

V

Pillage and Sadism

We found out that the German authorities were appropriating, for themselves, many private homes for themselves. Tenants were being thrown out and various offices were being established there. In addition, the Germans were seizing all the Jewish residences which had been left by their residents. The wealthy Jewish residences were looted – they took away linen, furniture and anything that could be removed. We also found out that one Jew, who they had thrown out of his apartment today, had been ordered to create a representative group of several people, who were to deliver the orders of the German authorities to the Jewish populace.

Ten days had passed since the Germans had entered the city - ten terrifying days and nights.

The barracks are full of people. The battalions that arrive stop here for twenty-four hours and then continue on their way, apparently to the front. The soldiers like to stop near our windows and tease us. They point their guns, ready to shoot at us. We see different types among them. One desires to start a conversation regarding the Aryan blood that Jews allegedly need, another about the wealth that the Jews had gained at the expense of the Aryan peoples and other suchlike Nazi themes. We conceal the long-bearded watchmaker from their eyes. But one of the soldiers noticed this Jew, and specifically demanded that he come to the window. The German began arguing with him about the Talmud, and he came very close to shooting a bullet through the window, because the Jew was unwilling to admit that he was familiar with the precept, "*Kill [even] the best among the Gentiles.*"¹

For several days, we had to endure the torments of one diabolical German. Every morning at four o'clock, he would come and pull all our windows open – "So that the dogs should not be able sleep", as he explained to the soldier on guard. After tearing the windows open, he would take a long wooden pole and push all those who were sleeping there off the tables.

However, while we Jews were made to suffer both as hostages and also as Jews, our Polish fellow detainees only suffered as hostages. When the same soldiers, who had left our windows pleased with having teased us, came to the next two windows of the Poles, wishing to comport themselves there in the same manner, there were three words for them - "We are Aryans." This sufficed for them to be left alone.

On one occasion, we had a talk with the guards as to why they permitted the soldiers to approach our windows and cause us trouble. The reply that we received was, "If a German person gets pleasure from it, we aren't interested in your troubles."

The German sadism towards us was applied in a refined manner. Ten men came in to us, looked at everyone from head to foot, selected twenty of us and went outside with them. The

¹ [TN: According to the rabbinical literature, this edict, which appears in the Jerusalem Talmud, Kiddushin 4:11, only refers to enemies during wartime.]

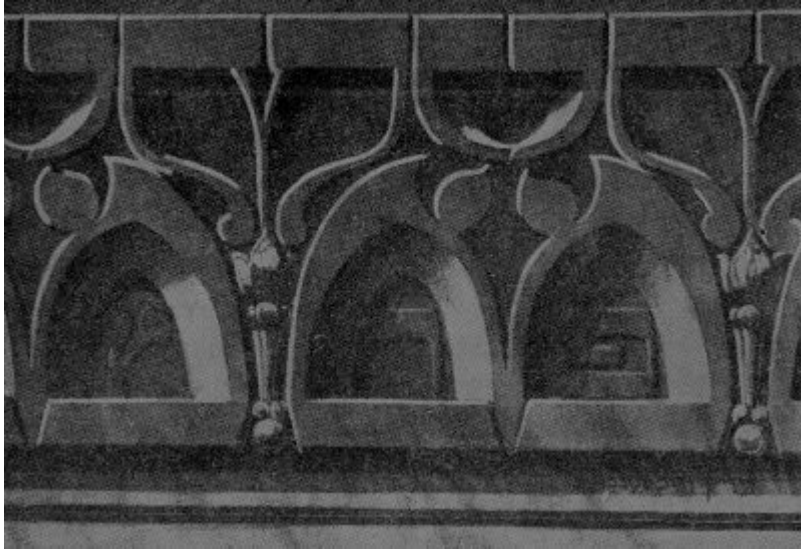
soldiers at the window immediately informed us that we would already never see our comrades again. They would be shot, "because Jews are shooting at the military in town". We tried to convince ourselves that the soldiers, as usual, were just teasing - to torment us. However, when several hours had passed and our friends had not returned, the soldiers' words began to drill into our brains. A father, who was there with a son who had been taken with the group, suffered terribly. He did not take his eyes off the door - perhaps the people would return. Dr Wider, who was imprisoned together with us, had had his brother taken away - he, too, was in deep despair.

All of us went about the entire day tormented and as silent as mourners. It was only at around eleven o'clock at night that we heard noises from a distance, and our hearts started beating vigorously. Soon afterwards, we heard steps in our passageway and, finally, the door was opened and our comrades entered. The father was beside himself with joy, as was the doctor whose brother had been returned to him, All the rest of us also breathed more freely.

Immediately, our friends began telling us what had happened to them. When they were taken away in the morning, they were taken to a stall, where each received a spade with which to dig. They were then led through the city to the Christian cemetery, where they were put in a row and ordered to dig a large pit. This led them to suspect that they might be digging a grave for themselves. The soldiers stood over them and pressed them to work quickly. The Polish overseer continuously measured the pit's depth.

When the work was finished, they were made to stand in a row on the edge of the pit. Some broke down and began begging the Germans to spare their lives. The soldiers ordered them to be quiet and to stand straight. They stood this way for quite a long while, which seemed like an eternity, while the soldiers stood a short way off behind them, testing their guns, from time to time, firing shots into the air. They then told our comrades that this was the manner in which they would be shot, should anything bad happen to the Germans in the city.

The ruined Częstochowa Synagogue
Artwork by Prof Perec Willenberg



Fragment of the front wall



Frescoes in the Synagogue