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The Accusation of the Ritual Murder of
St. William of Norwich

1144

MEDIEVAL Christians (and some modern ones, too) believed that Christian children were seized and tortured to death by the Jews during the Passover season. This myth appears in a complete form for the first time in *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich*, a Latin work written about 1173 by Thomas of Monmouth, a contemporary of the events which he relates. The story of the ritual murder of the boy William in 1144 is virtually the first of a long series of such accusations, a series that has not yet come to an end. The significance of these accusations is that by such descriptions of the Jew they have served throughout the ages to create an anti-Jewish mentality. Generations have believed that no Christian child was safe in Jewish hands. Hundreds of Jews have been imprisoned, killed, or burnt alive on this charge. The Papacy has frequently denounced this charge, yet it is equally true that in numerous instances the accusation of ritual murder was not made except with the vigorous support of the local Church authorities.

The author, Thomas of Monmouth, a monk in the Norwich Benedictine monastery, was an exceedingly credulous person. Dr. Jessopp of Norwich, one of the editors of Thomas' work, believes that our monkish author belongs to the class of those who are "deceivers and being deceived."

In the specific case of William of Norwich, the evidence, critically sifted, leads one to believe that he actually existed and that his body was found after he had died a violent death. Everything beyond this, however, is in the realm of speculation.

HOW WILLIAM WAS WONT TO RESORT TO THE JEWS, AND HAVING BEEN
CHID BY HIS OWN PEOPLE FOR SO DOING, HOW HE WITHDREW
HIMSELF FROM THEM

(When therefore he was flourishing in this blessed boyhood of his, and had attained to his eighth year [about 1140], he was entrusted to the skimmers [furriers] to be taught their craft. Gifted

with a teachable disposition and bringing industry to bear upon it, in a short time he far surpassed lads of his own age in the craft aforesaid, and he equalled some who had been his teachers. So leaving the country, drawn by a divine urge he betook himself to the city and lodged with a very famous master of that craft, and some time passed away. He was seldom in the country, but was occupied in the city and sedulously gave himself to the practice of his craft, and thus reached his twelfth year [1144].

Now, while he was staying in Norwich, the Jews who were settled there and required their cloaks or their robes or other garments (whether pledged to them, or their own property) to be repaired, preferred him before all other skimmers. For they esteemed him to be especially fit for their work, either because they had learnt that he was guileless and skilful, or, because attracted to him by their avarice, they thought they could bargain with him for a lower price. Or, as I rather believe, because by the ordering of divine providence he had been predestined to martyrdom from the beginning of time, and gradually step by step was drawn on, and chosen to be made a mock of and to be put to death by the Jews, in scorn of the Lord's Passion, as one of little foresight, and so the more fit for them. [William is to be put to death to mock the crucifixion.]

For I have learnt from certain Jews, who were afterwards converted to the Christian faith, how that at that time they had planned to do this very thing with some Christian, and in order to carry out their malignant purpose, at the beginning of Lent they had made choice of the boy William, being twelve years of age and a boy of unusual innocence.

So it came to pass that when the holy boy, ignorant of the treachery that had been planned, had frequent dealings with the Jews, he was taken to task by Godwin the priest, who had the boy's aunt as his wife, and by a certain Wulward with whom he lodged, and he was prohibited from going in and out among them any more. But the Jews, annoyed at the thwarting of their designs, tried with all their might to patch up a new scheme of wickedness, and all the more vehemently as the day for carrying out the crime they had determined upon drew near, and the victim, which they had thought they had already secured, had slipped out of their wicked hands.

Accordingly, collecting all the cunning of their crafty plots, they found—I am not sure whether he was a Christian or a Jew—a man who was a most treacherous fellow and just the fitting person for carrying out their execrable crime, and with all haste—for their Passover was coming on in three days—they sent him to find out

and bring back with him the victim which, as I said before, had slipped out of their hands.

