

AP European History/Spencer
The Black Death

As you read the three excerpts, consider how people reacted to the devastation of the Black Death. The plague brought out the best and worst in people. Why? Why were the Jews blamed?

Jean de Venette on the Progress of the Black Death

In A.D. 1348, the people of Florence and of almost the whole world were struck by a blow other than war. For in addition to the famine . . . and to the wars . . . pestilence and its attendant tribulations appeared again in various parts of the world. In the month of August, 1348, after Vespers when the sun was beginning to set, a big and very bright star appeared above Paris, toward the west. It did not seem, as stars usually do, to be very high above our hemisphere but rather very near. As the sun set and night came on, this star did not seem to me or to many other friars who were watching it to move from one place. At length, when night had come, this big star, to the amazement of all of us who were watching, broke into many different rays and, as it shed these rays over Paris toward the east, totally disappeared and was completely annihilated. Whether it was a comet or not, whether it was composed of airy exhalations and was finally resolved into vapor, I leave to the decision of astronomers. It is, however, possible that it was a presage of the amazing pestilence to come, which, in fact, followed very shortly in Paris and throughout France and elsewhere, as I shall tell. All this year and the next, the mortality of men and women, of the young even more than of the old, in Paris and in the kingdom of France, and also, it is said, in other parts of the world, was so great that it was almost impossible to bury the dead. People lay ill little more than two or three days and died suddenly, as if they were in full health. He who was well one day was dead the next and being carried to his grave. Swellings appeared suddenly in the armpit or in the groin -- in many cases both -- and they were infallible signs of death. This sickness or pestilence was called an epidemic by the doctors. Nothing like the great numbers who died in the years 1348 and 1349 has been heard of or seen of in times past. This plague and disease came from *ymaginatione* or association and contagion, for if a well man visited the sick he only rarely evaded the risk of death. Wherefore in many towns timid priests withdrew, leaving the exercise of their ministry to such of the religious as were more daring. In many places not two out of twenty remained alive. So high was the mortality at the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris that for a long time, more than five hundred dead were carried daily with great devotion in carts to the cemetery of the Holy Innocents in Paris for burial. A very great number of the saintly sisters of the Hôtel-Dieu who, not fearing to die, nursed the sick in all sweetness and humility, with no thought of honor, a number too often renewed by death, rest in peace with Christ, as we may piously believe.

This plague, it is said, began among the unbelievers, came to Italy, and then crossing the Alps reached Avignon, where it attacked several cardinals and took from them their whole household. Then it spread, unforeseen, to France, through Gascony and Spain, little by little, from town to town, from village to village, from house to house, and finally from person to person. It even crossed over to Germany, though it was not so bad there as with us. During the epidemic, God of His accustomed goodness deigned to grant this grace, that however suddenly men died, almost all awaited death joyfully. Nor was there anyone who died without confessing his sins and receiving the holy viaticum. . . .

Some said that this pestilence was caused by infection of the air and waters, since there was at this time no famine nor lack of food supplies, but on the contrary great abundance. As a result of this theory of infected water and air as the source of the plague the Jews were suddenly and

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violently charged with infecting wells and water and corrupting the air. The whole world rose up against them cruelly on this account. In Germany and other parts of the world where Jews lived, they were massacred and slaughtered by Christians, and many thousands were burned everywhere, indiscriminately. The unshaken, if fatuous, constantly of the men and their wives was remarkable. For mothers hurled their children first into the fire that they might not be baptized and then leaped in after them to burn with their husbands and children. It is said that many bad Christians were found who in like manner put poison into wells. But in truth, such poisonings, granted that they actually were perpetrated, could not have caused so great a plague nor have infected so many people. There were other causes; for example, the will of God and the corrupt humors and evil inherent in air and earth. Perhaps the poisonings, if they actually took place in some localities, reinforced these causes. The plague lasted in France for the greater part of the years 1348 and 1349 and then ceased. Many country villages and many houses in good towns remained empty and deserted. Many houses, including some splendid dwellings, very soon fell into ruins. Even in Paris several houses were thus ruined, though fewer here than elsewhere.

