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A Distant Mirror

The Calamitous 14th Century

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Chapter 5

"This Is the End of the World": The Black Death

In October 1347, two months after the fall of Calais, Genoese trading ships put into the harbor of Messina in Sicily with dead and dying men at the oars. The ships had come from the Black Sea port of Caffa (now Feodosiya) in the Crimea, where the Genoese maintained a trading post. The diseased sailors showed strange black swellings about the size of an egg or an apple in the armpits and groin. The swellings oozed blood and pus and were followed by spreading boils and black blotches on the skin from internal bleeding. The sick suffered severe pain and died quickly within five days of the first symptoms. As the disease spread, other symptoms of continuous fever and spitting of blood appeared instead of the swellings or buboes. These victims coughed and sweated heavily and died even more quickly, within three days or less, sometimes in 24 hours. In both types everything that issued from the body—breath, sweat, blood from the buboes and lungs, bloody urine, and blood-blackened excrement—smelled foul. Depression and despair accompanied the physical symptoms, and before the end "death is seen seated on the face."

The disease was bubonic plague, present in two forms: one that infected the bloodstream, causing the buboes and internal bleeding, and was spread by contact; and a second, more virulent pneumonic type that infected the lungs and was spread by respiratory infection. The presence of both at once cause the high mortality and speed of contagion. So lethal was the disease that cases were known of persons going to bed well and dying before they woke, of doctors catching the illness at a bedside and dying before the patient. So rapidly did it spread from one to another that to a French physician, Simon de

Covino, it seemed as if one sick person "could infect the whole world." The malignity of the pestilence appeared more terrible because its victims knew no prevention and no remedy.

The physical suffering of the disease and its aspect of evil mystery were expressed in a strange Welsh lament which saw "death coming into our midst like black smoke, a plague which cuts off the young, a rootless phantom which has no mercy for fair countenance. Woe is me of the shilling in the armpit! It is seething, terrible . . . a head that gives pain and causes a loud cry . . . a painful angry knob . . . Great is its seething like a burning cinder . . . a grievous thing of ashy color." Its eruption is ugly like the "seeds of black peas, broken fragments of brittle sea-coal . . . the early ornaments of black death, cinders of the peelings of the cockle weed, a mixed multitude, a black plague like halfpence, like berries. . . ."

Rumors of a terrible plague supposedly arising in China and spreading through Tartary (Central Asia) to India and Persia, Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, and all of Asia Minor had reached Europe in 1346. They told of a death toll so devastating that all of India was said to be depopulated, whole territories covered by dead bodies, other areas with no one left alive. As added up by Pope Clement VI at Avignon, the total of reported dead reached 23,840,000. In the absence of a concept of contagion, no serious alarm was felt in Europe until the trading ships brought their black burden of pestilence into Messina while other infected ships from the Levant carried it to Genoa and Venice.

By January 1348 it penetrated France via Marseille, and North Africa via Tunis. Shipborne along coasts and navigable rivers, it spread westward from Marseille through the ports of Languedoc to Spain and northward up the Rhône to Avignon, where it arrived in March. It reached Narbonne, Montpellier, Carcassonne, and Toulouse between February and May, and at the same time in Italy spread to Rome and Florence and their hinterlands. Between June and August it reached Bordeaux, Lyon, and Paris, spread to Burgundy and Normandy, and crossed the Channel from Normandy into southern England. From Italy during the same summer it crossed the Alps into Switzerland and reached eastward to Hungary.

In a given area the plague accomplished its kill within four to six months and then faded, except in the larger cities, where, rooting into the close-quartered population, it abated during the winter, only to reappear in spring and rage for another six months.

In 1349 it resumed in Paris, spread to Picardy, Flanders, and the Low Countries, and from England to Scotland and Ireland as well as to

Norway, where a ghost ship with a cargo of wool and a dead crew drifted offshore until it ran aground near Bergen. From there the plague passed into Sweden, Denmark, Prussia, Iceland, and as far as Greenland. Leaving a strange pocket of immunity in Bohemia, and Russia unattacked until 1351, it had passed from most of Europe by mid-1350. Although the mortality rate was erratic, ranging from one fifth in some places to nine tenths or almost total elimination in others, the overall estimate of modern demographers has settled—for the area extending from India to Iceland—around the same figure expressed in Froissart's casual words: "a third of the world died." His estimate, the common one at the time, was not an inspired guess but a borrowing of St. John's figure for mortality from plague in Revelation, the favorite guide to human affairs of the Middle Ages.

A third of Europe would have meant about 20 million deaths. No one knows in truth how many died. Contemporary reports were an awed impression, not an accurate count. In crowded Avignon, it was said, 400 died daily; 7,000 houses emptied by death were shut up; a single graveyard received 11,000 corpses in six weeks; half the city's inhabitants reportedly died, including 9 cardinals or one third of the total, and 70 lesser prelates. Watching the endlessly passing death carts, chroniclers let normal exaggeration take wings and put the Avignon death toll at 62,000 and even at 120,000, although the city's total population was probably less than 50,000.

When graveyards filled up, bodies at Avignon were thrown into the Rhône until mass burial pits were dug for dumping the corpses. In London in such pits corpses piled up in layers until they overflowed. Everywhere reports speak of the sick dying too fast for the living to bury. Corpses were dragged out of homes and left in front of doorways. Morning light revealed new piles of bodies. In Florence the dead were gathered up by the Compagnia della Misericordia—founded in 1244 to care for the sick—whose members wore red robes and hoods masking the face except for the eyes. When their efforts failed, the dead lay putrid in the streets for days at a time. When no coffins were to be had, the bodies were laid on boards, two or three at once, to be carried to graveyards or common pits. Families dumped their own relatives into the pits, or buried them so hastily and thinly "that dogs dragged them forth and devoured their bodies."

Amid accumulating death and fear of contagion, people died without last rites and were buried without prayers, a prospect that terrified the last hours of the stricken. A bishop in England gave permission to laymen to make confession to each other as was done by the Apostles, "or if no man is present then even to a woman," and if no priest could

be found to administer extreme unction, "then faith must suffice." Clement VI found it necessary to grant remissions of sin to all who died of the plague because so many were unattended by priests. "And no bells tolled," wrote a chronicler of Siena, "and nobody wept no matter what his loss because almost everyone expected death. . . . And people said and believed, 'This is the end of the world.' "

In Paris, where the plague lasted through 1349, the reported death rate was 800 a day, in Pisa 500, in Vienna 500 to 600. The total dead in Paris numbered 50,000 or half the population. Florence, weakened by the famine of 1347, lost three to four fifths of its citizens, Venice two thirds, Hamburg and Bremen, though smaller in size, about the same proportion. Cities, as centers of transportation, were more likely to be affected than villages, although once a village was infected, its death rate was equally high. At Givry, a prosperous village in Burgundy of 1,200 to 1,500 people, the parish register records 615 deaths in the space of fourteen weeks, compared to an average of thirty deaths a year in the previous decade. In three villages of Cambridgeshire, manorial records show a death rate of 47 percent, 57 percent, and in one case 70 percent. When the last survivors, too few to carry on, moved away, a deserted village sank back into the wilderness and disappeared from the map altogether, leaving only a grass-covered ghostly outline to show where mortals once had lived.

In enclosed places such as monasteries and prisons, the infection of one person usually meant that of all, as happened in the Franciscan convents of Carcassonne and Marseille, where every inmate without exception died. Of the 140 Dominicans at Montpellier only seven survived. Petrarch's brother Gherardo, member of a Carthusian monastery, buried the prior and 34 fellow monks one by one, sometimes three a day, until he was left alone with his dog and fled to look for a place that would take him in. Watching every comrade die, men in such places could not but wonder whether the strange peril that filled the air had not been sent to exterminate the human race. In Kilkenny, Ireland, Brother John Clyn of the Friars Minor, another monk left alone among dead men, kept a record of what had happened lest "things which should be remembered perish with time and vanish from the memory of those who come after us." Sensing "the whole world, as it were, placed within the grasp of the Evil One," and waiting for death to visit him too, he wrote, "I leave parchment to continue this work, if perchance any man survive and any of the race of Adam escape this pestilence and carry on the work which I have begun." Brother John, as noted by another hand, died of the pestilence, but he foiled oblivion.

The largest cities of Europe, with populations of about 100,000, were Paris and Florence, Venice and Genoa. At the next level, with more than 50,000, were Ghent and Bruges in Flanders, Milan, Bologna, Rome, Naples, and Palermo, and Cologne. London hovered below 50,000, the only city in England except York with more than 10,000. At the level of 20,000 to 50,000 were Bordeaux, Toulouse, Montpellier, Marseille, and Lyon in France, Barcelona, Seville, and Toledo in Spain, Siena, Pisa, and other secondary cities in Italy, and the Hanseatic trading cities of the Empire. The plague raged through them all, killing anywhere from one third to two thirds of their inhabitants. Italy, with a total population of 10 to 11 million, probably suffered the heaviest toll. Following the Florentine bankruptcies, the crop failures and workers' riots of 1346–47, the revolt of Cola di Rienzi that plunged Rome into anarchy, the plague came as the peak of successive calamities. As if the world were indeed in the grasp of the Evil One, its first appearance on the European mainland in January 1348 coincided with a fearsome earthquake that carved a path of wreckage from Naples up to Venice. Houses collapsed, church towers toppled, villages were crushed, and the destruction reached as far as Germany and Greece. Emotional response, dulled by horrors, underwent a kind of atrophy epitomized by the chronicler who wrote, "And in these days was burying without sorrowe and wedding without friendschippe."