HOW HE WAS SEDUCED BY THE JEWS' MESSENGER

At the dawn of day, on the Monday [March 20, 1144] after Palm Sunday, that detestable messenger of the Jews set out to execute the business that was committed to him, and at last the boy William, after being searched for with very great care, was found. When he was found, he got round him with cunning wordy tricks, and so deceived him with his lying promises. . . .

HOW ON HIS GOING TO THE JEWS HE WAS TAKEN, MOCKED, AND SLAIN. . . .

Then the boy, like an innocent lamb, was led to the slaughter. He was treated kindly by the Jews at first, and, ignorant of what was being prepared for him, he was kept till the morrow. But on the next day [Tuesday, March 21], which in that year was the Passover for them, after the singing of the hymns appointed for the day in the synagogue, the chiefs of the Jews. . . . suddenly seized hold of the boy William as he was having his dinner and in no fear of any treachery, and illtreated him in various horrible ways. For while some of them held him behind, others opened his mouth and introduced an instrument of torture which is called a teazle [a wooden gag], and, fixing it by straps through both jaws to the back of his neck, they fastened it with a knot as tightly as it could be drawn.

After that, taking a short piece of rope of about the thickness of one's little finger and tying three knots in it at certain distances marked out, they bound round that innocent head with it from the forehead to the back, forcing the middle knot into his forehead and the two others into his temples, the two ends of the rope being most tightly stretched at the back of his head and fastened in a very tight knot. The ends of the rope were then passed round his neck and carried round his throat under his chin, and there they finished off this dreadful engine of torture in a fifth knot.

But not even yet could the cruelty of the torturers be satisfied without adding even more severe pains. Having shaved his head, they stabbed it with countless thorn-points, and made the blood come horribly from the wounds they made. [Jesus had worn a crown of thorns before his death.] And so cruel were they and so eager to inflict pain that it was difficult to say whether they were more cruel or more ingenious in their tortures. For their skill in torturing kept up the strength of their cruelty and ministered arms thereto.

And thus, while these enemies of the Christian name were rioting

in the spirit of malignity around the boy, some of those present adjudged him to be fixed to a cross in mockery of the Lord's Passion, as though they would say: "Even as we condemned the Christ to a shameful death, so let us also condemn the Christian, so that, uniting the Lord and his servant in a like punishment, we may retort upon themselves the pain of that reproach which they impute to us."

Conspiring, therefore, to accomplish the crime of this great and detestable malice, they next laid their blood-stained hands upon the innocent victim, and having lifted him from the ground and fastened him upon the cross, they vied with one another in their efforts to make an end of him.

And we, after enquiring into the matter very diligently, did both find the house, and discovered some most certain marks in it of what had been done there. [This was supposed to be the house of a rich Jew, Eleazar, who was later murdered by order of his debtor, Sir Simon de Novers.] For report goes that there was there instead of a cross a post set up between two other posts, and a beam stretched across the midmost post and attached to the other on either side. And as we afterwards discovered, from the marks of the wounds and of the bands, the right hand and foot had been tightly bound and fastened with cords, but the left hand and foot were pierced with two nails. Now the deed was done in this way, lest it should be discovered, from the presence of nail-marks in both hands and both feet, that the murderers were Jews and not Christians, if eventually the body were found. [Both hands and feet were not nailed lest it look like a crucifixion.]

But while in doing these things they were adding pang to pang and wound to wound, and yet were not able to satisfy their heartless cruelty and their inborn hatred of the Christian name, lo! after all these many and great tortures, they inflicted a frightful wound in his left side, reaching even to his inmost heart, and, as though to make an end of all, they extinguished his mortal life so far as it was in their power. [Jesus was similarly pierced by a lance while nailed to the cross. The chronicler here imitates the Apostle John's narrative.] And since many streams of blood were running down from all parts of his body, then, to stop the blood and to wash and close the wounds, they poured boiling water over him.

Thus then the glorious boy and martyr of Christ, William, dying the death of time in reproach of the Lord's death, but crowned with the blood of a glorious martyrdom, entered into the kingdom of glory on high to live for ever. Whose soul rejoiceth blissfully in heaven among the bright hosts of the saints, and whose body by the

omnipotence of the divine mercy worketh miracles upon earth. . . . [St. William after his death worked many miracles that brought streams of people to his shrine.]