After this cessation of the epidemic, pestilence, or plague, the men and women who survived married each other. There was no sterility among the women, but on the contrary fertility beyond the ordinary. Pregnant women were seen on every side. . . . But woe is me! the world was not changed for the better but for the worse by this renewal of population. For men were more avaricious and grasping than before, even though they had far greater possessions. They were more covetous and disturbed each other more frequently with suits, brawls, disputes, and pleas. Nor by the mortality resulting from this terrible plague inflicted by God was peace between kings and lords established. On the contrary, the enemies of the king of France and of the Church or stronger and wickeder than before and stirred up wars on sea and on land. Greater evils than before [swarmed] everywhere in the world. And this fact was very remarkable. Although there was an abundance of all goods, yet everything was twice as dear, whether it were utensils, victuals, or merchandise, hired helpers or peasants and serfs, except for some hereditary domains which remained abundantly stocked with everything. Charity began to cool, and iniquity with ignorance and stand to abound, for a few could be found in the good towns and castles who knew how or were willing to instruct children in the rudiments of grammar.

[Source: Richard A. Newhall, ed., Jean Birdsall, trans., *The Chronicle of Jean de Venette* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), pp. 48-51.]

Boccaccio on the Plague

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The following is taken from the introduction of Giovanni Boccaccio's, Decameron. Boccaccio lived through the plague and wrote this description shortly thereafter, but he borrowed liberally from an earlier writer who was describing a completely different plague.

I say, then, that in the year 1348 after the Son of God's fruitful incarnation, into the distinguished city of Florence, that most beautiful of Italian cities, there entered a deadly pestilence. Whether one believes that it came through the influence of the heavenly bodies or that God, justly angered by our iniquities, sent it for our correction, in any case it had begun several years earlier in the east and killed an innumerable mass of people, spreading steadily from place to place and growing as it moved west.

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No human wisdom or provision was of any help. Huge amounts of filth were removed from the city by officials charged with that task; sick people were forbidden to enter the city; advice was given on how to stay healthy; devout persons made humble supplication to God not once but many times, in processions and by other means; but in the spring of that year the sad effects of the plague nonetheless began to appear in an almost miraculous manner. It was not as it had been in the east, where nosebleeds had signaled that death was inevitable. Here the sickness began in both men and women with swelling in the groin and armpits. The lumps varied in size, some reaching the size of an ordinary apple and others that of an egg, and the people commonly called them *gavoccioli*. Having begun in these two parts of the body, the *gavoccioli* soon began to appear at random all over the body. After this point the disease started to alter in nature, with black or livid spots appearing on the arms, the thighs, everywhere. Sometimes they were large and well spaced, other times small and numerous. These were a certain sign of impending death, but so was the swelling.

No doctor's advice, no medicine seemed to be of any help. Either the disease was incurable or the doctors simply didn't know how to cure it. Many tried, though. The number of doctors became huge as a multitude of people, male and female, with no medical training whatsoever took their place alongside those who were properly educated. But no one knew the cause of the pestilence and thus no one could do much about curing it, so not only were few people healed but most of them died by the third day after the aforementioned signs appeared, some a bit sooner or a bit later. Most of them died without any fever or other symptoms.

This pestilence was so powerful that it spread from the ill to the healthy like fire among dry or oily materials. It was so bad that it could be communicated not only through speaking or associating with the sick, but even by touching their clothing or anything else they had touched. What I must say here is so strange that if I and others had not seen it with our own eyes I would hesitate to believe it, let alone write about it, even if I had heard it from trustworthy people. The pestilence spread so efficiently that, not only did it pass from person to person, but if an animal touched the belongings of some sick or dead person it contracted the pestilence and died of it in a short time. I myself witnessed this with my own eyes, as I said earlier. One day when a poor man had died and his rags had been thrown out in the street, two pigs came along and, as pigs do, they pushed the rags about with their snouts and then seized them with their teeth. Both soon fell down dead on the rags, as if they had taken poison. Such experiences or others like them gave birth to a variety of fears and misconceptions among the living, and the cruel strategy they pursued was to avoid, even flee the sick and their belongings. They thought that by doing so they could stay healthy themselves.

There were some who thought moderate living and the avoidance of excess had a great deal to do with avoiding illness, so they lived apart from others in small groups. They congregated and shut themselves up in houses where no one had been sick, partaking moderately of the best food and the finest wine, avoiding excess in other ways as well, trying their best not speak of or hear any news about the death and illness outside, occupying themselves with music and whatever other pleasures they had available.

Others were of the opposite opinion. They believed that drinking a good deal, enjoying themselves, going about singing and having fun, satisfying all their appetites as much as they could, laughing and joking was sure medicine for any illness. Thus, doing exactly as they prescribed, they spent day and night moving from one tavern to the next, drinking without mode or measure, or doing the same thing in other people's homes, engaging only in those activities that gave them pleasure. They found this easy to do because people had abandoned their possessions as if they no longer had to cope with the problem of living, and most of the houses had become common property with complete strangers making use of whatever homes they arrived at as if they owned them. And they combined this bestial behavior with as complete an avoidance of the sick as they could manage.