In Siena, where more than half the inhabitants died of the plague, work was abandoned on the great cathedral, planned to be the largest in the world, and never resumed, owing to loss of workers and master masons and "the melancholy and grief" of the survivors. The cathedral's truncated transept still stands in permanent witness to the sweep of death's scythe. Agnolo di Tura, a chronicler of Siena, recorded the fear of contagion that froze every other instinct. "Father abandoned child, wife husband, one brother another," he wrote, "for this plague seemed to strike through the breath and sight. And so they died. And no one could be found to bury the dead for money or friendship. . . . And I, Angolo di Tura, called the Fat, buried my five children with my own hands, and so did many others likewise."

There were many to echo his account of inhumanity and few to balance it, for the plague was not the kind of calamity that inspired mutual help. Its loathsomeness and deadliness did not herd people together in mutual distress, but only prompted their desire to escape each other. "Magistrates and notaries refused to come and make the wills of the dying," reported a Franciscan friar of Piazza in Sicily; what was worse, "even the priests did not come to hear their confessions." A clerk of the Archbishop of Canterbury reported the same of English

priests who "turned away from the care of their benefices from fear of death." Cases of parents deserting children and children their parents were reported across Europe from Scotland to Russia. The calamity chilled the hearts of men, wrote Boccaccio in his famous account of the plague in Florence that serves as introduction to the *Decameron*. "One man shunned another . . . kinsfolk held aloof, brother was forsaken by brother, oftentimes husband by wife; nay, what is more, and scarcely to be believed, fathers and mothers were found to abandon their own children to their fate, untended, unvisited as if they had been strangers." Exaggeration and literary pessimism were common in the 14th century, but the Pope's physician, Guy de Chauliac, was a sober, careful observer who reported the same phenomenon: "A father did not visit his son, nor the son his father. Charity was dead."

Yet not entirely. In Paris, according to the chronicler Jean de Venette, the nuns of the Hôtel Dieu or municipal hospital, "having no fear of death, tended the sick with all sweetness and humility." New nuns repeatedly took the places of those who died, until the majority "many times renewed by death now rest in peace with Christ as we may piously believe."

When the plague entered northern France in July 1348, it settled first in Normandy and, checked by winter, gave Picardy a deceptive interim until the next summer. Either in mourning or warning, black flags were flown from church towers of the worst-stricken villages of Normandy. "And in that time," wrote a monk of the abbey of Fourcarment, "the mortality was so great among the people of Normandy that those of Picardy mocked them." The same unneighborly reaction was reported of the Scots, separated by a winter's immunity from the English. Delighted to hear of the disease that was scourging the "southrons," they gathered forces for an invasion, "laughing at their enemies." Before they could move, the savage mortality fell upon them too, scattering some in death and the rest in panic to spread the infection as they fled.

In Picardy in the summer of 1349 the pestilence penetrated the castle of Coucy to kill Enguerrand's mother, Catherine, and her new husband. Whether her nine-year-old son escaped by chance or was perhaps living elsewhere with one of his guardians is unrecorded. In nearby Amiens, tannery workers, responding quickly to losses in the labor force, combined to bargain for higher wages. In another place villagers were seen dancing to drums and trumpets, and on being asked the reason, answered that, seeing their neighbors die day by day while their village remained immune, they believed they could keep the plague from entering "by the jollity that is in us. That is why we

dance." Further north in Tournai on the border of Flanders, Gilles li Muisis, Abbot of St. Martin's, kept one of the epidemic's most vivid accounts. The passing bells rang all day and all night, he recorded, because sextons were anxious to obtain their fees while they could. Filled with the sound of mourning, the city became oppressed by fear, so that the authorities forbade the tolling of bells and the wearing of black and restricted funeral services to two mourners. The silencing of funeral bells and of criers' announcements of deaths was ordained by most cities. Siena imposed a fine on the wearing of mourning clothes by all except widows.

Flight was the chief recourse of those who could afford it or arrange it. The rich fled to their country places like Boccaccio's young patricians of Florence, who settled in a pastoral palace "removed on every side from the roads" with "wells of cool water and vaults of rare wines." The urban poor died in their burrows, "and only the stench of their bodies informed neighbors of their death." That the poor were more heavily afflicted than the rich was clearly remarked at the time, in the north as in the south. A Scottish chronicler, John of Fordun, stated flatly that the pest "attacked especially the meaner sort and common people—seldom the magnates." Simon de Covino of Montpellier made the same observation. He ascribed it to the misery and want and hard lives that made the poor more susceptible, which was half the truth. Close contact and lack of sanitation was the unrecognized other half. It was noticed too that the young died in greater proportion than the old; Simon de Covino compared the disappearance of youth to the withering of flowers in the fields.

In the countryside peasants dropped dead on the roads, in the fields, in their houses. Survivors in growing helplessness fell into apathy, leaving ripe wheat uncut and livestock untended. Oxen and asses, sheep and goats, pigs and chickens ran wild and they too, according to local reports, succumbed to the pest. English sheep, bearers of the precious wool, died throughout the country. The chronicler Henry Knighton, canon of Leicester Abbey, reported 5,000 dead in one field alone, "their bodies so corrupted by the plague that neither beast nor bird would touch them," and spreading an appalling stench. In the Austrian Alps wolves came down to prey upon sheep and then, "as if alarmed by some invisible warning, turned and fled back into the wilderness." In remote Dalmatia bolder wolves descended upon a plague-stricken city and attacked human survivors. For want of herdsmen, cattle strayed from place to place and died in hedgerows and ditches. Dogs and cats fell like the rest.

The dearth of labor held a fearful prospect because the 14th century lived close to the annual harvest both for food and for next year's seed. "So few servants and laborers were left," wrote Knighton, "that no one knew where to turn for help." The sense of a vanishing future created a kind of dementia of despair. A Bavarian chronicler of Neuberg on the Danube recorded that "Men and women . . . wandered around as if mad" and let their cattle stray "because no one had any inclination to concern themselves about the future." Fields went uncultivated, spring seed unsown. Second growth with nature's awful energy crept back over cleared land, dikes crumbled, salt water reinvaded and soured the lowlands. With so few hands remaining to restore the work of centuries, people felt, in Walsingham's words, that "the world could never again regain its former prosperity."

Though the death rate was higher among the anonymous poor, the known and the great died too. King Alfonso XI of Castile was the only reigning monarch killed by the pest, but his neighbor King Pedro of Aragon lost his wife, Queen Leonora, his daughter Marie, and a niece in the space of six months. John Cantacuzene, Emperor of Byzantium, lost his son. In France the lame Queen Jeanne and her daughter-in-law Bonne de Luxemburg, wife of the Dauphin, both died in 1349 in the same phase that took the life of Enguerrand's mother. Jeanne, Queen of Navarre, daughter of Louis X, was another victim. Edward III's second daughter, Joanna, who was on her way to marry Pedro, the heir of Castile, died in Bordeaux. Women appear to have been more vulnerable than men, perhaps because, being more housebound, they were more exposed to fleas. Boccaccio's mistress Fiammetta, illegitimate daughter of the King of Naples, died, as did Laura, the beloved—whether real or fictional—of Petrarch. Reaching out to us in the future, Petrarch cried, "Oh happy posterity who will not experience such abysmal woe and will look upon our testimony as a fable."

In Florence Giovanni Villani, the great historian of his time, died at 68 in the midst of an unfinished sentence: ". . . *e dure questo pistolenza fino a* . . . (in the midst of this pestilence there came to an end . . .)." Siena's master painters, the brothers Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti, whose names never appear after 1348, presumably perished in the plague, as did Andrea Pisano, architect and sculptor of Florence. William of Ockham and the English mystic Richard Rolle of Hampole both disappear from mention after 1349. Francisco Datini, merchant of Prato, lost both his parents and two siblings. Curious sweeps of mortality afflicted certain bodies of merchants in London. All eight wardens of the Company of Cutters, all six wardens of the Hatters, and four wardens of the Goldsmiths died before July 1350. Sir John Pulteney,

master draper and four times Mayor of London, was a victim, likewise Sir John Montgomery, Governor of Calais.

Among the clergy and doctors the mortality was naturally high because of the nature of their professions. Out of 24 physicians in Venice, 20 were said to have lost their lives in the plague, although, according to another account, some were believed to have fled or to have shut themselves up in their houses. At Montpellier, site of the leading medieval medical school, the physician Simon de Covino reported that, despite the great number of doctors, "hardly one of them escaped." In Avignon, Guy de Chauliac confessed that he performed his medical visits only because he dared not stay away for fear of infamy, but "I was in continual fear." He claimed to have contracted the disease but to have cured himself by his own treatment; if so, he was one of the few who recovered.