As a proof of the truth and credibility of the matter we now adduce something which we have heard from the lips of Theobald, who was once a Jew, and afterwards a monk. He verily told us that in the ancient writings of his fathers it was written that the Jews, without the shedding of human blood, could neither obtain their freedom, nor could they ever return to their fatherland. [There is no such statement in Jewish law or literature.] Hence it was laid down by them in ancient times that every year they must sacrifice a Christian in some part of the world to the Most High God in scorn and contempt of Christ, that so they might avenge their sufferings on Him; inasmuch as it was because of Christ's death that they had been shut out from their own country, and were in exile as slaves in a foreign land. [The Jews rejected Jesus and were as a result punished by exile from Palestine. Angry, they took revenge by secretly crucifying Christian children—thus Theobald. This libel is reminiscent of Apion, an Alexandrian writer of the first century.]

Wherefore the chief men and Rabbis of the Jews who dwell in Spain assemble together at Narbonne, where the Royal seed [resides], and where they are held in the highest estimation, and they cast lots for all the countries which the Jews inhabit; and whatever country the lot falls upon, its metropolis has to carry out the same method with the other towns and cities, and the place whose lot is drawn has to fulfill the duty imposed by authority. [Lots are cast in Narbonne, France, where Jews had a "king" to decide which city was to seize the Christian victim.]

Now in that year in which we know that William, God's glorious martyr, was slain, it happened that the lot fell upon the Norwich Jews, and all the synagogues in England signified, by letter or by message, their consent that the wickedness should be carried out at Norwich. "I was," said he, "at that time at Cambridge, a Jew among Jews, and the commission of the crime was no secret to me. But in process of time, as I became acquainted with the glorious display of miracles which the divine power carried out through the merits of the blessed martyr William, I became much afraid, and following the dictates of my conscience, I forsook Judaism, and turned to the Christian faith."

These words—observe, the words of a converted Jew—we reckon to be all the truer, in that we received them as uttered by one who

was a converted enemy, and also had been privy to the secrets of our enemies.

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The Ritual Murder Accusation at Blois

May, 1171

IN 1171 the Jews of Blois, France, were accused of having crucified a Christian child during the Passover holidays and of having thrown the corpse into the Loire. This is the first time that the accusation of ritual murder was made in continental Europe. It is difficult to account for its occurrence just at this time unless it is a reverberation of the William of Norwich tale of a generation before. The accusation that Jews require Christian blood for their Passover ritual has been made against the Jews from that time on down to the present day in practically all lands and has cost the lives of hundreds of innocent Jewish men, women, and children.

The following account of the burning of over thirty men and women at Blois is taken from *A Book of Historical Records*, a Hebrew historical work of Ephraim ben Jacob (1132—about 1200), a German Jewish Talmudist and poet of note.

¶What shall we say before God? What shall we speak? How can we justify ourselves? God must have found out our iniquity.

In the year 4931 [1171], evil appeared in France, too, and great destruction in the city of Blois, in which at that time there lived about forty Jews. It happened on that evil day, Thursday, toward evening, that the terror came upon us. A Jew [Isaac bar Eleazar] rode up to water his horse; a common soldier—may he be blotted out of the book of life—was also there watering the horse of his master. The Jew bore on his chest an untanned hide, but one of the corners had become loose and was sticking out of his coat. When, in the gloom, the soldier's horse saw the white side of the hide, it was frightened and sprang back, and it could not be brought to water.

The Christian servant hastened back to his master and said: "Hear, my lord, what a certain Jew did. As I rode behind him toward the river in order to give your horses a drink, I saw him throw a little Christian child, whom the Jews have killed, into the water. When I saw this, I was horrified and hastened back quickly for fear he might kill me too. Even the horse under me was so

frightened by the splash of the water when he threw the child in that it would not drink." The soldier knew that his master would rejoice at the fall of the Jews, because he hated a certain Jewess, influential in the city. He as much as put the following words into his master's mouth: "Now I can wreak my vengeance on that person, on that woman Pulcelina."