As our city sunk into this affliction and misery the reverend authority of the law, both divine and human, sunk with it and practically disappeared, for those who were supposed to be its ministers and executors were, like other people, either dead, sick or so taken up with the needs of their own families that they could not perform their offices. That left everyone else free to make his or her own arrangements.

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Many took a middle way between these two extremes, neither limiting themselves like the first group nor engaging in dissolute behavior as the second did. This group used things as they felt the need of them and, instead of shutting themselves in, they went about carrying flowers, fragrant herbs or various spices which they often held to their noses, assuming that the best thing for the brain was to comfort it with such odors, since the air was filled with the stench of dead bodies and illness and medicine.

Some were of a crueller opinion, though perhaps a safer one. They said there was no better medicine against the plague than to escape from it. Moved by this argument and caring from nothing except themselves, a large number of men and women abandoned their city, houses, families and possessions in order to go elsewhere, at least to the Florentine countryside, as if the wrath of God punishing humankind with this pestilence would not follow them there, but would content itself with oppressing only those found within the city walls, or as if they had concluded that no one would remain there and that the final hour of their city had arrived.

Not all of these variously-opinioned people died, but not all of them lived by employing these measures, either. And, having given an example to others while they were healthy, when they themselves fell sick they were in turn left abandoned by all. And we will pass over the fact that one citizen avoided another, no neighbor took care of another, and family members rarely if ever visited one another, in fact they stayed far apart. This tribulation struck such fear in the hearts of men and women that one brother abandoned another, uncles abandoned nephews, sisters abandoned brothers, often wives abandoned their husbands, and (a greater thing and barely believable) fathers and mothers abandoned their children, as if they were not even theirs.

The countless number of people who fell sick could look for help only to the charity of friends (and there were few of them) or to the avarice of servants, who received huge salaries without being required to do much and yet were still hard to find. They tended to be men or women with little intelligence or training who were good for little else except bringing the sick person whatever they requested or watching over them as they died. They often lost their own lives and profits in the process.

This situation in which the sick were abandoned by neighbors and families and could find few servants led to a practice practically unheard of earlier: A woman, no matter how attractive or beautiful she might be, did not hesitate to have as her servant a man, be he young or old, and show him every part of her body just as she would have done with a woman, as long as the needs of her illness required it. That practice may have contributed to those who survived having looser morals afterward.

It followed from this situation that many people died who might have lived if they had been cared for. Thus, between the lack of decent servants and the force of the pestilence, so many people died day and night in the city that it was a shock to hear about it, say nothing of seeing it. And thus, among those who remained alive, there developed, almost by necessity, ways of behavior contrary what had previously been the prevailing customs.

It had been the custom (and is again today) for female family members and neighbors to gather in the home of a dead person and mourn along with the female members of the household, while the male family members, neighbors and other townsmen gathered outside; and the clergy came in accordance with the dead person's rank. Then, with funereal pomp, candles and singing, he was carried on the shoulders of his equals to the church he had selected before his death. Once the ferocity of the plague began to increase, such things ceased either entirely or in large part, other new practices taking their place. Accordingly many died, not only without many women around them, but with not a single witness present. Few were those to whom was conceded the pious plaints and bitter tears of their family. On the contrary, most relatives managed to be somewhere else laughing, joking and having fun. The women learned that behavior too, abandoning their womanly compassion in the interests of their own health. And few were those who were accompanied to the church by more than ten or twelve neighbors, nor were they carried on the shoulders of honorable and worthy citizens, but rather by gravediggers from the lower class called *becchini*, who did it for pay. They picked up the coffin and hurried off, not to the church chosen by the deceased, but normally to the closest one, accompanied by four or six clergy and

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a few candles, and often none at all. These clergy, with the help of the *becchini* and without tiring themselves with any lengthy, solemn services, found whatever unoccupied sepulcher they could and put the body there.

The poor and even the middling classes faced an even grimmer prospect. Most of them stayed in their own homes and neighborhoods, either because they hoped they would be safe there or because they could afford to do no other. They fell sick by the thousands every day, and having neither servants nor anyone else to care for them they almost always died. Many of them died in the street either during the day or by night, while those who died in their homes were noticed by their neighbors only when the smell of their decomposing bodies brought them to public attention.

