



THE PERSECUTION

OF

THE JEWS.

PART II.

BY



SALADIN.

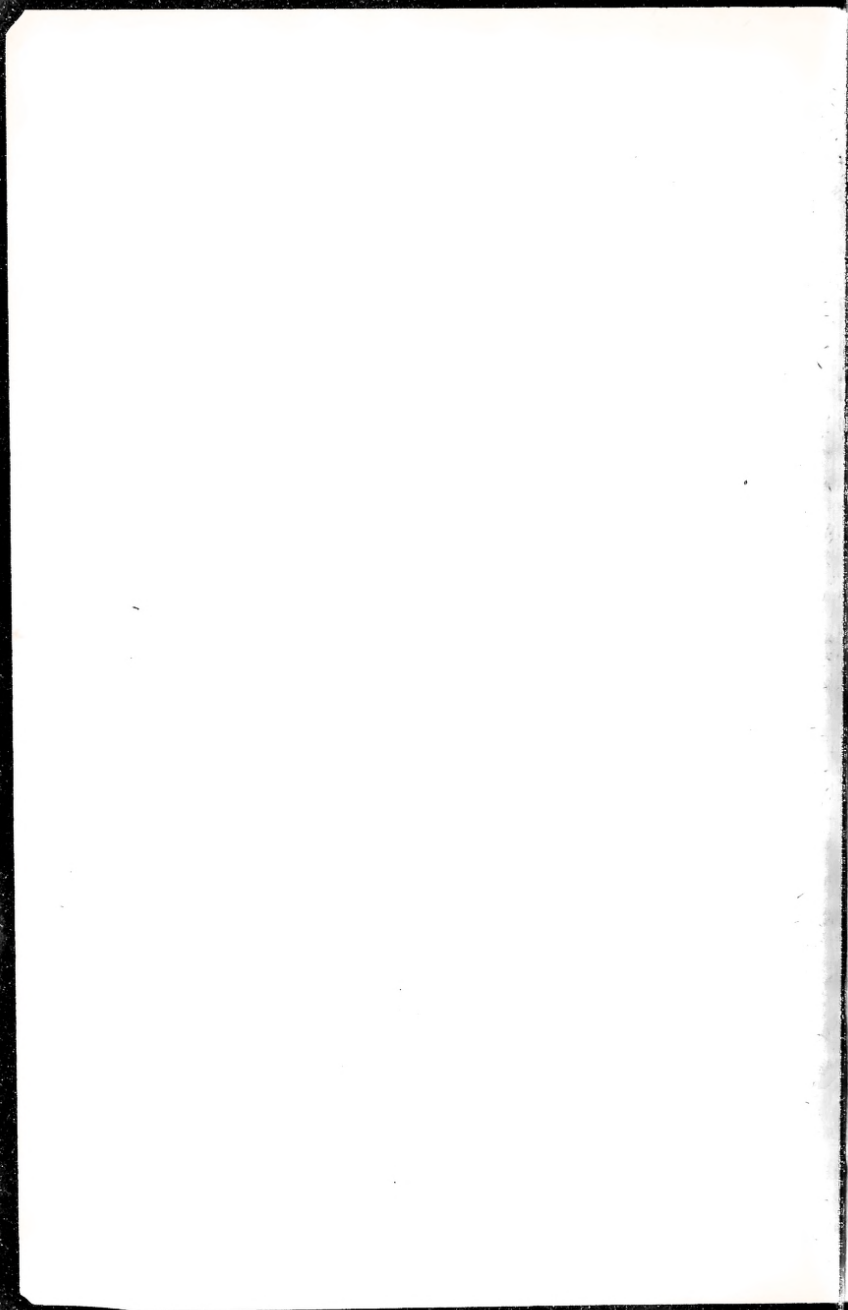
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THE

PERSECUTION OF THE JEWS.