Clerical mortality varied with rank. Although the one-third toll of cardinals reflects the same proportion as the whole, this was probably due to their concentration in Avignon. In England, in strange and almost sinister procession, the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Stratford, died in August 1348, his appointed successor died in May 1349, and the next appointee three months later, all three within a year. Despite such weird vagaries, prelates in general managed to sustain a higher survival rate than the lesser clergy. Among bishops the deaths have been estimated at about one in twenty. The loss of priests, even if many avoided their fearful duty of attending the dying, was about the same as among the population as a whole.

Government officials, whose loss contributed to the general chaos, found, on the whole, no special shelter. In Siena four of the nine members of the governing oligarchy died, in France one third of the royal notaries, in Bristol 15 out of the 52 members of the Town Council or almost one third. Tax-collecting obviously suffered, with the result that Philip VI was unable to collect more than a fraction of the subsidy granted him by the Estates in the winter of 1347–48.

Lawlessness and debauchery accompanied the plague as they had during the great plague of Athens of 430 B.C., when according to Thucydides, men grew bold in the indulgence of pleasure: "For seeing how the rich died in a moment and those who had nothing immediately inherited their property, they reflected that life and riches were alike transitory and they resolved to enjoy themselves while they could." Human behavior is timeless. When St. John had his vision of plague in Revelation, he knew from some experience or race memory that those who survived "repented not of the work of their hands. . . . Neither

repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

Ignorance of the cause augmented the sense of horror. Of the real carriers, rats and fleas, the 14th century had no suspicion, perhaps because they were so familiar. Fleas, though a common household nuisance, are not once mentioned in contemporary plague writings, and rats only incidentally, although folklore commonly associated them with pestilence. The legend of the Pied Piper arose from an outbreak of 1284. The actual plague bacillus, *Pasturella pestis*, remained undiscovered for another 500 years. Living alternately in the stomach of the flea and the bloodstream of the rat who was the flea's host, the bacillus in its bubonic form was transferred to humans and animals by the bite of either rat or flea. It traveled by virtue of *Rattus rattus*, the small medieval black rat that lived on ships, as well as by the heavier brown or sewer rat. What precipitated the turn of the bacillus from innocuous to virulent form is unknown, but the occurrence is now believed to have taken place not in China but somewhere in central Asia and to have spread along the caravan routes. Chinese origin was a mistaken notion of the 14th century based on real but belated reports of huge death tolls in China from drought, famine, and pestilence which have since been traced to the 1330s, too soon to be responsible for the plague that appeared in India in 1346.

The phantom enemy had no name. Called the Black Death only in later recurrences, it was known during the first epidemic simply as the Pestilence or Great Mortality. Reports from the East, swollen by fearful imaginings, told of strange tempests and "sheets of fire" mingled with huge hailstones that "slew almost all," or a "vast rain of fire" that burned up men, beasts, stones, trees, villages, and cities. In another version, "foul blasts of wind" from the fires carried the infection to Europe "and now as some suspect it cometh round the seacoast." Accurate observation in this case could not make the mental jump to ships and rats because no idea of animal- or insect-borne contagion existed.

The earthquake was blamed for releasing sulfurous and foul fumes from the earth's interior, or as evidence of a titanic struggle of planets and oceans causing waters to rise and vaporize until fish died in masses and corrupted the air. All these explanations had in common a factor of poisoned air, of miasmas and thick, stinking mists traced to every kind of natural or imagined agency from stagnant lakes to malign conjunction of the planets, from the hand of the Evil One to the wrath of God. Medical thinking, trapped in the theory of astral influences,

stressed air as the communicator of disease, ignoring sanitation or visible carriers. The existence of two carriers confused the trail, the more so because the flea could live and travel independently of the rat for as long as a month and, if infected by the particularly virulent septicemic form of the bacillus, could infect humans without reinfecting itself from the rat. The simultaneous presence of the pneumonic form of the disease, which was indeed communicated through the air, blurred the problem further.

The mystery of the contagion was "the most terrible of all the terrors," as an anonymous Flemish cleric in Avignon wrote to a correspondent in Bruges. Plagues had been known before, from the plague of Athens (believed to have been typhus) to the prolonged epidemic of the 6th century A.D., to the recurrence of sporadic outbreaks in the 12th and 13th centuries, but they had left no accumulated store of understanding. That the infection came from contact with the sick or with their houses, clothes, or corpses was quickly observed but not comprehended. Gentile da Foligno, renowned physician of Perugia and doctor of medicine at the universities of Bologna and Padua, came close to respiratory infection when he surmised that poisonous material was "communicated by means of air breathed out and in." Having no idea of microscopic carriers, he had to assume that the air was corrupted by planetary influences. Planets, however, could not explain the ongoing contagion. The agonized search for an answer gave rise to such theories as transference by sight. People fell ill, wrote Guy de Chauliac, not only by remaining with the sick but "even by looking at them." Three hundred years later Joshua Barnes, the 17th century biographer of Edward III, could write that the power of infection had entered into beams of light and "darted death from the eyes."

Doctors struggling with the evidence could not break away from the terms of astrology, to which they believed all human physiology was subject. Medicine was the one aspect of medieval life, perhaps because of its links with the Arabs, not shaped by Christian doctrine. Clerics detested astrology, but could not dislodge its influence. Guy de Chauliac, physician to three popes in succession, practiced in obedience to the zodiac. While his *Cirurgia* was the major treatise on surgery of its time, while he understood the use of anesthesia made from the juice of opium, mandrake, or hemlock, he nevertheless prescribed bleeding and purgatives by the planets and divided chronic from acute diseases on the basis of one being under the rule of the sun and the other of the moon.

In October 1348 Philip VI asked the medical faculty of the University of Paris for a report on the affliction that seemed to threaten human

survival. With careful thesis, antithesis, and proofs, the doctors ascribed it to a triple conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars in the 40th degree of Aquarius said to have occurred on March 20, 1345. They acknowledged, however, effects "whose cause is hidden from even the most highly trained intellects." The verdict of the masters of Paris became the official version. Borrowed, copied by scribes, carried abroad, translated from Latin into various vernaculars, it was everywhere accepted, even by the Arab physicians of Cordova and Granada, as the scientific if not the popular answer. Because of the terrible interest of the subject, the translations of the plague tracts stimulated use of national languages. In that one respect, life came from death.

To the people at large there could be but one explanation—the wrath of God. Planets might satisfy the learned doctors, but God was closer to the average man. A scourge so sweeping and unsparing without any visible cause could only be seen as Divine punishment upon mankind for its sins. It might even be God's terminal disappointment in his creature. Matteo Villani compared the plague to the Flood in ultimate purpose and believed he was recording "the extermination of mankind." Efforts to appease Divine wrath took many forms, as when the city of Rouen ordered that everything that could anger God, such as gambling, cursing, and drinking, must be stopped. More general were the penitent processions authorized at first by the Pope, some lasting as long as three days, some attended by as many as 2,000, which everywhere accompanied the plague and helped to spread it.

Barefoot in sackcloth, sprinkled with ashes, weeping, praying, tearing their hair, carrying candles and relics, sometimes with ropes around their necks or beating themselves with whips, the penitents wound through the streets, imploring the mercy of the Virgin and saints at their shrines. In a vivid illustration for the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duc de Berry, the Pope is shown in a penitent procession attended by four cardinals in scarlet from hat to hem. He raises both arms in supplication to the angel on top of the Castel Sant'Angelo, while white-robed priests bearing banners and relics in golden cases turn to look as one of their number, stricken by the plague, falls to the ground, his face contorted with anxiety. In the rear, a gray-clad monk falls beside another victim already on the ground as the townspeople gaze in horror. (Nominally the illustration represents a 6th century plague in the time of Pope Gregory the Great, but as medieval artists made no distinction between past and present, the scene is shown as the artist would have seen it in the 14th century.) When it became evident that

these processions were sources of infection, Clement VI had to prohibit them.

In Messina, where the plague first appeared, the people begged the Archbishop of neighboring Catania to lend them the relics of St. Agatha. When the Catanians refused to let the relics go, the Archbishop dipped them in holy water and took the water himself to Messina, where he carried it in a procession with prayers and litanies through the streets. The demonic, which shared the medieval cosmos with God, appeared as "demons in the shape of dogs" to terrify the people. "A black dog with a drawn sword in his paws appeared among them, gnashing his teeth and rushing upon them and breaking all the silver vessels and lamps and candlesticks on the altars and casting them hither and thither. . . . So the people of Messina, terrified by this prodigious vision, were all strangely overcome by fear."

The apparent absence of earthly cause gave the plague a supernatural and sinister quality. Scandinavians believed that a Pest Maiden emerged from the mouth of the dead in the form of a blue flame and flew through the air to infect the next house. In Lithuania the Maiden was said to wave a red scarf through the door or window to let in the pest. One brave man, according to legend, deliberately waited at his open window with drawn sword and, at the fluttering of the scarf, chopped off the hand. He died of his deed, but his village was spared and the scarf long preserved as a relic in the local church.

