From: *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland,* by Simon Dubnow (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916) Submitted by Ron Doctor

In Volume 1, around page 109, Dubnow notes that beginning with the middle of the sixteenth century, rabbinical representatives of the Kahals of Poland would gather at the time of the great fairs to conduct the business of the Jewish communities.

"Toward the end of the sixteenth century, the fair conferences received a firmer organization. They were attended by the rabbis and Kahal representatives of the following provinces: Great Poland (the leading community being that of Posen), Little Poland (Cracow and Lublin), Red Russia (Lemberg), Volhynia (Ostrog and Kremenetz), and Lithuania (Brest and Grodno). Originally, the name of the assembly varied ... [but it was] ultimately fixed as "the Council of the Four Lands" (Waad Arba Aratzoth)." (Dubnow, Vol. 1, p. 110)

"The rabbis of higher rank, who took an active part in the Kahal administration, and participated in the meetings of the Councils, ... paid particular attention to the practical application of Talmudic law. One of the oldest scholars of this category during the period under discussion was Mordecai Jaffe (died 1612), a native of Bohemia, who occupied the post of rabbi successively in Grodno, Lublin, Kremenetz, Prague, and Posen. Towards the end of the sixteenth century he presided a number of times over the conferences of the "Council of the Four Lands." Though a pupil of Moses Isserles, Jaffe did not consider the Shulhan Arukh as supplemented by his teacher the last word in codification. He objected to the fact that its juridical conclusions were formulated dogmatically, without sufficient motivation.

"For this reason he undertook the composition of a new and more elaborate code of laws, arranged in the accepted order of the four books of the Turim, which is known as Lebushim, or "Raiments." ... Apart from his code, Mordecai Jaffe wrote ... five more volumes, containing Bible commentaries, synagogue sermons, and annotations to Maimonides' "Guide," as well as Cabalistic speculations." (Dubnow, Vol. 1, p. 127-128)

During the time of the Khmelnitzki massacres,

"From Podolia the rebel bands penetrated into Volhynia. Here the massacres continued in the course of the whole summer and autumn of 1648. ... Similar massacres took place in Zazlav, Ostrog, Constantinov, Narol, Kremenetz, Bar and many other cities. The Ukraina as well as Volhynia and Podolia were turned into one big slaughter-house." (Dubnow, Vol. 1, p. 149)

Later, in the early 1800s, another noted Rabbi, Isaac Baer Levinsohn) came from Kremenets. Dubnow calls him the "recluse of Kremenets" and the "Volhynian hermit." Dubnow considered him to be "naive" because of his flirtations with the Imperial government.

"It was in the hot-bed of the most fanatical species of Hasidism that the first blossoms of Haskalah timidly raised their heads. Isaac Baer Levinsohn, from Kremenetz in Podolia (1788-

1860), had associated in his younger days with the champions of enlightenment in adjacent Galicia ...

When he came back to his native land, it was with the firm resolve to devote his energies to the task of civilizing the seculuded masses of Russian Jewry. ... [In 1828, he published] his book Teudah be-Israel ("Instruction in Israel"). ... In this book our author endeavored, without trespassing the boundaries of orthodox religious tradition, to demonstrate the ... elementary truths by citing examples from Jewish history and sayings of great Jewish authorities." (Dubnow, Vol. 2, p. 125-126). But "the Volhynian soil proved unfavorable for the seeds of enlightenment." Levinsohn died a pauper.

"The pioneer of modern culture among Russian Jews, the founder of Neo-Hebraic literature, spent his life in the midst of a realm of darkness, shunned like an outcast, appreciated by a mere handful of sympathizers. It was only after his death that he was crowned with laurels, when the intellecutals of Russian Jewry werre beginning to press forward in close formation. (Dubnow, Vol. 2, p. 132).