THE sphere of Jewish persecution has been so wide, and has extended over such a long period of time, that the limits of a brief and discursive paper demand that I should content myself with a specimen instance or two of the injustice and cruelty to which the Christians subjected the people of Israel. I turn to Strasburg in the fourteenth century. One of the principal streets in the town is still pointed out as having been formerly inhabited, like Old Jewry in London, by Jews exclusively. Five hundred years ago, at the period of the Black Death, that street of the Jews presented a far other aspect. It consisted of two parallel rows of high narrow houses that, as they ascended from the street, storey after storey, bulged out and approached each other, till, at the topmost storey, they almost met. The street was nearly dark, even on the brightest day, and, looking up, you could see, far over head, only a thin line of sky. At the corner, where you now find the houses numbered 31 and 32 respectively, stood the synagogue. And the houses opposite stand on the site of the ancient burial ground which five hundred years ago gave rest to the exiled sons and daughters of Israel. All the Jews in Strasburg, numbering about 2,000, lived in this street. No street in the town then opened into this. It was a *cul-de-sac*, or turn-again-lane, with facilities for ingress or egress at one end only, when a huge gate with strong iron bars was flung open. This gate was closed every evening, and opened every morning, with the exception of Sundays and holidays, when the grim portal stood closed all day, lest the Christian city, in its religious

solemnities, should be desecrated by the presence of a Jew.

Tidings reached the Jew street of the terrible persecution of their brethren elsewhere because of their supposed conspiracy to sweep the Christians off the earth by poisoning the springs of Europe. Every day the followers of Christ came to the great gate and leered and howled at the people of Israel, and threatened vengeance and thirsted for blood. The Jews well knew that they were a despised and hated handful in this city of the stranger ; and they howled back no defiance in return. Centuries of tribulation had taught them that, among those with whom they sojourned, a very slender pretext was needed to shed the blood and seize the gold of Israel. A terrible pretext—one they were not likely to let slip—presented itself to the followers of the Lamb. The Black Death was thrusting them into the grave in myriads, whole tracts of country were depopulated, and vessels were at sea, with rich cargoes, with captain and crew all corpses ; literally—

“ Ships were drifting with the dead
To shores where all was dumb.”

And a dark suspicion had seized the Christian mind that the Jews were at the bottom of all this : they had killed the Christ, and now they had set about exterminating his followers.

Centuries of unprecedented misfortunes as a people had taught the sons and daughters of Abraham the virtues of a sublime, even if desperate, resolution. There was no panic, no stampede. The men quietly waited or the inevitable, and the women had learnt how to meet their fate without hysterical screams. Home, synagogue, and sepulchre were all in the one street : in that street they lived, and in that street they must die. A cloud bigger than a man's hand had already gathered on the horizon of their fortunes. It was lurid with lightning and black with thunder ; but there was nowhere to flee to escape from its impending discharge. Over their heads in Strasburg gathered the mists of death ; but whither in all the wide world could they go where the earth would be green and the sky would be blue for them ? They lived

on sufferance everywhere, and wherever they went they owed the miserable boon of existence to the contemptuous toleration of their enemies.

Heroic even to stoicism, brave even to desperation, the Jews were still much out of harmony with the rampant and zealous militarism of Europe. They who had fought and bled under Joshua, Saul, and the Maccabees might have been charged with merciless ferocity, but never with craven cowardice. But, ever since the destruction of their Holy City, the valiant sons of valiant sires had applied themselves to the cultivation of the interests of commerce and the arts of peace. And for this, amid the mad militarism of Christendom, they were contemned and despised. I understand all the glory of chivalry, all the romance of war. I have recited Homer and Scott till the blood rushed to my cheeks in absolute flame; and with my cane for a sword, and the ragweeds, thistles, and dog-roses for an enemy, I have slashed and stabbed and sent their truncated fragments flying to the four winds of heaven. I myself have tuned the lyre of Tyrtæus, till, leading an imaginary forlorn hope, I, once, as the hour of midnight struck, dashed over the rampart of a feudal ruin, and, plunging to the neck into the water and mud of the ancient fosse, struggled through, with clenched teeth, to the battered and ivy-mantled walls. Never the soldier's blood burned fiercer in human veins than it has done in mine; never mortal born better understood the fascination that lies in "the pomp and circumstance of glorious war" and the sublime excitement of toeing the narrow and bloody line that lies between life and laurels and death and damnation.