Beyond demons and superstition the final hand was God's. The Pope acknowledged it in a Bull of September 1348, speaking of the "pestilence with which God is afflicting the Christian people." To the Emperor John Cantacuzene it was manifest that a malady of such horrors, stenches, and agonies, and especially one bringing the dismal despair that settled upon its victims before they died, was not a plague "natural" to mankind but "a chastisement from Heaven." To Piers Plowman "these pestilences were for pure sin."

The general acceptance of this view created an expanded sense of guilt, for if the plague were punishment there had to be terrible sin to have occasioned it. What sins were on the 14th century conscience? Primarily greed, the sin of avarice, followed by usury, worldliness, adultery, blasphemy, falsehood, luxury, irreligion. Giovanni Villani, attempting to account for the cascade of calamity that had fallen upon Florence, concluded that it was retribution for the sins of avarice and usury that oppressed the poor. Pity and anger about the condition of the poor, especially victimization of the peasantry in war, was often expressed by writers of the time and was certainly on the conscience of the century. Beneath it all was the daily condition of medieval life, in

which hardly an act or thought, sexual, mercantile, or military, did not contravene the dictates of the Church. Mere failure to fast or attend mass was sin. The result was an underground lake of guilt in the soul that the plague now tapped.

That the mortality was accepted as God's punishment may explain in part the vacuum of comment that followed the Black Death. An investigator has noticed that in the archives of Périgord references to the war are innumerable, to the plague few. Froissart mentions the great death but once, Chaucer gives it barely a glance. Divine anger so great that it contemplated the extermination of man did not bear close examination.

Efforts to cope with the epidemic availed little, either in treatment or prevention. Helpless to alleviate the plague, the doctors' primary effort was to keep it at bay, chiefly by burning aromatic substances to purify the air. The leader of Christendom, Pope Clement VI, was preserved in health by this method, though for an unrecognized reason: Clement's doctor, Guy de Chauliac, ordered that two huge fires should burn in the papal apartments and required the Pope to sit between them in the heat of the Avignon summer. This drastic treatment worked, doubtless because it discouraged the attention of fleas and also because de Chauliac required the Pope to remain isolated in his chambers. Their lovely murals of gardens, hunting, and other secular joys, painted at Clement's command, perhaps gave him some refreshment. A Pope of prodigal splendor and "sensual vices," Clement was also a man of great learning and a patron of arts and science who now encouraged dissections of the dead "in order that the origins of this disease might be known." Many were performed in Avignon as well as in Florence, where the city authorities paid for corpses to be delivered to physicians for this purpose.

Doctors' remedies in the 14th century ranged from the empiric and sensible to the magical, with little distinction made between one and the other. Though medicine was barred by the Church from investigation of anatomy and physiology and from dissection of corpses, the classical anatomy of Galen, transferred through Arab treatises, was kept alive in private anatomy lessons. The need for knowledge was able sometimes to defy the Church: in 1340 Montpellier authorized an anatomy class every two years which lasted for several days and consisted of a surgeon dissecting a cadaver while a doctor of medicine lectured.

Otherwise, the theory of humors, along with astrology, governed

practice. All human temperaments were considered to belong to one or another of the four humors—sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic. In various permutations with the signs of the zodiac, each of which governed a particular part of the body, the humors and constellations determined the degrees of bodily heat, moisture, and proportion of masculinity and femininity of each person.

Notwithstanding all their charts and stars, and medicaments barely short of witches' brews, doctors gave great attention to diet, bodily health, and mental attitude. Nor were they lacking in practical skills. They could set broken bones, extract teeth, remove bladder stones, remove cataracts of the eye with a silver needle, and restore a mutilated face by skin graft from the arm. They understood epilepsy and apoplexy as spasms of the brain. They used urinalysis and pulse beat for diagnosis, knew what substances served as laxatives and diuretics, applied a truss for hernia, a mixture of oil, vinegar, and sulfur for toothache, and ground peony root with oil of roses for headache.

For ills beyond their powers they fell back on the supernatural or on elaborate compounds of metallic, botanic, and animal substances. The offensive, like the expensive, had extra value. Ringworm was treated by washing the scalp with a boy's urine, gout by a plaster of goat dung mixed with rosemary and honey. Relief of the patient was their object—cure being left to God—and psychological suggestion often their means. To prevent pockmarks, a smallpox patient would be wrapped in red cloth in a bed hung with red hangings. When surgery was unavailing, recourse was had to the aid of the Virgin or the relics of saints.

In their purple or red gowns and furred hoods, doctors were persons of important status. Allowed extra luxury by the sumptuary laws, they wore belts of silver thread, embroidered gloves, and, according to Petrarch's annoyed report, presumptuously donned golden spurs when they rode to their visits attended by a servant. Their wives were permitted greater expenditure on clothes than other women, perhaps in recognition of the large fees doctors could command. Not all were learned professors. Boccaccio's Doctor Simon was a proctologist who had a chamber pot painted over his door to indicate his specialty.

When it came to the plague, sufferers were treated by various measures designed to draw poison or infection from the body: by bleeding, purging with laxatives or enemas, lancing or cauterizing the buboes, or application of hot plasters. None of this was of much use. Medicines ranged from pills of powdered stag's horn or myrrh and saffron to potions of potable gold. Compounds of rare spices and powdered pearls or emeralds were prescribed, possibly on the theory, not unknown to modern medicine, that a patient's sense of therapeutic value is in proportion to the expense.

Doctors advised that floors should be sprinkled, and hands, mouth, and nostrils washed with vinegar and rosewater. Bland diets, avoidance of excitement and anger especially at bedtime, mild exercise, and removal wherever possible from swamps and other sources of dank air were all recommended. Pomanders made of exotic compounds were to be carried on going out, probably more as antidote to the plague's odors than to its contagion. Conversely, in the curious belief that latrine attendants were immune, many people visited the public latrines on the theory that foul odors were efficacious.

Sewage disposal was not unprovided for in the 14th century, though far from adequate. Privies, cesspools, drainage pipes, and public latrines existed, though they did not replace open street sewers. Castles and wealthy town houses had privies built into bays jutting from an outside wall with a hole in the bottom allowing the deposit to fall into a river or into a ditch for subsequent removal. Town houses away from the riverbank had cesspools in the backyard at a regulated distance from the neighbor's. Although supposedly constructed under town ordinances, they frequently seeped into wells and other water sources. Except for household urinals, the contents of privies were prohibited from draining into street sewers. Public flouting of ordinances was more to blame for unsanitary streets than inadequate technology.

Some abbeys and large castles, including Coucy, had separate buildings to serve as latrines for the monks or garrison. The *donjon* at Coucy had latrines at each of its three levels. Drainage was channeled into vaulted stone ditches with ventilating holes and openings for removal, or into underground pits later mistaken by investigators of a more romantic period for secret passages and oubliettes. Under the concept of "noble" architecture, the 15th and later centuries preferred to ignore human elimination. Coucy probably had better sanitation than Versailles.

During the plague, as street cleaners and carters died, cities grew befouled, increasing the infection. Residents of a street might rent a cart in common to remove the waste, but energy and will were depressed. The breakdown in street-cleaning appears in a letter of Edward III to the Mayor of London in 1349, complaining that the streets and lanes of London were "foul with human fæces and the air of the city poisoned to the great danger of men passing, especially in this time of infectious disease." Removed as he probably was from the daily

sight of corpses piling up, the King ordered that the streets be cleaned "as of old."

Stern measures of quarantine were ordered by many cities. As soon as Pisa and Lucca were afflicted, their neighbor Pistoia forbade any of its citizens who might be visiting or doing business in the stricken cities to return home, and likewise forbade the importation of wool and linen. The Doge and Council of Venice ordered burial on the islands to a depth of at least five feet and organized a barge service to transport the corpses. Poland established a quarantine at its frontiers which succeeded in giving it relative immunity. Draconian means were adopted by the despot of Milan, Archbishop Giovanni Visconti, head of the most uninhibited ruling family of the 14th century. He ordered that the first three houses in which the plague was discovered were to be walled up with their occupants inside, enclosing the well, the sick, and the dead in a common tomb. Whether or not owing to his promptitude, Milan escaped lightly in the roll of the dead. With something of the Visconti temperament, a manorial autocrat of Leicestershire burned and razed the village of Noseley when the plague appeared there, to prevent its spread to the manor house. He evidently succeeded, for his direct descendants still inhabit Noseley Hall.