The next morning the master rode to the ruler of the city, to the cruel Theobald, son of Theobald—may his unrighteousness and bitter, evil curses fall upon his head. He was a ruler that listened to falsehood, for his servants were wicked. [Theobald V was Count of Blois, 1152–1191. He was called "the Good."]

When he heard this he became enraged and had all the Jews of Blois seized and thrown into prison. But Dame Pulcelina encouraged them all, for she trusted in the affection of the ruler who up to now had been very attached to her. However, his cruel wife, a Jezebel, swayed him, for she also hated Dame Pulcelina. [Theobald's wife was Alix, the daughter of King Louis VII of France.] All the Jews had been put into iron chains except Pulcelina, but the servants of the ruler who watched her would not allow her to speak to him at all, for fear she might get him to change his mind.

The ruler was revolving in his mind all sorts of plans to condemn the Jews, but he did not know how. He had no evidence against them until a priest appeared—may he be destroyed and may his memory be uprooted from the land of the living—who said to the ruler: "Come, I'll advise you how you can condemn them. Command that the servant who saw the Jew throw the child into the river be brought here, and let him be tested by the ordeal in a tank of water to discover if he has told the truth."

The ruler commanded and they brought him, took off his clothes, and put him into a tank filled with holy water to see what would happen. If he floated, his words were true; if he sank, he had lied. Such are the laws of the Christians who judge by ordeals—bad laws and customs by which one cannot live! The Christians arranged it in accordance with their wish so that the servant floated, and they took him out and thus they declared the wicked innocent and the righteous guilty. [In this ordeal the normal procedure appears to have been reversed. Generally the innocent sank and the guilty floated.]

The ruler had started negotiations for a money settlement before the coming of the priest who incited the ruler not to accept any ransom for the dead child. [In the Middle Ages many crimes could be expiated legally through a money payment.] He had sent a Jew

to the Jews [of the other communities] and had asked how much they would give him. The Jews consulted with their Christian friends and also with the Jews in the dungeon, and these latter advised offering only one hundred pounds and in addition their uncollected debts amounting to the sum of one hundred eighty pounds. [The Jews objected to paying high ransoms lest the Christians should find it profitable to imprison Jews.]

In the meantime the priest arrived on the scene, and from this time on the ruler paid no attention to the Jews and did not listen to them, but only to the instruction of the priest. In the day of wrath money could not help them. At the wicked ruler's command they were taken and put into a wooden house around which were placed thornbushes and faggots. As they were led forth they were told: "Save your lives. Leave your religion and turn to us." They mistreated them, beat them, and tortured them, hoping that they would exchange their glorious religion for something worthless, but they refused. Rather did they encourage each other and say to one another: "Persist in the religion of the Almighty!" [A Christian historian of that time says that some did convert.]

At the command of the oppressor they then took the two [Jewish] priests, the pious Rabbi Jehiel, the son of Rabbi David Ha-Kohen, and the just Rabbi Jekutiel Ha-Kohen, the son of Rabbi Judah, and tied them to a single stake in the house where they were to be burned. They were both men of valor, disciples of Rabbi Samuel and Rabbi Jacob [the grandsons of Rashi]. They also tied the hands of Rabbi Judah, the son of Aaron, and then set fire to the faggots. The fire spread to the cords on their hands so that they snapped, and all three came out and spoke to the servants of the oppressor: "The fire has no power over us. Why should we not go free?" [Since these three had withstood the ordeal by fire, they asked to be freed.] The enemy answered: "By our lives! You shall not get out." They kept on struggling to get out but they were pushed back into the house. They came out again and seized hold of a Christian to drag him along with them back onto the pyre. When they were right at the fire the Christians pulled themselves together, rescued the Christian from their hands, killed them with their swords, and then threw them into the fire. Nevertheless they were not burnt, neither they nor all those thirty-one persons. Only their souls were released by the fire; their bodies remained intact. When the Christians saw it they were amazed and said to one another: "Truly these are saints."

