

has been for ever in the minds of the ignorant and vulgar, the explanation of great catastrophes.

The belief spread over Europe that the plague was due to poisoned water, poisoned food and supplies and poisoned air. A common enemy of Europeans must, therefore, be the perpetrator. Who could that be other than the Jew? Thus in September and October of 1348 began at Chillon, Lake Geneva, the persecution and massacre of the Jews. With and without torture confessions were obtained. Public meetings were held to devise means how to exterminate the Jews and thus they were either burnt or forced out by sword, their money and property confiscated and stolen. In Strassburg two thousand Jews were burnt alive in their own cemetery, in Mayence 12,000 are said to have been executed; there and elsewhere the simultaneous entry of the Flagellants gave rise to greater slaughter. Humanity and restraint by Pope and Emperor were insufficient to stem the tide, although notables and secular and ecclesiastic powers finally took the Jews under their own protection. The Jews remained in public opinion poison mixers, conspirators through an apparent overwhelming evidence. A most important historic document in this respect is the communication of the Castellan of Chillon to the Mayor of the City of Strassburg, 1348, enclosing copy of the inquisition and confession of several Jews, which gave an appearance of justice to these executions. For example, Balaviguns, a Jewish physician, after having been put on the rack, confessed that about ten weeks before the Rabbi Jacob of Toledo sent him by a Jewish boy some poison in the mummy (shell) of an egg in form of a powder sewed in a thin leathern pouch, commanding him in an accompanying letter, on penalty of excommunication, to throw the poison into the larger and more frequented wells of Thonon. This he did. The same boy, he stated, brought similar messages to other Jews whom he mentioned by name and residence. He described the color of the poison as red and black. He believed this poison to contain a portion of the basilisk, because he had heard and felt assured that the above poison could not be prepared without it. Nine similar confessions, generally obtained after, at least short torture, are appended. Even Christians were suspected, arrested, quartered, flayed and hanged.

All respect for truth, law and order, secular or divine, had perished. No one would attend to his duties. Responsibility vanished. Violent fear of either disease or murderers or burglars controlled thought and action. Even after the "large mortality" had subsided in severity, recurrences, combined with continued warfare and pillaging and associated with natural disasters (famine, inundations, earthquakes, storms) prevented a rapid return to the normal and preserved terrible traditions in the public mind.