St. Roch, credited with special healing powers, who had died in 1327, was the particular saint associated with the plague. Inheriting wealth as a young man, as had St. Francis, he had distributed it to the poor and to hospitals, and while returning from a pilgrimage to Rome had encountered an epidemic and stayed to help the sick. Catching the malady himself, he retreated to die alone in the woods, where a dog brought him bread each day. "In these sad times," says his legend, "when reality was so somber and men so hard, people ascribed pity to animals." St. Roch recovered and, on appearing in rags as a beggar, was thought to be a spy and thrown into jail, where he died, filling the cell with a strange light. As his story spread and sainthood was conferred, it was believed that God would cure of the plague anyone who invoked his name. When this failed to occur, it enhanced the belief that, men having grown too wicked, God indeed intended their end. As Langland wrote,

> God is deaf now-a-days and deigneth not hear us,
> And prayers have no power the Plague to stay.

In a terrible reversal, St. Roch and other saints now came to be considered a source of the plague, as instruments of God's wrath. "In the time of that great mortality in the year of our Lord 1348," wrote a professor of law named Bartolus of Sassoferrato, "the hostility of God was stronger than the hostility of man." But he was wrong.

The hostility of man proved itself against the Jews. On charges that they were poisoning the wells, with intent "to kill and destroy the whole of Christendom and have lordship over all the world," the lynchings began in the spring of 1348 on the heels of the first plague deaths. The first attacks occurred in Narbonne and Carcassonne, where Jews were dragged from their houses and thrown into bonfires. While Divine punishment was accepted as the plague's source, people in their misery still looked for a human agent upon whom to vent the hostility that could not be vented on God. The Jew, as the eternal stranger, was the most obvious target. He was the outsider who had separated himself by choice from the Christian world, whom Christians for centuries had been taught to hate, who was regarded as imbued with unsleeping malevolence against all Christians. Living in a distinct group of his own kind in a particular street or quarter, he was also the most feasible target, with property to loot as a further inducement.

The accusation of well-poisoning was as old as the plague of Athens, when it had been applied to the Spartans, and as recent as the epidemics of 1320–21, when it had been applied to the lepers. At that time the lepers were believed to have acted at the instigation of the Jews and the Moslem King of Granada, in a great conspiracy of outcasts to destroy Christians. Hundreds were rounded up and burned throughout France in 1322 and the Jews heavily punished by an official fine and unofficial attacks. When the plague came, the charge was instantly revived against the Jews:

> . . . rivers and fountains
> That were clear and clean
> They poisoned in many places . . .

wrote the French court poet Guillaume de Machaut.

The antagonism had ancient roots. The Jew had become the object of popular animosity because the early Church, as an offshoot of Judaism striving to replace the parent, had to make him so. His rejection of Christ as Saviour and his dogged refusal to accept the new law of the Gospel in place of the Mosaic law made the Jew a perpetual insult to the newly established Church, a danger who must be kept distinct and apart from the Christian community. This was the purpose of the

edicts depriving Jews of their civil rights issued by the early Church Councils in the 4th century as soon as Christianity became the state religion. Separation was a two-way street, since, to the Jews, Christianity was at first a dissident sect, then an apostasy with which they wanted no contact.

The theory, emotions, and justifications of anti-Semitism were laid at that time—in the canon law codified by the Councils; in the tirades of St. John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Antioch, who denounced the Jews as Christ-killers; in the judgment of St. Augustine, who declared the Jews to be "outcasts" for failing to accept redemption by Christ. The Jews' dispersion was regarded as their punishment for unbelief.

The period of active assault began with the age of the crusades, when all Europe's intramural antagonisms were gathered into one bolt aimed at the infidel. On the theory that the "infidel at home" should likewise be exterminated, massacres of Jewish communities marked the crusaders' march to Palestine. The capture of the Holy Sepulcher by the Moslems was blamed on "the wickedness of the Jews," and the cry "HEP! HEP!" for *Hierosolyma est Perdita* (Jerusalem is lost) became the call for murder. What man victimizes he fears; thus, the Jews were pictured as fiends filled with hatred of the human race, which they secretly intended to destroy.

The question whether Jews had certain human rights, under the general proposition that God created the world for all men including infidels, was given different answers by different thinkers. Officially the Church conceded some rights: that Jews should not be condemned without trial, their synagogues and cemeteries should not be profaned, their property not be robbed with impunity. In practice this meant little because, as non-citizens of the universal Christian state, Jews were not allowed to bring charges against Christians, nor was Jewish testimony allowed to prevail over that of Christians. Their legal status was that of serfs of the king, though without reciprocal obligations on the part of the overlord. The doctrine that Jews were doomed to perpetual servitude as Christ-killers was announced by Pope Innocent III in 1205 and led Thomas Aquinas to conclude with relentless logic that "since Jews are the slaves of the Church, she can dispose of their possessions." Legally, politically, and physically, they were totally vulnerable.

They maintained a place in society because as moneylenders they performed a role essential to the kings' continuous need of money. Excluded by the guilds from crafts and trades, they had been pushed into petty commerce and moneylending although theoretically barred from dealing with Christians. Theory, however, bends to convenience,

and Jews provided Christians with a way around their self-imposed ban on using money to make money.

Since they were damned anyway, they were permitted to lend at interest rates of 20 percent and more, of which the royal treasury took the major share. The increment to the crown was in fact a form of indirect taxation; as its instruments, the Jews absorbed an added measure of popular hate. They lived entirely dependent upon the king's protection, subject to confiscations and expulsions and the hazards of royal favor. Nobles and prelates followed the royal example, entrusting money to the Jews for lending and taking most of the profits, while deflecting popular resentment upon the agent. To the common man the Jews were not only Christ-killers but rapacious, merciless monsters, symbols of the new force of money that was changing old ways and dissolving old ties.

As commerce swelled in the 12th and 13th centuries, increasing the flow of money, the Jews' position deteriorated in proportion as they were less needed. They could not deal in the great sums that Christian banking houses like the Bardi of Florence could command. Kings and princes requiring ever larger amounts now turned to the Lombards and wealthy merchants for loans and relaxed their protection of the Jews or, when in need of hard cash, decreed their expulsion while confiscating their property and the debts owed to them. At the same time, with the advent of the Inquisition in the 13th century, religious intolerance waxed, leading to the charge of ritual murder against the Jews and the enforced wearing of a distinctive badge.

The belief that Jews performed ritual murder of Christian victims, supposedly from a compulsion to re-enact the Crucifixion, began in the 12th century and developed into the belief that they held secret rites to desecrate the host. Promoted by popular preachers, a mythology of blood grew in a mirror image of the Christian ritual of drinking the blood of the Saviour. Jews were believed to kidnap and torture Christian children, whose blood they drank for a variety of sinister purposes ranging from sadism and sorcery to the need, as unnatural beings, for Christian blood to give them a human appearance. Though bitterly refuted by the rabbis and condemned by emperor and pope, the blood libel took possession of the popular mind most rabidly in Germany, where the well-poisoning charge too had originated in the 12th century. The blood libel formed the subject of Chaucer's tale of a child martyr told by the Prioresse and was the ground on which many Jews were charged, tried, and burned at the stake.

Under the zeal of St. Louis, whose life's object was the greater glory and fulfillment of Christian doctrine, Jewish life in France was

narrowed and harassed by mounting restrictions. The famous trial of the Talmud for heresy and blasphemy took place in Paris in 1240 during his reign, ending in forcordained conviction and burning of 24 cartloads of Talmudic works. One of the disputants in the case was Rabbi Moses ben Jacob of Coucy, intellectual leader of the northern Jewish community in the time of Enguerrand III.

Throughout the century the Church multiplied decrees designed to isolate Jews from Christian society, on the theory that contact with them brought the Christian faith into disrepute. Jews were forbidden to employ Christians as servants, to serve as doctors to Christians, to intermarry, to sell flour, bread, wine, oil, shoes, or any article of clothing to Christians, to deliver or receive goods, to build new synagogues, to hold or claim land for non-payment of mortgage. The occupations from which guild rules barred them included weaving, metalworking, mining, tailoring, shoemaking, goldsmithing, baking, milling, carpentry. To mark their separation, Innocent III in 1215 decreed the wearing of a badge, usually in the form of a wheel or circular patch of yellow felt, said to represent a piece of money. Sometimes green or red-and-white, it was worn by both sexes beginning between the ages of seven and fourteen. In its struggle against all heresy and dissent, the 13th century Church imposed the same badge on Moslems, on convicted heretics, and, by some quirk in doctrine, on prostitutes. A hat with a point rather like a horn, said to represent the Devil, was later added further to distinguish the Jews.

Expulsions and persecutions were marked by one constant factor —seizure of Jewish property. As the chronicler William of Newburgh wrote of the massacre of York in 1190, the slaughter was less the work of religious zeal than of bold and covetous men who wrought "the business of their own greed." The motive was the same for official expulsion by towns or kings. When the Jews drifted back to resettle in villages, market towns and particularly in cities, they continued in moneylending and retail trade, kept pawnshops, found an occupation as gravediggers, and lived close together in a narrow Jewish quarter for mutual protection. In Provence, drawing on their contact with the Arabs of Spain and North Africa, they were scholars and sought-after physicians. But the vigorous inner life of their earlier communities had faded. In an excitable period they lived on the edge of assault that was always imminent. It was understood that the Church could "justly ordain war upon them" as enemies of Christendom.

