

BURNING OF THE JEWS
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cross, the sharp iron gashed their skin, the black blood ran down, evil, sinful blood flowing exuberant as base desire.

Again they bent their knees. Anguish will pierce the soul, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. The Flagellants proclaimed curses against perjurers and liars, threats against Jews and usurers. Their eyes no longer saw. The scourge struck hard husks, the pain refused to grow greater, death could not be overcome. From their mouths laments and threats and savagely eager supplication came to the cross. With tigerish claws a thousand pair of eyes clung to the image of the savior.

A man hung nailed to the cross that a Brother held high. The metal drum beat. A song rose: "Jesus, with thy threefold name free us from our sin and shame — Jesus, save us with thy five bleeding wounds, keep us alive!"

One morning tumult filled the snow-covered streets of Strasbourg. A throng of thousands milled through the streets, past the huge empty space in the heart of the city where blocks of houses had been razed at the command of the architect Erwin, to make room for his cathedral. Now they neared a marching column of Flagellants. It became obvious that everything had changed overnight.

The same hard-faced men as yesterday marched in the procession of Flagellants, many of them wild-eyed, repulsive, their shaggy hair horribly matted. A vindictive avenging spirit marched here. The crowd that surrounded them blazed like a flame. Their voices sang hoarsely. They had slept little. They had come to purify the lands of the earth. Something was about to happen here.

Before the jail at the city limits, within the prison walls the mob gathered. The Flagellants, together with the workmen of the city, had made all their prayers very softly, else blows rained upon them.

Flagellants and townspeople surrounded the jail, encircling it ever closer. At nearby street-corners they shouted down to the mob. The same fulminations as yesterday: The true doctrine of Christ had never reached the nations, it remained in Jerusalem alone, at the altar of Saint Peter. The teachings of the clergy were false. No priests were in the crowd. Then the agitators raged against the Jews, and reached the fierce, covetous heart of their listeners. The Jews, that sinister, alien, terrible, ungodly people, those usurers, they nailed the saviour to the cross, they poison the wells, the black plague is their weapon, they want to destroy Christendom.

In a monotone the circle about the prison chanted: "Usurer, a curse on thee, thou dost weigh dishonestly! Every ounce becomes a pound—in the pit of hell be drowned! There thy soul thy soul shall rot forever!"

The troops refused to advance against the menacing mob; the authorities, temporal and spiritual, could not be reached. At ten o'clock in the morning, on February 13, 1349, a Saturday, the gates of the jail gave way to the crushing crowd, the Jews were taken out of their cells, greeted with howling jeers. The Jews who had remained in the ghetto were brought out too. About two thousand of them were herded together, there they stood—the Flagellants and townspeople surrounded them, looked at the men

Slowly the menacing, sinister host moved out of the freezing city. The Jewish cemetery was their goal. At first the procession marched in a and the women and the children, the whole infernal crew—there they stood in the light of day, a disgusting sight. Judgment was to be passed upon them, burst of shrill piping. Now they grew still. Silently Flagellants and townspeople dragged their victims out of the city. Wailing and weeping and screaming rose from the mass of Jews, many had to be carried, old men wearing shrouds walked in the train, they had to chant their prayers very softly, else blows rained upon them.

The townspeople and Flagellants heard but did not understand the words which the old men mumbled, the

words of Jeremiah, praising God and calling down the curse upon cruel Babylon.

Before the cemetery all crossed themselves. A number of townsmen ran over the graves, they had to wait, many wagons loaded with wood were driven through the gates. The Jews saw this, and a heart-piercing shrieking, shrieks of anguish broke out. This meant death by fire. The blows of the townsmen could not silence these cries, a few were beaten to death, there were even some hand-to-hand combats between the more robust Jews and townsmen. The murder began before the cemetery walls. The Flagellants had to rescue a number of bleeding comrades from the mass of Jews. Then, at the gate of the cemetery, they began again with their kneeling and scourging. The crucifix rose high. On the wooden cross writhed one to whom all human failings had been known and who for the sake of all had taken upon himself the full measure of pain. In vain, in vain.