There were dead bodies all over, and all were treated in pretty much the same manner by their neighbors, who were moved no less by fear that the corrupted bodies would infect them than by any pity they felt toward the deceased. They would drag the dead bodies out of their homes (either themselves or with the aid of porters, when they could get them) and left them in front of their doors. In the morning great numbers of them could be seen by any passerby. At that time they were laid out and carried away on biers or, if none were available, on planks. Nor did a bier carry only one. Sometimes it carried two or three at a time, and there were occasions when a husband and wife, two or three brothers, or a father and son were carried off together. Any number of times two priests with a cross would be on the way to the church with someone and porters would fall in behind with two or three more biers, so that the priests, who thought they were on their way to bury one person, eventually found that they had six, eight or even more.

Nor were these dead honored with tears, lights or companions. Things sunk to the level that people were disposed of much as we would now dispose of a dead goat. Thus it became clear that what the wise had never learned to suffer with patience when, in the natural course of things, it struck less dramatically and less often, became a matter of indifference even to the simple thanks to the sheer scale of this misfortune.

The amount of holy ground available for burials was insufficient for the huge quantity of corpses arriving at the church every day and even every hour, especially if they wished to follow the old custom and give every body its own place; so when all individual places in a churchyard was taken they dug huge trenches and put people in them by the hundreds like merchandise in the hold of a ship, then covered them over with a little dirt, until the ditch was filled to the top.

But I shall spare you a detailed description of the miseries visited upon us and simply mention that the ill winds blowing through our city did not spare the surrounding countryside. There, to say nothing of the towns (which were like smaller versions of the city), throughout the villages and fields the poor, miserable peasants and their families, who lacked the care of doctors or the aid of servants, died more like beasts than humans, day and night, on the roads and in their fields, And thus like the city-dwellers they became loose in their behavior and stopped taking care of their possessions and occupations, and all of them, once they began to anticipate their deaths, stopped caring about what they might do in the future with their beasts and lands and simply concentrated on consuming what they had. Thus their cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens and even their dogs, man's best friends, were driven off into the fields where the wheat stood abandoned, not merely unharvested but not even cut. These animals were allowed to roam where they pleased, and many, like rational beings, returned home each night after eating well during the day, without being encouraged to do so by a shepherd.

Enough about the countryside. Returning to the city, what more can be said except that the cruelty of heaven (and perhaps in part of humankind as well) was such that between March and July, thanks to the force of the plague and the fear that led the healthy to abandon the sick, more than one hundred thousand people died within the walls of Florence. Before the deaths began, who would have imagined the city even held so many people? Oh, how many great *palazzi*, how many lovely houses, how many noble dwellings once full of families, of lords and ladies, were emptied down to the lowest servant? Oh, how many memorable pedigrees, ample estates and renowned fortunes were left without a worthy heir? How many valiant men, lovely ladies and handsome youths

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whom even Galen, Hippocrates and Aesculapius would have judged to be in perfect health, dined with their family, companions and friends in the morning and then in the evening with their ancestors in the other world?

Jewish History Sourcebook: The Black Death and the Jews 1348-1349 CE

In 1348 there appeared in Europe a devastating plague which is reported to have killed off ultimately twenty-five million people. By the fall of that year the rumor was current that these deaths were due to an international conspiracy of Jewry to poison Christendom. It was reported that the leaders in the Jewish metropolis of Toledo had initiated the plot and that one of the chief conspirators was a Rabbi Peyret who had his headquarters in Chambéry, Savoy, whence he dispatched his poisoners to France, Switzerland, and Italy.

By authority of Amadeus VI, Count of Savoy, a number of the Jews who lived on the shores of Lake Geneva, having been arrested and put to the torture, naturally confessed anything their inquisitors suggested. These Jews, under torture, incriminated others. Records of their confessions were sent from one town to another in Switzerland and down the Rhine River into Germany, and as a result, thousands of Jews, in at least two hundred towns and hamlets, were butchered and burnt. The sheer loss of numbers, the disappearance of their wealth, and the growing hatred of the Christians brought German Jewry to a catastrophic downfall. It now began to decline and did not again play an important part in German life till the seventeenth century.

The first account that follows is a translation from the Latin of a confession made under torture by Agimet, a Jew, who was arrested at Chatel, on Lake Geneva. It is typical of the confessions extorted and forwarded to other towns.