Consequently, my sympathy with the peaceful and non-military character of the Jews does not proceed from the absence of that ardour within me to which the military spirit can appeal. But sober sense says that there is no splendour of achievement that can light up the darkness of desolation, and nothing that man can win by the sword that can compensate for the horrors of a single campaign. Priestcraft appeals to man in his imbecility; War to man in his delirium. O that Time could, at one bound, rape ten thousand years from Eternity, and that

the sun might look down and, at last, behold man neither imbecile nor delirious ! The arm that tingles as I write tells me that in the dance of Death I could be the maddest of the mad ; and yet how unspeakably mad is he who, on the modern battle-field, blazes away out of a ditch and over a mound of earth, till the bursting of a shell, in the twinkling of an eye, dashes him into suitable stuffing for a sausage, his blood and clothes and brain and viscera splashed around for yards. The most distinguished of war correspondents* wrote thus from a modern battle-field : " Let your readers fancy masses of coloured rags glued together with blood and brains and pinned into strange shapes by fragments of bones. Let them conceive men's bodies without heads, legs without bodies, heaps of human entrails attached to red and blue cloth, and disembowelled corpses in uniform, bodies lying about in all attitudes with skulls shattered, faces blown off, hips smashed, *bones, flesh, and gay clothing all pounded together as if brayed in a mortar*, extending for miles.....and then they cannot, with the most vivid imagination, come up to the sickening reality of that butchery." It is to the honour and not to the shame of the Jews that they have contributed little to the carnage of ancient, mediæval, or modern Christendom.

The Plague had not yet shown itself in Strasburg ; but the report of it had spread terror, and the suspicion that the Jews were responsible for it terribly imperilled that peaceful and much-suffering people. Angry groups of soldiers clashed and brandished their swords at the great gate of the Jewish street, and furious mobs began to surge around it, hissing and leering at the people who had slain the "blessed Lord," and thirsting for blood and plunder, from which the civic authorities were with difficulty able to restrain them. At length, in January, 1349, the authorities had to yield to the ignorant fury and racial and religious antipathies of the mob. The bishop and city dignitaries issued a decree to banish every Jew in Strasburg. The sentence of banishment was equivalent to the sentence of death, for those against whom the sentence had been passed knew of no region of the world that would give rest and protection to their exiled race. They might as well die

at Strasburg as elsewhere. The sword, the scaffold, and the river were had recourse to in carrying out the edict of banishment. Driven to desperation, from time to time groups of the doomed people took every man his sword, and, falling upon the Christian oppressor, sold their lives full dearly. The Christians hewed their pathway down the street against all opposition, and, galled by the fierce but ineffectual resistance of the Jewish sword, they applied the torch to several of the buildings, and burnt them and their inmates to death—man, woman, and child. Six Jews in particular were publicly tried and executed on the charge of having poisoned the wells. But this mere sip could not pacify the Cerberus of Christian bigotry and hate. Christianity, even from the childhood of its Lord, had laid much superstitious stress on dreams and visions. The dream voice that said, "Flee with the young child into Egypt, for Herod will seek to take his life," again spoke in the long, assinine ear of credulity and ignorance. This time it spake to numbers of the inhabitants of Strasburg, and warned them that it was the will of God that they should kill and stay their Jewish fellow-citizens. Sleeping on your back when you should sleep on your side is apt to give you visions from heaven or—the other place. Sleep while your gastric juice is busy at work on a hard-boiled egg, and the cloudy feet of God or the club feet of Satan are pretty sure to stand on the vantage-ground of that said egg and make terrible the realm of "Chaos and old Night." Who would not be a Christian and be privileged to mistake the promptings of an indigestible radish for a dream message from the lips of the Almighty!