In the torment of the plague it was easy to credit Jewish malevo-

trial, which halted the attacks in Avignon and the Papal States but was ignored as the rage swept northward. Authorities in most places tried at first to protect the Jews, but succumbed to popular pressure, not without an eye to potential forfeit of Jewish property.

In Savoy, where the first formal trials were held in September 1348, the Jews' property was confiscated while they remained in prison pending investigation of charges. Composed from confessions extracted by torture according to the usual medieval method, the charges drew a picture of an international Jewish conspiracy emanating from Spain, with messengers from Toledo carrying poison in little packets or in a "narrow stitched leather bag." The messengers allegedly brought rabbinical instructions for sprinkling the poison in wells and springs, and consulted with their co-religionists in secret meetings. Duly found guilty, the accused were condemned to death. Eleven Jews were burned alive and the rest subjected to a tax of 160 florins every month over the next six years for permission to remain in Savoy.

The confessions obtained in Savoy, distributed by letter from town to town, formed the basis for a wave of accusations and attacks throughout Alsace, Switzerland, and Germany. At a meeting of representatives of Alsatian towns, the oligarchy of Strasbourg attempted to refute the charges but were overwhelmed by the majority demanding reprisal and expulsion. The persecutions of the Black Death were not all spontaneous outbursts but action seriously discussed beforehand.

Again Pope Clement attempted to check the hysteria in a Bull of September 1348 in which he said that Christians who imputed the pestilence to the Jews had been "seduced by that liar, the Devil," and that the charge of well-poisoning and ensuing massacres were a "horrible thing." He pointed out that "by a mysterious decree of God" the plague was afflicting all peoples, including Jews; that it raged in places where no Jews lived, and that elsewhere they were victims like everyone else; therefore the charge that they caused it was "without plausibility." He urged the clergy to take Jews under their protection as he himself offered to do in Avignon, but his voice was hardly heard against local animus.

In Basle on January 9, 1349, the whole community of several hundred Jews was burned in a wooden house especially constructed for the purpose on an island in the Rhine, and a decree was passed that no Jew should be allowed to settle in Basle for 200 years. In Strasbourg the Town Council, which opposed persecution, was deposed by vote of the guilds and another was elected, prepared to comply with the

burial ground, where all except those who accepted conversion were burned at rows of stakes erected to receive them.

By now another voice was fomenting attack upon the Jews. The flagellants had appeared. In desperate supplication for God's mercy, their movement erupted in a sudden frenzy that sped across Europe with the same fiery contagion as the plague. Self-flagellation was intended to express remorse and expiate the sins of all. As a form of penance to induce God to forgive sin, it long antedated the plague years. The flagellants saw themselves as redeemers who, by re-enacting the scourging of Christ upon their own bodies and making the blood flow, would atone for human wickedness and earn another chance for mankind.

Organized groups of 200 to 300 and sometimes more (the chroniclers mention up to 1,000) marched from city to city, stripped to the waist, scourging themselves with leather whips tipped with iron spikes until they bled. While they cried aloud to Christ and the Virgin for pity, and called upon God to "Spare us!", the watching townspeople sobbed and groaned in sympathy. These bands put on regular performances three times a day, twice in public in the church square and a third in privacy. Organized under a lay Master for a stated period, usually 33½ days to represent Christ's years on earth, the participants were required to pledge self-support at 4 pence a day or other fixed rate and to swear obedience to the Master. They were forbidden to bathe, shave, change their clothes, sleep in beds, talk or have intercourse with women without the Master's permission. Evidently this was not withheld, since the flagellants were later charged with orgies in which whipping combined with sex. Women accompanied the groups in a separate section, bringing up the rear. If a woman or priest entered the circle of the ceremony, the act of penance was considered void and had to be begun over again. The movement was essentially anti-clerical, for in challenge to the priesthood, the flagellants were taking upon themselves the role of interceders with God for all humanity.

Breaking out now in the German states, the new eruption advanced through the Low Countries to Flanders and Picardy as far as Reims. Hundreds of bands roamed the land, entering new towns every week, exciting already overwrought emotions, reciting hymns of woe and claims that but for them "all Christendom would meet perdition." The inhabitants greeted them with reverence and ringing of church bells, lodged them in their houses, brought children to be healed and, in at least one case, to be resurrected. They dipped cloths in the flagellants' blood, which they pressed to their eyes and preserved as relics. Many, including knights and ladies, clerics, nuns, and children, joined the

bands. Soon the flagellants were marching behind magnificent banners of velvet and cloth of gold embroidered for them by women enthusiasts.

Growing in arrogance, they became overt in antagonism to the Church. The Masters assumed the right to hear confession and grant absolution or impose penance, which not only denied the priests their fee for these services but challenged ecclesiastical authority at its core. Priests who intervened against them were stoned and the populace was incited to join in the stoning. Opponents were denounced as scorpions and Anti-Christs. Organized in some cases by apostate priests or fanatic dissidents, the flagellants took possession of churches, disrupted services, ridiculed the Eucharist, looted altars, and claimed the power to cast out evil spirits and raise the dead. The movement that began as an attempt through self-inflicted pain to save the world from destruction, caught the infection of power hunger and aimed at taking over the Church.

They began to be feared as a source of revolutionary ferment and a threat to the propertied class, lay as well as ecclesiastical. The Emperor Charles IV petitioned the Pope to suppress the flagellants, and his appeal was augmented by the no less imperial voice of the University of Paris. At such a time, when the world seemed to be on the brink of doom, to take action against the flagellants who claimed to be under Divine inspiration was not an easy decision. Several of the cardinals at Avignon opposed repressive measures.

The self-torturers meanwhile had found a better victim. In every town they entered, the flagellants rushed for the Jewish quarter, trailed by citizens howling for revenge upon the "poisoners of the wells." In Freiburg, Augsburg, Nürnberg, Munich, Königsberg, Regensburg, and other centers, the Jews were slaughtered with a thoroughness that seemed to seek the final solution. At Worms in March 1349 the Jewish community of 400, like that of York, turned to an old tradition and burned themselves to death inside their own houses rather than be killed by their enemies. The larger community of Frankfurt-am-Main took the same way in July, setting fire to part of the city by their flames. In Cologne the Town Council repeated the Pope's argument that Jews were dying of the plague like everyone else, but the flagellants collected a great proletarian crowd of "those who had nothing to lose," and paid no attention. In Mainz, which had the largest Jewish community in Europe, its members turned at last to self-defense. With arms collected in advance they killed 200 of the mob, an act which only served to bring down upon them a furious onslaught by the townspeople in revenge for the death of Christians. The Jews fought until overpowered; then retreating to their homes, they too set their

own fires. Six thousand were said to have perished at Mainz on August 24, 1349. Of 3,000 Jews at Erfurt, none was reported to have survived.

Completeness is rare in history, and Jewish chroniclers may have shared the medieval addiction to sweeping numbers. Usually a number saved themselves by conversion, and groups of refugees were given shelter by Rupert of the Palatinate and other princes. Duke Albert II of Austria, grand-uncle of Enguerrand VII, was one of the few who took measures effective enough to protect the Jews from assault in his territories. The last pogroms took place in Antwerp and in Brussels where in December 1349 the entire Jewish community was exterminated. By the time the plague had passed, few Jews were left in Germany or the Low Countries.

By this time Church and state were ready to take the risk of suppressing the flagellants. Magistrates ordered town gates closed against them; Clement VI in a Bull of October 1349 called for their dispersal and arrest; the University of Paris denied their claim of Divine inspiration. Philip VI promptly forbade public flagellation on pain of death; local rulers pursued the "masters of error," seizing, hanging, and beheading. The flagellants disbanded and fled, "vanishing as suddenly as they had come," wrote Henry of Hereford, "like night phantoms or mocking ghosts." Here and there the bands lingered, not entirely suppressed until 1357.

Homeless ghosts, the Jews filtered back from eastern Europe, where the expelled had gone. Two Jews reappeared in Erfurt as visitors in 1354 and, joined by others, started a resettlement three years later. By 1365 the community numbered 86 taxable hearths and an additional number of poor households below the tax-paying level. Here and elsewhere they returned to live in weakened and fearful communities on worse terms and in greater segregation than before. Well-poisoning and its massacres had fixed the malevolent image of the Jew into a stereotype. Because Jews were useful, towns which had enacted statutes of banishment invited or allowed their re-entry, but imposed new disabilities. Former contacts of scholars, physicians, and financial "court Jews" with the Gentile community faded. The period of the Jews' medieval flourishing was over. The walls of the ghetto, though not yet physical, had risen.

What was the human condition after the plague? Exhausted by deaths and sorrows and the morbid excesses of fear and hate, it ought to have shown some profound effects, but no radical change was immediately visible. The persistence of the normal is strong. While dying

of the plague, the tenants of Bruton Priory in England continued to pay the heriot owed to the lord at death with such obedient regularity that fifty oxen and cattle were received by the priory within a few months. Social change was to come invisibly with time; immediate effects were many but not uniform. Simon de Covino believed the plague had a baneful effect upon morals, "lowering virtue throughout the world." Gilles li Muisis, on the other hand, thought there had been an improvement in public morals because many people formerly living in concubinage had now married (as a result of town ordinances), and swearing and gambling had so diminished that manufacturers of dice were turning their product into beads for telling paternosters.