The second account describes the Black Death in general and treats specifically of the destruction of the Jewish community in Strasbourg. In this city the authorities, who attempted to save the Jews, were overthrown by a fear-stricken mob led by the butchers' and tanners' guilds and by the nobles who were determined to do away with the Jews who were their economic competitors and to whom they were indebted for loans. Thus in this city, at least, it was not merely religious bigotry and fear of the plague, but economic resentment that fired the craftsmen and the nobles to their work of extermination. Those people of Strasbourg, who had thus far escaped the plague and who thought that by killing off the Jews they would insure themselves against it in the future, were doomed to disappointment, for the pest soon struck the city and, it is said, took a toll of sixteen thousand lives.

The confession of Agimet is found in the Appendix to Johann S. Schilter's 1698 edition of the Middle High German chronicle of the Strasbourg historian, Jacob von Königshofen (1346-1420). The second selection is taken from the body of Königshofen's history. This account merits credence, not only because Königshofen was an archivist and lived close to the events of which he writes, but also because he incorporated considerable material from his Strasbourg predecessor, the historian F. Closener, who was probably an eyewitness of the tragedy. The third selection is an epitaph of an otherwise unknown Jew who died a victim of the plague in 1349. Obviously, Jews, too, were not spared by this dread disease. The epitaph in the original Hebrew is in poetical form.

I. The Confession of Agimet of Geneva, Châtel, October 20, 1348

The year of our Lord 1348.

On Friday, the 10th of the month of October, at Châtel, in the castle thereof, there occurred the judicial inquiry which was made by order of the court of the illustrious Prince, our lord, Amadeus, Count of Savoy, and his

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subjects against the Jews of both sexes who were there imprisoned, each one separately. [Jews were sometimes imprisoned separately to prevent suicide.] This was done after public rumor had become current and a strong clamor had arisen because of the poison put by them into the wells, springs, and other things which the Christians use-demanding that they die, that they are able to be found guilty and, therefore, that they should be punished. Hence this their confession made in the presence of a great many trustworthy persons.

Agimet the Jew, who lived at Geneva and was arrested at Châtel, was there put to the torture a little and then he was released from it. And after a long time, having been subjected again to torture a little, he confessed in the presence of a great many trustworthy persons, who are later mentioned. To begin with it is clear that at the Lent just passed Pultus Clesis de Ranz had sent this very Jew to Venice to buy silks and other things for him. When this came to the notice of Rabbi Peyret, a Jew of Chambéry who was a teacher of their law, he sent for this Agimet, for whom he had searched, and when he had come before him he said: "We have been informed that you are going to Venice to buy silk and other wares. Here I am giving you a little package of half a span in size which contains some prepared poison and venom in a thin, sewed leather-bag. Distribute it among the wells, cisterns, and springs about Venice and the other places to which you go, in order to poison the people who use the water of the aforesaid wells that will have been poisoned by you, namely, the wells in which the poison will have been placed."

Agimet took this package full of poison and carried it with him to Venice, and when he came there he threw and scattered a portion of it into the well or cistern of fresh water which was there near the German House, in order to poison the people who use the water of that cistern. And he says that this is the only cistern of sweet water in the city. He also says that the mentioned Rabbi Peyret promised to give him whatever he wanted for his troubles in this business. Of his own accord Agimet confessed further that after this had been done he left at once in order that he should not be captured by the citizens or others, and that he went personally to Calabria and Apulia and threw the above mentioned poison into many wells. He confesses also that he put some of this same poison in the well of the streets of the city of Ballet.

He confesses further that he put some of this poison into the public fountain of the city of Toulouse and in the wells that are near the [Mediterranean] sea. Asked if at the time that he scattered the venom and poisoned the wells, above mentioned, any people had died, he said that he did not know inasmuch as he had left everyone of the above mentioned places in a hurry. Asked if any of the Jews of those places were guilty in the above mentioned matter, he answered that he did not know. And now by all that which is contained in the five books of Moses and the scroll of the Jews, he declared that this was true, and that he was in no wise lying, no matter what might happen to him. [This Jew does not seem to know that the books of Moses and the scroll of the Jews are identical!]