Finding that the Jews had poisoned the water, the Christians, of course, could not drink it. They took to drinking their own fiery liquors which adumbrage so beautifully their own fiery lake. And, reeling drunk (no religionists in the world drink like Christians), they had further visions and monitions from heaven that it was their duty to make short work of the descendants of those who had "slain the Lord of Glory." It was resolved that every Jew must become a Christian, or at once be

* Dr. Russell of the *Times*, writing from the battle field of Sedan.

thrust down to hell at the point of the Christian sword. Sober, rational, discriminating judgment never made a Christian in this world, and never will till the end of time. Fanaticism and Terror made Christianity, and mental and moral laziness prevented her from being unmade. A fanaticism in favour of Christianity could not be got up at Strasburg; but there were plenty of swords and plenty of Christian scoundrels to wield them, and a terror could soon be inaugurated in the interests of the most cut-throat faith that ever cursed the race of man. Full of the spirit of God and the spirit of goblets, the followers of the crucified carpenter prayed and hiccupped and flew to arms—and, woe to the people of Judah!

The Christians have an old-fashioned and silly rite known as baptism—a rite far older than Christianity, and practised at this hour among peoples who, fortunately, have never heard of the mythical Christ and his sanguinary faith. But the Christians laid claim to this incantation and witch-cauldron-looking old rite as if it were peculiarly their own, and as though it were special to them to have an infant squalling with cold water on its face, simultaneously with a Beetle drying his fingers upon a towel and drawing the gibberish appointed for the silly occasion. If you submitted to this rite of baptism, and said you were a Christian, all was well; nothing more was required. In other words, if you were a Jew, you could become a Christian by getting damped and being a liar.

The machinery for turning out damped liars in the interests of Christianity in Strasburg was set vigorously in motion. At the point of the sword the Jews were expelled from their street. The dim sun of a January day in "the year of our Lord" 1349 shone down coldly upon the blue steel of the blades, the tossing plumes, and the glittering helmets and hauberks of a body of guards. Proud was the poise of head erect, inflated chest, and vertical sword. There was something imposing and triumphant in the steady thudding of hoofs, the jangling of stirrups, and the jingling of bridles; but, in bitter contrast and tragically mournful, was the long array that, on foot, followed the prancing chargers

of the cavalry. There was a melancholy *cortège* of nearly 2,000 Jews, of both sexes, and ranging in years between the two extremes that mark the boundaries of human life. The unconscious babe was there, asleep on the breast of its wretched mother; and there was the old man, tottering on his staff, his head whitened with the snows of ninety winters. There was the youth, red-lipped and proud, lithe and elastic as David on the field of Elah;* and there was the dark-skinned girl, graceful as a gazelle, sweet as the rose of Sharon, the girdle round her waist touched by the ripples of her raven hair, and her dark eye languishing with that hidden power and depth of inextinguishable passion which even at this hour contributes so much to the charm and witchery of the maid of Judah, and which often, with me, has cast a retrospective glamour over the sun-embrowned and half-naked Ruth gleaning in the field at Bethlehem Judah, and the sweet and innocent and, perchance, too trustful Mary that legend deemed worthy to be the mother of the Son of God.

On, on, behind the guards, trailed the *cortège*, chained together in groups, with cruel and galling chains cutting into the brittle bones of the senile and abrasing the tender flesh of the child. Behind were a party of soldiers who brought up the rear by cruel prods from their weapons; in front were the guards; and on both sides was the infuriated and howling Christian mob with mud, dead cats, and rotten eggs and horrid saliva, which they squirted through their teeth in the faces and on the garments of the motley and mournful 2,000 who marched up the street, chained and helpless.