A certain Jew by the name of Rabbi Baruch, the son of David,

a priest, was there and saw all this at that time with his own eyes. He lived in the territory of that ruler and had come there to arrange terms for the Jews of Blois, but, because of our sins, he had no success. However, a settlement was made by him for one thousand pounds to save the other Jews of that accursed ruler. He also saved the scrolls of the Torah and the rest of their books. This happened in the year 4931 on Wednesday, the 20th of the month of Siwan [May 26, 1171]. This day ought to be established as a fast day like the Fast of Gedaliah. [The assassination of Gedaliah, who was governor of Judah after the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.E., is still observed on the 3rd of Tishri.] All these facts were written down by the Jews of Orleans—a city close by that of the martyrs—and made known to the teacher, our master Rabbi Jacob [ben Rabbi Meir, Rashi's grandson, the greatest French rabbi of his day. He died in the third week after the Blois burning].

It was also reported in that letter that as the flames mounted high the martyrs began to sing in unison a melody that began softly but ended with a full voice. The Christian people came and asked us: "What kind of a song is this for we have never heard such a sweet melody?" We knew it well for it was the song: "It is incumbent upon us to praise the Lord of all." [This prayer, the *Alenu*, or Adoration, now recited daily, was then a New Year's prayer with a special melody.]

O daughters of Israel, weep for the thirty-one souls that were burnt for the sanctification of the Name, and let your brothers, the entire house of Israel, bewail the burning.

Because of our sins these men were not even given a Jewish burial but were left at the bottom of the hill on the very spot where they had been burnt. It was only later the Jews came and buried their bones. There were about thirty-two holy souls who offered themselves as a sacrifice to their Creator; and God smelled the sweet savor, for him whom He has chosen does He cause to come nigh unto Him. [The number of those burnt varies in different sources. One source lists a new-born babe.]

Of their own free will all the communities of France, England, and the Rhineland observed Wednesday, the 20th of Siwan, 4931, as a day of mourning and fasting. This was also the command of our great teacher Jacob, the son of Rabbi Meir, who wrote letters to them informing them that it was proper to fix this day as a fast for all our people, and that it must be greater even than the Fast of Gedaliah ben Ahikam; it was to be like the Day of Atonement [a twenty-four hour fast].

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The York Riots
England, March 16-17, 1190

THE religious zeal of the English people was fired by the Third Crusade (1189-1192) in which their king, Richard the Lion-Hearted (1189-1199), played a leading part. The coronation of Richard in September, 1189 was the occasion for a mob attack on London Jewry, and from the capital city the mob spirit spread slowly north in February-March, 1190 till it reached the ancient city of York. Here the gullible and bigoted lower estates were utilized by a band of unscrupulous nobles to wipe out the Jewish community to whom the nobles were heavily indebted. The plot succeeded, the community was destroyed, and, for the time being at least, the nobles were free of their creditors.

The following account, because of its richness of detail and because it is typical, is particularly valuable for a study of the medieval technique of wiping out a Jewish community. It is part of the *History of English Affairs* written in Latin by the monk William of Newburgh (1136-about 1201). William, who was canon of the Augustine priory at Newburgh in Yorkshire, describes conditions which he must have known at first hand, and he wrote this work, at the latest, within ten years after the events had transpired. It was the decided opinion of this monk, who is a faithful historian and viewed events from a lofty moral height, that greed for booty was the real motive of the riots in York.

¶The zeal of the Christians against the Jews in England . . . broke out fiercely. [Fanaticism was aroused by the Third Crusade, now beginning.] It was not indeed sincere, that is, solely for the sake of the faith, but in rivalry for the luck of others or from envy of their good fortune. Bold and greedy men thought that they were doing an act pleasing to God, while they robbed or destroyed rebels against Christ and carried out the work of their own cupidity with savage joy and without any, or only the slightest, scruple of conscience—God's justice, indeed, by no means approving such deeds but cunningly ordaining that in this way the insolence of that perfidious people might be checked and their blaspheming tongues curbed. . . . [The perfidy of the Jews lay in rejecting Jesus.]