"Forward now, all ye brothers, zealously now scourge your flesh, let us watch this fearsome death, we shall see God's agonies which this odorous, fensidish people iniquitously sold and betrayed."

"Usurer, a curse on thee, thou dost weigh dishonestly! Every ounce becomes a pound—in the pit of hell be drowned! There thy soul shall rot forever!"

With stern assurance the Flagellants now set to work, the townspeople were permitted only to assist them. On this Sabbath day, in this broad snow-covered graveyard they chained and bound the Jews of Strasbourg to a hundred stakes. And because there were too many for a single incineration shrieking swarms of survivors had to be driven to the spot already covered

with the charred, twisted bodies of the first victims. And only in the afternoon—for there had not been enough wood—was there an end to the screaming and the burning, and the Jewish community of Strasbourg was wiped out.

And in the afternoon the citizens of Strasbourg looted the Jewish quarter, dragging away heavy sacks. The first of those whom the pestilence would strike were already being borne through the streets by carriers wearing warning bells on their feet. Out of many doors people fled in terror. Looters broke into the empty houses.

In the early dusk of this February day no one remained in the cemetery. The Flagellants left the city.

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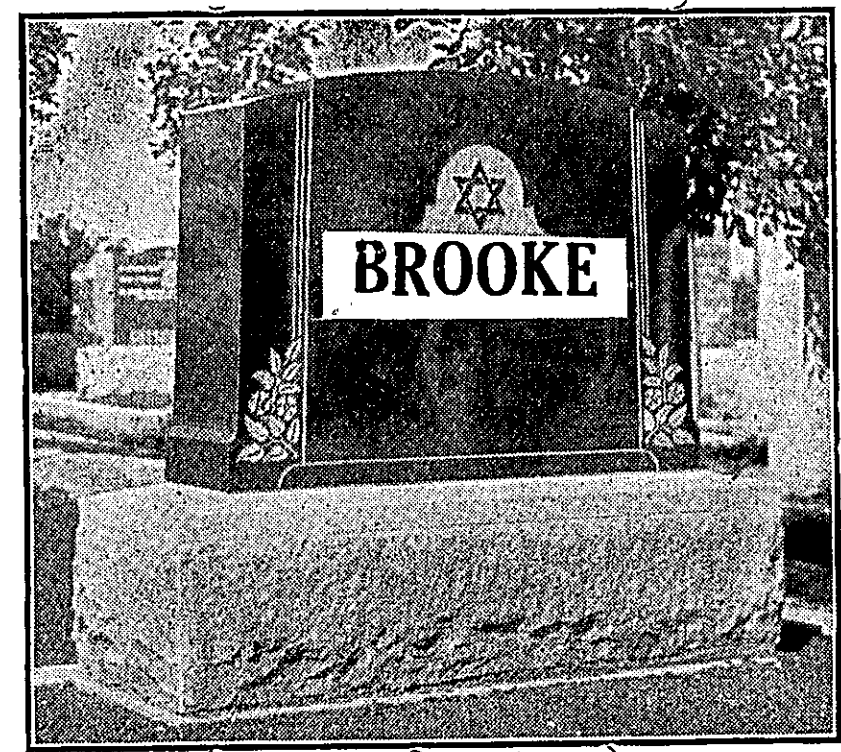
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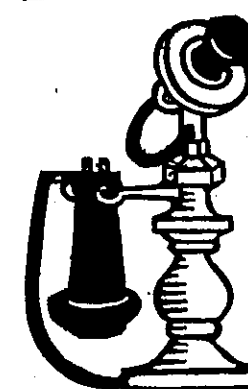
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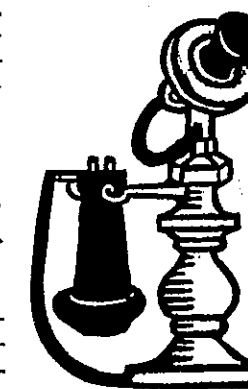
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