At length the long procession reached the gate of one of the principal churchyards of the town. There were the priests with cope and stole and cord, and they held out to their persecuted victims the cross and fixed to it a representation of him of Galilee—forever accursed be his baneful name—the most terrible slogan-cry of blood and agony that ever tingled in the ears of the race of man. Behold the picture, ye that still call yourselves after the name of Christ. There, with spear and jeer

* I Samuel xvii. 2.

and mud and spittle, the people of whom Christ was one are huddled and driven into the churchyard. There are Christ's priests with their crucifixes and their jargon of sacerdotal Latin. There is the howling and murderous rabble that fourteen centuries of Christianity had trained and moulded. There, at one side of the gate, is a vat of water for the damping of the brows of cowards and cravens, in the name of Father, Son, and Ghost. This is the *damping* apparatus. In close proximity is the *drying* apparatus, in the shape of chains and stakes and faggots. There are two alternatives for the Jews of Strasburg : Lie and be damped, or Burn and be damned.

Terrible is death, and to none more terrible than the brave. The thoughtless and the reckless may leap with a shout into the inscrutable gloom. But the more that a man is a man, the more does his foot linger and falter on the line that lies between "this earnest, anxious being" and the world the sound of whose voices and the roll of whose wheels have never yet sent back an echo to the bourne of the earth. The 2,000 of men, women, and children behold inglorious life on the side of a Lie, and death by fire on the side of the Truth. Better is a living dog than a dead lion. About one-half of the unfortunates kissed for bare life the damnable symbol of Christ the carpenter, and had their brows sprinkled with the water from the vat. The other half preferred, to the cool water of the vat, the fiery flame of the stake. No Christ and cowardice for them. The Almighty maker of heaven and earth was strong to save. Whom he loveth he chasteneth. The God who keeps watch over Israel slumbers not, neither does he sleep. The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob was potent, and present to his chosen people as he was in the mystery at Horeb, strong as he was among the lightnings and thunders of Sinai. They strode up to the stake undaunted, and, arrayed in vestments of devouring fire, sublimely triumphant over Christ and his rabble, passed through cinders and ashes to Death and God.

The smug and respectable Christian is as ignorant of how his faith has figured in the guilty past as of the doom that awaits it in the not far distant future. Christianity's very priests are ignorant of what Christianity

really is and has done. This persecution of the Jews of Strasburg because they had originally crucified the Christian and lately poisoned the waters is small and trifling when we look back through the centuries of gloom where nought is distinguishable save the vague outlines of mountains of human corpses and oceans of human blood, lying in a cold and Malébolgean trance under a world-withering legend anent a crucifixion, an upper heaven, and a nether hell. And yet this holocaust at Strasburg is, alone, enough to put the mark of Hecate upon Christianity's brow. Who that bears a human heart does not even yet feel his cheek flush red in the heat of that Strasburg fire, whose ear does not yet catch the sound of the January wind roaring and whistling against the flames, whose nostril is not yet gorged with the stench of burning flesh, and whose eye does not light upon the wind-driven heaps of burnt wood and burnt bones that were drifted over the ground when the fiery agony was over?

O for a Redeemer who would live for the world, not die for it! O for a Sinai whose detonating voice would enact the brotherhood of mankind, the federation of the world! O for a God that would stay forever man's inhumanity to man, and arrange the stars into the motto, PHILADELPHIA, to flame every eve across the heavens from the austral to the boreal pole! O Omnipotence, I, a poor Agnostic, groping on the cis-mortal side of the Infinite, invoke thee to utterly destroy this Christian Frankenstein which we ourselves have created.

God did not make the bowls of providence roll aright. The Jews of Strasburg were not burnt because they had already poisoned the waters, but because, if permitted to live, they might have poisoned them. The Black Death did not commence its ravages in Strasburg till after the Jews had been burnt. Then it broke out with terrible fury, and tens of thousands of the persecutors were huddled off to join the persecuted on the bourn from which no traveller returns. Fresh churchyards had to be opened; and the dead-cart plied its trade till the City of the Dead outnumbered by three to one the City of the Living. By the end of the year, of Strasburg's 48,000 inhabitants only 16,000 remained alive. Many

of these had preserved their lives by fleeing from the doomed city and living in the wilds on roots and herbs, or on grass like Nebuchadnezzar. The ministers of Christ, whose office it was to remain by the sinner's dying bed and shrive the departing soul, fled to the woods and the hills, and let the departing soul look after itself; and the Christian corpses which were not devoured in the streets by dogs and swine and flies were tumbled pell-mell into trenches, uncoffined, unannealed, like rubbish shot from the pestilential streets into the insatiable grave.