II. *The Cremation of Strasbourg Jewry St. Valentine's Day, February 14, 1349 - About The Great Plague And The Burning Of The Jews*

In the year 1349 there occurred the greatest epidemic that ever happened. Death went from one end of the earth to the other, on that side and this side of the sea, and it was greater among the Saracens **than** among the Christians. In some lands everyone died so that no one was left. Ships were also found on the sea laden with wares; the crew had all died and no one guided the ship. The Bishop of Marseilles and priests and monks and more than half of all the people there died with them. In other kingdoms and cities so many people perished that it would be horrible to describe. The pope at Avignon stopped all sessions of court, locked himself in a room, allowed no one to approach him and had a fire burning before him all the time. [This last was probably intended as some sort of disinfectant.] And from what this epidemic came, all wise teachers and physicians could only say that it was God's will. And as the plague was now here, so was it in other places, and lasted more than a whole year. This epidemic also came to Strasbourg in the summer of the above mentioned year, and it is estimated that about sixteen thousand people died.

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In the matter of this plague the Jews throughout the world were reviled and accused in all lands of having caused it through the poison which they are said to have put into the water and the wells-that is what they were accused of-and for this reason the Jews were burnt all the way from the Mediterranean into Germany, but not in Avignon, for the pope protected them there.

Nevertheless they tortured a number of Jews in Berne and Zofingen [Switzerland] who then admitted that they had put poison into many wells, and they also found the poison in the wells. Thereupon they burnt the Jews in many towns and wrote of this affair to Strasbourg, Freiburg, and Basel in order that they too should burn their Jews. But the leaders in these three cities in whose hands the government lay did not believe that anything ought to be done to the Jews. However in Basel the citizens marched to the city-hall and compelled the council to take an oath that they would burn the Jews, and that they would allow no Jew to enter the city for the next two hundred years. Thereupon the Jews were arrested in all these places and a conference was arranged to meet at Benfeld rAlsace, February 8, 1349. The Bishop of Strasbourg [Berthold II], all the feudal lords of Alsace, and representatives of the three above mentioned cities came there. The deputies of the city of Strasbourg were asked what they were going to do with their Jews. They answered and said that they knew no evil of them. Then they asked the Strasbourgers why they had closed the wells and put away the buckets, and there was a great indignation and clamor against the deputies from Strasbourg. So finally the Bishop and the lords and the Imperial Cities agreed to do away with the Jews. The result was that they were burnt in many cities, and wherever they were expelled they were caught by the peasants and stabbed to death or drowned. . . .

[The town-council of Strasbourg which wanted to save the Jews was deposed on the 9th-10th of February, and the new council gave in to the mob, who then arrested the Jews on Friday, the 13th.]

THE JEWS ARE BURNT

On Saturday - that was St. Valentine's Day-they burnt the Jews on a wooden platform in their cemetery. There were about two thousand people of them. Those who wanted to baptize themselves were spared. [Some say that about a thousand accepted baptism.] Many small children were taken out of the fire and baptized against the will of their fathers and mothers. And everything that was owed to the Jews was cancelled, and the Jews had to surrender all pledges and notes that they had taken for debts. The council, however, took the cash that the Jews possessed and divided it among the working-men proportionately. The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews. If they had been poor and if the feudal lords had not been in debt to them, they would not have been burnt. After this wealth was divided among the artisans some gave their share to the Cathedral or to the Church on the advice of their confessors.

Thus were the Jews burnt at Strasbourg, and in the same year in all the cities of the Rhine, whether Free Cities or Imperial Cities or cities belonging to the lords. In some towns they burnt the Jews after a trial, in others, without a trial. In some cities the Jews themselves set fire to their houses and cremated themselves.

THE JEWS RETURN TO STRASBOURG

It was decided in Strasbourg that no Jew should enter the city for a hundred years, but before twenty years had passed, the council and magistrates agreed that they ought to admit the Jews again into the city for twenty years. And so the Jews came **back again** to Strasbourg iii the year 1368 after the birth of our Lord.

III. *The Epitaph of Asher aben Turiel, Toledo, Spain, 1349*

This stone is a memorial
That a later generation may know
That 'neath it lies hidden a pleasant bud,
A cherished child.
Perfect in knowledge,

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A reader of the Bible,

A student of the Mishnah and Gemara.

Had learned from his father

What his father learned from his teachers:

The statutes of God and his laws.

Though only fifteen years in age,

He was like a man of eighty in knowledge.

More blessed than all sons: Asher-may he rest in Paradise -

The son of Joseph ben Turiel-may God comfort him,

He died of the plague, in the month of Tam muz, in the year 109 [June or July, 1349].

But a few days before his death

He established his home;

But yesternight the joyous voice of the bride and groom

Was turned to the voice of wailing.

[Apparently he had just been married.]

And the father is left, sad and aching.

May the God of heaven

Grant him comfort.

And send another child

To restore his soul.