The marriage rate undoubtedly rose, though not for love. So many adventurers took advantage of orphans to obtain rich dowries that the oligarchy of Siena forbade the marriage of female orphans without their kinsmen's consent. In England, Piers Plowman deplored the many pairs "since the pestilence" who had married "for greed of goods and against natural feeling," with result, according to him, in "guilt and grief . . . jealousy, joylessness and jangling in private"—and no children. It suited Piers as a moralist that such marriages should be barren. Jean de Venette, on the other hand, says of the marriages that followed the plague that many twins, sometimes triplets, were born and that few women were barren. Perhaps he in turn reflected a desperate need to believe that nature would make up the loss, and in fact men and women married immediately afterward in unusual numbers.

Unlike the dice transformed into prayer beads, people did not improve, although it had been expected, according to Matteo Villani, that the experience of God's wrath would have left them "better men, humble, virtuous and Catholic." Instead, "They forgot the past as though it had never been and gave themselves up to a more disordered and shameful life than they had led before." With a glut of merchandise on the shelves for too few customers, prices at first plunged and survivors indulged in a wild orgy of spending. The poor moved into empty houses, slept on beds, and ate off silver. Peasants acquired unclaimed tools and livestock, even a wine press, forge, or mill left without owners, and other possessions they never had before. Commerce was depressed, but the amount of currency was in greater supply because there were fewer people to share it.

Behavior grew more reckless and callous, as it often does after a period of violence and suffering. It was blamed on parvenus and the newly rich who pushed up from below. Siena renewed its sumptuary laws in 1349 because many persons were pretending to higher position than belonged to them by birth or occupation. But, on the whole, local

studies of tax rolls indicate that while the population may have been halved, its social proportions remained about the same.

Because of intestate deaths, property without heirs, and disputed title to land and houses, a fury of litigation arose, made chaotic by the shortage of notaries. Sometimes squatters, sometimes the Church, took over emptied property. Fraud and extortion practiced upon orphans by their appointed guardians became a scandal. In Orvieto brawls kept breaking out; bands of homeless and starving brigands roamed the countryside and pillaged up to the very gates of the city. People were arrested for carrying arms and for acts of vandalism, especially on vineyards. The commune had to enact new regulations against "certain rascals, sons of iniquity" who robbed and burned the premises of shopkeepers and craftsmen, and also against increased prostitution. On March 12, 1350, the commune reminded citizens of the severe penalty in store for sexual relations between Christian and Jew: the woman involved would be beheaded or burned alive.

Education suffered from losses among the clergy. In France, according to Jean de Venette, "few were found in houses, villas and castles who were able and willing to instruct boys in grammar"—a situation that could have touched the life of Enguerrand VII. To fill vacant benefices the Church ordained priests in batches, many of them men who had lost their wives or families in the plague and flocked to holy orders as a refuge. Many were barely literate, "as it were mere lay folk" who might read a little but without understanding. Priests who survived the plague, declared the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1350, had become "infected by insatiable avarice," charging excessive fees and neglecting souls.

By a contrary trend, education was stimulated by concern for the survival of learning, which led to a spurt in the founding of universities. Notably the Emperor Charles IV, an intellectual, felt keenly the cause of "precious knowledge which the mad rage of pestilential death has stifled throughout the wide realms of the world." He founded the University of Prague in the plague year of 1348 and issued imperial accreditation to five other universities—Orange, Perugia, Siena, Pavia, and Lucca—in the next five years. In the same five years three new colleges were founded at Cambridge—Trinity, Corpus Christi, and Clare—although love of learning, like love in marriage, was not always the motive. Corpus Christi was founded in 1352 because fees for celebrating masses for the dead were so inflated after the plague that two guilds of Cambridge decided to establish a college whose scholars, as clerics, would be required to pray for their deceased members.

Under the circumstances, education did not everywhere flourish.

Dwindling attendance at Oxford was deplored in sermons by the masters. At the University of Bologna, mourned Petrarch twenty years later (in a series of letters called "Of Senile Things"), where once there was "nothing more joyous, nothing more free in the world," hardly one of all the former great lecturers was left, and in the place of so many great geniuses, "a universal ignorance has seized the city." But pestilence was not alone responsible; wars and other troubles had added their scars.

The obvious and immediate result of the Black Death was, of course, a shrunken population, which, owing to wars, brigandage, and recurrence of the plague, declined even further by the end of the 14th century. The plague laid a curse on the century in the form of its own bacillus. Lodged in the vectors, it was to break out again six times over the next six decades in various localities at varying intervals of ten to fifteen years. After killing off most of those susceptible, with increasing mortality of children in the later phases, it eventually receded, leaving Europe with a population reduced by about 40 percent in 1380 and by nearly 50 percent at the end of the century. The city of Béziers in southern France, which had 14,000 inhabitants in 1304, numbered 4,000 a century later. The fishing port of Jonquières near Marseille, which once had 354 taxable hearths, was reduced to 135. The flourishing cities of Carcassonne and Montpellier shrank to shadows of their former prosperity, as did Rouen, Arras, Laon, and Reims in the north. The vanishing of taxable material caused rulers to raise rates of taxation, arousing resentment that was to explode in repeated outbreaks in coming decades.

As between landowner and peasant, the balance of impoverishment and enrichment caused by the plague on the whole favored the peasant, although what was true in one place often had an equal and opposite reaction somewhere else. The relative values of land and labor were turned upside down. Peasants found their rents reduced and even relinquished for one or more years by landowners desperate to keep their fields in cultivation. Better no revenue at all than that cleared land should be retaken by the wilderness. But with fewer hands to work, cultivated land necessarily shrank. The archives of the Abbey of Ramsay in England show that thirty years after the plague the acreage sowed in grain was less than half what it had been before. Five plows owned by the abbey in 1307 were reduced to one a century later, and twenty-eight oxen to five.

Hill farms and sections of poor soil were let go or turned to pasture for sheep, which required less labor. Villages weakened by depopulation and unable to resist the enclosure of land for sheep were deserted in increasing numbers. Property boundaries vanished when fields re-

verted to wasteland. If claimed by someone who was able to cultivate them, former owners or their heirs could not collect rent. Landowners impoverished by these factors sank out of sight or let castles and manors decay while they entered the military brigandage that was to be the curse of the following decades.

When death slowed production, goods became scarce and prices soared. In France the price of wheat increased fourfold by 1350. At the same time the shortage of labor brought the plague's greatest social disruption—a concerted demand for higher wages. Peasants as well as artisans, craftsmen, clerks, and priests discovered the lever of their own scarcity. Within a year after the plague had passed through northern France, the textile workers of St. Omer near Amiens had gained three successive wage increases. In many guilds artisans struck for higher pay and shorter hours. In an age when social conditions were regarded as fixed, such action was revolutionary.

The response of rulers was instant repression. In the effort to hold wages at pre-plague levels, the English issued an ordinance in 1349 requiring everyone to work for the same pay as in 1347. Penalties were established for refusal to work, for leaving a place of employment to seek higher pay, and for the offer of higher pay by employers. Proclaimed when Parliament was not sitting, the ordinance was reissued in 1351 as the Statute of Laborers. It denounced not only laborers who demanded higher wages but particularly those who chose "rather to beg in idleness than to earn their bread in labor." Idleness of the worker was a crime against society, for the medieval system rested on his obligation to work. The Statute of Laborers was not simply a reactionary dream but an effort to maintain the system. It provided that every able-bodied person under sixty with no means of subsistence must work for whoever required him, that no alms could be given to able-bodied beggars, that a vagrant serf could be forced to work for anyone who claimed him. Down to the 20th century this statute was to serve as the basis for "conspiracy" laws against labor in the long struggle to prevent unionization.

A more realistic French statute of 1351, applying only to the region of Paris, allowed a rise in wages not to exceed one third of the former level. Prices were fixed and profits of middlemen were regulated. To increase production, guilds were required to loosen their restrictions on the number of apprentices and shorten the period before they could become masters.

In both countries, as shown by repeated renewals of the laws with rising penalties, the statutes were unenforceable. Violations cited by the English Parliament in 1352 show workers demanding and employers paying wages at double and treble the pre-plague rate. Stocks were ordered set up in every town for punishment of offenders. In 1360 imprisonment replaced fines as the penalty and fugitive laborers were declared outlaws. If caught, they were to be branded on the forehead with F for "fugitive" (or possibly for "falsity"). New laws were enacted twice more in the 1360s, breeding the resistance that was to come to a head in the great outbreak of 1381.