In rancorous prejudice, the blood of a Jew (a Jew was and is, hygienically, far superior to a Christian) was believed to be rank, black, putrid, and malodorous. Christ was a Jew, therefore the blood shed upon Calvary for the redemption of the world was black and putrid and unsavoury to the nostrils. But Christian stupidity did not see thus far: from the first it has been built on bigotry and ignorance, and it is only in proportion as breadth of view and intelligence supersede these that it totters to its fall. The pious Christian Queen, Jeanne I., in authorising and regulating a brothel at Avignon for the accommodation of her Christian subjects, enacted that any Jew found on the establishment should be flogged. Thus it was implied that the touch of a Jew was pollution even to a Christian harlot. When executed for the faith of their fathers, and guiltless of any other crime, they were reckoned as too filthy and execrable to be put to death with even the most horrible of Christian criminals. Down till the fourteenth century they were executed separately, and, with the *head downward, hung between two dogs*. So much for what Christianity has done in the way of promoting loving-kindness and the brotherhood of the human race! The Christ that cursed Chorazin because it would not attend to his crazy vapourings was now loyally represented upon the earth by millions of his followers, and who, unlike him, had the *power* to blight society with narrow and bitter intolerance. True, in the long dark night of Christian fervour a voice was now and again heard crying in the wilderness for mercy to the house of Israel; but the best intellects that Christ had were, like himself, on the side of cursing

and persecution : even the learned and subtle St. Thomas Aquinas was no exception to the rule.

What was always of immense importance with the Christian was that, by shedding Jewish blood, he became possessed of Jewish gold. The money the persecuted people had lent to their Christian persecutors was forfeited ; and over their burnt ashes were muttered the sneers of contempt at their cent. per cent. and their lust for money. But what about the lust for money of those who, to possess money, resorted to murder and massacre ? The Jews set the example of amassing capital by trade and commerce—a lesson Christian Europe was slow to learn. Christian Europe obtained capital by murdering those who amassed it, as bees are smoked to death in the autumn that their slayers may possess all that a summer of industry has won. Christian Europe at that time, and for ages after, deemed it mean and sordid to work for money, and the patrician classes to this day look haughtily down upon trade and commerce, and manage, in the fading daylight of the olden times, to live opulently upon their poorer brethren. But these last links of the feudal chain will shortly now be called upon to support a weight that will break them, and there will, at last, be no wine and no bread for him who will neither toil nor spin.

I loathe with an utter loathing the wretch whose soul is balanced on the edge of a sixpence—a mean hen scraping diamonds, and whose talons were made only to scratch a dunghill. But, on the other hand, I have a contempt for the man who has a contempt for money. He simply admits that he has a contempt for the power to do good and to help his brothers and sisters of mankind. It is, perhaps, because I am not a Christian, but I hereby candidly admit that I have no contempt for money, as a means to an end. I recognise in it the Archimedian lever with which, it seems to me, I could move the globe out of its old orbit of folly and crime, and set it to revolving in a new ecliptic of knowledge and happiness. Up to this date I have had only my own pen, and the pens of such volunteers as rank around me, to do good for good's own sake, without a view to monetary reward or literary fame ; for, at present, fighting

in the cohort that I aspire to lead tends to the yew upon talent's grave, not to the laurel upon talent's brow. My colleagues, unlike the Christian priesthood, toil away without fee or reward, and often behind a *nom de plume* that stands between them and ruin. I should have a contempt for my cause and my colleagues had I a contempt for money. With a mere fraction of what the religious bodies possess I should, in less than thirty years, set the bells of the English cathedrals to crashing and jangling out the parting knell of the Christian faith; and I should have England's sons and daughters ready for the reception of a nobler and mightier evangel. For myself I ask nothing. A *farle* of oat-meal cake, a suit of hodden grey, and shelter under a roof of thatch will be sufficient for me. Neither ease nor comfort can fall to the lot of them who have the daring to ask the world for the dynamite to blow it out of its orbit, and send it cycling round the centre of quite another stellar system.