The men of York were restrained neither by fear of the hot-tempered King [Richard I] nor the vigor of the laws, nor by feelings of humanity, from satiating their fury with the total ruin of their perfidious fellow-citizens and from rooting out the whole race in their city. And as this was a very remarkable occurrence, it ought to be transmitted to posterity at greater length. . . .

When the King had established himself across the sea [Richard the Lion-Hearted was back in France, December, 1189, preparing his crusade], many of the province of York plotted against the Jews, not being able to suffer their opulence, when they themselves were in need, and, without any scruple of Christian conscience, thirsting for the blood of infidels from greed for booty. The leaders of this daring plan were some of the nobles [such as the Percy family] indebted to the impious usurers in large sums. Some of these, having given up their estates to them [the Jews] for the money they had received, were now oppressed by great want; some, bound by their own sureties, were pressed by the exactions of the Treasury to satisfy the royal usurers. [The state helped the Jews collect their debts and took a large part for itself.]

Some, too, of those who had taken the cross and were on the point of starting for Jerusalem, were more easily induced to defray the expenses of the journey undertaken for the Lord's sake out of the booty taken from the Lord's enemies, especially as they had little fear of being questioned for the deed when they had started on their journey.

One stormy night no small part of the city became on fire either by chance or, as is believed, by arson perpetrated by the conspirators, so that the citizens were occupied with their own houses in fear of the fire spreading. There was nothing, therefore, in the way of the robbers, and an armed band of the conspirators, with great violence and tools prepared for the purpose, burst into the house of the before-mentioned Benedict, who had miserably died at London as was mentioned above. [This wealthy Jew of York was beaten and forced by a mob in London to become a Christian, 1189. He died on his way back home.] There his widow and children with many others dwelt; all of those who were in it were slain and the roof put on fire. [Some of Benedict's sons, however, were living in 1191-1192.]

And while the fire gloomily increased in strength, the robbers seized their booty and left the burning house, and by help of the darkness retired unobserved and heavy laden. The Jews, and especially their leader Joce, in consternation at this misdeed, having begged the assistance of the Warden of the royal castle, carried into

it huge weights of their monies equal to royal treasures, and took more vigilant guard of the rest at their houses.

But after a few days these nocturnal thieves returned with greater confidence and boldness and many joined them; they boldly besieged Joce's house which rivalled a noble citadel in the scale and stoutness of its construction. [Jews were among the first in England to build private houses of stone.] At length they captured and pillaged it, and then set it on fire after having removed by sword or fire all those whom an unlucky chance had kept in it. For Joce a little before had wisely anticipated this mischance and had removed with his wife and children into the castle, and the rest of the Jews did the same, only a few remaining outside as victims.

When the robbers had departed with so great a reward of their daring, a promiscuous mob rushed up at break of day and tore to pieces the furniture which remained from the spoilers and the fire. Then at length those who had personally held the Jews in hatred, no longer having any fear of public rigor, began to rage against them openly and with abundant license. No longer content with their substance, they gave to all found outside the castle the option of sacred baptism or the extreme penalty. Thereupon some were baptized and feignedly joined Christianity to escape death. But those who refused to accept the sacrament of life, even as a matter of pretense, were butchered without mercy.

While all this was happening the multitude who had escaped into the castle seemed to be in safety. But the Warden of the castle, having gone out on some business, when he wished to return was not readmitted by the trembling multitude, uncertain in whom to trust and fearing that perchance his fidelity to them was tottering, and that being bribed he was about to give up to their enemies those whom he should protect. But he immediately went to the sheriff of the county [John Marshal] who happened to be at York with a large body of the county soldiers, and complained to him that the Jews had cheated him out of the castle entrusted to him. The sheriff became indignant and raged against the Jews. The leaders of the conspiracy fanned his fury, alleging that the timid precaution of those poor wretches was an insolent seizure of the royal castle and would cause injury to our lord, the King. And when many declared that such traitors were to be got at by some means or another, and the royal castle taken out of their hands, the sheriff ordered the people to be summoned and the castle to be besieged.