The sense of sin induced by the plague found surcease in the plenary indulgence offered by the Jubilee Year of 1350 to all who in that year made the pilgrimage to Rome. Originally established by Boniface VIII in 1300, the Jubilee was intended to make an indulgence available to all repentant and confessed sinners free of charge—that is, if they could afford the journey to Rome. Boniface intended the Jubilee Year as a centennial event, but the first one had been such an enormous success, attracting a reported two million visitors to Rome in the course of the year, that the city, impoverished by the loss of the papacy to Avignon, petitioned Clement VI to shorten the interval to fifty years. The Pope of the joyous murals operated on the amiable principle that "a pontiff should make his subjects happy." He complied with Rome's request in a Bull of 1343.

Momentously for the Church, Clement formulated in the same Bull the theory of indulgences, and fixed its fatal equation with money. The sacrifice of Christ's blood, he stated, together with the merit added by the Virgin and saints, had established an inexhaustible treasury for the use of pardons. By contributing sums to the Church, anyone could buy a share in the Treasury of Merit. What the Church gained in revenue by this arrangement was matched in the end by loss in respect.

In 1350 pilgrims thronged the roads to Rome, camping around fires at night. Five thousand people were said to enter or leave the city every day, enriching the householders, who gave them lodging despite shortages of food and forage and the dismal state of the city's resources. Without its pontiff the Eternal City was destitute, the three chief basilicas in ruins, San Paolo toppled by the earthquake, the Lateran half-collapsed. Rubble and ruin filled the streets, the seven hills were silent and deserted, goats nibbled in the weed-grown cloisters of deserted convents. The sight of roofless churches exposed to wind and rain, lamented Petrarch, "would excite pity in a heart of stone." Nevertheless, famous saints' relics raked in lavish offerings, and Cardinal Anibaldo Ceccano, Legate for the Jubilee, administered an immense program of absolutions and indulgences to the crowds craving remis-

sion of sin. During Lent, according to Villani, who took a special interest in figures, as many as a million were in Rome at one time. The inpouring suggests either extraordinary recklessness and vigor so soon after the plague or a great need for salvation—or possibly that conditions did not seem as bad to participants as they seem in report.

The Church emerged from the plague richer if not more unpopular. When sudden death threatened everyone with the prospect of being carried off in a state of sin, the result was a flood of bequests to religious institutions. St. Germain l'Auxerrois in Paris received 49 legacies in nine months, compared to 78 in the previous eight years. As early as October 1348 the Council of Siena suspended its annual appropriations for religious charities for two years because these were so "immensely enriched and indeed fattened" by bequests. In Florence the Company of Or San Michele received 350,000 florins intended as alms for the poor, although in this case the directors of the company were accused of using the money for their own purposes on the grounds that the very poor and needy were dead.

While the Church garnered money, personal attacks on the clergy increased, stimulated partly by the flagellants, and partly by the failure of priests during the plague to live up to their responsibilities. That they died like other men was doubtless forgiven, but that they let Christians die without the sacraments or charged more for their services in the crisis, as many did, was violently resented. Even during the Jubilee the Roman populace, moved by some mysterious tremor of local hostility, jeered and harassed the Cardinal-Legate. On one occasion, as he was riding in a procession, he was shot at by a sniper and returned pale and trembling with an arrow through his red hat. Venturing out thereafter only with a helmet under his hat and a coat of mail under his gown, he departed for Naples as soon as he could, and died on the way—poisoned, it was said, by wine.

In England, where anti-clericalism was endemic, citizens of Worcester in 1349 broke down the gates of the Priory of St. Mary attached to the cathedral, attacked the monks, "chased the Prior with bows and arrows and other offensive weapons," and tried to set fire to the buildings. At Yeovil in the same year, when the Bishop of Bath and Wells held a thanksgiving service to mark the passing of the plague, it was interrupted by "certain sons of perdition" who kept the Bishop and congregation besieged in the church all night until rescue came.

Enriched by legacies, the friars' orders too reaped animus on top of that already felt for them. When Knighton reported the total demise of 150 Franciscans at Marseille, he added: "*bene quidem*" (a good thing), and of the seven friars who survived out of 160 at Maguelonne,

he wrote: "and that was enough." The mendicant orders could not be forgiven for embracing Mammon and "seeking after earthly and carnal things."

The plague accelerated discontent with the Church at the very moment when people felt a greater need of spiritual reassurance. There had to be some meaning in the terrorizing experience God had inflicted. If the purpose had been to shake man from his sinful ways, it had failed. Human conduct was found to be "wickeder than before," more avaricious and grasping, more litigious, more bellicose, and this was nowhere more apparent than in the Church itself. Clement VI, though hardly a spiritual man, was sufficiently shaken by the plague to burst out against his prelates in a tirade of anger and shame when they petitioned him in 1351 to abolish the mendicant orders. And if he did, the Pope replied, "What can you preach to the people? If on humility, you yourselves are the proudest of the world, puffed up, pompous and sumptuous in luxuries. If on poverty, you are so covetous that all the benefices in the world are not enough for you. If on chastity—but we will be silent on this, for God knoweth what each man does and how many of you satisfy your lusts." In this sad view of his fellow clerics the head of the Church died a year later.

"When those who have the title of shepherd play the part of wolves," said Lothar of Saxony, "heresy grows in the garden of the Church." While the majority of people doubtless plodded on as before, dissatisfaction with the Church gave impetus to heresy and dissent, to all those seeking God through the mystical sects, to all the movements for reform which were ultimately to break apart the empire of Catholic unity.

Survivors of the plague, finding themselves neither destroyed nor improved, could discover no Divine purpose in the pain they had suffered. God's purposes were usually mysterious, but this scourge had been too terrible to be accepted without questioning. If a disaster of such magnitude, the most lethal ever known, was a mere wanton act of God or perhaps not God's work at all, then the absolutes of a fixed order were loosed from their moorings. Minds that opened to admit these questions could never again be shut. Once people envisioned the possibility of change in a fixed order, the end of an age of submission came in sight; the turn to individual conscience lay ahead. To that extent the Black Death may have been the unrecognized beginning of modern man.

Meantime it left apprehension, tension, and gloom. It accelerated

the commutation of labor services on the land and in so doing unfastened old ties. It deepened antagonism between rich and poor and raised the level of human hostility. An event of great agony is bearable only in the belief that it will bring about a better world. When it does not, as in the aftermath of another vast calamity in 1914–18, disillusion is deep and moves on to self-doubt and self-disgust. In creating a climate for pessimism, the Black Death was the equivalent of the First World War, although it took fifty years for the psychological effects to develop. These were the fifty-odd years of the youth and adult life of Enguerrand de Coucy.

A strange personification of Death emerged from the plague years on the painted walls of the Camposanto in Pisa. The figure is not the conventional skeleton, but a black-cloaked old woman with streaming hair and wild eyes, carrying a broad-bladed murderous scythe. Her feet end in claws instead of toes. Depicting the Triumph of Death, the fresco was painted in or about 1350 by Francesco Traini as part of a series that included scenes of the Last Judgment and the Tortures of Hell. The same subject, painted at the same time by Traini's master, Andrea Orcagna, in the church of Santa Croce in Florence, has since been lost except for a fragment. Together the frescoes marked the start of a pervasive presence of Death in art, not yet the cult it was to become by the end of the century, but its beginning.

Usually Death was personified as a skeleton with hourglass and scythe, in a white shroud or bare-boned, grinning at the irony of man's fate reflected in his image: that all men, from beggar to emperor, from harlot to queen, from ragged clerk to Pope, must come to this. No matter what their poverty or power in life, all is vanity, equalized by death. The temporal is nothing; what matters is the after-life of the soul.

In Traini's fresco, Death swoops through the air toward a group of carefree, young, and beautiful noblemen and ladies who, like models for Boccaccio's storytellers, converse and flirt and entertain each other with books and music in a fragrant grove of orange trees. A scroll warns that "no shield of wisdom or riches, nobility or prowess" can protect them from the blows of the Approaching One. "They have taken more pleasure in the world than in things of God." In a heap of corpses nearby lie crowned rulers, a Pope in tiara, a knight, tumbled together with the bodies of the poor, while angels and devils in the sky contend for the miniature naked figures that represent their souls. A wretched group of lepers, cripples, and beggars (duplicated in the surviving fragment of Orcagna), one with nose eaten away, others legless or blind or holding out a cloth-covered stump instead of a hand,

implore Death for deliverance. Above on a mountain, hermits leading a religious contemplative life await death peaceably.

Below in a scene of extraordinary verve a hunting party of princes and elegant ladies on horseback comes with sudden horror upon three open coffins containing corpses in different stages of decomposition, one still clothed, one half-rotted, one a skeleton. Vipers crawl over their bones. The scene illustrates "The Three Living and Three Dead," a 13th century legend which tells of a meeting between three young nobles and three decomposing corpses who tell them, "What you are, we were. What we are, you will be." In Traini's fresco, a horse catching the stench of death stiffens in fright with outstretched neck and flaring nostrils; his rider clutches a handkerchief to his nose. The hunting dogs recoil, growling in repulsion. In their silks and curls and fashionable hats, the party of vital handsome men and women stare appalled at what they will become.