Let those who have the good fortune to possess it "count money by the broken hearts it could heal, by the hungry stomachs it could satisfy, by the hopes deferred that it could fulfil, by the aspirations it could realise, by the sorrows that it could transform into joys, by the uneasy pillows that it could this night turn into softest down, by the tearful eyes that it could dry, by the bitter cares that it could allay, and thou wouldst see how far the incalculable sum of human joy would transcend the petty total of the gold pieces and outweigh the feather-weight of paper which thy fingers can scarcely estimate. When will men learn to count their wealth by such standards as these? When they do, then down with the empty prison and the useless gallows, and let the sunbeams of that bright to-morrow be heralded round the circling orb by the glad cries of the redeemed millions: The earth is mankind's and the fulness thereof!"*

I am weary of the story of ignorance and bigotry and blood. I could fill volumes where I have filled only pages, and from Christian records cull such evidences of superstition and devilry as would seem, to the gentle modern

* Lara.

reader, more like fiendish invention than veritable human history. As a historical student, hundreds of hideous phantasms crowd upon my memory where, under the symbol of the Christian cross, under Christian steel, the racial blood which flowed in the veins of Christ was poured out like water by those who bore his name and regarded him as the son of God. Even in this green England loom up in lurid mists history's bloody tableaux: the creatures of King John tearing out of the Jew's head tooth by tooth, the ship load of fugitive Jews scuttled in the Thames, and the roaring flames at York Castle hissing with Jewish blood shed by Jewish hands, that in death the children of Israel might escape falling into the hands of the English followers of Christ.

There rises before me, too, a baleful vision of bigotry and malice—the charge which was perpetuated from century to century that the Jews, as an integral part of their Passover celebrations, crucified a Christian boy in revengeful mockery of the crucifixion upon Calvary, performing diabolical incantations with his blood. Thousands upon thousands were thrust from the light of the sun into the gloom of the grave on this charge alone. All on the line of the march of the Crusaders I see the Jewish mother slay her girl children, and then herself, to escape a fate that, by the virtuous woman, is more terrible than death. Many a Rebecca rushed into the arms of destruction to escape the embraces of the Christian ravisher.

It was not at all times that Christian hate, to the imputed rank and fetid blood of the Hebrew, formed an effective barrier to Christian lust. Many a Jewish mother and maid lay stabbed by her own hand at the feet of the baffled Christian ravishers. And still the chosen people of God, in their olden faith and lineage, found asylum as in the shelter of a great rock in a weary land. Trampled under foot, their burning flesh tainting the air, and their blood reddening the gutter in every town in Christendom, they were yet mighty in the unconquerable intensity of their ethnology and faith, and from the stake and the dungeon and the fagot they swayed the intellectual and financial sceptre of the world. Scattered over the globe, a mere handful among the Gentiles, much of their ancient

empire is still theirs.* Without the Israelite no great enterprise can be undertaken. The formation of public opinion, the control of the newspaper press of Europe, is largely in Jewish hands; through their monetary advances the tunnel is bored through the rock-ribs of the mountain, and the cannon thunders, and the clashing-steel of battle rings in response to Jewish gold.

* Just as I go to press I find the Jewish Mission Report or the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland admit that Jews are the masters in the money market, and in the universities they hold the premier places. Every tenth educated man in Germany, they were told, would in a few years be a Jew. Not only so, even in politics of European States Jews were eminent; and even in America they found the Jews governors of States, leaders at the bar, and exceedingly successful soldiers.

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