window and perhaps two people - one after the other. I had more than once witnessed such scenes in occupied Warsaw. But a moment passed and another thud came, followed by yet another. I opened my eyes wide and strained them as much as I could. I saw a bit and the rest I deduced - sacks of potatoes had just been thrown over to us from the Polish yard. Two Jews of short stature dashed out from their corners, jumped and seized hurriedly the sacks and moved them running to a specific place inside the building. After an interval of a quarter of an hour, or perhaps more, two more sacks were thrown over and, again, two men appeared - leaping, grasped hold of them, and hid them away. With what insight this whole operation was planned! They did not hurl 10 or 15 sacks over all at once, for fear that 10 or 15 heavy thuds, one after the other, would alert the guards, who stood not more than fifty paces away.

On the second night, the potatoes were shared out - even I, the stranger in the building, was not forgotten. I was called into the room where the potatoes were strewn on the floor. The “Committee” sat at a table. One weighed the potatoes, the second took the money and the third recorded the transaction. I received a few potatoes and was asked whether I could pay - if not, there was no need to. I paid willingly - the price was almost nothing, under the circumstances of the time and the place.

This operation, wonderful in its moral level and precise organisation, was carried out by simple, anonymous Jews, just a few days before they were transported to their deaths in Treblinka.

No One Grasped the Whole Truth

It became more and more apparent to me that there was no purpose to our having fled from Warsaw as, sooner or later, what had transpired there would doubtlessly happen in Częstochowa also and that it was therefore necessary to plan a new escape to somewhere else while there was

time - although I still did not know to where. And precisely when this had become clear to me, the *Judenrat* gave me "my own" corner of an apartment, to live in permanently.

The owner of the apartment, in which I was given lodgings, at first made desperate efforts to prevent us from moving in. Once he realised that all his protests were in vain, he received us peacefully and, at once, even started a friendly conversation with me. He was a boor and an uncouth ignoramus the likes of which are seldom seen. But in the course of our conversation, I seemed to momentarily discover in him a trace of understanding and human disposition, I therefore attempted taking him to task for having tried to put obstacles in our way and close his house before us, as we were persecuted refugees who had been saved from death only by miracle. Did he not know what had now happened to the Jews in other places, I asked.

"What? Not know?", he interrupted me. He had Christian acquaintances with whom he engaged in commerce who told him everything. "You will see how many Christians come to my house!", he boasted. From them, he had heard terrible things which were not told and not known in the Cześćochowa ghetto. Yes! He knew that they killed people, shot them, poisoned them, and on, and on.

His wife heard his every word. She stood a few paces away, feeding her 5-6-year-old daughter - her husband was not at all careful with his words. The woman had obviously already heard these things more than once before, possibly from the same Christians from whom her husband had heard them. She did not add a single word, but was completely absorbed with the task in hand - feeding her girl. I asked myself - did she believe these things or did she think they were fabrications? She suddenly cried out piercingly, flinging the spoon down, and exclaimed in a despairing tone, "I wish I was rid already of all the troubles this girl causes me".

What big troubles? The girl simply did not want to eat what her mother was trying to feed her. The people did not believe the veracity of the stories.

But, as for myself and my young friend Geller Leizer, we felt that the danger facing the Jews of Cześćochowa was tangible and imminent. We therefore decided to leave the city.