The irrevocable word went forth, the zeal of the Christian folk was inflamed, immense masses of armed men both from the town and

the country were clustered round the citadel. Then the sheriff, struck with regret at his order, tried in vain to recall it and wished to prohibit the siege of the castle. But he could by no influence of reason or authority keep back their inflamed minds from carrying out what they had begun. It is true the nobles of the city and the more weighty citizens, fearing the danger of a royal movement, cautiously declined such a great transgression. But the whole of the work-people and all the youth of the town and a large number of the country folk, together with soldiers not a few, came with such alacrity and joined in the cruel business as if each man was seeking his own gain. And there were not lacking many clergymen, among whom a certain hermit seemed more vehement than the rest. . . .

Accordingly the Jews were besieged in the royal tower [probably Clifford's Tower, the ruins of which may still be seen], and the besieged lacked a sufficient supply of provisions, and would have been quickly starved out by hunger even if no one attacked them from without. But they did not have either a sufficient stock of arms for their own safety or for repelling the enemy. Naturally they held back the threatening enemy with stones taken from the inner wall. The tower was stoutly besieged for several days, and at length the machines which had been prepared for the purpose were brought into position. . . .

When the machines were thus moved into position, the taking of the tower became certain, and it was no longer doubtful that the fatal hour was nearing for the besieged. On the following night the besiegers were quiet, rejoicing in the certainty of their approaching victory. But the Jews were brave, and braced up by their very despair, had little rest, discussing what they should do in such an extremity. . . .

[At the advice of their rabbi, the noted Yomtob of Joigny, many killed themselves, after first setting fire to the tower. Those who were left offered to convert, but were mercilessly slaughtered by the aroused mob.]

The look of things in the city was at that time horrid and nauseous, and round the citadel were lying scattered the corpses of so many unfortunates still unburied. But when the slaughter was over, the conspirators immediately went to the Cathedral and caused the terrified guardians, with violent threats, to hand over the records of the debts placed there by which the Christians were oppressed by the royal Jewish usurers. Thereupon they destroyed these records of profane avarice in the middle of the church with the sacred fires to release both themselves and many others. Which being done, those

of the conspirators who had taken the cross went on their proposed journey before any inquest; but the rest remained in the country in fear of an inquiry. Such were the things that happened at York at the time of the Lord's Passion, that is, the day before Palm Sunday. . . . [The massacre occurred Friday night and Saturday morning, March 16-17, 1190.]

The deeds done at York were soon carried across the sea to the prince who had guaranteed peace and security to the Jews in his kingdom after the rising at London. [After a mob had killed many Jews in London in September, 1189, Richard issued writs guaranteeing security to the Jews.] He is indignant and in a rage both for the insult to his royal majesty and for the great loss to the treasury, for to the treasury belonged whatever the Jews, who are known to be the royal usurers, seem to possess in the way of goods. Soon giving a mandate to [William of Longchamp, d. 1197,] the Bishop of Ely, the Royal Chancellor and Regent of the Kingdom, that such a great deed of audacity should be punished with a suitable revenge, the said Bishop, a man of fierce mind and eager for glory, came to the city of York about Ascension day [May 3, 1190] with an army, and began an inquiry to the great fear of the burgesses. But the chief and best known actors of the deeds done, leaving everything they had in the country, fled before his face to Scotland. But as the citizens, persistently declared that the deeds for which they were incurring his displeasure had not been done with their wish or counsel or aid, and that with slender resources they could not prevent the unbridled attack of an undisciplined mob, at length the Chancellor, having imposed a pecuniary mulct on each according to the income of his fortune, received satisfaction for not punishing them more severely. [The citizens of York are fined for not keeping the peace.]

But the promiscuous and numberless mob, whose untrained zeal had been the principal cause of the deed, could not be summoned or brought to justice. And so the Chancellor, removing him [the sheriff] who had had the administration of the county, went off without shedding blood since he could not carry out the King's command more efficaciously. Nor has anyone been brought to punishment for that slaughter of the Jews up to this day.

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